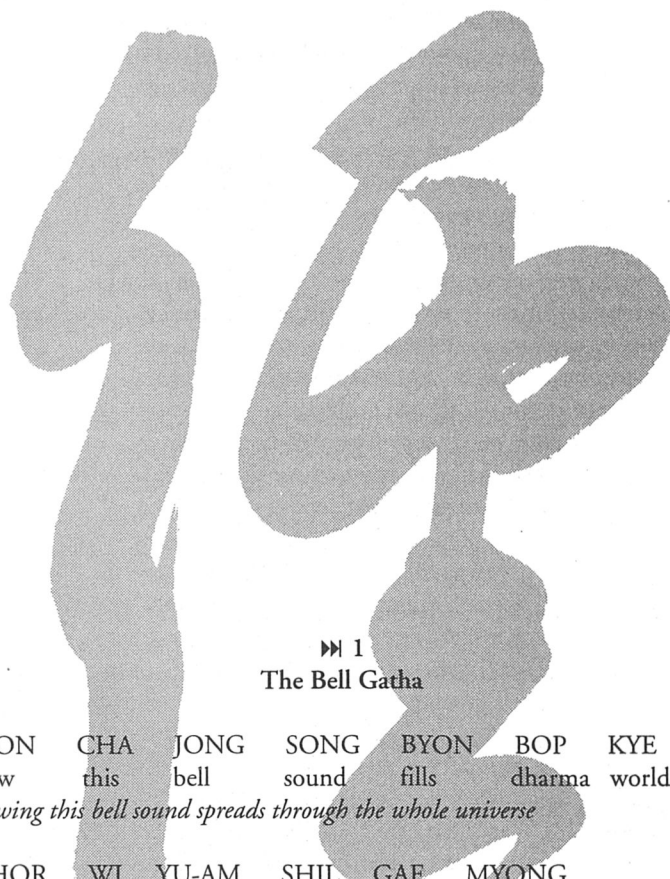


# RESPECTING OUR ANCESTRAL PRACTICE: MORNING BELL CHANT PART 1

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*The Morning Bell Chant is an extremely rich chant, combining three major Buddhist traditions: Hua Yen (Hwa Om) Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism. Hua Yen Buddhism is based on the Avatamsaka Sutra, the most comprehensive of all the Mahayana sutras and one which presents the bodhisattva ideal of universal liberation in truly cosmic terms. Hua Yen Buddhism was both a philosophical school and a mass movement within Buddhism in China and Korea. Huge societies would form to chant the Avatamsaka Sutra, which runs to over 1600 pages in English translation. Pure Land Buddhism is still the most popular form of Buddhism in the world. The central figure in Pure Land Buddhism is Amitabul, the Buddha of Infinite Light, who, eons ago, established a Western Pure Land, an ideal environment in which to practice and get enlightenment, a land open to everyone who chants this Buddha's name. Original Pure Land Buddhism also involved meditation practice, and in China, around the year 1000 there developed a Pure Land Zen School. It was probably about this time or a little later that the Morning Bell Chant, or its ancestor, was created. The chant is here divided into sections to make its structure clear. The translation in italics is freely adapted from an early version used in the Kwan Um School of Zen. The literal meaning of each Chinese Korean word is given as an aid to understanding the meaning and experiencing the chant directly.*



▶▶ 1

## The Bell Gatha

WON CHA JONG SONG BYON BOP KYE  
Vow this bell sound fills dharma world  
*Vowing this bell sound spreads through the whole universe*

CHOR WI YU-AM SHIL GAE MYONG  
iron wall dark fully all brighten  
*Making all the Hell of Dark Metal bright,*

SAM DO I GO PA DO SAN  
three ways ease pain shatter sword mountain  
*Relieving the three realms of suffering, shattering the Hell of Swords;*

IL-CHE JUNG SAENG SONG JONG GAK  
All many beings attain correct enlightenment  
*All beings become enlightened.*

The chant begins with a gatha—a short poem that connects everyday occurrences in our lives to a bodhisattva vow. When I showed the Chinese text of the Morning Bell Chant to a monk from Taiwan, he said that he had learned this gatha when he was young, in exactly the same words as in the chant, but he had never seen the rest of the chant. He said he was taught to say the gatha whenever he heard the sound of any bell. The Evening Bell Chant is another such gatha. In the Morning Bell Chant our vow (or intention or wish) goes out with the sound of the bell through the whole universe, and the vibrations shatter the metallic hells that imprison us and perpetuate our suffering. Once these dark realms are broken open, the radiance of the universe pours through and all beings become enlightened. So the gatha expresses a vow to save all beings, but it also presents a metaphor for our own practice, the practice of opening our minds.

▶▶ 2  
Vairocana

NA-MU BI-RO GYO JU HWA JANG JA JON  
Namu Vairocana teaching master flower womb love lord  
*Become one with Vairocana, lotus world master, Great Love, Holy One.*

Next the chant expresses our unity with Vairocana, the cosmic Buddha who presides over the assembly in the Hwa Yen Sutra although he himself never speaks (numerous, wonderful bodhisattvas do all the talking). Vairocana, like Amitabul, is also a Buddha of light—he radiates light like a quasar, and every photon contains countless Buddhas: he is constantly birthing Buddhas from the flower womb of the universe and he is the universe itself. This primordial Buddha is the Buddha of the Avatamsaka Sutra, the Flower Adornment Sutra.

▶▶ 3  
The Avatamsaka Sutra

YON BO GYE JI GUM MUN  
Expound treasured poem of golden text  
*Expound the treasured verses of the golden text,*

PO NANG HAM JI OK CHUK  
Open carnelian case of jade scroll  
*Open the carnelian case of the jade scroll:*

JIN JIN HON IP  
dust dust mix enter  
*Every dust particle interpenetrates,*

CHAL CHAL WOL LYUNG  
Moment moment completely fuse  
*Every moment contains every other.*

SHIP JO KU MAN O CHON SA SHIP PAL CHA  
10 10,000,000 9 10,000 5 1,000 4 10 8 words  
*100,095,048 words*

IL SUNG WON GYO  
One vehicle complete teaching  
*Are the complete teaching of the One Vehicle.*

NA-MU DAE BANG GWANG BUL HWA OM GYONG  
Namu great wide direction Buddha flower adorn sutra  
*Become one with the Great Wide Buddha, the Avatamsaka Sutra.*

Next, we open the sutra itself, a golden text on jade scrolls that we take out of a carnelian case, and the opening of the case or the unrolling of the scrolls is another metaphor for opening our minds. As soon as the sutra is opened out comes its fundamental teaching: JIN JIN HON IP/ CHAL CHAL WOL LYUNG, literally “Dust, dust, mix, enter,/ Moment, moment, completely fuse.” Every particle interpenetrates every other particle; every moment contains every other moment. The text of the sutra contains millions of words and constitutes the complete teaching of the great wide Buddha, the cosmic Buddha and is identical with that Buddha.

The First Poem  
and the Mantra of Shattering Hell

JE-IL GYE  
first poem  
*The first poem:*

YAG IN YONG NYO JI  
if one wants fully understand  
*If you wish to thoroughly understand*

SAM SE I-CHE BUL  
three worlds all Buddhas  
*All the Buddhas of the past, present, and future,*

UNG GWAN BOP KYE SONG  
should view dharma world nature  
*You should view the nature of the Universe*

IL-CHE YU SHIM JO  
all only mind make  
*As being created by mind alone.*

PA JI OK JIN ON  
shatter earth prison true words  
*The Mantra of Shattering Hell:*

NA-MU A-TTA SHI-JI-NAM  
SAM-MYAK SAM-MOT-TA GU-CHI-NAM  
OM A-JA-NA BA-BA JI-RI JI-RI HUM

Then from all these millions of words in the sutra one poem appears, the first of several which will appear in the chant. In the sutra, this poem is spoken by the bodhisattva Forest of Awareness, one of the many enlightening beings who speak in the sutra (it can be found on p. 452 of the Thomas Cleary translation published by Shambhala). This poem presents another fundamental teaching of Hwa Yen Buddhism: all things are created by mind alone. Another way of saying this is that everything is made out of consciousness; every particle in the universe is conscious and consists of consciousness. As soon as we get that, hell is shattered, and so the mantra of shattering hell appears next in the chant. A mantra is literally “true words” and comes from the depths of experience, as does a vow. This mantra takes us back to our vow to shatter hell that began the chant, and concludes this section. In the next part of the chant we will turn to Amitabul, the Buddha of Infinite Light.

▶▶ *Continued next issue*

