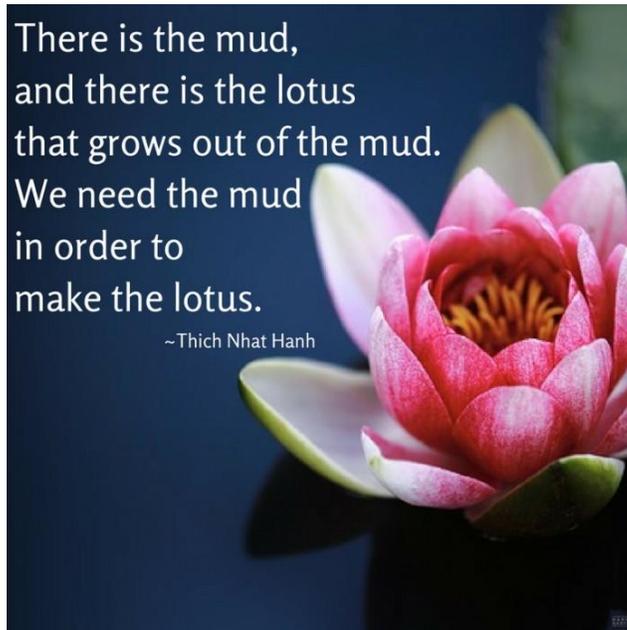


The Muddy Season

March 6 – April 23, 2022



What does it mean to practice the spiritual task of Moving through Mud?

Merriam-Webster's definition of *moving*

- 1 a: marked by or capable of movement; e.g., a moving target
b: of or relating to a change of residence; e.g., *moving* expenses
c: used for transferring furnishings from one residence to another
e.g., a *moving* van
- 2 a: producing or transferring motion or action; e.g., *moving* along
b: stirring deeply in a way that evokes a strong emotional response
e.g., a *moving* story of a faithful dog

Merriam-Webster's definition of *mud*

- 1: a slimy, sticky mixture of solid material with a liquid, especially water
e.g., soft wet earth
- 2: malicious remarks or charges
e.g., political campaigners slinging *mud* at each other
- 3: someone or something disliked or discredited
e.g., one's name is *mud*

This Soul Matters packet was moved through the mud by Amy Stockwell & Mary Hammele, with help from Rev. AJ and the Packet-Writing Team.

Dear Ones,

While many spiritual practices strive to achieve a sense of stillness, there is also spiritual wisdom in the idea that motion is inescapably ever-present. We are always moving – growing, changing, learning, moving about the face of the earth, and experiencing time's constant passage. With or without our attention to it, we move. Sometimes, we're moving on solid ground, or swimming through clear water, and we know our way easily. But other times the road gets muddy and rough, and we are overwhelmed by the confluence of earth and water conspiring to slow us down, to obscure the way forward, and to mess up our clean clothes.

On the other hand, if we let go of our haste to arrive at the next destination and our need to stay clean and dry – we may find immense joy in playing in mud, enjoying the motion of our bodies through muddy puddles. We can make beautiful art out of wet clay. We can transmute the difficulties and obstacles of life into growth, peace, and joy. And – sometimes mud is just mud in our way.

In Buddhism, the Lotus flower symbolizes enlightenment because of how it moves through mud. The wetland flower grows through thick mud (which represents the world of rebirth and attachment to desires) and blooms in the open air above. Thich Nhat Hanh, the beloved Vietnamese Buddhist teacher who recently passed into memory, reminds us that “without the mud, there is no lotus.” The mud we struggle with is not simply a mess of obstacles and suffering to be overcome or endured – but moving *through* the mud is the stuff of spiritual growth itself. The nutrients needed for our own soul's flowering are found in the mud.

And so, while we continue to face the difficulties and losses of our own lives amidst a world reeling without respite from COVID variants, crumbling democracy, and climate catastrophe, we turn to the work of Soul Matters to ask how we can move through this muddy season. This season itself invites us into hope, renewal, and forward motion, with its cycles of snow, melt, and mud, with those impatient crocuses poking a little further out each time the snow recedes. As we await Spring's glory, we can also come to appreciate this time of change.

Along the way we will be visited by observances and festivals such as Purim, Ramadan, Ostara, Lent and Easter, Passover, and even Earth Day. These holidays – ancient and modern – invite us away from the routines and ruts of life, and into intentional spiritual practices and rituals to help us live intentionally, to live according to the values we hold sacred. We hope that this Soul Matters packet will offer some ways to consider & reflect on how we can help one another and ourselves in living out this Muddy Season.

Sometimes the way out is through. Sometimes moving forward is the only way, never turning back (as the [Emma's Revolution protest song](#) declares). Sometimes, caught in quicksand, we need to move backwards or sideways to free ourselves! However we need to move through the mud, we will get there.

In faith,

Rev. AJ van Tine
Assistant Minister
First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Select one of the exercises below to practice, and come prepared to discuss the experience and your thoughts and feelings about it with your group.

Exercise A. In Like a Lion/Out Like a Lamb – the Ups & Downs of the Muddy Season

Here in Rochester, and other Northern cities, we have a fifth season between Winter and Spring, where the ground alternates between ice-crusty and mud-mushy. It's too soon to plant, or bike, or hike. Farmers impatiently watch the weather, constantly revising their plans to begin. Kids and pets come home needing baths. It's the Muddy Season.

Often, our moods mirror the weather, as we pace in frustration, waiting for Winter to finally end. March has been described as "coming in like a lion and out like a lamb." Does your mood swing from lion to lamb during the Muddy Season? Take time to notice your reaction to weather-related frustrations and ways that you cope. Jot each day in a journal, with a note on the weather – lion or lamb – your thoughts & feelings, and some antidotes to boredom, frustration, or despair. Share this activity with a friend and see if your emotional reactions to the weather differ. With a young friend, you might enjoy reading [In Like a Lion, Out Like a Lamb](#), a children's book by [Marion Dane Bauer](#), or you could [watch the video](#).

Share your experience, or some of your journal entries, with your group.

Exercise B. Moving Through Quicksand

In certain cases, mud can turn into quicksand. Do parts of your life feel as though you are trapped in or sinking in quicksand? Do you feel like you are working harder and harder and making less progress? Are you struggling against great odds?

[WikiHow](#) offers "A practical guide for how to get out of quicksand" – the real stuff. It includes: 1. Drop everything; 2. Take a step backward; 3. Move horizontally; 4. Lay Back; 5. Take your time, go slow; 6. Relax and take breaks; and 7. Reach out for a helping hand.

Think of a part of your life that feels like drowning in quicksand. How can you apply the lessons of real physical quicksand to this challenge? Write down which steps could apply to your challenge. In the Resources section are more articles and materials to read about dealing with "emotional quicksand." Tell your group about the experience and any insights or emotions that came up.

Exercise C. Creative Mud

As long as there have been humans, we have been making things from mud. Whether utilitarian dwellings and pottery – or means of artistic expression like mud paintings and sculpture – we've been reshaping the material under our feet to make our lives better.



Kool-Aid Playdough by Nicole McLaughlin

The Zen Japanese idea of wabi-sabi is about appreciating beauty in *imperfection*, the transitory, and natural processes. It is the opposite of contemporary obsession with perfection: rather, it is about gratitude for what we have and the way things are. In wabi-sabi pottery, the material used in creation, little mistakes, and the hand of the maker can readily be seen.

Obtain some playdough, or other "clay" modeling material and set about to make something for the sheer joy of creation.

(You can make your own playdough with [this no-cook recipe](#) shown in the picture.) Turn mindful intention to the *process* of creation, the ancient joy of being connected to your materials.

Prepare to be surprised! Thank your material for giving you the opportunity to participate in the miracle of creation.

Exercise D. Make an Intention to Compost at Home

Our Environmental Ministry reminds us that making compost (i.e., making mud) is one easy way to care for the Earth. We can prevent food waste from entering a landfill & creating methane waste, *and* we are returning nutrients to Earth's life cycles. Today's broccoli parings can be tomorrow's roses or tomatoes.

If you do not already compost your kitchen scraps, set an intention to start. If you have room, clear an outdoor space and begin (see resources section). Learn about best mixes & layers. Wait and aerate. Some months from now, dig out your beautiful black earth and enjoy your part in creation.



If you don't have room or prefer not to compost at home, Rochester has a compost service: [Impact Earth](#) (used by First Unitarian Church), for residential & commercial composting. Collect your food waste in a provided covered bucket. When it's full, exchange it for a new bucket (for a small fee). Be mindful of your contribution to the health of the planet every time you exchange.

MORE READING FOR SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

B. Moving Through Quicksand

[Therapist view of emotional quicksand](#) Autumn Gallegos, PhD, Clinical psychologist

Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals (2021). *Oliver Burkeman*. British American journalist and author.

[What would happen if we slowed down?](#) *Cal Newport*. American computer scientist and author of *Deep Work* (2016)

Radical Acceptance. (2019) *Tara Brach*, American author & teacher of mindfulness

C. Creative Mud

[History of Pottery](#), Wikipedia

[Mali Mud Cloth](#) (Bògòlanfini) production and uses, *Wikipedia*

[Why Wabi-Sabi is the life you need to lead](#), *Keren Brown*, 3/25/18

D. Composting

[How to Build a Compost Pile](#), *Andrew Carberry*, Wikihow, 3/29/21

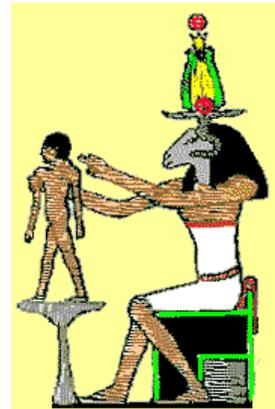
[15 Benefits of Composting](#), *Alma Rominger*, Grow Ensemble, 6/29/20

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions aren't "homework" that need to be covered entirely. Instead, simply pick one question that speaks to you in some way and let it lead you where you need to go. The questions often lead not to answers, but more questions...

1. Which of your life experiences remind you of trying to walk through thick mud? How do you keep moving and not get stuck, or leave a shoe behind?
2. When moving through mud – in what ways do you bring traces of the mud along with you, or leave something (a part of you) behind?
3. What kind of thoughts does the appearance of early Spring plants, like crocuses & daffodils, pushing through the mud & snow bring for you?

4. Dealing with the changeable weather and messiness of late Winter/early Spring can be exasperating & exhilarating at the same time. What kinds of activities help you navigate these “in-between” days we are blessed (or cursed) with?
5. Many world religions tell a creation story that involves humankind’s emergence from the dirt or clay of the Earth – or the building of the firm ground from the mud of the ocean. In what ways does this oneness with the soil resonate with you?
6. Spring Equinox (this year on March 20), or Ostara, marks the day when the light of day is equal to the dark of night *AND* the “start” of Spring. We leap ahead one hour for Daylight Savings Time on March 13. How does this time of balance of day and night call you to adjust the balance in your schedule, spiritual life, or relationships?
7. Many Springtime religious observations honor patient waiting, purification, and anticipation of light & joy. Are there any rituals and celebrations, from your past or current life, that you observe at this time of year?



Egyptian god, Khnum, creating a clay human

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR SOUL MATTERS READING & MEETINGS

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As we ground ourselves in this time and place, let us be present in our minds, hearts, and bodies with reverence for the soul work we are undertaking. We acknowledge that the land where we are situated is the seized territory of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, including the Onöndowa'ga:' (Seneca), Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and Tuscarora Nations.

In recognition of the indigenous people of this land and the reverence in which they hold Mother Earth, let us resolve to work together to care for our planet and to respect the interconnected web of all life & the dignity of all souls.

READINGS FOR CHALICE LIGHTING

Spark of Hope

By [Melanie Davis](#),

UUA's OWL Program Manager

If ever there were a time
for a candle in the darkness, this would be it.
Using a spark of hope,
kindle the flame of love,
ignite the light of peace,
and feed the flame of justice.

Author unknown (adapted from [UUA archive](#))

Our various paths merge today in this place.

May this hour bring rest and renewal,
comfort and challenge.

May we know once again that we are not
isolated beings,
but that we are connected – in mystery and in
wonder to each other,
to this community, and to the universe.

CHALICE EXTINGUISHING

Growing Out of Our Comfort

[Melissa Jeter](#), Student Minister, First Unitarian Toledo

We extinguish this chalice today

but we are illuminated by a faith that allows us to sit and think.

In this quiet time, we can reflect in solitude, meditating on Love,
and growing out of our comfort.

Though we experience discomfort

we are excited to give birth to a new, just world.

FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM



Help Us to Hold the Mystery

By [Celie Katovitch](#), Spiritus Christi Church
(formerly of First Universalist), Rochester
Prayer written for Tenebrae (Good Friday)

“Spirit of life and death,
Thou who art as present to us in our suffering
As in our wellbeing,
Abide with us in this permeable time
Between dusk and dark.
Soothe the secret pains we carry.
Bless us with the courage to move toward our grief
And not away.

When all is hidden
When we find ourselves moving among the shadows—
When we do not know the way—
Quiet our hearts; still our restlessness.
Help us to embrace the unknown:
To hold the mystery,
And to let ourselves be held by it.
For Thou art the great Hiddenness,
And yet we know that our breath is not so close to us
As thy presence.

Abide with us, O spirit of compassion,
As the power of healing,
The assurance of peace,
The Love that will not let us go.”

Into The Wilderness [Rev. Sarah York](#). 1990. Unitarian Universalist Meditation Manual.
A meditation on Jesus’s forty days in the wilderness (excerpt)

“...Wilderness is a part of every person’s soul-journey, and part of our journey together as human beings who seek to live in community. Time in the wilderness is always a time of struggle. It is also a time of transformation and renewal. In traditional terms, it is a time of purification. The journey into wilderness reminds us that we are alone and not alone. We are neither where we have been nor where we are going.

There is danger and possibility, risk and promise. In the wilderness, the spirit may descend like a dove and lift us on its wings of hope, then drive us into the depths of despair; it may affirm us with a gift of grace, then challenge us to change...”

Note: From 1932 until 1960, the Unitarians and the Universalists had a tradition of publishing forty meditations at this time of year—for Lent.



EB Adventure Photography, Wilderness

FROM THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[The Holiness of Mud](#)

Donna Frischknecht Jackson, *Presbyterian Today*

"I thought I was prepared for my first mud season in Vermont. I wasn't...

...I soon discovered that my cute boots were no match for the mud. The thick goo pulled at the flimsy rubber soles, leaving gaps that allowed cold mud to squish between my toes. I tried persevering, but each squishing step made my spirits sink a bit more....

...I was sitting with a cup of coffee in a local gas station/convenience store, looking down at the sad shape of my wellies, when a woman joined me to tell me the good news. The sap from the trees was flowing. Maple sugaring season was here... she delivered a beautiful homily on the holiness of mud season: "There is always something beautiful, something sweet, waiting beneath the messes of life."

She then took a bottle of maple syrup from her bag and gave it to me. On the bottle was a handwritten label that read, 'Bottled with love from Mud Valley Farm...'

Note: As Unitarian Universalists, we regularly draw wisdom from the pluralism of the world's religious traditions, and in doing so, we put in our own spiritual language. For example, if "Lent" doesn't work for you, you might substitute our "Muddy season," the reflective time of awaiting spring.

FROM SACRED TEXTS

Buddhist Pali Tipitaka, Anguttara Nikaya 4.36

"As a lotus flower is born in water, grows in water and rises out of water to stand above it unsoiled, so I, born in the world, raised in the world having overcome the world, live unsoiled by the world." ~ Buddha



[Sculpture by Barten](#)

Hebrew Bible Genesis 2:7

"The Lord God formed [humans] out of the clay of the ground and blew into [their] nostrils the breath of life."

(*New American Bible*, 1970)

Christian New Testament

John 13:4-5 & 13-15. Jesus washes the feet of the disciples "Jesus rose from the meal and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin, began to wash his disciples' feet & dry them with the towel... He said to them: 'Do you understand what I did for you? If I washed your feet – I who am Teacher & Lord – then you must wash each other's feet. What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do.'" (*New American Bible*, 1970)

Taoism [Tao Te Ching, Chapter 15](#)

"Do you have the patience to wait
'til your mud settles and the water is clear
Can you remain unmoving
'til the right action arise by itself"
~ Lao Tzu

Haudenosaunee [Sky Woman creation story](#) *New World Histories*, YouTube

The Haudenosaunee believe that Sky Woman fell from an island in the sky, through a hole under the tree of life, grabbing seeds from this sacred tree as she fell. The animals of Earth saw her falling and congregated to help her. The birds caught her and gently placed her on the back of a turtle. Water animals brought mud from the bottom of the ocean to create an Island where Sky Woman was able to plant her various seeds from the Tree of Life.

Note: As listed in this Wikipedia article, [Creation of Life from Clay](#), many creation myths – from Sumerian to Greek, Chinese, Laotian, Cherokee & many other civilizations – picture humankind coming from the earth. It is interesting to ponder the ways in which our species "comes from" & uses the soil and how we return to it in the end.

QUOTATIONS

“The flower of consciousness needs the mud out of which it grows.” ~ [Eckhart Tolle](#), Canadian spiritual teacher & author

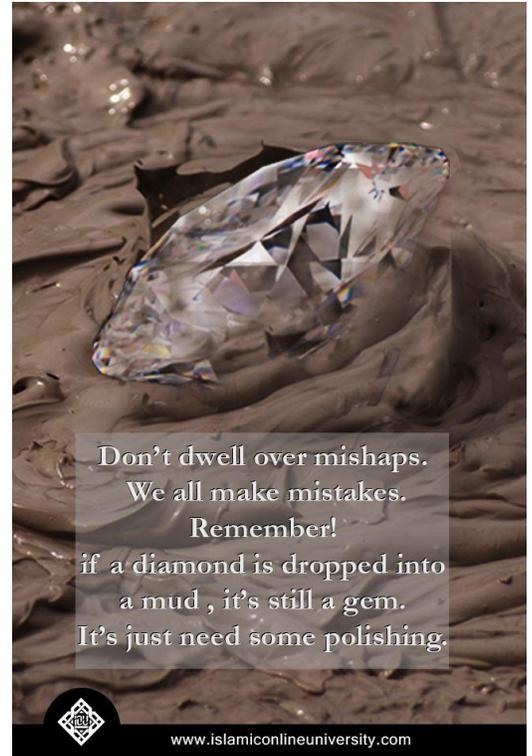
“Some people could look at a mud puddle and see an ocean with ships.” ~ [Zora Neale Hurston](#), American author, anthropologist, and filmmaker

“The world is mud-lucious and puddle-wonderful.”
~ e e cummings, American poet, painter, essayist, author, and playwright

“No mud can soil us but the mud we throw,” ~ [James Russell Lowell](#), American poet, critic, editor, & diplomat

You pray for rain, you gotta deal with the mud too. That's a part of it. ~ [Denzel Washington](#), American actor, director, & producer.

There is an eagle in me that wants to soar, and there is a hippopotamus in me that wants to wallow in the mud. ~ [Carl Sandburg](#), American poet, biographer, journalist, & editor



Don't dwell over mishaps.
We all make mistakes.
Remember!
if a diamond is dropped into
a mud , it's still a gem.
It's just need some polishing.



Mud Racer, Sita Patel w/Team

Mud Season

[Tess Taylor](#), American poet (from poets.org)

“We unstage the winter’s tangle.
Sad tomatoes, sullen sky.

We unplay the summer’s blight.
Rotted on the vine, black fruit

swings free of strings that bound it.
In the compost, ghost melon; in the fields

POETRY EXCERPTS

Mud in Magic

[Beverly Collins](#), American poet

“...Mud in magic can be welcome. As “loud” at the library, “quiet” at the amusement park, fun as a root canal one day before the feast. It can murk up the view of a clear day then dry quickly. It is the moment a way with words does not win one a way with other things wanted...

Proof in the face, some stumble and win the race one foot behind the other; however triumphant or tragic. The low-down on high-life appears that dry desert has hidden moisture and there are obvious bits of mud in magic.”

grotesque extruded peppers.
We prod half-thawed mucky things.

In the sky, starlings eddying.
Tomorrow, snow again, old silence.

Today, the creaking icy puller.
Last night I woke

to wild unfrozen prattle.
Rain on the roof—a foreign liquid tongue

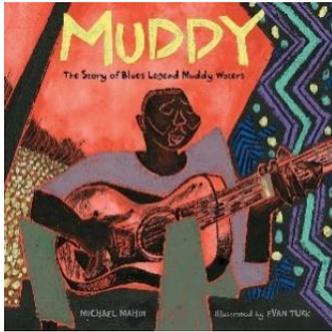
PODCASTS, SONGS, ARTICLES, FILMS, & BOOKS

BOOKS

[Noisy Stones: A Meditation Manual](#)

by Robert R Walsh

“The light green shoots of blossoms-to-have-been are out of sight under the drifting snow. Gale force winds are rattling the old house. The temperature is far below freezing. Nature is not cooperating with preparations for Easter...”



[Muddy: The Story of Blues Legend Muddy Waters](#)

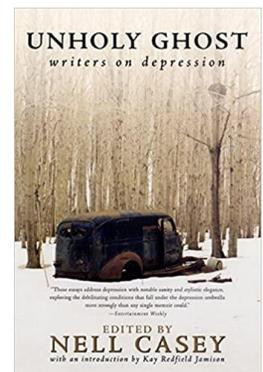
By Michael Mahin

Illustrated by Evan Turk

The heartwarming illustrated story of how blues pioneer, Muddy Waters, transmuted loss and loneliness into music that changed history. His fierce and electric sound laid the groundwork for what would become rock and roll.

Winner of the Ezra Jack Keats Book Award

[Unholy Ghost: writers on depression](#) Edited by Nell Casey 22 stories that offer solace & enlightenment for the bewildering experience of depression. An excerpt from Lee Stringer’s *Fading to Gray*: “...perhaps what we call depression isn’t a disorder at all, but, like physical pain, an alarm of sorts, alerting us that something is wrong; that perhaps it is time to stop, take a time-out, take as long as it takes, and attend to the unaddressed business of filling our souls.”



BLOGS

[Mud & Lotus blogspot](#): “A bit of mindfulness in all the rest”

By Lauren Thompson, Buddhist practitioner, dyslexia tutor, & children’s book author

[Five Ways to Embrace Mud This Spring](#), National Wildlife Federation, some tips on getting outside with kids, plus other links to ideas for making your yard welcoming to wildlife. There’s also a short video: [Frogs and mud make my kids happy](#).

ARTICLES



The [Boryeong Mud Festival](#) is an annual summer gathering attracting millions to Daecheon Beach, near Seoul, South Korea. Mineral-rich mud is trucked from the Boryeong mud flats to the beach. Entertainment includes a mud pool, mud slides, & mud skiing, along with live music & competitions. The festival is scheduled for Jul 31 in 2022, so plan accordingly!



[Iranian Shia Muslims attend a mud-rubbing ritual](#)

Atta Kenare

Kharrāh mali, or 'mud rubbing', is a solemn annual ritual held in the Iranian city of Khorramabad, commemorating the death of the prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein ibn Ali, in AD680 (AH61 in the Islamic calendar). Shia Muslims roll in mud and dry themselves by gathering around bonfires, as part of the Mourning of Muharram rituals. It takes place on the [10th day, or "Ashura."](#) which in 2022 will fall on August 8. It is considered the first day of the Muslim calendar. Sunni Muslims commemorate the day by fasting.

[Origins & Practices of Ostara, Holi, and Purim](#)

Dhruti Bhagar, Boston Public Library

Stories & backgrounds of three joyful spring religious holidays, with suggestions for books for adults and kids.

SONGS

[Digging in the Dirt](#)

By Peter Gabriel

"Something in me, dark & sticky
All the time it's getting strong.
No way of dealing with this feeling
Can't go on like this too long...

Digging in the dirt
Stay with me, I need support.
I'm digging in the dirt
To find the places I got hurt
Open up the places I got hurt..."

[Keep on Moving Forward](#)

By Emma's Revolution

[Woyaya](#)

By Osibisa

"We are going,
heaven knows where we are going,
but we know within.

And we will get there,
heaven knows how we will get there,
but we know we will.

It will be hard, we know,
and the road will be muddy & rough,
but we'll get there,
heaven knows how we will get there,
but we know we will.

Woyaya, Woyaya,
Woyaya, Woyaya.

VIDEOS

[Festival of Holi](#), *Anichakra Vids*, YouTube, This year Holi is March 18, 2022.

The Hindu festival of spring, fertility, and colors (PG – preview before watching with young children – some violence).

[The Princess of Persia - a Purim Story](#), from BimBam. Go Esther! Celebrate Esther's bravery, Mordechai's wisdom & BOO Haman. This year Purim is March 16-17, 2022.

TedX & YouTube

[Why I Live in a Mud House](#)

By Laura Tarimo

The speaker runs workshops on sustainable living from her eco-friendly home in Tanzania. She shares her journey of learning about permaculture & building with earth materials.

[Waiting for the Mud to Settle](#)

August 8, 2021 Service (25:53 min)
Holston Valley Unitarian Universalist Church
Gray, Tennessee

Rev. Tiffany Sapp explores how practices connected to Stillness, and the Wisdom of the Tao Te Ching, can support us during challenging times.
HVVUC Choir singing.



FUN STUFF



Haiku for Muddy Feet

By Jane Woodman

Mud season has come
Coats foot pads, mats fur between
Makes happy eyes shine



[Edgewick Farm blog](#); [Wiley Miller](#), cartoonist



Photo by Ps Guo on Unsplash

ALTERNATIVE SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

Getting into Mud

Round up a nearby child, a silly adult, an enthusiastic pet, or your own Inner Child. Find a juicy mud puddle - and then hold hands/paws and jump in it. Shout and stamp around. If *completely* safe, do this with bare feet. Enjoy feeling the mud coming through your toes. Allow yourself to experience the fun! Then, help each other thoughtfully and mindfully clean up your shoes and/or feet and/or paws. Be gentle and deliberate, and thank the mud for

offering such delight. After you are finished, share a silly smile with your partner. You have a secret: you played in the mud, *and* you enjoyed it!