

# The Yoga of Eight Offerings

by Tarchin Hearn

## Preamble

In Buddhist temples, one will encounter various ritual practices of offerings. One such practice involves cultivating eight qualities represented by: water for drinking, water for washing, flowers, incense, light, perfume, food and music. On a Tibetan shrine, it is quite common to see eight bowls containing water, candles, flowers and so forth, arranged before a Buddha statue or an equivalent object of reverence. Less common, is to realize that the offerings and the Buddha statue represent potentials and qualities that exist within each one of us. The practice is not to offer flowers to a statue but to contemplate deeply the process of bringing certain qualities and understandings into the world. The Buddha represents the fully unfolded natural state of being. The offerings represent the various qualities that facilitate the realizing of this natural state. Ideally, these acts of offering become, in the words of Namgyal Rinpoché, 'an outer visible sign of an inner invisible grace'. By nurturing the living inner grace behind the symbols, these practices can become profoundly transformative.

Although this practice can be carried out entirely in your imagination, you might occasionally augment the experience by having eight bowls containing the offerings, to physically represent the qualities you are aspiring to bring into the world. When you come to the phrase *"and I offer it without attachment"*, raise the appropriate object in front of you and symbolically offer it to everyone and everything that you value.

If you have a bell or a gong, you can separate the segments with a soft, full <<bong>> resting with your breathing, as the reverberating sound gradually fades to silence.



## The Yoga of Eight Offerings

*(Smiling, breathing, present, appreciating, allow these to words invite direct experience.)*

*Within me and around me 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 – such mysterious linkings;  
companions on a pathless path of life unfolding.*

*Resting at ease in the flow of my breathing,  
I feel the presence of my mentors and teachers, inspiring awakening  
and wonderment in the midst of the daily unfolding of my life.*

*I sense the vast braided river of my ancestors,  
flowing through the changing landscapes of time;  
a treasury of multi-levelled talents and aptitudes.*

*I rest in the rich evolving ecology of this living world,  
breathing with a matrix of being and becoming.*

*I pray for the well-fare of everyone and make offerings;  
giving myself away.*

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

Offering water for drinking, I 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 I offer it without attachment.

**Water for Washing** To all of my teachers, ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, I offer water for washing the 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 being and 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 my feet, instead of a chaos of conflicting projects, whirlwinds of hopes and fears that churn the ocean of my life, I discover my 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 I offer it without attachment.

**Flowers** To all of my teachers, ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, I offer flowers; ever fresh blossomings 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. I offer the flowering beauty of my life and I offer it without attachment.

**Incense** To all of my teachers, ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, I offer an immense cloud of incense; the incense of pure moral conduct scenting each activity of my body, speech and mind. Appreciating and supporting life, cultivating a mind of spontaneous generosity, actively using the senses to explore the world, communicating skilfully and compassionately, and nourishing myself and all beings in ways that support awakening; all these actions pervading my relationships with people, animals, plants and landscapes, with micro beings too small to see and macro beings beyond my 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 my body, speech and mind become incense for all that I meet. This is the offering of incense and I offer it without attachment.

**Light** To all of my teachers, ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, I offer light; not merely candles or butter lamps, but the illumination of wisdom; the luminosity 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, I offer the light of deepening wisdom. May all beings shine forth, illuminating the best in each other. This is offering of light and I offer it without attachment.

**Perfume** To all of my teachers, ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, I 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 I offer it without attachment.

**Food** To all of my teachers, ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, I 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 beings, each according to their needs.

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

**Music** To all of my teachers, ancestors and the vast ecology of living beings, I offer music, the voice of Dharma, a symphony of teaching – encouraging, cajoling, inspiring, instructing, humoring, reasoning, uplifting, and demonstrating through voice and silence the very action of bodhi. I 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 I meet. This is the offering of music and I offer it without attachment.

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 I cultivate it in every situation I encounter.

### Afterthoughts

If you have the time, it can be rich and rewarding to practice this yoga of eight offerings after doing 'Touching the Earth in Six Prostrations'. These two contemplations fit together very well and can be an inspiring way to begin your day.

(*Touching the Earth in Six Prostrations* [click here](#))

Although the practice of offering is often seen as just one part of a larger body of spiritual work, it can also be a very deep and complete path in itself. A way to encourage this is to take one of the offerings or one particular aspect of it and make this a theme of contemplation and exploration for your entire day. For example from the phrase "I moisten the entire field of experience with the simple bliss of seeing clearly without judgment," you might explore seeing without judgment throughout the entire day. Does it give rise to 'simple bliss'? How can one 'moisten the field of experience? What could this mean? Can I experience each act of seeing as an act of generosity?

A more extensive explanation and a slightly different version of this practice can be found in my essay 'The Yoga of Eight Offerings' ([Click here for this essay.](#)) It also can be found in my e-book 'Sangha Work' in the chapter on Beginning Anew. ([Click here for Sangha Work.](#))