



The Three Earth Touchings

Introduction:

This is the full text guiding the practice of Three Earth Touchings that we use at our practice centres and sanghas in the Plum Village Tradition. Practicing the Three Earth Touchings gives us an opportunity to deeply touch the reality of interbeing across space and time.

After practicing with this standard text, we encourage you to write your own, so that you can go even deeper into your practice.

To begin this practice, we invite you join your palms in front of your chest in the shape of a lotus bud. If you are with others, one of you may like to take the role of bell master, and invite the bell and read the text for others to practice. If you are alone, you may like to invite the bell, and read the text out loud.

Then, gently lower yourself to the ground so that all four limbs and your forehead are resting comfortably on the floor. While touching the Earth, turn your palms face up, showing your openness to the Three Jewels — the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. When we touch the Earth, we breathe in all the strength and stability of the Earth, and breathe out our suffering - our feelings of anger, hatred, fear, inadequacy and grief.

Enjoy your practice.

[invite the bell three times to begin]

I.

Touching the Earth, I connect with ancestors and descendants of both my spiritual and my blood families.

[invite the bell] [touch the earth]

My spiritual ancestors include the Buddha, the bodhisattvas, the noble Sangha of Buddha's disciples, [insert names of others you would like to include], and my own spiritual teachers still alive or already passed away. They are present in me because they have transmitted to me seeds of peace, wisdom, love, and happiness. They have woken up in me my resource of understanding and compassion. When I look at my spiritual ancestors, I see those who are perfect in the practice of the mindfulness trainings, understanding, and compassion, and those who are still imperfect. I accept them all because I see within myself shortcomings and weaknesses. Aware that my practice of the mindfulness trainings is not always perfect, and that I am not always as understanding and compassionate as I would like to be, I open my heart and accept all my spiritual descendants. Some of my descendants practice the mindfulness trainings, understanding, and compassion in a way which invites confidence and respect, but there are also those who come across many difficulties and are constantly subject to ups and downs in their practice.

In the same way, I accept all my ancestors on my mother's side and my father's side of the family. I accept all their good qualities and their virtuous actions, and I also accept all their weaknesses. I

open my heart and accept all my blood descendants with their good qualities, their talents, and also their weaknesses.

My spiritual ancestors, blood ancestors, spiritual descendants, and blood descendants are all part of me. I am them, and they are me. I do not have a separate self. All exist as part of a wonderful stream of life which is constantly moving.

[take three breaths] [invite the bell] [stand up]

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Touching the Earth, I connect with all people and all species that are alive at this moment in this world with me.

[invite the bell] [touch the earth]

I am one with the wonderful pattern of life that radiates out in all directions. I see the close connection between myself and others, how we share happiness and suffering. I am one with those who were born disabled or who have become disabled because of war, accident, or illness. I am one with those who are caught in a situation of war or oppression. I am one with those who find no happiness in family life, who have no roots and no peace of mind, who are hungry for understanding and love, and who are looking for something beautiful, wholesome, and true to embrace and to believe in. I am someone at the point of death who is very afraid and does not know what is going to happen. I am a child who lives in a place where there is miserable poverty and disease, whose legs and arms are like sticks and who has no future. I am also the manufacturer of bombs that are sold to poor countries. I am the frog swimming in the pond and I am also the snake who needs the body of the frog to nourish its own body. I am the caterpillar or the ant that the bird is looking for to eat, and I am also the bird that is looking for the caterpillar or the ant. I am the forest that is being cut down. I am the rivers and the air that are being polluted, and I am also the person who cuts down the forest and pollutes the rivers and the air. I see myself in all species, and I see all species in me.

I am one with the great beings who have realised the truth of no-birth and no-death and are able to look at the forms of birth and death, happiness and suffering, with calm eyes. I am one with those people—who can be found a little bit everywhere—who have sufficient peace of mind, understanding and love, who are able to touch what is wonderful, nourishing, and healing, who also have the capacity to embrace the world with a heart of love and arms of caring action. I am someone who has enough peace, joy, and freedom and is able to offer fearlessness and joy to living beings around themselves. I see that I am not lonely and cut off. The love and the happiness of great beings on this planet help me not to sink in despair. They help me to live my life in a meaningful way, with true peace and happiness. I see them all in me, and I see myself in all of them.

[take three breaths] [invite the bell] [stand up]

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Touching the Earth, I let go of my idea that I am this body and my life span is limited.

[invite the bell] [touch the earth]

I see that this body, made up of the four elements, is not really me and I am not limited by this body. I am part of a stream of life of spiritual and blood ancestors that for thousands of years has been flowing into the present and flows on for thousands of years into the future. I am one with my ancestors. I am one with all people and all species, whether they are peaceful and fearless, or suffering and afraid. At this very moment, I am present everywhere on this planet. I am also present in the past and in the future. The disintegration of this body does not touch me, just as when the plum blossom falls it does not mean the end of the plum tree. I see myself as a wave on the surface of the ocean. My nature is the ocean water. I see myself in all the other waves and see all the other waves in me. The appearance and disappearance of the form of the wave does not affect the ocean. My Dharma body and spiritual life are not subject to birth and death. I see the presence of myself before my body manifested and after my body has disintegrated. Even in this moment, I see how I exist elsewhere than in this body. Seventy or eighty years is not my life span. My life span, like the life span of a leaf or of a Buddha, is limitless. I have gone beyond the idea that I am a body that is separated in space and time from all other forms of life.

[take three breaths] [invite the bell] [stand up]

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