

Rooted, Not Hardened: How Struggle Shapes Us

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Welcome to Portland



Disclosures

- I have no disclosures to report

Resilience

- Challenge & adversity
- Engagement
- Community & passion

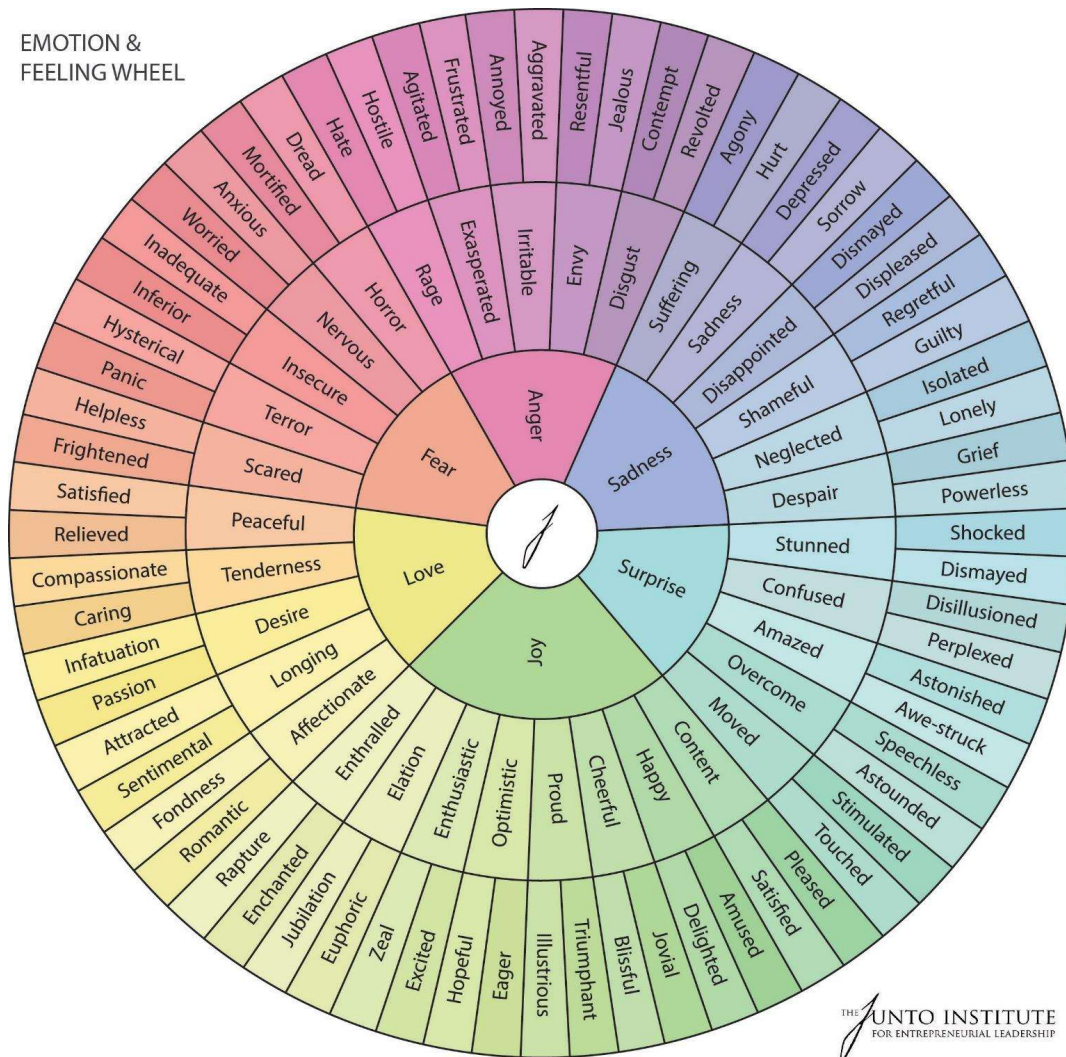


MIND  OVER MATTER

 **Inova**TM

Name That
Feeling

EMOTION &
FEELING WHEEL



Check in with yourself.

- What is the biggest or loudest feeling you are having **right now**?
- Any hints (clues or cues) from your body?

I feel... **TERRIFIED**



Mud Flowers



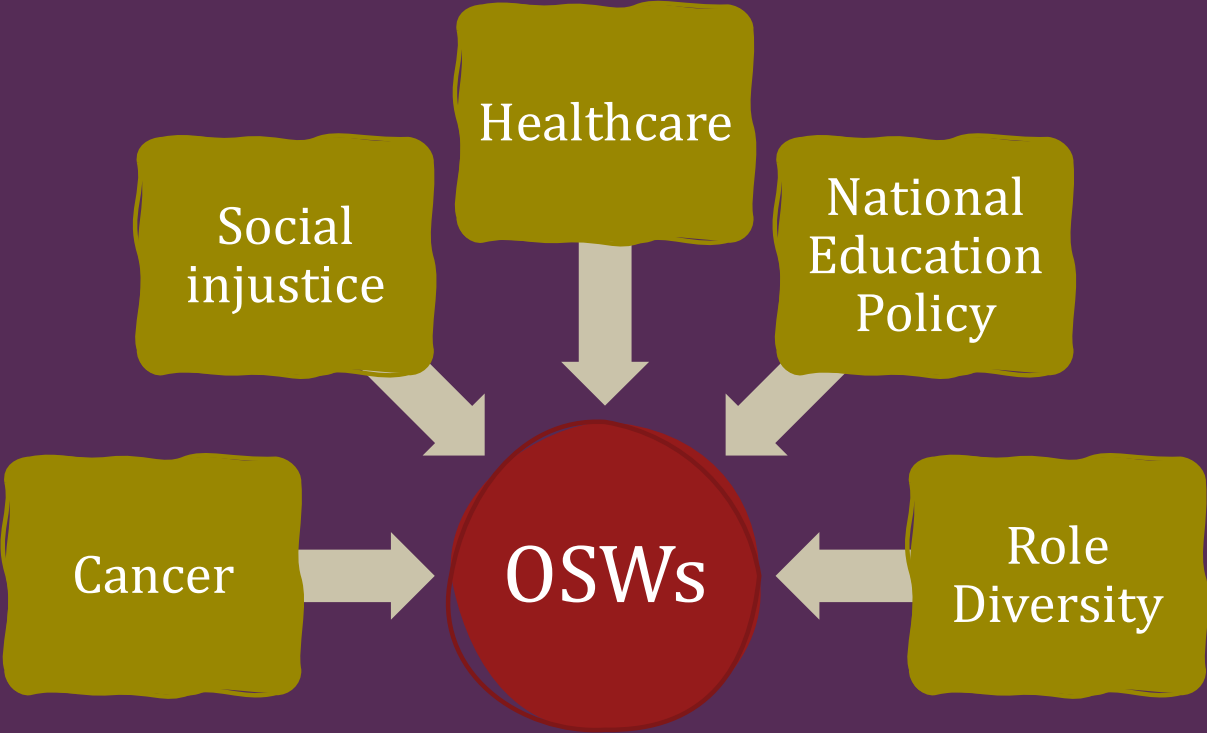


“No mud, no lotus”

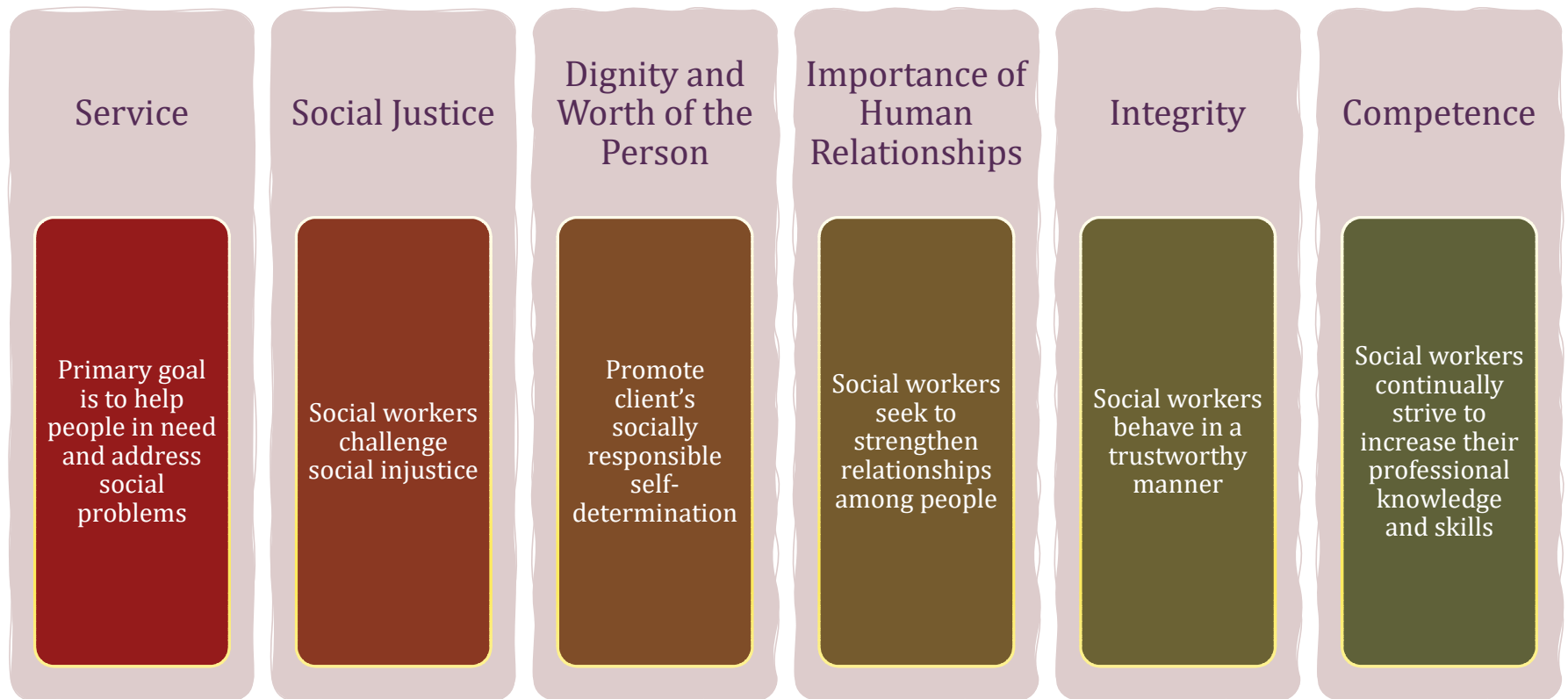
-Thích Nhất Hạnh

The Mud

The Mud



Social Work Values



(National Association of Social Workers, 2026)

Moral Distress in Oncology Social Workers

- Knowing the right thing to do, but not being able to do it
- Feeds job dissatisfaction and burnout
- Poorer patient care
- connected to values, breaches of human rights, and discriminatory practices.

(Guan et al., 2021)

Cost of Caring

- Working among suffering daily has an impact
 - Compassion Fatigue
 - Satisfaction Fatigue
 - Burnout
 - Vicarious trauma
 - Secondary traumatic stress
- Experienced by an estimated 40-85% of helping professionals working closely with trauma

(Mattison, 2015)



What does the mud feel like?

A close-up photograph of a tree trunk. The bark is dark, textured, and appears to be peeling or cracking in several places. A prominent vertical crevice runs down the center of the frame. The lighting is dramatic, with deep shadows and bright highlights on the bark's surface.

Taking Root



Resilience

- *Resilire* — *to rebound, recoil.*
- the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.
- factors that contribute to resilience include how individuals view and engage with the world, coping strategies and the availability and quality of social resources.

(American Psychological Association, 2026)

Resilience In Context

- Not an individual trait
- Depends on the resilience of other systems
- Dynamic

(Denckla et al. 2020; Edelkott, et al. 2016; Masten & Cicchetti, 2016; Tsesmelis Piccolino, 2024)





How do they
do it?



Brian

Vicarious Resilience

- The **meaning-making, growth, and transformation** that occurs through a close connection to a client's resilience in facing trauma. (Herandez, Gangsei et al. 2007)
- Increased sense of **purpose and sustainment** because of **mutual meaning-making** (Tsesmelis Piccolino, 2022)





Benefits

- increased
 - client-based hope
 - capacity for listening to trauma narratives
 - self-care practices
 - resilience and perspective taking
 - awareness of power and privilege
- changes in
 - goals or priorities
 - change/impact on spiritual beliefs and practices

(Hernandez-Wolfe et al., 2015)

How?

- Connect with empathy
- Acknowledge and cultivate a mutual therapeutic alliance
- Meaning making
- Spirituality

(Tsesmelis Piccolino, 2022)



Witnessing

- Leaning in with empathy
- Listening
- Not being the expert
- Connect
- Feel

“this connection allows clinicians to suffer with their clients, but also to derive meaning from witnessing clients’ suffering”

(Tsesmelis Piccolino, 2022; Tsesmelis Piccolino, 2024)



Mutual Therapeutic Alliance

- Both powerful and mutual, and based in empathy
- Can soften power and privilege imbalances between provider and patient

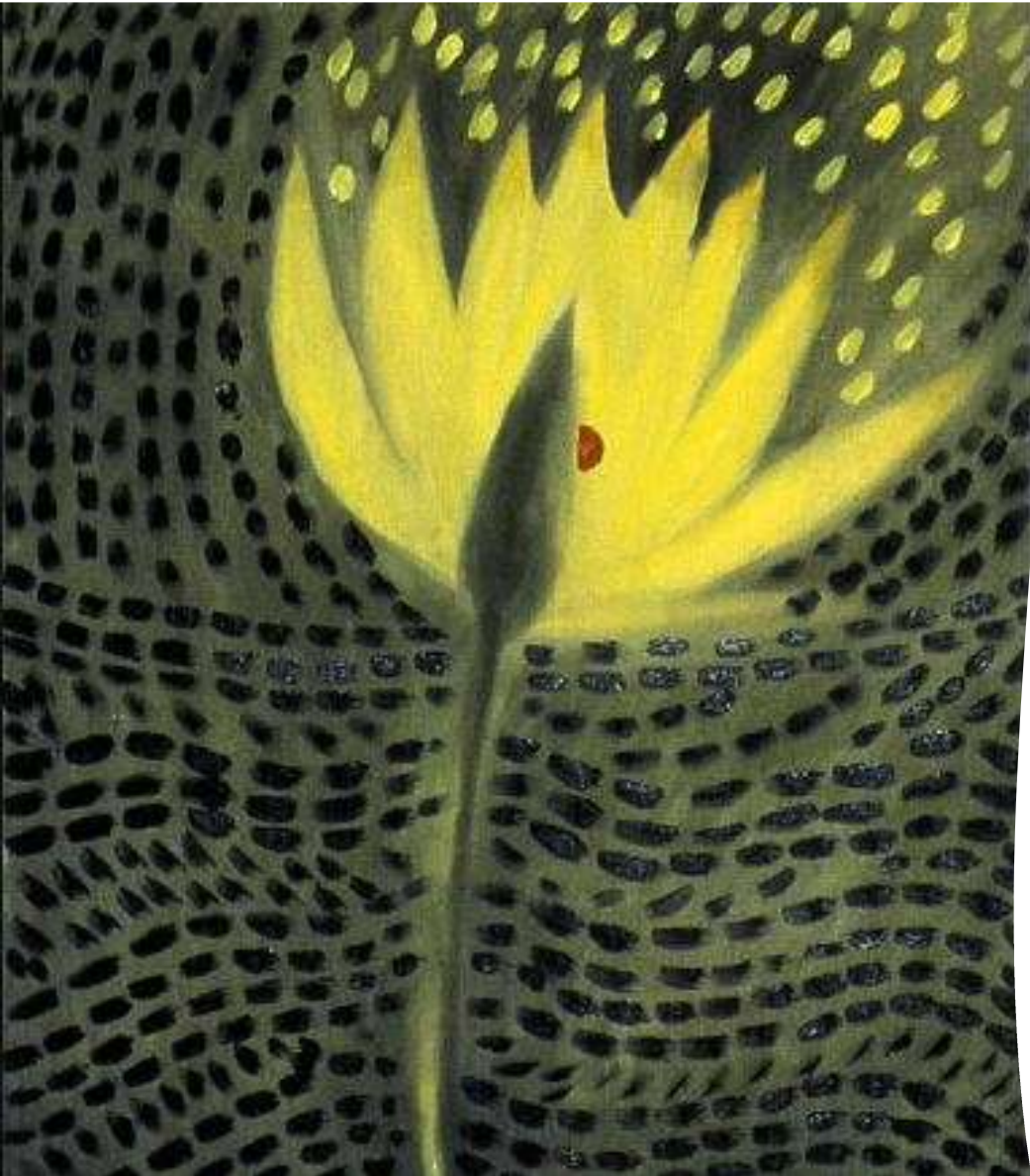
Tsesmelis Piccolino, S. (2022)

Meaning Making

- More than optimism.
- In honoring the suffering, allowing for growth and transformation.
- Supports individual and collective resilience.

(Tremblay et al., 2022; Tsesmelis Piccolino, 2022)





Spirituality

the aspect of humanity through which persons seek ultimate meaning, purpose, and transcendence . . .

. . . and experience relationship to self, family, others, community, society, nature, and the significant or sacred.”

(Puchalski et al., 2014)

Supporting Resilience

- Education
 - Vicarious resilience
 - Opportunities for advanced training
 - Connecting to passion
- Supervision
 - Grounding in strength-based framework and trauma focused lens
 - Affirming process and power of mutual therapeutic alliance
 - Opening to mutual meaning making

(Mattison, 2015; Tsesmelis Piccolino, 2022; Tsesmelis Piccolino, 2024)

“Another [bleeping] growth opportunity.”

-Person with metastatic prostate cancer who has been sober for 22 years.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a red, pointed object, possibly a flower or a piece of fabric, against a dark, textured background. The object is held vertically, with the tip pointing upwards. The background is dark and appears to be a rough, possibly stone or concrete surface, with some lighter, circular patterns. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the object and the hand.

Connection

Honoring Our Unique Voices



(Edelkott et al., 2016; Zebrack et al., 2025)

The strength of community

- Resilience depends on relationships
- Team communication, coordination and creation of a pleasant environment support resilience



(Mattison, 2015; Tremblay et al., 2022; Tsesmelis Piccolino, 2022)

“Speak your mind, even when your
voice shakes.”

- Ruth Bader Ginsberg



Our Collective Wisdom

- Distress
- Social determinants of health
- Patient navigation

(Zebrack et al., 2025)



What does connection
feel like?

What's your passion?

Passions

Social Justice

Research

Connection
to external
resources

Connection
to internal
resources

Meaningful
Connection

Survivorship
Support

Integrative
Approaches

Financial
Toxicity

Leadership

Clinic
Efficiency

Macro
Advocacy

Patient
Advocacy

The mud

Injustice

Bureaucracy

Compassion
Fatigue

Limited
resources

Fragmented
Care

Time pressure

Values
conflicts

National
Policy

Moral distress

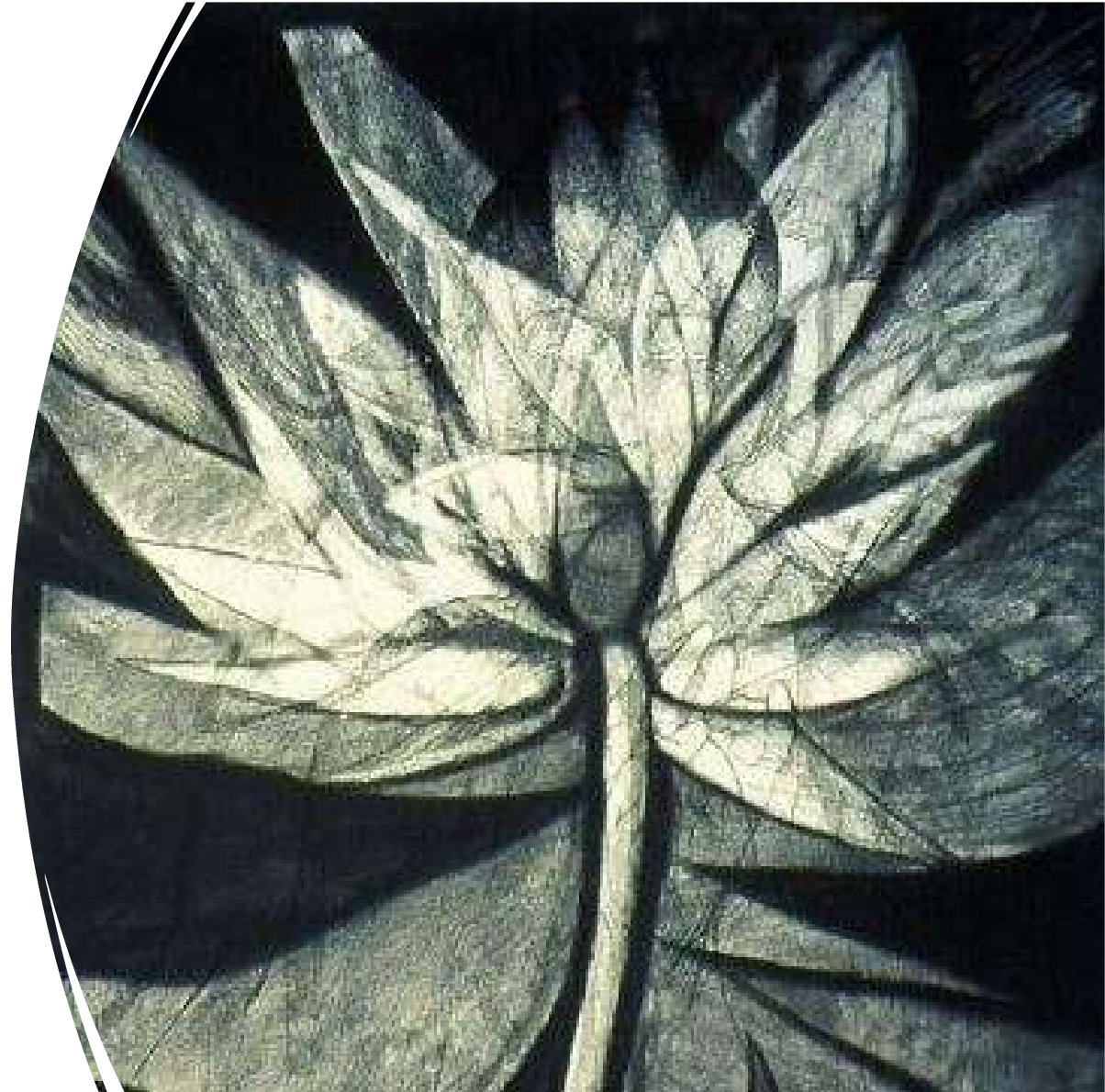
Cancer

Loss

Discrimination

Mud Flower

- Honor the mud
- Meaning making
- Lean into our community
- Speak to our passions to advocate and lead.



Thank you

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