

Touching the Earth (in six or twelve prostrations)

Tarchin Hearn

May this be for all of us!

*Blessed with a life-giving intuitive sense of belonging,
A capacity for radical inclusivity and a cellular knowing of home;
Breathing refuge as living presence,
An immeasurable communing of self and other,
I prostrate in all directions to the magnificence of creation.*

At the heart of all spiritual experience, whether it be religious or secular in form, dwells a sense of empowering trust and deep seated confidence that everything, at every level of being, is profoundly inter-linked and inter-dependent. The universe reveals itself as a magnificent confluence of immense diversity and dynamic wholeness. "Touching the Earth" is a contemplative practice that integrates body, speech and mind in a way that can help transform this often transient and somewhat ephemeral intuition into a tangible experience arising in the very midst of the life we are living.

Phrases such as touching the ground or touching the earth are rich and evocative images. Ecologically, socially, economically and biologically; all life is about relationship. This living that we are, emerges from the matrix of living that is the earth, our shared mother – intimately linked with an even larger father/mother, the sun. To truly touch the earth or ground is to know our roots, to feel grounded and well earthed in this communal dancing of relations and relating. Familiarizing with this way of being in every situation and circumstance of our living transforms everything. Through conceptually, emotionally and physically touching again and again and again, this living loom of creation-unfolding, we gently and thoroughly awaken to the very ground and groundlessness of being and becoming.

In Buddhist scriptures, on the so called 'night of the awakening', the Buddha-to-be, in a moment of being plagued with doubts and negativities, reached out and 'touched

the earth' and in the insightful embrace of that 'touching', realised the profound blessing of knowing/trust in the interbeingness of everything and everyone. He was unshakably home.

The Basic Practice

- 1) Contemplating the ecological ground – sensing this matrix of living beings and processes – in wonderment and appreciation, I touch the earth.
- 2) Contemplating the ancestral and cultural (*the genetic and historical*) ground of becoming – feeling this vast river of talents – with profound gratitude and appreciation, I touch the earth.
- 3) Contemplating my teachers and mentors; an ocean of inspiration – feeling your presence within and around me – with unending respect and gratitude, I touch the earth.
- 4) Realising that myself and these three have never been separate, I touch the earth.
- 5) Letting go of negativities and clinging, I touch the earth.
- 6) Radiating lovingkindness to all beings, I touch the earth.



An Expanded Version

– 1 –

Standing; feet firmly upon the earth, I soften into my bones and muscles, my whole body, swaying in space, a dancing of fine adjustments supporting this upright posture. Breathing in and breathing out; I feel the tides of air – the ebb and flow – an endless intimate exchange with a living world. Present; all my senses are open: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking.

Standing, breathing, present; I open the doors of appreciation to the vast ecological ground of becoming. I feel myself intimately partnered in a dynamic matrix of living process; a multi-leveled unfolding of uncountable interdependent manifestations of embodied knowing. With each breath, I breathe with a photosynthesizing world. My body, speech and mind are expressions of air, water, earth and radiant solar energy; weavings of becoming; journeyings of atoms, molecules, cells, and organs. This living world that I am, is an immeasurable dancing of physiology, organisms, bio-systems, planets, solar systems and cosmic arisings.

I sense the rivers and oceans in my blood and tears. I feel the mystery of transforming vegetable and animal flesh, the continuous coming into being and passing away that is my body, feelings and thinking. With awe and wonderment, sensing the beginninglessness and endlessness of everything that is, experiencing this unbroken wholeness of being as the very ground and soil of life, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM (embodied communication and mind). Then I lower myself down to the ground, resting there, physically touching the earth while sensing the union of myself and this vast display of wholeness unfolding. On each exhalation I relax more deeply in this grounding. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations I mindfully stand up.

– 2 –

Standing; feet firmly upon the earth, I soften into my bones and muscles, my whole body, swaying in space, a dancing of fine adjustments supporting this upright posture. Breathing in and breathing out; I feel the tides of air – the ebb and flow – an endless intimate exchange with a living world. Present; all my senses are open: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking.

Standing, breathing, present; I open the doors of appreciation to the ancestral and cultural, (the genetic and historical) river of becoming. My mother and father, aunts and uncles, grandparents and great grandparents; a beginningless chain of ancestors extending back as far as I can imagine. I feel the presence of entire societies, peoples migrating across the earth, meeting new challenges, discovering ways of surviving, passing on knowledge to future generations, a braiding river of talents, flowing through as an eternally creative now. I feel your presence in the shape and workings of my body, the dance of my senses and the play of my attitudes: hopes and fears and beliefs and values – skillsets of emotion and understanding. I sense the history of mammalian life; the mystery of living forms weaving the story of becoming that is this planet making itself known through me and around me.

I feel these ways of living flowing out into my children and my children's children, generations of ancestors yet to come: life-skills in healing, educating, growing food and building shelter; traditions of arts and sciences, religions and philosophies. Feeling this vast repository of talent and knowledge empowering my body, speech and mind – experiencing this as the ground and soil of life itself – with profound wonderment and respect, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself to the ground, resting there, physically touching the earth while feeling the union of myself and these myriad sources of talent and knowledge. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into this ancestral and cultural ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations I mindfully stand up.

– 3 –

Standing; feet firmly upon the earth, I soften into my bones and muscles, my whole body, swaying in space, a dancing of fine adjustments supporting this upright posture. Breathing in and breathing out; I feel the tides of air – the ebb and flow – an endless intimate exchange with a living world. Present; all my senses are open: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking.

Standing, breathing, present; I open the doors of appreciation to all those who have been master-teachers¹ for me: yogis, gurus, mystics and mentors of many lineages and traditions; artists, musicians and philosophers; scientists, adventurers and writers; educators, social activists, healers, and friends; – teachers who through being profoundly immersed in life-long apprenticeships with rich and meaningful living, have inspired my unfolding in the direction of Wisdom and Compassion. I open the doors of appreciation to teachers of the past, teachers in the present and teachers yet to come. I feel your presence inspiring and shaping me in innumerable wondrous ways. You are expressions of the very foundation of my being, reminders of what is truly functional and meaningful. Sensing your influence in my body, speech and mind; with deep gratitude and profound appreciation, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat, and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the ground, resting there, physically touching the earth while feeling the union of myself and these luminous expressions of guidance and inspiration. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations I mindfully stand up.

– 4 –

Standing; feet firmly upon the earth, I soften into my bones and muscles, my whole body, swaying in space, a dancing of fine adjustments supporting this upright posture. Breathing in and breathing out; I feel the tides of air – the ebb and flow – an endless intimate exchange with a living world.

¹□'master-teachers' – We all have had many teachers in the course of our living but some have been what I think of as 'master-teachers'. These are the special people in our lives who have touched us in profound and meaningful ways, inspiring a flow of something beautiful and good in our lives.

Present; all my senses are open: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking.

Standing, breathing, present; with deepening confidence that myself and these three great treasures, these three faces of the ineffable ground of being, (ecological ground, ancestral ground and ground of inspiration) are not separate in the least; sensing the unbreakable wholeness of totality, a seamless un-pin-down-able mystery appearing as the fullness of now; with awe, vitality and presence, resting in the blessing of non-separation, the spacious openness of interbeing, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the ground, resting there, physically touching the earth while feeling the mystery of union revealing itself in every moment of knowing. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations I mindfully stand up.

– 5 –

Standing; feet firmly upon the earth, I soften into my bones and muscles, my whole body, swaying in space, a dancing of fine adjustments supporting this upright posture. Breathing in and breathing out; I feel the tides of air – the ebb and flow – an endless intimate exchange with a living world. Present; all my senses are open: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking.

Standing, breathing, present; I recognise how clinging to patterns of body, communication and conceptualising, are habits inherited or arising from this same triple ground. Feeling the suffering of clinging, the struggle of trying to make permanent that which is impermanent; feeling the anguish, pain, hopes, fears and confusions of uncountable beings weaving these present patterns of dysfunction and defensiveness in my own being; with courage and determination to uplift everyone, letting go of clinging in body, speech and mind, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the ground, resting there, physically touching the earth while completely letting go in every aspect of my being. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations I mindfully stand up.

– 6 –

Standing; feet firmly upon the earth, I soften into my bones and muscles, my whole body, swaying in space, a dancing of fine adjustments supporting this upright posture. Breathing in and breathing out; I feel the tides of air – the ebb and flow – an endless intimate exchange with a living world. Present; all my senses are open: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking.

Standing, breathing, present; experiencing a vast glow of kindness and interest for every manifestation of life; radiating lovingkindness to all beings of present, past and future, with a deep wish that everyone recognise the true nature of being; with body, speech and mind, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the ground, resting there, physically touching the earth while feeling the healing presence of lovingkindness flowing out in all directions, supporting and nourishing every arising manifestation. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations I mindfully stand up.

After finishing the practice, sit in meditation; smiling, breathing, present; appreciating the immensity of life in all its grandeur. Then finish by 'sharing the merit' – aspiring that through practising in this way, all beings will come to know their own true nature.

Further Hints and Comments

- 1) This practice could of course be adapted for any posture. If you are sitting you might reach out with a hand and touch the earth. If you are lying or walking you could be acutely aware of the sensations of your body on the bed or your feet upon the ground.
- 2) If you are just beginning this practice, first learn the general format. Feel free to use your own words, one's that touch you most relevantly. The words I have used in this expanded version are just to give a hint at the immensity of these themes. As you familiarise yourself with the spirit of these contemplations, you may find your language becoming simpler as you silently deepen into a mode of being that is rich and multidimensional. At this point simply remembering the 'basic practice' can be sufficient to evoke vast experience.
- 3) Explore each of the three aspects of the ground as an unbroken flow. The continual flowing exchange of materials and energies, revealed in a dancing of transient forms that all together compose this ecosystem of life. Talents of past generations flowing into you and out through your children and your interactions with others. Guidance and inspiration from the past and present, flowing through you and inspiring all the beings that you meet. In the experience of true refuge everything becomes a living expression of flow and transformation – an unbreakable wholeness of being and becoming that involves the entire universe.
- 4) Come to know the triple ground, not just intellectually, but with your body, your feelings and your felt-sense understandings.
- 5) Do each prostration in a smooth unhurried manner as if the entire practice was an exquisitely sensitive body awareness exploration similar to that found in some forms of Tai Chi or Kum Nye or Feldenkrais awareness-through-movement work.

(If you are involved with the Tibetan practice of 100,000 prostrations, after completing these six and before you sit in meditation, you could continue with the more traditional form of prostration, infusing your practice with this knowing of the presence of the Triple Ground.)

- 6) Learn to see other beings; family, friends, strangers, co-workers, enemies and so forth as expressions of this vast creative ground – this total field of all events and meanings.

- 7) Practice the essence of touching the earth in every moment of the day - walking, working, cooking, driving the car etc. Not stepping out of the ground for an instant! Like the water of all rivers returning to the great ocean of being – at rest, attentive, loving, appreciating, respectful, responsive, clear and even, – we discover a profound sense of connectedness and belonging. We could call this 'Living Refuge'.



Part Two of Touching the Earth

(with six additional prostrations)

– mind and knowing and effortless naturalness –

As your dharma explorations mature and deepen you will likely find yourself engaged with questions about consciousness and the nature of mind and knowing. When this becomes your

experience and having thoroughly explored "Touching the Earth in Six Prostrations", then try adding these further six to your meditations so that you now do twelve prostrations in all.

May they support a deepening of insight and joy!

– 7 –

Standing, breathing, present; experiencing the empty, open dimension of all these forms and processes, I look for an essence and find nothing whatsoever to grasp. Being spacious openness – resting in itself – with body, speech and mind, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the ground resting there for a while, physically touching the earth and deepening into the spacious openness of inter-being. On each exhalation I relax more into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations and I mindfully stand up.

– 8 –

Standing, breathing, present; experiencing this boundless openness as itself, a display of lucid clarity, a dancing of myriad dimensions of knowing; with body, speech and mind, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the ground, resting there for a while, physically touching the earth while recognising the clear, knowing, cognising nature of this present arising experience. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations and I mindfully stand up.

– 9 –

Standing, breathing, present; experiencing the entire world of appearances as an unimpeded and interrupted play of responsiveness. Flowing as a beginningless endless weaving of inter-becoming – in which everything and every situation, at

every level of being, is mutually affecting and responding to and with, every other thing and situation – with body, speech and mind, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the ground, resting there for a while, physically touching the earth, sensing this unimpeded, seamless matrix of inter-responsiveness. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations and I mindfully stand up.

– 10 –

Standing, breathing, present; abiding in and as the Great Moving², the Utterly Complete³, a mystery beyond description yet clearly apparent; with body, speech and mind, I touch the earth.

Contemplating in this way, I bring my hands together in a gesture of prayer and touch them to my forehead, throat and heart, with the mantras OM, AH, HUM. Then I lower myself down to the floor, resting there for a while, physically touching the earth while surrendering into a flowing presence that is effortlessly natural and utterly beyond words. On each exhalation I relax more deeply into the ground. After three or four unhurried inhalations and exhalations and I mindfully stand up.

– 11 –

Standing, breathing, present;
I touch the earth.

– 12 –

Smiling, breathing, present;
May all beings touch the earth.

When you have finished, share the merit and continue in wonderment.

Sarva Mangalam

2□ Great Moving – This is a pointing towards the experience of *Mahamudrā*.

3□ Utterly Complete – This is a pointing towards the experience of *Dzogchen*.