

DAILY ANCESTOR RITUAL

VIEW

Who are our ancestors? Our ancestors are those with whom we share strong patterns of consciousness and energy. We have different names for this patterning: our bodies, our habitual activities, and our habitual emotions. The nearer ancestors are to us, the more habitual patterning, or karma, we share.

The purpose of performing a daily ancestor ritual is twofold. First, we communicate to our ancestors our gratitude for our human lives. Second, we state the intention to benefit our ancestors through our dharmic activities in this life. Both of these purposes can be achieved because the largest context for our lives is Great Time, or all-at-onceness. How do we benefit the deceased? By working to unwind the karmic tensions that we share with them. Relaxing our compulsive, destructive patterning also unwinds it for our ancestors.

METHOD

Set up your ancestor altar in the South. This means that the ancestors face North and you face South while performing the ritual. If possible, position the altar away from close proximity to windows and doors. It's fine to have your altar on top of a bookcase or dresser. It's also fine to have a separate altar table. Whatever your arrangement, the altar should not be shared with other things, e.g. your comb and brush, or stacks of school books, or your television.

The altar should contain photographs and/or artifacts representing your immediate ancestors going back no more than seven generations. (Most of us in the West only know of ancestors going back one or two generations.) "Immediate ancestors" means brothers, sisters, mother, father, and generations of grandparents. Aunts, uncles and cousins are not generally included. Do not include those with whom you have simply lost touch. Unless you are certain, or fairly certain, an immediate ancestor is deceased, do not include them on your altar.

You will need a bell, an incense burner, and some nice incense. Use a mellow scent such as natural sandalwood or aloeswood. Keep your altar, photographs and artifacts clean and dust-free.

Once or twice a day, face your altar. Light up the incense, holding it in your right hand. Hold the bell in your left hand. Take a moment to enter into natural presence, or just to relax. See if you are able to relax your grip on individuality and sense with love and gratitude all of those to whom you owe your life. It is not necessary to focus on each individual ancestor. Rather, they are, as a group, part of your prana or life force.

Also, it doesn't matter if your relationship to someone on your altar was difficult. You are here, in a precious human body. You have been fortunate enough to find dharma teachings. Whatever else your ancestors did, they have made this possible. Now is your time each day to recognize this simple, but profound, fact.

You can make the offering of gratitude and intention to benefit your ancestors in your own words, either silently or aloud. Ring the bell, while circling the incense three times clockwise. You can do this either while you are stating your intention, or just afterward.

The sound of the bell is the nondual sound of Great Time. It is interbeing—the unstruck sound of anahata chakra, the heart chakra and the true source of nondual wisdom. The smoke of the incense is the simultaneously universal and individual prana shared by you and your ancestors. Now place the incense in your incense holder and pranam (bow with hands in anjali mudra at the heart). The ritual is complete.

FRUIT

This ritual, performed once or twice a day, will renew and refresh communication between you and your ancestors so that they can receive the benefit of your sadhana most effectively. It will assist in many ways to relax karmic tension and develop a sense of non-individuated Self. This ritual expresses real kindness. Kindness is the offering that contributes most to the relaxation and realization of your ancestors, yourself and all beings. Kindness is literally the recognition of all beings as kin.

