

Muddy Season 2023

March 5 – April 22

Slogging with Spirit



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How do we care for our **spirit** while **slogging** through tough times?

Definitions (from Lexico by Oxford)

slogging // gerund or present participle

1. work hard over a period of time.
"they were slogging away to meet a deadline."
2. walk or move with difficulty or effort.
"he slogged home through the gray slush."

spirit // noun

1. nonphysical part of a person which is the seat of emotions and character; the soul.
"we seek a harmony between body and spirit."

Gratitude: This packet was prepared by Suzanne Morgan and Tom Perry with the assistance of the three-church worship team, Rev. AJ van Tine, and the whole-hearted support of the packet writers' team.

Acknowledgement: We acknowledge with respect the Seneca (*Onöndowa'ga:*) Nation, Keepers of the Western Door and part of the *Haudenosaunee* People, on whose ancestral land First Unitarian Church of Rochester, First Universalist Church of Rochester, and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua now stand.

Dear Rochester-Area Unitarian Universalists,

Anyone who has climbed a mountain or done a long hike may know the feeling – you begin with a lot of energy, enthusiasm, and enjoyment. After a few miles, however, the novelty wears off and the journey becomes all about putting one foot in front of the other, with the scenery now a blur of trees or rocks or grass. You begin to wonder why you put yourself through this, and hope that the view from the top makes it all worth the effort it took to get there.

Our day-to-day existence may sometimes feel like a slog as well. As we move through our days and weeks, busy with the daily tasks that jobs, parenting, school, or social justice work require of us, it can feel like an endless trudge toward some distant destination, with only the occasional scenic view to inspire wonder and awe at how far we've come. What keeps us going when we feel bored or frustrated or just plain tired?

The word “slog” has a couple of potential origins. One possibility is the word “slough” - a swampy, marshy area of land. In John Bunyan's work *Pilgrim's Progress*, his protagonist gets stuck in the Slough of Despond, and must be pulled out by another character so that he can resume his travels. It can make all the difference to find companions and community on our journey to lift us up when we're bogged down!

Another possible origin of “slog” is the root word “slug”, as in “to slug someone”. When “slugging away” at a repetitive or boring task, we may get so lost in the action that we have trouble remembering the goal. In her book *Wild*, author Cheryl Strayed describes hiking the Pacific Crest Trail as being akin to “the maddening effort of knitting (a) sweater and unraveling it over and over again. As if everything gained was inevitably lost.” And that is one of the characteristics of “the slog”; you don't necessarily feel that you are making much progress in any particular direction. Parenting kids can feel like this – an endless series of chores that seem to “undo” themselves as soon as they're accomplished, with no immediate end in sight.

In this season of mud, we may take a moment to ask ourselves and discern how we can “slog with spirit” to avoid getting stuck in a slough of despond. We hope you find resources in this packet that can help you continue your journey with renewed energy and inspiration.

Suzanne Morgan, Packet Team Co-Editor
First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY

Packet Threads: Four threads weave through this packet:

- **Persistence**: the term “slogging” implies that there is something difficult that we need to get through. We can take this opportunity to ask ourselves “What keeps us going when the going gets tough?”
- **Pilgrimage**: What is the purpose of our “slog”? Where are we heading, and what is the goal? Does “slogging with spirit” indicate that the journey itself is imbued with meaning and value, not only the destination?
- **Practice**: How can we bring a sense of purpose and intention to our daily slog so that we may “slog with spirit?”
- **Partnership**: Friendship and solidarity can change our experience of slogging. Who are our comrades on the journey? What individuals or groups encourage us, assist us, or simply trudge alongside us as companions?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

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

Exercise A. Examine Your Slogging

Make some time and space in your daily schedule for a period of quiet contemplation. Make that period an intentional break from your daily routine and dedicate it to doing nothing productive. Weather permitting you could take a quiet walk in your neighborhood. If not, find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Being able to gaze out a window may help you to disconnect from your daily grind.

Settle in and let go of your mental to-do list. Make this a quiet time to listen to what your life has to tell you. Recall some “work” that feels like a “slog” to you. The “work” can be any kind (paid or unpaid; in the community or in the home; completed recently or ongoing).

1. Describe in a few words how this work makes you feel in mind and in body?
2. What causes this work to feel like a slog that could grind you down?
3. What has helped you to care for your spirit while slogging through tough times?

Optionally on another day: Repeat this exercise recalling a different work situation that also feels like a slog to you.

Do any patterns emerge for you? Practices that sustain your spirit during occasional bad patches? Outcomes that make you feel the slog was worth your effort?

Resource:

“Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it,” he writes, “listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent.”

– Parker J. Palmer, [Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation](#)

Exercise B. Daily Practice to Transcend the Grind

Try this simple daily practice for a month to transcend the negative effects of your daily slog... with one thing... have a meaningful exchange with someone you love. Every day.

Read the blog post at the link below. Then “figure out your definition of ‘meaningful exchange,’ make a list of the people you love, and then go and do it.” Make it a habit. Don’t let a day go by without connecting with one of your people.

Resource:

<https://medium.com/the-write-purpose/the-one-thing-you-must-do-every-day-to-transcend-the-daily-slog-and-hold-onto-your-lifes-meaning-1915f77a10a1>

Exercise C. Reflect on (or Plan) your Pilgrimage

According to Wikipedia, a pilgrimage is a “journey, often into an unknown or foreign place, where a person goes in search of new or expanded meaning about their self, others, nature, or a higher good through the experience. It can lead to a personal transformation, after which the pilgrim returns to their daily lives.”

Think of a journey you have taken that contained some or all of these elements of a pilgrimage and write about it. It does not have to be a long-distance expedition, or even a journey in the physical sense.

Alternately, write about a pilgrimage you’d like to make. Where would you go? How would you get there? What “new or expanded meaning” would you hope to gain from it?

Exercise D. Add Some Spice to your Slog (intergenerational)

For this exercise, identify an area where you feel like your “slog” has become tedious, monotonous, or uninspiring. Think of at least one way to approach your slog in a different way, then try it. Crank a new playlist while you wash the dishes. Try a new activity or running route.

Celebrate a silly “national day” with your family (like “National Cheese Doodle Day” or “National



Puppy Day”). Identify where the opportunities for creativity at work are. Gather up family or friends to accompany you on your slog.

Reflect on how it felt to perform your routine actions with a different flavor. Did it change how you felt about your slog? Is it something you might try more often, or a one-time thing?

Resources:

Comprehensive list of national days: <https://nationaldaycalendar.com>

Mindfulness Tips for On-The-Job Drudgery: <https://www.mindful.org/when-work-is-meh/>

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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

1. How do you know when you're in a slog?
2. What does it look like to slog with spirit, and without spirit?
3. When does joy and beauty break through the mundane day-to-day experiences of life?
4. How do you keep your daily routine and slog in alignment with your ethics and who you want to be in the world? [Jump to resource](#)
5. Do you find joy or satisfaction in testing yourself with physical tasks that are intentionally a long slog with some risk of failing to finish, e.g., climbing a mountain, completing a charity bike tour, even doing a yoga session every day for a month? What value do you find in it?
6. What can cause you to persist in a task that ultimately isn't worth the time or effort?
7. Are there social justice issues that feel like an endless slog to you? If so, how do you find forward momentum when the slog feels overwhelming but the goal being worked towards is of highest value?
8. What sources of encouragement and inspiration help you to "slog" with spirit when you feel tired, overwhelmed, or uninspired?
9. What qualities do you look for in a spiritual companion or friend?
10. How can you be a better spiritual companion or friend?

CHALICE LIGHTING

By Rev. Sara Ascher:

May the light from this flame be a beacon of our faith, in the days that grow dark and dreary.

May the light from this flame be warmth to our spirits, during nights of restless searching.

May the light from this flame be a celebration of the truth, meaning and joy we find within these walls and in our dreams.

By Rev. Maureen Killoran:

The poet Langston Hughes has written:

"Hold fast to dreams
for if dreams die,
life is a broken-winged bird
that cannot fly."

May this chalice flame challenge each of us to cherish to our dreams,
for all things worth doing begin in the courage and inspiration of a dream.

CHALICE EXTINGUISHING

By Rev. Cynthia Landrum:

We leave this gathered community,
But we don't leave our connection,
Our concerns, our care for each other.
Our service to each other, to the world, and
to our faith continues.
Until we are together again, friends,
Be strong, be well, be true, be loving.

By Rev. Lyn Cox:

Let this be a time of resilience. May the
changing seasons bring new meaning and
new insights. May creativity and persistence
lead us to find resources for all to share. May
those who migrate find safety, and may there
be good news in the wind. May
transformation lead us onward.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Just as we select spiritual exercises that speak to a diversity of experience, we draw from a diversity of sources and include a diversity of voices here. We explicitly seek voices and perspectives of people with disabilities, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), Women, Trans and NonBinary People, other members of the LGBTQ community, children and youth.

QUOTATIONS

“Spring teaches me to look more carefully for the green stems of possibility; for the intuitive hunch that may turn into a larger insight, for the glance or touch that may thaw a frozen relationship, for the stranger's act of kindness that makes the world seem hospitable again.”

– Parker J. Palmer, [Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation](#)

“Those who have a ‘why’ to live, can bear with almost any ‘how’.”

“Ever more people today have the means to live, but no meaning to live for.”

– [Viktor E. Frankel](#), Jewish-Austrian psychiatrist

“Few, if any, of us go to Damascus and have one experience that changes absolutely everything (though in hindsight, we might be tempted to try to identify some turning point or other this way). More often, certain events make us ripe to regard things with a different kind of lens—though it's never a foregone conclusion that we actually will.”

– Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, [Surprised by God](#)

FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

Hymn 389 Gathered Here

<https://youtu.be/WtBEf6dCbWm>

Hymn 1017 Building a New Way

<https://farfringe.com/stj1017-building-a-new-way/>
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2881222965442670>

Hymn 1028 Fire of Commitment

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGJan0LD5JI>

Unitarian Universalism Worship Web

From [The Holy Work of Showing Up](#) by Rev. Ashley Horan

Our ancestors and our descendants are beckoning us, compelling us onward toward greater connection, greater compassion, greater commitment to one another and to the earth. Together, **we are resilient and resourceful** enough to say "yes" to that call, to make it our life's work in a thousand different ways, knowing that we can do no other than bind ourselves more tightly together, and throw ourselves into **the holy work of showing up**, again and again, to be part of building that world of which we dream but which we have not yet seen.

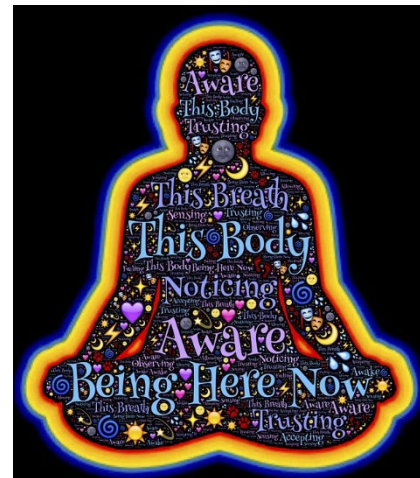


FROM SACRED TEXTS

Buddhist Teaching

From [Everyday Zen](#), page 132, by Charlotte Joko Beck

We never grow by dreaming about a future wonderful state or by remembering past feats. We grow by being where we are and experiencing what our life is right now. We must experience our anger, our sorrow, our failure, our apprehension; they can all be our teachers, when we do not separate ourselves from them. When we escape from what is given, we cannot learn, we cannot grow. That's not hard to understand, just hard to do. Those who persist, however, will be those who will grow in understanding and compassion. How long is such practice required? Forever.



Hebrew Bible

Proverbs 24:16

A righteous man falls seven times, but rises again.

Proverbs 4:25-26

Let your eyes look straight ahead;
Fix your gaze directly before you.
Give careful thought to the paths for your feet
and be steadfast in all your ways.

Zen Kōan

*Before enlightenment:
chop wood, carry water.*

*After enlightenment:
chop wood, carry water.*

Bhagavad Gita (Ved Vyasa)

The happiness which comes from long practice, which leads to the end of suffering, which at first is like poison, but at last like nectar - this kind of happiness arises from the serenity of one's own mind.

Indigenous Wisdom

From [Keep Going – the Art of Perseverance](#) by Joseph M. Marshall III, Lakota teacher
A young man asked his grandfather why life had to be so difficult sometimes. This is the old man's reply.

Grandfather says this: "In life there is sadness as well as joy, losing as well as winning, falling as well as standing, hunger as well as plenty, bad as well as good. I do not say this to make you despair, but to teach you reality that life is a journey sometimes walked in light and sometimes walked in shadow.

Grandfather says this: "You did not ask to be born, but you are here. You have weaknesses as well as strengths because in life there are two of everything. Within you is the will to win as well as the willingness to lose, the heart to feel compassion as well as the smallness to be arrogant. Within you is the way to face life as well as the fear to turn away from it."

POEMS, SONGS, PODCASTS, ARTICLES, FILMS, & BOOKS

The Ladder of St. Augustine by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

Standing on what too long we bore
With shoulders bent and downcast eyes,
We may discern — unseen before —
A path to higher destinies,

Full text: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44636/the-ladder-of-st-augustine>

[Climb Every Mountain \(scene from the movie\)](#)

Lyrics: <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=climb+every+mountain+lyrics>

[Les Misérables Cast - Do You Hear The People Sing? \(Official Video\)](#)

Lyrics: <https://www.themusicallyrics.com//114-les-miserables-the-musical-lyrics/1109-do-you-hear-the-people-sing-lyrics.html>

Freedom Highway

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_Highway_\(The_Staple_Singers_album\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_Highway_(The_Staple_Singers_album))

Staple Singers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V99Eu3dWjO8>

Lyrics: <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/38837228/The+Specials/Freedom+Highway>

Women of the World presents "Bread and Roses"

This 100-year-old labor movement song outlines the need workers have for food for the spirit as well as the body, dignity as well as pay. James Oppenheim's poem was embraced and sung by women in the 1912 Lawrence textile strike.

As we go marching, marching, unnumbered women dead
Go crying through our singing their ancient call for bread.
Small art and love and beauty their drudging spirits knew.
Yes, it is bread we fight for, but we fight for roses too.

History & full text: <https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/bread-and-roses-song/>

On Being interview *Parker Palmer + Courtney Martin Inner Life of Rebellion*

<https://onbeing.org/programs/parker-palmer-courtney-martin-the-inner-life-of-rebellion/>

Ms. Martin: ... I think it was a sort of soul-shaking experience for me to have a moment to pause and go, "Wow, I've been working so hard to make a life, to be able to pay my rent and create a life that I haven't paused to go, 'Wow, I actually have a little bit of power now. What am I going to do with that? And are the things I'm doing with that in line with my ethics and who I am in the world?'" And I think a lot of very powerful people have no time to pause. They don't create those spaces. And I think some of the most unethical things that happen in the world is because of that cacophony.

The Myth of Sisyphus – Alex Gendler, TED-Ed (4:56)

Did Sisyphus win by embracing his daily slog? <https://youtu.be/q4pDUxth5fQ>

Pilgrimage (23:05)

Award winning documentary about Manzanar, one of the concentration camps where people of Japanese descent were incarcerated during WWII, and how their descendants claimed it as a symbol of pride and identity.

An atheist embraces the Camino de Santiago

<https://www.caminodesantiago.me/community/threads/an-atheist-embraces-the-camino.69054/>

Go on a Unitarian Universalist pilgrimage

We may not have saints and shrines, but Unitarian Universalists do visit the scenes of our tradition's great stories.

Pilgrimages in or near Rochester

- Visit the grave sites of Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony (as well as others active in the abolition and suffrage movements) at Mount Hope Cemetery <https://www.cityofrochester.gov/visitmounthope/>
- Susan B. Anthony house: <https://susanb.org/>
- Harriet Tubman house (Auburn, NY) <https://www.harrietthubmanhome.com/>
- The Women's Rights National Historical Park: <https://www.nps.gov/wori/index.htm>

Follow a self-guided tour of historically significant local places, such as:

- The “No Soil Better” tour of Rochester sites that were significant to the life and work of Frederick Douglass <https://www.douglasstour.com/tour/>
- The Landmark Society Walking Tour of Western New York LGBTQ+ Landmarks <https://landmarksociety.org/wnylgbtgsites/>

Sri Pada, the Sacred Footprint (12:13)

Documentary video about a pilgrimage to interdenominational sacred site.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSKi1LY77UA>

Radical Sincerity: Cheryl Strayed at TEDx ConcordiaUPortland (16:46)

She walked the Pacific Crest Trail seeking forgiveness and hoping to find her "innocent self" again, yet what began as an "idea, vague and outlandish and full of promise," became something much greater.

HUMOR

“The first rule of holes: When you’re in one, stop digging.”

– [Molly Ivins](#), maverick Texas journalist

Get a Little Mud on the Tires

Brad Paisley has some fun in the mud!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6nxHNrlwJA>

For would-be pilgrims...

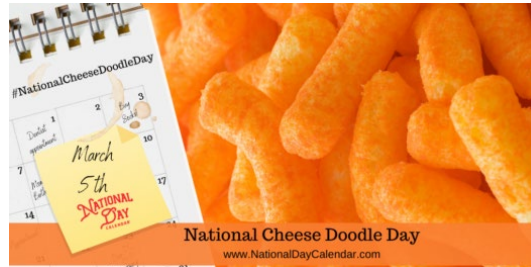


DESTINATION	HOW TO GET THERE
Nowhere	Road
Anywhere	Midnight Train
Georgia	Midnight Train
Clarksville	Last Train
Heaven	Stairway
Hell	Highway
Hotel California	Dark Desert Highway

Exercise D – Packet Team Test of Silly National Days

S1 10:47am The first day of Muddy Season, March 5, 2023, is:

NATIONAL CHEESE DOODLE DAY!!!



I hope we can arrange to have cheese doodles for an after-service snack.

S2 10:49am What great news!!!!

S3 10:51am It's on my calendar ...

S4 12:06pm Unitarian Universalist Communion: Take and eat, in remembrance of cheese. Whatever type speaks to your spirit: cheddar, brie, Stilton, Velveeta, Kraft Macaroni & ... Express your gratitude for the memory of "real" cheese with a poem or interpretive dance 🎭🎭🎭

S1 2:13pm In Memory of Cheese
 Cheese doodles remind me of childhood,
 My fascination with cheesy things.
 The Krapp Dinner that we could only have when Dad was out.
 The fresh cheese curds from the Lakefield cheese factory
 Its signature tooth squeak as we accompanied Mom,
 Protecting her from the leering cheesemaker in the tasting room.
 How can I help from chewing and sucking on cheese doodles . . .
 And taking that trip down memory lane once again.

S4 2:19pm ❤️❤️❤️

S3 3:41pm At Paychex, we referred to Tom Golisano as the Big Cheese, our boss as the Little Cheese, and ourselves as the Cheese Doodles.

S4 5:10pm ["Blessed are the Cheese Makers"](#)
 - Monty Python's "Life of Brian"

S1 5:44pm Tom says we're having way too much fun with cheese doodles. 😊

S3 9:16am If we can't have cheesy fun, where are we? 🏠❤️😊

S4 12:55pm 🎵 Sweet dreams are made of cheese. Who am I to dis a Brie? I've scoured the world for cheddar cheese. Everybody's looking for Stilton. 🎵