

TOUCHING THE EARTH TO OUR ANCESTORS

Expanded Version by the Plum Village Fourfold Sangha

In gratitude I bow to this land and to all of the ancestors who made it available. (Bell, all touch the earth).

I see that I am whole, protected, and nourished by this land and all of the living beings that have been here and made life easy and possible for me through all their efforts. I see all those known and unknown who have made this country a refuge for people of so many origins and colors, by their talent, perseverance, and love—those who have worked hard to build schools, hospitals, bridges, and roads; to protect human rights; to develop science and technology; and to fight for freedom and social justice. *(Bell, all stand up. Take three breaths.)*

I touch my African American and descendant ancestors, you who were enslaved and brought to this land, who poured your blood, sweat, and tears on this land, whose unrewarded labor helped make this country an economic world power. (Bell, all touch the earth).

I am in touch with the crippling violence and inhumanity that my African American ancestors faced every day, the loss of your land, language, culture, family, and freedom, and how you always found ways to resist, to subvert oppression, to maintain your humanity, through soulful singing, prayer, humor, slave revolts, communities of escaped slaves, as well as through political struggle, a strong commitment to education, and economic empowerment. I aspire to preserve, nourish, and pass on your strength, patience, perseverance, love, forgiveness, humility, your creativity and innovation in agriculture, inventions, history, music, dance, art, the sciences, sports, oratory, literature, religion, civil and human rights activism, and community spirit. *(Bell, all stand up. Take three breaths.)*

I touch my Asian American and Pacific Islander ancestors of this land, those of you from the Philippines, China, Japan, Korea, India, Nepal, Tibet, Burma, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. (Bell, all touch the earth).

I am in touch with you who courageously survived the devastation of war, colonialism, and displacement from our ancestral homelands and who carved a graceful new path amidst the turmoil of dislocation and discrimination. I touch your experiences of Chinese and South Indian indentured servitude, Japanese-American internment camps, anti-Asian exclusion laws, labor exploitation, land dispossession and contamination, refugee camps, family separation, hate crimes, and assimilation. I touch your sacrifice and contribution to the economic success of this land through your underpaid labor in gold mines, farms, and canneries along the Pacific Coast, your work in the dangerous construction of

transcontinental railroads, and your many innovations in agriculture, textiles, manufacturing, and technology throughout this land. I honor the ways that you preserved your body, mind, and spirit through music, poetry, literature, food, culture, community, and interracial solidarity. I aspire to preserve, nourish, and pass on your patience, perseverance, determination, respect for ancestors and elders, commitment to youth and family, education, arts, and your painstaking care to maintain culture, language, and religion for future generations. *(Bell, all stand up. Take three breaths.)*

I touch my European American ancestors, you who came to this land to find freedom from political and religious oppression and poverty, who came seeking a new vision of society. (Bell, all touch the earth).

I touch the deep insight and compassion of these ancestors: the Quakers, Abolitionists, peace activists, and the great conservationists. I am aware that many of you European American ancestors lost your fortunes and even your lives to resist the oppression of people of color. At the same time, I touch the great suffering experienced by some of you in my ancestry who were misguided in their views, whose belief in your superiority led to the decimation of Native peoples, the horrors of slavery, and the exclusion of people of color. I pour all this suffering on the earth and ask the earth to help me transform it into wisdom and compassion. I aspire to preserve, nourish, and pass on your courage in coming to an unfamiliar land, your strong faith and commitment to democracy, your perseverance, respect for the arts and ingenuity. *(Bell, all stand up. Take three breaths.)*

I touch my Latina and Latino ancestors of this land, you who are the children of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and the Spanish colonizers, some who for centuries lived on and built up roughly half of the present day U.S., and some who immigrated from Central and South America more recently. (Bell, all touch the earth).

I touch the blood, sweat, and tears you have poured on to this land as farm laborers, skilled artisans, teachers, politicians, architects, and activists. I am in touch with the suffering of my Latina/o ancestors due to war and racist policies, like the deportation of two million Mexican American U.S. citizens during the Depression, and the continued targeting and deportation of immigrants south of the US border, as well as loss of land and culture. I am in touch with the United Farm Workers movement to end dehumanizing conditions for migrant workers, and I feel this collective energy, courage, intelligence, and dedication nourishing and supporting me to also do my part. I aspire to preserve, nourish, and pass on your strength, patience, perseverance, love, forgiveness, humility, humor, your creativity and innovation in the arts, your tradition of nourishing food and taking care of family. *(Bell, all stand up. Take three breaths.)*

I touch my Native American ancestors, you who have lived on this land for such a long time and known the ways to live in peace and harmony with nature, protecting the mountains, forests, animals, plants, and minerals. (Bell, all touch the earth).

I am grateful for all the foods that you, our ancestors have cultivated to nourish us today, and for the Iroquois contribution to our system of government. I am in touch with the pro-found suffering of my Native American ancestors: genocide, displacement, racism, and separation from homeland, culture, religion, food, dance, and songs. I deeply honor the bravery and leadership that has allowed our people to survive and thrive, and I am humbled by the brilliance of our cultural renewal, the resilience of our traditions, and our deep generosity over the past five hundred years. I release our suffering to the earth and ask the earth, sky, water, and fire to help me transform it into wisdom and compassion. I aspire to preserve, nourish, and pass your medicine, ingenuity, humor, courage, dignity, clarity, compassion, art, culture, traditions of cooperation, and selfless service to the community. *(Bell, all stand up. Take three breaths.)*

I touch my Middle Eastern, Arab, and Northern African ancestors, including those from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Iraq, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan.

(Bell, all touch the earth).

I am in touch with you who came as slaves in the 16th century, you who sought refuge from war and injustice and you who migrated for a better life. I am grateful for you who joined other immigrants in providing much-needed labor that helped transform the United States from a semi-agricultural society into one of the world's most advanced industrial powers. I deeply honor my ancestors who enriched the economic, political and cultural landscape of American life and the scientists, engineers, and doctors who contributed to the making of a great America. I am grateful for all the foods that you, our ancestors have shared with America from a generous spirit, the beautiful tapestry and art, and your priority of education, entrepreneurship, family and extended family support, and respect for our elders. I am in touch with the pro-found suffering of my Northern African, Middle Eastern and Arab ancestors from wars in their homelands and the current day suffering of their descendants. I am in touch with the way this historic and current day suffering may at times manifest in unskillful actions leading to wrong perceptions and persecution of our beautiful culture and religions. I release our suffering to the earth and ask the earth, sky, water, and fire to help me transform it into wisdom and compassion. I aspire to preserve, nourish, and pass your bravery, your perseverance, generosity, your religions and languages, your ingenuity, clarity, art, culture, foods, traditions of cooperation and family loyalty

(Bell, all stand up. Take three breaths.)

I feel the energy of this land penetrating my body, mind, and soul, supporting and accepting me. I vow to cultivate and maintain this energy and to transmit it to future generations. I vow to contribute my part in transforming the violence, hatred and delusion that still lie deep in the collective consciousness of this society—in all ethnic groups—so that future generations will have more safety, joy, and peace. I ask this land for its protection and support. (End with three sounds of the bell.)

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