



Touching the Earth to Mother Earth

Introduction:

The following texts are a kind of intimate conversation—a living dialogue—with Mother Earth. They are also a practice of looking deeply.

Looking deeply, with mindfulness and concentration, will always bring insight. We need to look deeply in order to see our true nature and the true nature of the Earth. We need to look deeply to see that we *are* the Earth. With this insight, love will be born. Our love and understanding will heal us and heal the Earth.

As Thay (Thich Nhat Hanh) has said:

When we look into our own bodily formation, we see Mother Earth inside us, and so the whole universe is inside us, too. Once we have this insight of interbeing, it is possible to have real communication, real communion, with the Earth. This is the highest possible form of prayer.

To express our reverence for the Earth is not to deify her or believe she is any more sacred than ourselves. It is to love her, to take care of her and to take refuge in her. When we suffer, the Earth embraces us, accepts us, and restores our energy, making us strong and stable again. The relief that we seek is right under our feet and all around us. Much of our suffering can be healed if we realise this. If we understand our deep connection and relationship with the Earth, we will have enough love, strength, and awakening to look after ourselves and the Earth so that we both can thrive.

These texts have been written by Thay, and are published in his book *Love Letters to the Earth* (2013). They have been developed to be read out loud as part of the practice of “Touching the Earth”. “Touching the Earth” is the name Thay has given to the practice of combining a contemplative text with a deep, mindful, full-body prostration on the ground.

Touching the Earth is part of the daily mindfulness practice in Plum Village practice centres around the world, and is usually done after a session of sitting meditation. One person is bell master, another person reads the text out loud, and the whole community touches the earth (makes a full body prostration) at the same time after having heard the text being read. We allow the words to fall gently like rain, and slowly penetrate our consciousness, where they can bring about insight, deep healing and transformation. The collective energy of concentration is very powerful and has the capacity to bring healing and transformation. The practice of Touching the Earth deepens over time. We suggest that you select just one or two texts per session. You can invite a sound of the bell before you start, and another sound of the bell at the end of the text, before touching the earth. The sound of the bell helps keep a strong atmosphere of peace, concentration and awakening. We can take time to touch the earth deeply, and take at least three deep in-breaths and out-breaths while we are touching the earth, before the bell is sounded and we stand up again.

I BELOVED MOTHER OF ALL BEINGS

[invite the bell three times to begin]

Dear Mother Earth,

I BOW MY HEAD before you as I look deeply and recognise that you are present in me and that I am a part of you. It is from you that I have been born, and you who are always present, offering me everything I need for my nourishment and growth. My mother, my father, and all my ancestors are also your children. It is your fresh air that we breathe, your clear water that we drink, your nourishing food that we eat, and your medicinal herbs that heal us when we are sick.

You have all the qualities of a mother. You are nothing less than the Mother of all Beings. I call you by the human name *Mother*, and yet I know your mothering nature is more vast and ancient than humankind. We are just one young species of your many children. All the millions of other species who live—or have lived—on Earth are also your children. You are not a person, but I know you are not *less* than a person either. You are a Great Being, not in the form of a human, but in the form of a planet—a living, breathing being.

Each species has its own language, yet as our Mother you can understand us all. That is why you can hear me today. That is why I can open my heart to you and offer you my prayer.

Dear Mother, wherever there is soil, water, rock or air, you are there, nourishing me and giving me life. You are present in every cell of my body. My physical body is your physical body, and just as the Sun and stars are present in you, they are also present in me. You are not outside of me and I am not outside of you. You are more than just my environment. You are nothing less than myself.

I promise to keep the awareness alive that you are always in me, and I am always in you. I promise to be aware that your health and wellbeing is my own health and wellbeing. I know I need to keep this awareness alive in me for us both to be peaceful, happy, healthy, and strong.

But sometimes I forget. Lost in the confusions and worries of daily life, I forget that my body is your body, and sometimes even forget that I have a body at all. Unaware of the presence of my body and the beautiful planet around me and within me, I am unable to cherish and celebrate the precious gift of life you have given me. Dear Mother, it is my deep wish to wake up to the miracle of life. I promise to train myself to be present for myself, my life and for you in every moment. I know that my true presence is the best gift I can offer you, the one I love.

[touch the earth] [take three breaths] [invite the bell] [stand up]

II

YOUR WONDER, BEAUTY & CREATIVITY

Dear Mother Earth,

EACH MORNING WHEN I WAKE UP you offer me twenty-four brand new hours to cherish and enjoy your beauty. Every miraculous life-form—the clear lake, the green pine, the pink cloud, the snow-capped mountaintop, the fragrant forest, the white crane, the golden deer, and the extraordinary caterpillar—each one has been born from you. So too has every brilliant mathematician, every skilled artisan, and gifted architect. And looking deeply I can see that it is *you* who are the greatest mathematician, *you* the most accomplished artisan, and *you* the most talented architect of all. A simple branch of cherry blossoms, the shell of a snail, or the wing of a bat—each bear witness to this amazing truth. It is my deep wish, dear Mother, to live in such a way that I am awake to each of your wonders, and nourished by your beauty. I cherish your precious creativity, and I smile to this gift of life.

We humans have talented artists, but how can our paintings compare to your masterpiece of the four seasons? How could we ever we paint such a compelling dawn or create a more radiant dusk? We have great composers, but how can our music compare to your celestial harmony with the Sun and planets—or to the sound of the rising tide? We have great heroes and heroines who have endured wars, hardship, and dangerous voyages, but how can their bravery compare to your great forbearance and patience along your hazardous journey of eons? We have many great love stories, but who among us has love as immense as your own, embracing all beings without discrimination? Dear Mother, you have given birth to countless buddhas, saints, and enlightened beings.

Shakyamuni Buddha is a child of yours. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and yet he is also the Son of Man, a child of the Earth, your child. Mother Mary is also a Daughter of the Earth. The Prophet Mohammed is also your child. Moses is your child. So too are all the bodhisattvas. You are also mother to eminent thinkers and scientists who have made great discoveries, investigating and understanding not only our own solar system and Milky Way, but even the most distant galaxies. It is through these talented children that you are deepening your communication with the cosmos. Knowing that you have given birth to so many great beings, I know that you are not mere inert matter, but living spirit. You are yourself a great being, a bodhisattva. It is because you are endowed with the capacity of awakening that all your children are, too. Each one of us carries within us the seed of awakening, the ability to live in harmony and with your deepest wisdom—the wisdom of interbeing.

But there are times when we have not done so well. There are times when we have not loved you enough; times when we have forgotten your true nature; and times when we have discriminated and treated you as something other than ourself. There have even been times when, through ignorance and unskillfulness, we have underestimated, exploited, wounded and polluted you. That is why I make the deep vow today, with gratitude and love in my heart, to cherish and protect your beauty, and to embody your wondrous consciousness in my own life. I vow to follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before me, to live with awakening and compassion, and so be worthy of calling myself your child.

[touch the earth] [take three breaths] [invite the bell] [stand up]

III

WALKING TENDERLY ON MOTHER EARTH

Dear Mother Earth,

EVERY TIME I STEP UPON THE EARTH, I will train myself to see that I am walking on you, my Mother. Every time I place my feet on the Earth I have a chance to be in touch with you and with all your wonders. With every step I can touch the fact that you are not just beneath me, dear Mother, but you are also within me. Each mindful step can nourish me, heal me, and bring me into contact with myself and with you in the present moment.

Walking in mindfulness I can express my love, respect, and care for you, our precious Earth. I will touch the truth that mind and body are not two separate entities. I will train myself to look deeply to see your true nature: you are my loving mother, a *living* being, a *great* being—an immense, beautiful and precious wonder. You are not only matter, you are also mind, you are also consciousness. Just as the beautiful pine or tender grain of corn possess an innate sense of knowing, so, too, do you. How else can you give birth to so many thousands of buddhas, bodhisattvas and saints? Each step can reveal that the mind of love, the mind of awakening, is not only present in humans, but in all things. Within you, dear Mother Earth, there are the elements of Earth, water, air and fire; and there is also time, space and consciousness. Our nature is your nature, which is also the nature of the cosmos.

It is my deep wish to walk gently, with steps of love and with great respect. I shall walk with my own body and mind united in oneness. I know it is possible to walk in such a way that every step is a pleasure, every step is nourishing, and every step is healing—not only for my body and mind, but also for you, dear Mother Earth. You are the most beautiful planet in our entire solar system. I do not want to run away from you, dear Mother, nor to hurry. I know I can find happiness right here with you. I do not need to rush to find more conditions for happiness in the future. At every step I can take refuge in you. At every step I can enjoy your beauties, your delicate veil of atmosphere and the miracle of gravity. I can stop my thinking. I can walk relaxingly and effortlessly. Walking in this spirit I can experience awakening. I can awaken to the fact that I am alive, and that life is a precious miracle. I can awaken to the fact that I am never alone and can never die. You are always there within me and around me at every step, nourishing me, embracing me and carrying me far into the future.

Dear Mother, I know it is your wish that we live with more awareness and gratitude, and we can do this by generating the energies of mindfulness, peace, stability, and compassion in our daily lives. Therefore I make the promise today to return your love and fulfil this wish by investing every step I take on you with love and tenderness. I will train myself to see the truth that I am you, *I am the Earth*, and as I walk, I am walking not merely on *matter*, but on *spirit*.

[touch the earth] [take three breaths] [invite the bell] [stand up]

www.plumvillage.org
www.plumvillage.org/thich-nhat-hanh