



Touching the Earth, by Tracy Cochran

In the great myth of the Buddha's journey, there came a point when he is completely overwhelmed. As he sits meditating under the Bodhi tree, the devil Mara sends temptations to distract him from the wish of his deepest essence. Mara flashes images of the Buddha as a great leader, as a huge success in business with mountains of money, surrounded by beautiful women. He shows the Buddha that can make India

great again if he would just give up his quest to awaken, and get up and do something. The Buddha will not move.

When temptation doesn't work, Mara tries fear, conjuring visions of terrible armies howling for his blood. These armies are external and also internal, legions of anxieties and fears. But the Buddha does not flinch. Slowly, he reached down and touched the earth. The classical explanation is that he is asking the Earth itself to bear witness to his many life times of effort. Not his blinding brilliance or his unique talent, mind you, but his effort, his perseverance, his willingness to show up no matter what. His willingness to fail and fail again. "Ever tried. Ever failed," writes Beckett. "No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." The Buddha understood what the Christian author G.K. Chesterton meant when he wrote, "Everything worth doing is worth doing badly."

Touching the Earth symbolizes humility, coming down out of our thoughts, out of the busy hive of ego, to join the rest of life. The Latin word *humus*, the rich living earth, is related to the word *humility*. When difficulty arises, it creates a clearing in the deadening trance of habit. We remember that what really matters is not the list of worries and desires we spend so much time thinking about every day. What matters is much more essential. Being alive, for example. Taking part in life, having a chance to give and receive in the most elemental ways, taking in the beauty of the world and giving back where we can.

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At moments when the ground gives way beneath our feet, it's good to

remember the power of touching the earth, descending from our racing thoughts and fears to an awareness of the present moment. When words

fail, we can sometimes discover a new voice and a new kind of determination. We can rise up rooted, like trees.

