

# DAILY ANCESTOR OFFERING

## Who are our ancestors?

Our ancestors are those with whom we share strong karmas related to our bodies, our tendencies, and our habitual emotions. The nearer ancestors are to us, the more habitual patterning, or karma, we share.

Daily ancestor offering gives us the opportunity to:

1. communicate to our ancestors our gratitude for our human lives;
2. state the kind intention to benefit our ancestors through our dharmic activities in this life;
3. express our wish that our ancestors, in whatever form they now exist, might find opportunities to be relieved of suffering and to self-realize; and
4. ask for support or communicate things that need to be said.

## Setting up an ancestor altar

Set up your ancestor altar in the South. This means that the ancestors face North and you face South while performing the offering. 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, artifacts, and/or symbols representing your immediate ancestors going back no more than seven generations. Many of us only know of ancestors going back one or two generations. Symbolic objects that are meaningful to you can be placed on the altar to represent ancestors for whom we have no photos or personal items.

“Immediate ancestors” means brothers, sisters, mother, father, and generations of grandparents, great grandparents, etc. Aunts, uncles and cousins are not generally included unless you were raised by them or have an unusually close relationship with them. Do not include those with whom you have simply lost touch. Unless you are certain, or fairly certain, that an immediate ancestor is deceased, do not include them on your altar.

If you are adopted, whether or not you know the identity of your birth parents, the ancestor offering is done for your birth parents and their lineage. If a parent has been out of your life for a long time, and you don't know if they are alive or deceased, you can include them in the ritual.

## The method of daily ancestor offering

You need:

- a bell
- incense and incense holder
- a flower
- a small copper, ceramic, glass, brass, or silver vessel filled with fresh water

Once or twice a day, face your altar.

The water vessel and flower can be laid on the altar in front of your ancestor momentos. You only need a single flower, but you can also use more. It's also okay to float flower heads with short stems in the vessel.

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 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 you body, energy, and mind.

Even if your relationship to someone on your altar was difficult, you have been fortunate enough to find dharmic teachings. Whatever else your ancestors did, they are a part of what has 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 simultaneously circling the incense three times clockwise. You can do this either while you are stating your intention or just afterward.

Now place the incense in your incense holder and *pranam* (bow with hands in *anjali mudra* at the heart). The ritual is complete.

## The significance of the offerings

- The sound of the bell is the unstruck sound of *anahata chakra*, the heart chakra, and the source of wisdom.
- The flower is a living symbol of space element or that which hosts us all.
- Water is the essence of nourishment and connection.
- The smoke of the incense is a living symbol of wind element. Its movement carries your kind intentions and prayers to your ancestors.
- Kindness is the most important offering. Kindness contributes most to the relaxation and realization of your ancestors, yourself, and all beings.