

Ceremony for Beginning Anew

compiled by Tarchin Hearn (*with inspiration from experience at Plum Village*)

This meditation has been written for a community of friends-in-dharma. One person could read the sections with everyone joining in when it is appropriate. Where "Bell" is written, ring the bell or gong and then sit with awareness of breathing as the sound fades to silence. With some minor grammatical changes, the text could be used by an individual practicing on their own.

1. – **Walking Meditation**

Begin with a group walking meditation

2. – **Introduction**

The Buddha once said, 'If you would honour me, practice what I teach.' This ceremony for Beginning Anew is just that – an opportunity to honour and practice what we value. It is a time to remember our strengths and a time to recognize our failings. It is a time to remember the blessing of forgiveness and letting go. It is a time to nourish our aspiration and determination to cultivate love and clear-seeing presence, for the sake of all beings. True beginning anew is both liberating and healing. Every moment is potentially a new beginning. Ultimately, non-clinging awareness *is* the experience of continually beginning anew.

3. – **Sitting Meditation**

Sit together for a few minutes.

4. – **Contemplating Refuge**

(recite together)

We take refuge in Buddha; the natural state of complete authenticity and presence.

We take refuge in Dharma; the universal teachings and demonstrations of awakening.

We take refuge in Sangha; the unfolding community of all life.

May we actively cultivate: generosity, wholesome relating, patience, skilled use of energy, a continuity of caring and enquiry, and profound understanding.

May we awaken speedily, for the sake of everything and everyone.

Bell

5. – **Contemplating the Four Great Universal Vows of a Bodhisattva**

(recite together)

Beings and phenomena are innumerable

We vow to meet them with kindness and interest.

States of suffering are inexhaustible,

We vow to engage them with patience and love.

Dharmas are immeasurable,

We vow to explore them deeply.

The ever-present mystery of interbeing is beyond words and symbols,
We vow to surrender within it fully.

From this moment on, with wisdom and compassion as my lamp and staff,
We dedicate all our life energies to the welfare of all beings.

Bell

6. – **The Yoga of Eight Offerings** (leader reads on behalf of everyone)

Rest with your breathing and allow these words invite direct experience.

Within and around each one of us is the shrine of the world, this living earth, a monastery of becoming. Clouds in the sky, plants reaching towards the sun; creatures of water, air, earth and star-light; the smells and sounds of living beings singing their stories, chattering messages; mysterious linkings – companions on a pathless path of life unfolding.

We feel the presence of our teachers inspiring awakening
and wonderment in the daily unfolding of our lives.
We sense our ancestors, rivers of multi-leveled talents,
bubbling through the changing landscapes of time.
We rest in the vast ecology of this living world,
breathing with a matrix of being and becoming.

We pray for the well-fare of everyone and make offerings;
giving ourselves away.

Water for Drinking To all our teachers, our ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, we offer water for drinking. Crystal fluidity, pouring through our bodies, purifying the gateways of knowing; cleansing our seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and mental activity so that we can meet the world, just as it is; so that we can be utterly present and compassionately responsive to every arising object, whether inner or outer, animate or inanimate.

Offering water for drinking, we moisten the entire field of experience with the simple bliss of seeing clearly without judgment, of hearing without confusion, of touching with wonderment and curiosity, of smelling with vast sensitivity, of tasting with subtle discrimination, of remembering, emotioning, thinking, and conceptualizing whilst clearly knowing that these extraordinary processes are deeply linked with the whole of the world. This is the offering of water for drinking and we offer it without attachment.

Bell

Water for Washing To all of our teachers, our ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, we offer water for washing our feet. Feet symbolize foundation, roots, our contact with the earth and the ground of becoming. Washing the feet purifies and reveals the deep base of wholesome shaping, the cooperative activity of myriad levels of knowing bringing forth a living world. This is the real *bodhicitta*, the embodied process of awakening. The act

of purifying is the act of hundred percent-ing; a way of living that is profoundly inclusive and utterly present.

By washing the mud from our feet, instead of a chaos of conflicting projects, whirlwinds of hopes and fears that churn the ocean of our lives, we discover our total at-oneness with a vibrant mystery of awakening that is already in process; a mystery that is the core of each and every sentient being. This is offering water for washing the feet and we offer it without attachment.

Bell

Flowers To all of our teachers, our ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, we offer flowers; ever fresh mysteries of living beauty. Not dead plants, not style or fashion, but the natural beauty that shines forth when we feel utterly in tune, when the inner and the outer mesh together in a harmonious burst of creativity, birthing newness into the world.

Ultimately, offering flowers is to offer the beauty of buddhahood, the flowering of wisdom and compassion, tolerance and kindness, the budding, the bodhi, the buddha that is everyone's very nature, shining forth and functioning well through body, speech and mind. We offer the flowering beauty of our lives and we offer it without attachment.

Bell

Incense To all of our teachers, our ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, we offer an immense cloud of incense; the incense of pure moral conduct, scenting each activity of our body, speech and mind. Appreciating and supporting life, cultivating a mind of spontaneous generosity, actively using the senses to explore the world, communicating skillfully and compassionately, and nourishing ourselves and all beings in ways that support awakening; all these actions pervading our relationships with people, animals, plants and landscapes; with micro beings too small to see and macro beings beyond our comprehension; with inner thoughts and feelings and memories; with each and every facet of this vast dance of life.

To sweeten every action with love, compassion, clear-seeing and deepening understanding *is* the offering of incense. May the activities of our body, speech and mind become incense for all that we meet. This is the offering of incense and we offer it without attachment.

Bell

Light To all of our teachers, our ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, we offer light; not merely candles or butter lamps, but the illumination of wisdom; the 'light' of experientially understanding the profound interconnectedness and interdependence of everything and everyone.

Just as the light from one candle can ignite another, so too, the natural play of broad, inclusive, continuously fresh awareness, can awaken others to broad, loving, inclusiveness and this in turn can awaken others; a fire of love and understanding spreading in every direction. Dwelling in the domain of the all embracing, we offer the light of deepening wisdom. May all beings shine forth, illuminating the best in each other. This is the offering of light and we offer it without attachment. *Bell*

Perfume To all of our teachers, our ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, we offer the perfume of sincere devotion. This is an offering of love and support for all that is wholesome, perfuming each moment with immense energy; a heart felt commitment to uplift beings.

Devotion to truth. Devotion to honesty. Devotion to compassion. Devotion to questioning and exploring freely. Devotion to looking deeply into whatever is arising and then to living according to the implications of what is discovered. May all beings enhance the world with the perfume of total engagement flowing from a fearless heart. This is the offering of perfume and we offer it without attachment.

Bell

Food To all of our teachers, our ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, we offer an abundance of food and nourishment; a great banquet, a cornucopia of talents, interests and engagements, over flowing as a magnificent feast to feed all beings, each according to their needs.

We offer the food of *sila*, the delight and well-being which comes from living in accord with dharma. We offer the food of *samadhi*, the harmonizing of body and mind through meditation. We offer the food of *prajña*, the wisdom of seeing through the illusion of separateness. May the activities of our body, speech and mind become a banquet for all beings. This is the offering of the food of living abundance and we offer it without attachment.

Bell

Music To all of our teachers, our ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, we offer music, the voice of Dharma, a symphony of teaching – encouraging, cajoling, inspiring, instructing, humouring, reasoning, uplifting and demonstrating through voice and silence the very action of *bodhi*. We offer the wonderful rhythms, harmonies, syncopations and surprises – the music of heart and mind functioning beautifully; singing the song of awakening to and with all that we meet. This is the offering of music and we offer it to all without attachment.

Bell

Abiding in the midst of this miraculous mandala of boundless generosity: water for drinking, water for washing, flowers, incense, light, perfumes, food and music, we offer all that we are and all that we have.

E MA HOH (*a mantra for calling all beings to the banquet*)

Resting in a beginningless endless stream of offering; parent to child, child to parent, teacher to student, student to teacher, inner to outer, outer to inner, friend to friend, creature to creature, this is the yoga of eight offerings, a celebration of living. May we cultivate it day and night, season by season, in every situation we encounter.

Bell 3xs

7. – *Salutation*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

Buddhadharma is all around us.
It can be found in everything and every situation.
It is closer than hands and feet.
May each one of us take the dharma to heart.
May we put it into practice, and realise its true meaning.

8. – *Bowing*

Demonstrating awareness in the very midst of suffering and confusion,
to Shakyamuni Buddha, the Enlightened One, we bow in gratitude.

Showing the way fearlessly and compassionately,
to each and every one of our ancestral teachers, we bow with profound gratitude.

Bell 3xs

9. – *Confession, Aspiration and Beginning Anew*

With deepening respect and strengthening love, we flower in the presence of buddha-nature,
this womb of thus-ness that is the ground of everything.

Too often we live in states of unawareness and confusion, straying from the path of compassion and mindfulness, thus turning our backs on the vast mystery of life. We have contributed to our own suffering and through doing so, we have contributed to the suffering of others. Our heart gardens are sown with attachment, ill-will, fear, defensiveness, envy and pride. In us are seeds of violence, stealing, sensual misconduct, and dishonest communication. Our ordinary deeds and words can do damage. All these unskillful actions are obstacles to peace and joy. Sincerely recognizing our errors, we breathe deeply, appreciating the enormity of all actions.

Let us begin anew.

Bell

We also know that in our consciousness are innumerable wholesome seeds – seeds of love and understanding, and seeds of peace and joy. But if we neglect to water them, and allow irritation or sorrow to overwhelm them, how can they blossom and grow? When we chase after future happiness, life here and now becomes but a thin, shadow play of reality. Too often, our mind is occupied by the past, or worried about this and that in the future. Grasping at permanence, we trample on real happiness. Now, recognizing these patterns and tendencies.

Let us begin anew.

Bell

Although we recite the precepts and bodhisattva vow and chant the prayers of refuge, when difficulties arise, the dharma often seems abstract and far away. Remembering the dharma with every action of our body, speech and mind,
Let us begin anew.

Bell

From this moment onward with great determination, we aspire to live in ways that support awakening in ourselves and all beings. We will learn the art of true happiness and cultivate compassionate awareness in the midst of all of life's arisings. (*breathe and contemplate*)

When we stray into difficulty, may we quickly and courageously strengthen our awareness of the ever fresh present. May we plant our heart's garden with good seeds; and cultivate strong foundations of understanding and love.

May we follow the way of mindfulness, the practice of looking and understanding deeply in order to be able to see the nature of all that is and so to be free of the bonds of hope and fear.

May we learn to speak lovingly, to be affectionate, to care for others, to bring the roots of joy to many places and to help people to abandon sorrow.

May we realize everything and everyone to be embodiments of spontaneously present, ever fresh awareness.

May we continuously begin anew

Bell

10. – **Resolutions**

(Repeat together)

We take refuge in the Buddha,
the one who shows us the way in this life.

Namo Buddhaya.

We take refuge in the Dharma,
the way of understanding and love.

Namo Dharmaya

We take refuge in the Sangha,
the community that lives in harmony and awareness.

Namo Sanghaya

We are aware that the three gems are within us. We vow to realize them.

We vow to cultivate happiness, to practice mindful breathing and to look deeply into whatever is arising.

We vow to never abandon trying to understand living beings and their struggles to live and unfold.

We vow to cultivate the *brahma vihara*:
lovingkindness, compassion, joy and equanimity.

Bell

We vow to offer support and inspiration to at least one person each morning, and to help relieve the grief of at least one person each afternoon.

We vow to live simply and sanely, content with simple possessions, to keep our bodies healthy, and to use the five precepts both in traditional and positive expression, to inform our conduct.

We vow to let go of worry and anxiety in order to be light and free.

Bell

We are aware that we owe so much to our parents, teachers, and friends; in fact to the entire matrix of life unfolding. We vow to honour their struggles and discoveries by engaging in this vast work of awakening, so that understanding and compassion will flower.

We vow to do all that we can to help living beings be free from suffering.

May the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha support these great efforts.

Bell 3xs

11. – ***The Three Refuges***

Buddham saranam gacchami

Dharmam saranam gacchami

Sangham saranam gacchami

Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami

Dutiyampi Dharmam saranam gacchami

Dutiyampi Sangham saranam gacchami

Tatiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami

Tatiyampi Dharmam saranam gacchami

Tatiyampi Sangham saranam gacchami

12. – ***Individual Contributions***

(if there is time and it feels appropriate)

Now, in the spirit of beginning anew, if any of you would like to share something personal – a positive insight or strengthened understanding arising in this mandala of refreshed aspiration – please do so.

13. – *Sharing the Merit*

Beginner's Mind,
Ever-fresh Awareness,
Unshakable Presence,
Beginning Anew,
Different words to point out a single truth.

By the power of these wholesome activities
May our lives be rich with awakening.
Living thus may we abandon all unwholesomeness.
Through the endless storm of birth, illness, old age and death,
May we help each and every being to realize their true nature.

*Aham avero homi! abyapajjho homi! anigho homi!
sukhi attanam pariharami!
Aham viya sabbe satta avera hontu, abyapajjho hontu,
anigha hontu, sukhi attanam pariharantu*

May the day be well,
And the night be well,
And the mid-day hours bring happiness too,
May both day and night always be well,
By the blessings of the Triple Gem, may all be auspicious.

Sarva Mangalam