

CEREMONIES

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Ceremonies

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PLEASE REFER TO THE CANTOR'S MANUAL FOR CHANTS MENTIONED HERE BY TITLE
AND FOR THE TEXTS ASSOCIATED WITH CEREMONIES LIKE REFUGE

Origin Stories

Ceremonies unite the lives of individuals with the life of our community, and with our ancestors and the spirit world. They mark thresholds and are occasions of remembering, celebration, and transformation. These particular ceremonies are used at Pacific Zen Institute and within The Open Source, and were given their present forms by myself or in collaboration with John Tarrant. Some are based on very old rituals, and some were created recently. All have evolved to express ancient traditions in a symbolic language that respects and resonates with our time and place. It's customary that the Holder of the Ceremony be a roshi, sensei, or other teacher.

- ◆ Commemorations from deep layers of international buddhist culture : Buddha's Birthday and Ullambana

- ◆ Ceremonies from Zen : New Year's Eve, Refuge, Shoken, and 49-day Ceremony

- ◆ Ceremonies inherited from our lineage : Wedding, Baby Welcoming, and Death and Funeral ceremonies

- ◆ New ceremonies : Beloved Dead, Winter Solstice, and Installing Ancestors

As an example of how a new ceremony appears, I created the Installing Ancestors ceremony based on ancient Chinese rituals, both pre-buddhist and buddhist. I learned of the old rituals from Stephen Karcher and the writings of John Blofeld and other scholars; I folded in my experience in Japan of home ancestor altars — all the while holding in mind what practitioners have shared about their struggles with and appreciations of their own ancestors, so we could perform a ceremony that might be meaningful and helpful.

These ceremonies will probably go on evolving, as they should. I found it useful, when working with an old ceremony, to first ask what it's for, what it's meant to do; it's surprising how easily that can get lost — and how much more obvious the content and shape of a ceremony becomes when we're clear about its purpose. Then, to explore what ritual forms best serve those purposes, which isn't always the same thing as received tradition. Then, what's the most beautiful mix of the old, which carries the power of the ages, and the new, which embraces our peoples and cultures? Some modifications are obvious, like removing gender references from the wedding ceremony, but most are more subtle. Also, our inherited ceremonies can be enriched by bringing in elements from other traditions like the Tibetan body of light visualization for Winter Solstice, or from recently discovered treasures from our own history, like the Tokeiji women's koans for Buddha's Birthday, or the Guanyin oracles.

Blessings on all yr ceremonies, large and small, formal and impromptu. May they be warm fields and lovely gates, and may the beings of many realms be delighted to join you.

The Wheel of the Year

- 1 SPRING ~ BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY
- 2 SUMMER ~ FEEDING HUNGRY GHOSTS
- 3 AUTUMN ~ CEREMONY FOR THE BELOVED DEAD
- 4 WINTER SOLSTICE ~ LIGHT & DARK
- 5 NEW YEAR'S EVE ~ BEGINNING AGAIN

Buddha's Birthday

SPRING

PREPARATION

A flower-covered bower with a statue of the baby buddha standing in a bowl of (cooled) sweet tea is set up on or in front of the altar, with a ladle nearby

The sweet tea represents the sweet rain that was said to fall when Siddhartha was born, and / or the perfumed water in which arriving sages washed the baby



Participants have been invited to bring flowers, which are massed around the hall

This represents Lumbini ('the lovely') where Siddhartha was born, and the tree that supported his mother Mahamaya as she gave birth

CEREMONY

Holder of the Ceremony gives a welcome & introduction

(Optional : Timekeeper leads one period of sitting and walking meditation — depending on the participants)

Honoring the children : Kids offer flowers at the altar

Cantor leads singing of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" in a round, as people come to the altar to ladle tea on the baby buddha

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily merrily merrily merrily
Life is but a dream

Once everyone has returned to their seats, a brief talk on the meaning of the day

Cantor leads singing of Ti Sirana

Refreshments are served

KOANS FOR BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

In medieval Japan, the nuns of the great temple of Tokeiji would take up the poems composed by earlier nuns as koans. Here are some poems for Buddha's Birthday, written by Yodo, the fifth abbess of Tokeiji, and her attendants, along with the questions about them that were asked in later generations.

1 /

Decorate your own heart,
for the buddha of the flower hall
is nowhere else.

How do you recognize your own heart?
How would you decorate the flower hall?
If you revere a buddha who is in your own heart, what do you need with a flower hall?

2 /

Throw the past into the street.
What is born in its place, on the flower altar,
let it raise its newborn cry.

When the past has been thrown away, what is born in its place?
Let's hear the newborn cry.
Where is the flower altar?

3 /

Born, and forgetting the parents who bore you —
the parents who are Guanyin and Shakyamuni.

Where is the birth?
Where are Guanyin and Shakyamuni?

THE STORY OF BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

Mahamaya's child was conceived in a dream. In her ninth month, she set out for her parents' home so that she could give birth there, as was the custom in those days. Along the way she stopped at Lumbini to rest in a grove of trees, where birds sang and peacocks strutted among the flowers. Suddenly unsteady, Mahamaya stood among the roots of a great tree. As she reached up for one of its branches, heavy with flowers, she gave birth to a son. As soon as Siddhartha was born he took a step and pointed with one hand to the sky and with the other to the earth. He said, "Above heaven and below earth, only I, alone and sacred."

Attendants wrapped the boy in silk and carried him back to the palace. Seven days later Mahamaya died of unknown causes and was taken into the heavenly realms. Siddhartha was raised by her sister, Mahaprajapati, the Lady Gautami, who later would become head of the order of bhikshunis (buddhist nuns).

A DIZZYING NOTE ON CALCULATING BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

Buddha's Birthday is celebrated at different times by different schools of Buddhism in different countries, based on a variety of lunar / solar calculations — basically sometime between April 8 and the first full moon in May (or June in leap years).

In Japan Buddha's Birthday is celebrated on Hanamatsuri (Flower Festival) and is based on the solar Gregorian calendar, which makes it April 8 every year.

In the Chinese and Korean calendars Buddha's Birthday is on the 8th day of the 4th month after the lunar new year, which means the date changes every year.

The Tibetan calendar has Buddha's birthday as the 7th day of the 4th lunar month.

The Indian calendar uses the 15th day of the 2nd month after the new year.

In Southeast Asian countries, Vesak is celebrated on the first full moon in May, except in a leap year, when it is held in June. Vesak is a combined celebration of the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha, which some Theravadins believe happened on the same day of the year (the 15th day of the 2nd Indian lunar month). But in Mahayana tradition the Buddha's birth (8th day of 4th month), enlightenment (8th day of 12th month), and death (15th day of 2nd month) are believed to have occurred on different days of the year.

Feeding Hungry Ghosts

SUMMER

First, we meet on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month to make an offering for the healing of hungry ghosts, in a ceremony based on traditional Ullambana and Obon commemorations. We discuss how we understand hungry ghosts in our own time, sing a beautiful chant of commitment to ending their / our suffering, and make a donation to the unattended among us. (See page 10 for more information)

Second, two weeks later we meet again to collect donations participants have brought for a food bank, in honor of the two-week duration of traditional Ullambana commemorations.

Timekeeper leads meditation : a 40-minute period followed by a 5-minute walk

This is in honor of the long communal retreat during the summer monsoon season in India, which is why we sit for 40 instead of 25 minutes; at the end of the retreat, on the 15th day of the 7th lunar month, the monastics assembled before returning to their itinerant lives, and this is when the Ullambana story took place

Holder of Ceremony gives talk on the origins and meaning of the ceremony
(See page 10)

Holder leads discussion of how we see hungry ghosts in our time now

Cantor leads singing of “Gate of Sweet Nectar” (See page 9) nine times while everyone makes an offering of bird seed into a bowl at the altar (The bird seed can be passed out to participants or held in a second bowl on the altar)

Cantor makes a dedication to healing hungry ghosts

Holder or Cantor announces the conclusion of the ceremony in two weeks, when everyone will bring donations for the food bank; if available, hand out lists of what’s needed

Cantor leads The Four Vows

Participants scatter bird seed in the garden

In many parts of Asia people launch lanterns onto the waters at Ullambana. This is environmentally tricky, but it’s beautiful if you can find a non-harming way to do it.



GATE OF SWEET NECTAR

Calling out to hungry hearts
Everywhere through endless time
You who wander, you who thirst
I offer you this heart of mine

Calling out to hungry spirits
Everywhere through endless time
Calling out to hungry hearts
All the lost and the left behind

Gather round and share this meal
Your joy and your sorrow
I make it mine

Bernie Glassman
& Krishna Das

*This chant can be heard on Krishna Das' album Door of Faith
and on YouTube ([youtube.com/watch?v=bLxoDtuxj-k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLxoDtuxj-k))*

THE ULLAMBANA STORY & ITS MEANING

This Mahayana tradition began a few hundred years after the time of the Buddha, based on a story about Maudgalyayana, the most accomplished of the Buddha's disciples in the supernatural arts. He had all kinds of powers : he was clairvoyant, could read people's minds, and performed magic. Most important for the story, he could travel through the six realms of existence, which are inhabited by contented gods (devas), angry anti-gods (asuras), humans, animals, hell-dwellers, and hungry ghosts. Hungry ghosts represent insatiable craving : They have small mouths, thin necks, and large bellies; they're ravenous but either can't swallow food or the food turns to fire.

The South Asian monastics of that time gathered during the summer monsoons for intensive practice. On the 15th day of the 7th month of the lunar calendar, they prepared to return to their itinerant lives. Maudgalyayana spent some of his retreat looking for his dead parents in the six realms, discovering that his mother was in torment, having been reborn as a hungry ghost. In his meditation, he tried to use his metaphysical skills to save her. In one version of the story, he goes to the realm of the hungry ghosts, bringing her a bowl of magical food, but she can't eat it; he tries spells to release her but they don't work. He's distraught because everything he's good at can't save her, so he goes to the Buddha to ask for help.

The Buddha tells him that no one individual has the power to save a hungry ghost; it takes the entire community. Maudgalyayana holds a feast for the monastics and asks for their help, and his mother is saved. Maudgalyayana had been weeping, but when he understands that if we take care of those in need among the living we'll help save the hungry ghosts in that other realm, he begins to laugh and do a dance that is still done today. So this became known as the day of joy.

In East Asia, Ullambana blended with already-existing ancestor ceremonies. In China the hungry ghosts become the spirits of the dead that we're not taking proper care of, so they're roaming in a kind of half-life. In Japan families get together to clean graves and feast the ancestors in what has become a joyous holiday.

Here in the West things continue to evolve, as with this ceremony. We tend to see both the psychological and cultural implications of hungry ghosts, in personal and communal patterns of greed and insatiability. We're also moving from ideas of hungry ghosts as other beings punished for some transgression or as neglected ancestors who are haunting us, to something more internal : What are the hungry ghosts in us? How do we project that onto others, those in society whom we are not feeding or taking care of, who live, as the tradition says, in wild and ruined places? It's important to do something concrete about this as part of the ceremony, through donations to a food bank or something similar.

Ceremony for the Beloved Dead

AUTUMN



This is similar to a Dia de los Muertos or All Souls Day gathering, except that it includes elements of a Mahayana Forty-nine Day Ceremony (See page 33 for more information). Although we usually do the Forty-nine Day Ceremony soon after someone has died, most of us have loved ones for whom we didn't have the chance, and it can be very moving to do it in community like this.

PREPARATION

- ❖ Participants are invited to bring pictures, ancestor tablets (see page 34) or other mementos of the dead for the altar
- ❖ The altar has a tray of votive candles on it

CEREMONY

- ❖ Cantor leads Guanyin Sutra of Endless Life
- ❖ Timekeeper leads seated and walking meditation as a time to recollect the dead
- ❖ Participants light a candle on the altar for each person being remembered
- ❖ (Optional, depending on size of gathering : Participants speak about the dead person when lighting candle — memories, thanks, release)
- ❖ Cantor leads Celtic Blessing (“Deep Peace ...”)

Dark & Light

WINTER SOLSTICE

A ceremony that honors the embracing dark as well as the return of the light at the solstice ... We begin in the dark, taste its sweetness in the form of chocolate, chant the sun up, invite autumn spirits to return to their own lands, renew ourselves and our community with visualizations of the new light, and share a feast together

PREPARATION

- ◆ We gather before dawn in a dark hall to sit the solstice sunrise
- ◆ The altar is done in black and gold, with snow in a silver bowl if possible, a small branch for water blessing, and pieces of dark chocolate in a dish
- ◆ Optional : Invite participants to bring objects that symbolize the dark and / or the light to put on the altar
- ◆ Have an unlit fire ready in the fireplace, and an unlit votive candle at everyone's place (a grouping of large candles can substitute for a fireplace)
- ◆ Have coffee, tea, and light refreshments available for before the ceremony

What is Zen?
Snow in a silver bowl.

CEREMONY

Holder of Ceremony speaks briefly about sinking into the dark and into the dreaming of all beings

Timekeeper leads seated and walking meditation for as many periods as it takes for the dawn to appear

While it's still dark, in the midst of meditation, eat the dark in the form of chocolate passed around from the altar by the Cantor

As the sun rises, Cantor leads chanting of *HO* ("Dharma" in Japanese) together in a sustained and deep way, going for as long as it wants to last



Cantor lights a fire in the fireplace and passes a flame from it around to light each person's votive candle

Timekeeper leads seated meditation

Towards the end of the meditation, Holder performs a water blessing with melted snow from the altar

“All you demons and hungry ghosts, we thank you for your autumn visits. It’s too cold for you here now! Please go home and be comfortable, and let us be comfortable here on our own.”

Cantor leads chanting of Ti Sarana

Holder leads body of light visualization

This is a traditional Tibetan winter solstice ceremony done lying down with eyes closed

- ◆ Imagine the wind blowing away first your clothes, then your skin, flesh, muscles, blood vessels, and organs, until there’s only a skeleton left
- ◆ The wind stops; lie for awhile as a skeleton
- ◆ Then imagine a glowing jewel inside your ribcage, where your heart would be
- ◆ Layer by layer reconstitute your body — organs, blood vessels, muscles, flesh, skin — except this time it’s all radiant
- ◆ Lie for awhile as a body of light

DARKNESS
SILENCE
MEDITATION
LIGHT
CEREMONY
FEASTING

Holder leads ancient Chinese meditation

Everyone returns to a seated meditation position, aware of the radiance of themselves and everyone else

- ◆ Let your radiance flow out to everyone else in the room so that everything disharmonious among us dissolves
- ◆ Call in the ancestors and invite them to sit with us
- ◆ The radiance circulates through the group, living and ancestors, and eventually flows out into the rest of world
- ◆ Let the light soften and mellow; imagine yourself as a mountain and everyone else, too; the light begins to flow back into the mountains, settling at everyone’s hara (the root of breath, three fingers below the navel)
- ◆ When you’re ready, return to your meditation and breathe normally

Holder closes the ceremony quietly, without many words, and then invites everyone for ...

Breakfast feast

Beginning Again

NEW YEAR'S EVE

We meet about 10:30 pm and finish the ceremony just after midnight, when we have refreshments. This is considered an auspicious time for taking up the Way, recommitting to practice, rededicating altars, and awakening intentions for the year.

The ceremony can be held on December 31 or at the lunar new year awhile later. (Many people appreciate having an event like this as an alternative to New Year's Eve partying.)

PREPARATION

- ◆ Tell participants ahead of time to bring statues or other practice objects to be blessed and rededicated
- ◆ On the altar in addition to the usual : a statue of Guanyin instead of a Buddha, a bowl of water and a branch for the water blessings, a lit blue candle in its holder and divination sticks if available, Guanyin oracle cards in a bowl (see below), and an extra cloth on the floor in front of the altar as a place to set practice objects being rededicated
- ◆ The large temple bell is just outside
- ◆ Warm apple cider and cookies are ready for after the ceremony



Hiroshige, New Year's Eve
Foxfires at the Changing Tree

CEREMONY

Holder of Ceremony introduces themes, and starts introductions around the circle

Recommitment to the Way / Setting Intentions

- ◆ Timekeeper leads seated meditation
- ◆ Cantor leads Ti Sarana

Rededication of Practice Objects

- ◆ One at a time, people place their statues or practice objects on or in front of the altar, depending on space
- ◆ When all are in place, Holder of the Ceremony gives objects a water blessing

Purification

- ◆ Timekeeper leads meditation while Holder offers prompts, on physically cleaning one's home and workplace ... clearing one's heart-mind ... and ceremonially regenerating spiritual ties
- ◆ Holder performs silent water blessing of participants during the meditation

Cantor leads Sho Sai Myo Kichijo Dharani 9 times for protection, peace, & happiness

- ◆ 3 for oneself
- ◆ 3 for loved ones & community
- ◆ 3 for the world

Timekeeper leads walking meditation or stretch

Holder introduces Guanyin oracles

- ◆ It's traditional to do divination on this night
- ◆ The Guanyin Oracle comes from the Ming dynasty and is a collection of brief poems; traditionally the diviner determines which poem the petitioner gets, but we print each poem inside a folded card, place all the cards in a bowl, and each person chooses one (A version of the poems is in Appendix B)
- ◆ Have everyone focus for a moment, then pass the bowl around so that each person can pick one
- ◆ Meditate on the oracle
- ◆ Optional : People share their oracle and comment on it

Ring the temple bell 108 times at midnight

- ◆ Just before 12:00, so that the tolling will cross midnight, people go outside one at a time to strike the bell, and then return to the hall
- ◆ Holder of the Ceremony or Cantor does a quick calculation of the maximum number of strikes each person can make, and lets everyone know
- ◆ Holder or Cantor keeps track and goes last, bringing the count to 108

Holder performs a new year's water blessing

Refreshments

We have a New Year's Eve custom in our school of reading poetry that people have brought for the occasion to each other

The Wheel of Life

6 REFUGE CEREMONY

7 SHOKEN CEREMONY

8 WEDDING & COMMITMENT CEREMONY

9 BABY WELCOMING CEREMONY

10 WHEN SOMEONE DIES

11 FUNERAL & MEMORIAL SERVICE

12 FORTY-NINE DAY CEREMONY

13 CEREMONY FOR INSTALLING ANCESTORS

The Ceremony of Taking Refuge in the Bodhisattva Way

Preparations for taking refuge is a months-long process that includes meetings of participants to discuss the vows, sewing rakus, writing one's own vows, and work in the room. For details, see the booklet "Taking Refuge in the Bodhisattva Way."

THE RAKUSUS

- ◆ Participants will deliver their rakus to the teacher, who writes on the undersides. Each teacher has her own style, but common elements include the name and dharma name of the participant, the home sangha, the date and location of the refuge ceremony, and the teacher's signature.
- 
- ◆ Supplies : brushes, ink, permanent markers, seals and their ink, alcohol for cleaning them, tissue paper to keep the writing from smearing, and a large cloth in which to wrap the rakus to carry them into the ceremony.
 - ◆ Writing on the raku is like casting a spell and is best done as a kind of private ceremony deep in retreat, with whatever elements seem right.

PREPARATION FOR THE REFUGE CEREMONY

- ◆ A low table is set up in front of the altar with room for the Teacher(s) to sit between it and the altar, the Head of Practice and Cantor (with instruments) to either side, facing the participants
- ◆ On the table are water glasses for the Teacher(s), any recording device, and a bowl of water that can be held in one hand with a small evergreen branch
- ◆ Put out cushions for the ceremony participants to sit in a line on the other side of the table, facing the altar
- ◆ Cushions and chairs are set up for retreatants and guests. Ceremony programs are handed out or placed on cushions and chairs
- ◆ Leaders greet and seat guests as they arrive

CEREMONY

See the Cantor Manual for details of the ceremony

The Liaison fetches the Teacher(s) and carries in the rakus, which are placed on the table. The Teacher is met by the Head of Practice to offer incense at the altar.



Teacher : Welcome, Invocation, and Water Blessing

Cantor : Conducts ceremony beginning with Purification and continuing through the Four Boundless Vows

All (led by Cantor) : Purification

The Three Refuge Vows

- ◆ *Cantor* announces the Three Refuge Vows
- ◆ *All* read each vow
- ◆ *Participants* read their own words after each vow

All (led by Cantor) : Ti-Sarana

The Three Root Vows

- ◆ *Cantor* announces the Three Root Vows
- ◆ *All* read each vow
- ◆ *Participants* read their own words after each vow

Cantor : The Story of Bird's Nest Roshi

The Ten Bodhisattva Vows

- ◆ *Cantor* announces the Ten Bodhisattva Vows
- ◆ *All* read each vow and Bodhidharma's commentary
- ◆ *Participants* read their own words
- ◆ *All* read Dogen's commentary

Teacher : Presentation of rakusus

- ◆ Explanation of rakusus
- ◆ Explanation of names
- ◆ Verse of the Rakusu

VERSE OF THE RAKUSU

This is the robe of freedom
the bare field, the blessings.
I receive the Tathagata's teaching
which wakes all beings.

A representative of the community pledges support for those taking refuge

All, led by Cantor : Heart Sutra with participants' incense offering

Cantor : Dedication

All (led by Cantor) : The Four Boundless Vows

Close of ceremony and serving of refreshments

Shoken

CEREMONY FORMALIZING THE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP

A request for this ceremony comes from a student and is agreed to, or not, by the teacher. It is done in retreat or during work in the room outside of retreat. It is customary for the student to bring a gift to the ceremony.

Some teachers require a written covenant between teacher and student, describing the relationship, specifying the rights and responsibilities of each person's role, and indicating how to end the relationship if that becomes necessary. The covenant usually involves specific commitments on the student's part regarding practice, study, and dana. This needs to be discussed, and the document prepared, ahead of time.

THE CEREMONY

The teacher liaison explains the ceremony to the student ahead of time and makes arrangements for the student to come into the room at the beginning of a period of Work in the Room

When the teacher rings her opening bell, the liaison doesn't ring the bell in response but instead leads the student to the interview room, taking the student's gift for the teacher (If the student doesn't have a gift, the liaison can supply a bundle of incense)



FULL PROSTRATIONS

- ◆ Stand with hands in gassho
- ◆ Drop to one's knees, then bend forward so the forehead touches the ground
- ◆ Forearms rest on the floor next to the head, palms upward
 - ◆ Elbows remaining on the floor, raise the palms straight upward to head level, then drop them back to the floor
- ◆ Straighten the back and stand up, with hands in gassho



- ◆ At the doorway, the student makes 3 full prostrations over the threshold, and the liaison simultaneously prostrates behind the student
- ◆ The student makes 3 prostrations at the mat, with the liaison again prostrating behind the student, and then sits as usual
- ◆ The liaison gives the student's gift to the teacher, saying, "Roshi / Sensei, I'd like to present X, who has requested to be your student." The liaison bows and leaves, closing the door

What happens next is between teacher and student, perhaps a conversation about the student's intentions and aspirations, reviewing the written covenant or discussing what the commitment means to both people, as well as any elements particular to that teacher

The teacher opens the student's gift

Teacher and student offer incense together at the altar; the teacher breaks one stick of incense in half and places the two pieces on either side of the incense bowl, then breaks another stick in half, and each offers one of the halves in the middle of the bowl

Teacher and student return to their cushions; when the ceremony ends, they bow to each other while both are seated, then the student rises and makes 3 prostrations at the cushion, backs up to the door, bows toward the altar, opens the door, and returns to the hall

When the teacher rings the hand bell, the liaison rings the bell in the usual sequence to open Work in the Room

Wedding & Commitment Ceremony

ENTRANCE & MEDITATION

- ◆ A ten-minute bell sequence calls everyone to the ceremony
- ◆ Each Partner stands with their respective 'tribes' while the Holder of the Ceremony offers incense at the altar
- ◆ Partners come together to the altar to offer incense
- ◆ Holder invites all to join in two minutes of silent meditation
- ◆ A bell rings, signaling the end of meditation

INTRODUCTION & WATER BLESSING

- ◆ Introductory remarks from the Holder
- ◆ Holder performs the invocation and water blessing, using a bowl of water and a small leafy branch to sprinkle everyone with water

WELCOME

- ◆ Partners welcome the wedding guests and include those family and friends who are absent or departed; if there are children in the family, they may be acknowledged and welcomed into the ceremony



THE PRECEPTS

- ◆ Explanatory remarks from Holder
 - Holder will say each vow and Partners will repeat it; anyone among the guests may say the vows along with Partners
- ◆ A bell is struck once at the beginning of each vow
- ◆ Partners take the Three Refuge Vows
 - We take refuge in awakening
 - We take refuge in the way
 - We take refuge in our companions

◆ Partners take the Three Root Vows

We vow to do no harm
We vow to do good
We vow to do good for others

◆ Partners take the Five Bodhisattva Vows

Together : We vow not to kill
To each other : I promise to nourish and protect our life together

Together : We vow not to steal
To each other : I promise you a generous and open heart

Together : We vow not to misuse sex
To each other : I promise to respect the power of the bond between us

Together : We vow not to lie
To each other : I promise to trust you

Together : We vow not to misuse drugs
To each other : I promise to keep showing up

◆ Everyone sings the Four Vows

I vow to wake the beings of the world
I vow to set endless heartache to rest
I vow to walk through every wisdom gate
I vow to live the great Buddha way

WORDS TO EACH OTHER

◆ Partners read poems or other words or sing to each other, and / or a Guest reads or sings something they've selected



EXCHANGE OF RINGS & VOWS

- ◆ Holder blesses the rings by passing them through incense smoke, saying :
“These rings represent that which is whole and unbroken : the vastness from which we arise together, and the great wheel of life, which, though it turns and changes through time, continues without end. These rings shine with that light, they are pieces of the light you now entrust to each other for safekeeping.”
- ◆ Holder hands a ring to First Partner, who recites own vow to Second Partner
- ◆ Holder hands a ring to Second Partner, who recites own vow to First Partner
- ◆ Holder : “Do you, _____, take _____ to be your partner / wife / husband, to love her / him wholeheartedly as your companion on the path, the light in her / him illuminating the light in you, to honor and to cherish her / him, in sorrow and in joy, ‘til death do you part?”
Partner : “I do.”
- ◆ Holder : “Do you, _____, take _____ to be your partner / wife / husband, to love her / him wholeheartedly as your companion on the path, the light in her / him illuminating the light in you, to honor and to cherish her / him, in sorrow and in joy, ‘til death do you part?”
Partner : “I do.”

Spouses kiss



BLESSING OF THE NEW SPOUSES

- ◆ A flower girl showers Spouses with rose petals while Holder blesses them, saying :
“May the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions bless you
May the ancestors bless you
May the spirits of this place bless you
May your family, friends and community bless you

May you be blessed by rock and piñon and the breezes of all the seasons
(can be adapted to different landscapes)
An old buddhist tradition says that if you give each other lovingkindness,
you will ...
Sleep peacefully
Wake peacefully
Dream peaceful dreams
People will love you
Gods will love you
Gods will protect you
Poison and weapons and fire can't harm you
Your faces will become clear
Your minds will become serene
You will die unconfused
And when you die you will be reborn in the heavenly realms.
May all these blessings be yours;
May you extend them to all your relations."



COMMUNITY AFFIRMATION

- ◆ Holder presents Spouses to the community for its blessing and affirmation of support, saying :
“Today _____ and _____ bring us their love, their hopes, and the promise of what will flow from their union, and we as a community are renewed by this. In turn, we can offer them something : our caring and our help to nourish their union. If you wish to do this, please respond “We will!” to my question. Will you, _____ and _____’s family, friends, and community, rejoice with them today and support and sustain them in all the days to come?”
- ◆ All respond : “We will!”
- ◆ A bell tolls, and Spouses are congratulated by their Guests

Baby Welcoming Ceremony

PREPARATION

- ◆ The ceremony is usually held in the family's home but can also be held during a retreat
- ◆ Prepare the altar as for Buddha's Birthday, with lots of flowers ... Statues of the baby buddha, Guanyin or the Virgin Mary with a child, and Jizo (the protector of children) can be placed on the altar
- ◆ People should be able to sit either on cushions or in chairs
- ◆ You can make up cards with the baby's picture, date of birth, etc., and the words of the Guanyin Sutra for the participants

Everyone gathers around the family, who sit in front of the altar with the Holder of the Ceremony. The cantor is nearby, with a bell and mokugyo or drum.

CEREMONY

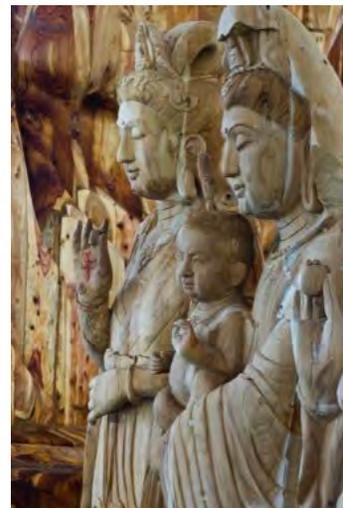
The Holder welcomes everyone. This is one of the ceremonies in which friends and family from beyond the community are likely to be participating, so it's important to make them feel welcome and comfortable.

While everyone chants the Guanyin Sutra of Endless Life, which is chanted at threshold moments like births, the family offers incense or water at the altar.

The Holder speaks to the baby and then to the community, asking them to support the life of this child and this family. Everyone answers, "We will!"

Parents speak to the baby, they invite other family members to do so, and then others come forward to speak to the baby and the family. A basket of flower petals is nearby, and as people offer their blessings, they scoop up some petals and sprinkle them on the family.

At some point while this is going on the Thirteenth Fairy interrupts, offering a blessing against difficulty. This is based on the fairytale tradition of the one who isn't invited to



the party and so curses the child; instead, we include an acknowledgement that life can be difficult, and we turn the curse into a blessing. The person who plays the Thirteenth Fairy should be someone close to the family. She or he can wear a mask or some other indication of her role.

“I am the Thirteenth Fairy, the one it’s important not to turn away. Sometimes life is difficult, sometimes you will know pain, but I give you my blessing now : that when it is hard, people who love you will offer their hands; that you will remember the beauty of the sky and the long grasses, and it will console you; that the pain will pass away, having opened your heart and strengthened your spirit.”



If requested, the Holder gives the baby a dharma name

The Holder performs a dedication with water blessing, using a bowl of water and a small leafy branch to sprinkle everyone with water, while calling on the beings of all the realms to bless the ceremony

Everyone sings “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” as a round

Refreshments are served

When Someone Dies

What happens to bodies after death is determined by state law. In particular, someone who has died in a hospital can sometimes, but not always, be sent home rather than to a mortuary. Check ahead of time, as it might affect where a person chooses to die. In most states, it's legal but not necessarily customary to keep the body of a dead person at home for three days. For everyone's peace of mind, find a funeral director who's willing to accommodate your wishes well ahead of time.

PREPARATIONS RIGHT AFTER DEATH

The person who's died might still feel present for a number of hours after breathing stops. It's possible to communicate with them, and they might be aware of what's going on around their body. Touch the body lovingly, and be aware of what you say.

As soon as appropriate after death occurs, wipe the body with rubbing alcohol to seal the pores, wearing surgical gloves.

To counter the effects of rigor mortis, keep the mouth closed by tying a scarf around the lower jaw and the top of the head, and tie the ankles together. The ties can be removed after a few hours if the jaw stays closed and the feet stay together on their own.

Wearing surgical gloves, wash the body in lukewarm astringent tea (black, green, lavender, or sage).

For a man, put a condom on to catch the last release of urine; for a woman, put on a sanitary pad. These can be removed after they've served their purpose. Pack the rectum with cotton balls.

Change the bedclothes and dress the body in white or light-colored clothing. Put on the person's rakusu, if they have one.

Cover the feet. Place the hands folded together on the abdomen.

Whisper the Heart Sutra into the person's ear.



SITTING WITH THE BODY FOR THREE DAYS

Set up an altar between the body and the people who come to sit with the body : a figure like Jizo, guide through the underworld, or Guanyin; candle, incense, flowers; and a picture of the dead person.

Keep the room where the dead person is lying as cold, well-ventilated, and quiet as possible. If the weather is warm, place the body on a bed of dry ice.

Encourage people to come in and meditate. Try to always have someone with the body.

Chant the Guanyin Sutra of Endless Life as much as possible, to help the person cross into the death bardo. After a time, the person's presence will be less vivid as they enter the death bardo. This is the stage of resting in deepest samadhi, and it can be very peaceful and full of love.

After some more time has passed, the person will cross over into the after-death bardo, where a real sense of journeying begins. Sometimes it's possible to travel for awhile with them, but this should be done carefully, with the awareness that at a certain point it's necessary to turn around and come back to ordinary consciousness.

MOVING THE BODY TO THE MORTUARY

Gather together for a goodbye ceremony, including the Ti Sarana, Heart Sutra, Guanyin Sutra, and Four Vows. Offer incense and place small mounds of salt on either side of the door to the outside.

When the hearse arrives, one person should touch the body continuously from the bed to the van.

Have someone follow the hearse out to the road and remain there until it is no longer visible.

CREMATION

This service is usually performed by a small group of those closest to the dead person; some might prefer not to attend because it can be intense. Some mortuaries will allow you to put things like a rakusu into the coffin.

A formal ceremony includes the Purification Verse, Ti Sarana, Heart Sutra, and Guanyin Sutra. Use bells and mokugyo; set up the altar from the three days' sitting. Offer incense and speak to the dead person. Close with the Four Vows.

After the world-ending kalpa fires
consume all things
Won't the emerald hills still soar
into white clouds?
With these words I commit you to
the flames.

Baisao

Mortuaries have varying policies about people witnessing the actual burning, so check ahead of time. Those who wish can follow the body into the furnace room, everyone chanting the Guanyin Sutra. Ask if you may push the button or pull the lever sending the body into the fire.

Return to the other room, circle, and close with the Four Vows.

BURIAL

A formal graveside service is similar to that for cremation, with the same elements : the Purification Verse, Ti Sarana, and the Heart Sutra. If possible, use bells and mokugyo, and set up the altar from the three days' sitting. Offer incense and speak to the dead person.

“The stone woman calls her back
from her dream of the world.”

Toll the bell 108 times and chant the Guanyin Sutra while the casket is lowered into the earth. Flowers can be placed in the grave.

Close with the Four Vows.

Funeral or Memorial Service

The ceremony can be held at a meditation hall, mortuary, private home, or somewhere else. There's no particular timing once the three-day period of sitting with the body has passed. This is one of the ceremonies in which friends and family from outside the community are likely to be participating, so it's important to make them feel welcome and comfortable, beginning with an introduction and orientation to the ceremony.

First is a **PURIFICATION**. We chant the Purification verse, but even a moment of silence would do. You can add a fire puja or smudging.

Second is a **TESTAMENT OF FAITH**, for which we use the Heart Sutra.

Third is **TESTIMONY**, in which the Holder of the Ceremony speaks directly to the dead person, represented by a photograph on the altar. After that might be one or more eulogies. Decide ahead of time whether you want everyone else who has something to say to come forward, offer incense, and speak. (This can be profoundly moving, exhausting, or occasionally hurtful.)

Here in this village,
there are so many people
coming and going —
but when one of them isn't you
it can be very lonely.

Ryokan
at the early death
of his only pupil

Fourth, it is traditional to recite this **KOAN** :

One day Changsha went wandering in the mountains. When he returned, the head of practice met him at the gate and asked, "Where have you been?"

"Wandering in the mountains."

"Where did you go?"

"I went out following the scented grasses and returned chasing the falling blossoms."

We add this koan :

"What about the ones who neither come nor go?"

"The stone woman calls them back from their dream of the world."

Fifth is a chant to mark the **CROSSING OVER**. We use the Guanyin Sutra of Endless Life and chant it for a good while.

Sixth is the **DEDICATION** of the ceremony to the dead person, which is done by the Holder and may include a Water Blessing.

LONG DEDICATION

Black Tara, mother of the buddhas,
Fire and wind, water and the boundless
earth below,
Guanyin, whose hands and eyes console
the world,
Jizo, companion in the worlds beyond,
All the ancestors, the spirits of this place,
all those seen and unseen who accompany
us,
humans in your many kinds,
cicada, dolphin, frog and deer,
hungry ghosts and gods in the lovely
heavens —
attend us now, bear witness :
a beloved human has died.
Day and night and the moments in
between
the wheel turns,
the waves rise on the sea
the waves fall back into the sea
Each wave, each life full and complete,
Vivid in the light.

Mother and grandmother [or whoever],
bless the generations of this family —
we love the life you gave us
and that in our turn we hand down.
May we flourish underneath the stars.
Now you go beyond the earth
and earthly concerns —
Thank you for your time with us,
travel with our love.

SHORT DEDICATION

Sunlight and moonlight and rainlight,
dawn and noon, dusk and deepest night
reveal the buddha mind at peace,
each creature perfect in its time,
vivid in the light.
We dedicate our service
and our hearts today to you,
Mother and grandmother [or whoever].
Now you go beyond the earth
and earthly concerns —
Thank you for your time with us,
travel with our love.

The dedication can be done as a call and response, the Holder reading a line which is then repeated by the participants. It ends with everyone singing the Prajna Paramita Mantra (“*Gate, gate, paragate ...*”)

Seventh, we close with the Four Bodhisattva Vows (“All beings one body ...”), a **REAFFIRMATION** of our commitment to the ways of compassionate action and spiritual awakening while we still live.

Eighth, we have a feast and a **CELEBRATION** of the person’s life.

Forty-Nine Day Ceremony

In most Mahayana traditions, it's thought that a person who has died is still in some ways attached to this world and the life they just left for forty-nine days, during which time the ties slowly dissolve. The dead person is in an intermediate state when material life is gone but the momentum of karma persists.

Offer incense each day. Pay attention to dreams. Some zen people refrain from eating meat during this period. Make prayers for the dead person's peaceful journey.

At forty-nine days it's believed that the person turns towards the next thing — the afterlife, rebirth, dissolution back into the universe, however you see it. So at that moment it's important for those who are still alive to let the person continue their journey with thanks and blessings, and to send energy to help the person on their way. The dead person turns away from the Earth and towards eternity; the living turn back towards life.

As with all ceremonies, this isn't an arbitrary deadline; for the living, it marks a moment in a process that will go on for however long it takes. It just helps us to remember what the dead person needs, what we need, and how they might be different. Why 49? Seven is a sacred number in the Mahayana, and 7 x 7 is a week of weeks, the completion of a cycle.

CEREMONY

Gather to meditate, perhaps before dawn to sit the sun up

Chant the Guanyin Sutra and offer incense at an altar with the person's picture on it

People can speak about their willingness to let go now and encourage the on their journey

Do something that reminds everyone of the person, which can be serious or light

Participants thank each other for their companionship during this passage

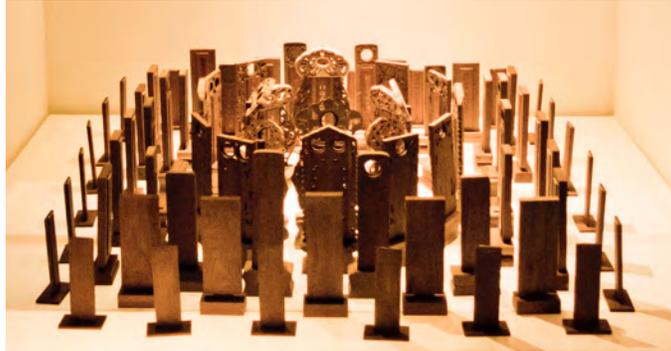
Sing the Celtic Blessing ("Deep Peace ...") to close

Perhaps each person takes away something to remind them of the dead person

People should leave with a sense of something completed, of a new time beginning

Ceremony for Installing Ancestors

AT THE CONCLUSION OF A GHOSTS INTO ANCESTORS RETREAT



PREPARATION

- ◆ This ceremony is done at the conclusion of a Ghosts into Ancestors Retreat, which can last a single day or long weekend, or can be woven throughout a longer meditation retreat.
- ◆ The participants' preparatory work involves choosing (or being chosen by) a ghost you wish to turn into an ancestor, doing the work of releasing the ghost (who is made up of the dead person *and* yourself) and liberating the ancestor to become a figure who brings blessings. Since this takes some time, participants should be given instructions well ahead of a day or weekend retreat, or at the beginning of a longer residential retreat. The teacher can work with this in talks, in work in the room, during dream circles, etc.
- ◆ The ancestor installation happens in two steps, the first at the retreat and the second at home, for which instructions are included in the ceremony.
- ◆ This ceremony requires special supplies and setup : wooden ancestor tablets, Sharpie pens, a way of installing the tablets upright above the altar (like a large bowl of sand on a hanging shelf to stand them in), Samantabhadra paper (blank cards with an image of Samantabhadra on the outside, like the one on page 37), and food for an offering and feast.



CEREMONY

Introduction

Guanyin Visualization

- ◆ Everyone begins the Guanyin Sutra of Endless Life chant, slow and soft, which each person continues aloud or to themselves all the way through the visualization
- ◆ Visualize a calm ocean spreading to the horizon in all directions; you're sitting in the middle as though floating weightless on the water
- ◆ A recently risen full moon softly illuminates the scene; Guanyin appears within it and the moon disc is a nimbus of white light around her; she stands on a white lotus; her body emits light
- ◆ Guanyin skims across the water until she's standing only a few feet in front of you, smiling; a stream of light issues from her heart and enters through the crown of your head
- ◆ This light flows slowly downwards, driving before it all pains, sorrows, anxieties, addictions, stupidities, and illnesses, which take the form of a stream of heavy, thick liquid goo flowing down and out the lower part of your body, sinking into the ocean and feeding sea monsters who've rushed in to partake of the feast
- ◆ Now you're full of light; sit quietly and continue the invocation. Eventually Guanyin's body begins to grow fainter, until it disappears into a moonlike nimbus, which contracts to a pinhead and then vanishes.
- ◆ Wind down the chanting and ask people to return to their meditation, still aware of the light

Ancient Chinese Meditation

- ◆ Let the radiance flow out from you to everyone else in the hall, so that everything disharmonious among us dissolves
- ◆ Call in the ancestors and invite them to sit with us
- ◆ The radiance circulates through the group, living and ancestors, and eventually flows out into the rest of world
- ◆ Let the light soften and mellow; imagine yourself as a mountain and everyone else, too; the light begins to flow back into the mountains, settling at everyone's hara
- ◆ When you're ready, return to your meditation and breathe normally

Pass out ancestor tablets and black Sharpie pens



Everyone meditates on their tablet in preparation for writing on it

Everyone writes an ancestor's name on the tablet in black ink

Everyone chants Sho Sai Myo Kichijo Dharani while one person at a time installs her tablet on a shelf above the altar

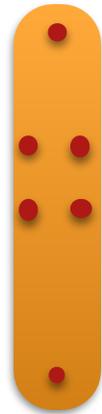
The Cantor leads the Remembrance Dedication

Food is offered at the altar

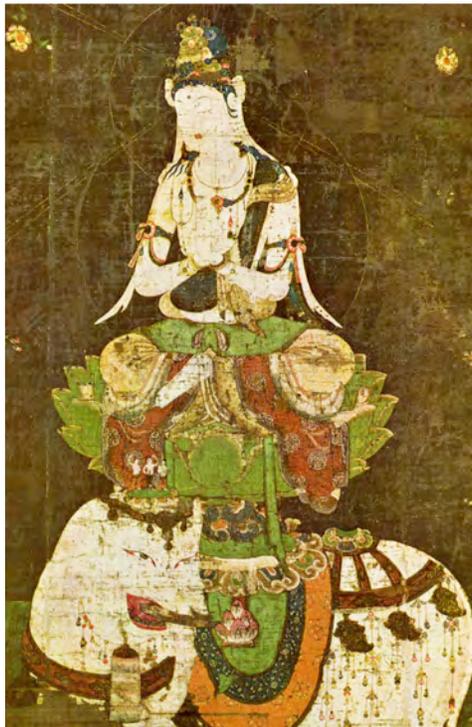
Instructions are given for installing the tablets at home, where they should first be enlivened with 6 red dots : 2 pairs in the middle, representing eyes and ears, 1 on the top for heaven, and 1 on the bottom for earth

Each person gives dana as a living memorial for her ancestor, writing the gift on a Samantabhadra card

The offered food is taken from the altar and passed out to everyone for feasting



Discussion



**SAMANTABHADRA,
BODHISATTVA OF
SKILLFUL ACTION**

Appendices

A INVOCATIONS & BLESSINGS

B GUANYIN ORACLES

Appendix A : Invocations & Blessings

BASIC INVOCATION

Adaptable For Different Ceremonies, Seasons, & Locations

Great Mystery, mother of all things
Earth and water, wind and flame
All buddhas throughout space and time
Shining Manjushri
Guanyin in your mercy
Bodhi tree and morning star
All the nations who leap and crawl, swim and fly
Moonlight and rain light and darkest night
All grandmothers, grandfathers
All the ancestors of our Way in the still halls,
in the fragrant teashops
Attend us now, bless this ceremony
For all our relations
The humans are ...
 ... taking refuge
 ... getting married
 ... welcoming a baby, etc.
this morning, tonight, etc.

SAMPLE BLESSINGS FOR A NEW MEDITATION HALL

1 /
May the spirits of this place —
of mountain and pine,
cloud and prairie —
May the ancestors of meditation,
May all the bodhisattvas and all the grandparents
watch over you
smile on you
and may you forever take joy in each other's joy

2 /
Rare and precious, to come together as companions of the Way ...
Nothing more important than the kindness for others
that arises from knowing our own hearts

May the spirit of your sangha be one of welcoming, encouragement, and generosity
May you be blessed
May you grow old together on the greatest adventure of all

Note : In Japanese tradition, during the ceremony inaugurating a new meditation hall a Daruma (Bodhidharma) doll with blank eyes sits on the altar. At some point the holder of the ceremony fills in the pupils with black ink, vivifying the statue (and therefore the hall). What would our North American equivalent be?

BLESSINGS FOR STATUES

for a Buddha Statue

The Tathagata as a Rain Cloud

I refresh this entire world
Like a cloud which releases its rain evenly for all ...

When I rain down the rain of the Dharma,
All this world is well-refreshed.
Each one according to their power to take heart
This well-preached Dharma, one in taste.

As when it rains the shrubs and grasses,
The bushes and the smaller plants,
The trees and also the great woods
Are all made splendid in the ten regions;

So the Dharma always exists for the good of the world,
And it refreshes the entire world.
And then, refreshed, just like the plants,
The world will burst forth into blossoms.

from the Saddharmapundarika Sutra

for a Guanyin Statue

So vast and deep the vows she made
To liberate afflicted beings,
To hear her name or see her form
Or fervently recite her name
Delivers beings from every woe.

Were you closed in prison walls,
Your wrists and ankles chained,
One thought of Guanyin's saving power

Would instantly procure release.

Had you taken some fatal substance
And lay at the door of death,
One thought of Guanyin's saving power
Would nullify its poison.

To those enmeshed in litigation
Or trembling in the midst of hosts
There comes the thought of Guanyin's power,
Whereat all hatred is dispersed.

Were you beset by raksha-fiends
Or noxious dragons, gibbering demons,
One thought of Guanyin's saving power
And none would dare offend you.

If savage beasts press all around
With fearful fangs, ferocious claws,
One thought of Guanyin's saving power
Would send them helter-skelter.

Should thunder roll and lightning flash,
Or fearsome rains come hissing down,
One thought of Guanyin's saving power
Would straightway lull the storm.

In every corner of the world
She manifests her countless forms.
No matter what evils gather,
What hell-spawned demons, savage beasts,
What ills of birth, age, sickness, death,
Guanyin will one by one destroy them.

Your mercy is a shield from danger,
Your compassion forms a wondrous cloud
Which, raining down the Dharma-nectar,
Extinguishes the flames of woe.

To the perfection of her merits,
To the compassion of her glance,
To the infinitude of her blessings,
Worshipping, we bow our heads!

from the Lotus Sutra

TRADITIONAL CIRCUMAMBULATION CHANTS

Religious places like shrines and stupas, sacred landscapes like mountains and lakes, and venerable people of all sorts can all be circumambulated ... The traditional direction is clockwise, the traditional number of times is in multiples of three

1 /

Om!

Muni muni

Maha muni

Shakya muni

Svaha!

2 /

Om mani padme hum

BLESSING FOR A NEW HOME

May the spirits of this place
May the ancestors of meditation
May all the bodhisattvas and all the grandparents
watch over you
smile on you
bless your new home
may wisdom go to every corner of this house
and may you forever take joy in each other's joy

INVOCATION & BLESSING FOR A NEW TEACHER

Great Mystery, mother of all things
The ancient seven buddhas
and the buddhas yet to be born
Earth and water, wind and flame
Bodhi tree and morning star
All the nations who leap and crawl, swim and fly
All grandmothers, grandfathers
All the ancestors of our Way in the still halls,
in the fragrant teashops
Great Ancestor Horse and Spirit Shining Pang
The poets on every shore
Attend us now, bless this ceremony
The humans are making a teacher tonight

Appendix B : Quanyin Oracles

The Flying One

The whale waits and watches in the waters ...
Don't try to reach too high, or fly too far.
One day your inner eye will light up and open
And you'll jump through the Dragon Gate in a
single leap!

Be Yourself

Go and live in a copper mine underground with
the birds!
Be in harmony with yourself and all the other
animals.
Everyone goes their own way and does the best
they can,
even if they don't own heaven and earth.

Starting Over

Way back, a mirror was shattered; now it can be
mended again :
She can leave her mate, and choose another.
Setting up a new nest, they make their lives
complete,
And it wafts good magic and ease to all their
children.

Living the Dao

In the forest, pine and cypress grow straight,
and neither rain nor wind, snow nor frost can
harm them.
One day you'll see what it was all for :
They'll be the pillars of the community temple.

In the Darkness

Dig deep into the earth where the spring water
gushes,
Through labor and struggle, seek to win through.
In a place like this, you come across a true
friend ...
And seeing each other again (*It's you!*) you both
touch heaven.

Turn Around

The line between exalted and debased is fine —
Reach out and talk with the one who lives near
the mountain gate.
That one says: You will have good news ...
What your heart centers on completely will open
the door.

It's You

There's a treasury of jade and jewels, and it is in
you.
Don't go searching far from home — it's here.
Otherwise you're like a person with a lantern
looking for light,
And can't you see what a waste of time that is?

In the Clear

Like the undying crane that breaks free,
you can slip the bars of your cage and fly where
you choose.
North, south, east, west — nothing obstructs you
and you rise all the way to the Ninth Heaven.

Wonder

This isn't the moment for a long face or frown;
Throw fear from your mind and let the joy in.
It's like finding a piece of jade in a dung heap :
The worker stands and wipes the dirt off in
wonder.

Into the Green

As you walk in the heat of the day, thirsty and
footsore,
Sudden disasters come out of the sky, out of
nowhere,
Like a bird whose nest has fallen out of the tree.
To find peace, go deep into the wilderness.

Breathe

The ferryboat in the gorge is tossed by white
 water;
 Wind and waves surge — but why?
 You can't steer in this mess,
 So wait until it ebbs and dies away.

After the Grey

After a long rain, the clear sky is a joy —
 Jade hare moon and gold crow sun slowly,
 slowly brighten.
 The tangled times are gone, the joy time is
 coming,
 And with just one leap you can clear the Dragon
 Gate.

Guanyin's Warning

My advice to you is : please don't be over-
 ambitious;
 Like a crane, beware the secret arrow in the mist.
 Pulling at firewood, you might uncover a hissing
 snake,
 And one bite from it could seriously harm you.

In Perfect Time

You structure, you plan, you think it out in detail,
 But it's all held back and you can't go forward.
 When you really need it and the time is right, a
 wise one comes,
 And your house will be fit for you to dwell in.

Relaxation

A wise one's life is relaxed and spacious;
 pause and breathe, take time to drink your tea.
 It's pointless to wear yourself out with what
 you're doing —
 Rest assured that no harm will be drawn to you.

Invisible World

The moon rises in the east, so full of grace,
 And even when it's hidden, it still *is* ...
 Full or waning, it goes on its way.
 Loudmouths will always curse, but their words
 are nothing.

The Heart of It

The journey goes on, far into the unknown,
 And you can't know whether there's jade inside
 the rock.
 One day someone will chisel it free into the light
 of day,
 So be calm; you know, it's been there since the
 beginning of time.

Presence

Don't you understand that everything here is
 what matters?
 To find the jade, go beyond the boundaries of
 your skin.
 You can't do better than wait for the wise one to
 manifest.
 I tell you, this is the best thing — no question
 about it.

Guanyin's Assurance

For the moment there's trouble, but don't be
 distressed;
 Please know that the riches of the earth await
 you.
 A clever monkey wants freedom, even from a
 golden chain,
 She's longing to find the way back to her
 mountain cave.

Morality

In everything you do, live for the truth —
 Your words should be clear and your actions
 substantial.
 Don't have ideas in your heart that aren't visible,
 Stand at the center like the sun pouring out
 bright rays!

In Passing

Waiting for words of wisdom from the moonlit
 sky ...
 Suddenly, clouds drift across like chilling smoke.
 But don't let your heart be darkened like them;
 The moment always passes and gladness returns.

With Love

Let a new breeze of love blow through your
house;
the Way is opened by Virtue, as it always was.
So clear your path of the harsh growths that
separate you,
When all Three are in harmony, you'll know
what's to come.

Sweetness

Patience and intelligence overcome force and
brute strength.
Nurture happiness, and the Gates of Goodness
will open.
Why is this true? Because it brings the right
reading,
And then it's like slaking your thirst with nectar.

The Helper

The wise one's advice is : First of all, do nothing.
Take care not to try anything at all, stay still;
Wait for someone to come who can guide the
work for you.
After times like this, the withered tree flowers
again.

Guanyin's Promise

It's unwise to always follow your own mind —
It sounds like a tiger's laugh, which makes the
dragon groan.
Look up at heaven now : it has a Milky Way of
stars ...
I tell you recognition and wisdom will come in
time.

Ordinary and Extraordinary

In autumn, a simple forest bird becomes a great
dragon —
Such good luck and blessing is beyond words.
It soars vast distances at the sky's edge,
beyond all bounds, beyond all you have known.

The Family

When one generation teaches the next, and they
teach the next,
Heaven will take care of everything that's
needed.
The ancestors will blossom in their garden ...
Ah, let them drink and sleep, not hemmed in with
your worries.

Wisdom

Weather below zero, earth freezing, water turned
to ice.
So what's the point of being famous?
It's best to wait and see beyond all this ...
Until the real time comes, and ice turns to
flowing water again.

Balance

The stream bubbles and sings over its bed of
pebbles;
The wind is keen, the moon bright, the high ones
glad.
See this about the path of all your striving :
The scent of forest flowers comes from the right
conditions.

Collaboration

Don't let the swamp of small talk addle your
brain;
Isn't it better to honor yourself and earn respect?
The wise one doesn't think about age or rank :
You feel the same as I do; let's put our thoughts
together.

Not the Way

When the day to set sail arrives, the compass is
lost.
We're in mid-ocean now, still trying to find it,
As if this is the time we *have* to have it —
But that's a waste of energy, a waste of
compassion.

Your Own Authority

Take down a wise one's advice :
Don't go around everywhere looking for *it*.
Stand back and make your own decisions;
Cut loose and find space, without intrusion.

The Living Image

A candle in the wind casts flickering shadows,
Fanning out like blurred willow flowers.
The child adrift at sea pleads to be rescued —
Just learn to be true to yourself, like a raft on the
water.

The Prize of Life

At sunrise, prayers are chanted; at moonset
there's singing.
Take part in whatever's happening, but laugh,
too.
Grief comes out of nowhere and you turn your
face away,
So shout out for the prize of life, join in with the
song!

The Middle Way

The wise one takes care to maintain the golden
mean;
Don't add to it, resist it, or fawn over it, either.
Stay with truth, standing awake, putting others
first;
You need consciousness and grounding to shine
as you are.

Blessing

Open your doors to blessing; it doesn't come
every day.
Store up goodness and open the gates wide to
glory!
It's a good time for you farmers, couples, and
families —
And at last the sick are freed into a new lease on
life.

The Wrong Way Up

It's not a good idea to climb a mountain with a
tiger —
You're nervous, and every move you make is
tense.
Suddenly you remember something that could
help you now,
And if you do what you learned, you'll stay out of
danger.

Five Seasons

A plum tree stands alone on top of a hill.
Its petals drop, its branches wither, its sap sinks
low ...

And yet spring comes in the midst of frost;
See that life and beauty return to the flowers.

The Lovers

A fish and a dragon thought, "We'll live
together."
They hide in the depths of the river, waiting for
their time ...
Staying out of trouble, one morning they'll
escape
And leap the gate in one, into the palace of
ecstasy.

Being Who You Are

A snow goose gets trapped inside a cage —
She wanted to change herself, but this is *not* the
way through.
Every way *away from herself* is no escape ...
This reading is the saddest and truest one of all.

In Reality

In a dream you're told how to find a great
fortune,
Though it seems beyond your grasp right now.
Hardships exist, but they don't have to bring you
down,
Wise ones will guide you, and then you'll be
laughing.

Simplicity

Don't heat the water until it turns to steam;
Neither chilly nor boiling, let it warm gently.
Do what heaven wants, not what someone else
decides;
Make do with what you have — that's the milk of
human life.

Visible and Invisible

You can't see the moon when it's new,
But isn't it radiant, gold, and round anyway?
Wait until mid-month for the Lighting of the
Night,
When its brightness fills the dome of the sky.

The Unknown Story

In autumn, leaves flake from the phoenix tree,
And travelers come home like migrating birds.
They thank heaven for its protection,
And a vessel full of treasure is borne home on the
wind.

Awakening

The clouds part, but the way is misty on the
mountain.
All of creation becomes a circle when the moon is
full.
When you wake up, your dreams and fantasies
die,
And the wise ones lead you to the true paradise.

The Water Lily

A fire blazes with a heat like heaven,
Scorching everything in its path, but not the
water lily.
It seems as if it will die, but it isn't even touched;
All its tendrils and flowers come back on the
other side.

Shaken

Spring flowers shine with a paradise glow,
Thousands of wagons arrive, stacked with
treasure.
You ride a wave to the highest accolades,
And if you're lucky, you'll descend like a
lightning bolt!

Danger Mountain

You climb and reach the peak in a day —
But what are you doing here? It's dangerous!
You pray to heaven for protection,
And the rock wall before you opens like a cave.

Rainbow Mountain

A surprise prompting comes from heaven —
Mount Tai gives its riches unexpectedly.
Still, it's good to know what could happen to you;
The wise ones have ways and means to help you
journey on.

The Face of Power

Carve a wooden tiger to guard your door :
Its teeth are bared, but it can't harm anyone.
It seems to do the trick,
So you can relax while you're out being human.

After the Gold

It's good to relax and go into the world.
Really think about your work, and search for
happiness.
A great path appears before you, and heaven
opens the gate;
And then? Do all you can for those who don't
have what you have.

The Jackpot

If you go out to try, you'll have great luck,
Invisible to you now as jade inside the rock.
Yes indeed, you should get advice from a wise
one ...
The time has come to find happiness the way it's
always been found.

To the Devotee

From the beginning of creation, everything's had
meaning;
A lucky day brings everything to ripeness.
Revelation comes, and don't take it lightly —
The Divine One will grace a pure-hearted being.

The Beacon of Truth

No need to keep searching for the precious
pagoda;
It beams its light in every direction.
The wise one says : Be willing to work, pray, and
be humble.
If you do, heaven will bless you with every
reward.

Beyond Class or Creed

Golden crow sun sets, jade hare moon rises —
Day and night circle each other from
beginningless time.
Since you know this, follow the Way as it's
helping everyone,
So scholar and worker, shopkeeper and
householder all benefit.

Dryness and Understanding

When drought comes, the rice crop withers and
dies;
Thank heavens a rainstorm bursts, soaking it —
flowers, fruit, trees, and grasses all fed to their
roots.
The beginning of wisdom is : rain is worth
everything.

The Recluse

Don't stick your head up at the wrong time;
It's never a good idea to light a candle in the
wind.
Don't try to do things here; get yourself away,
And live like a hermit in retreat, in peace.

The Queen's Time

Moonlight is born in the red of sunset.
Yin breathes and yang sighs, suffusing
everything.
If a woman wants to find a good mate,
If she's careful with her heart, she'll be blessed.

The Chess Game

For the first time, you meet someone on your
level;
In this game, it's so hard to know how to move.
Why? Because one false step and you blow it,
So think before you decide what to do.