

RESPECTING
OUR
ANCESTRAL
PRACTICE:
MORNING
BELL
CHANT
PART 3

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Three Poems

(1)

CHONG SAN CHOP-CHOP MI-TA GUL
blue mountain ridge ridge Amita home
The blue Mountain of many ridges is Buddha's home.

CHANG HE MANG-MANG JONG MYOL GUNG
blue-green ocean vast vast still extinction palace
The vast blue ocean is the Palace of Still Extinction.

MUL-MUL YOM NAE MU GA AE
beings beings take come no hindrance obstacle
Being with all things without hindrance,

KI GAN SONG JONG HAK DU HONG
few see pine arbor crane head red
Few can see the red crane's head on the pine tree.

NA-MU A-MI-TA BUL
Namu Amita Buddha
Become One, Infinite Time, Infinite Space Buddha

(2)

SAN DAN JONG YA JWA MU ON
Mountain hall quiet night sit no words
Sitting silently in a mountain temple in the quiet night,

JOK-CHONG NYO-YO BON JA YON
quiet quiet still still original nature surely
Extreme quiet and stillness are original naturalness.

HA SA SO PUNG DONG NIM YA
what business west wind shake forest wilderness
Why does the Western wind shake the forest?

IL SONG HAN ANG NYU JANG CHON
one sound cold geese cry long sky
A single cry of the cold-weather geese fills the sky.

NA-MU A-MI-TA BUL
Namu Amita Buddha
Become One, Infinite Time, Infinite Space Buddha

(3)

WON GONG BOP-KYE JAE JUNG SAENG
vow together dharma -world all many beings
Vowing together with all world beings

DONG IM MI-TA DAE WON HAE
together enter Amita great vow ocean
Together into Buddha's Ocean of Great Vows

JIN MI RAE JE DO JUNG SAENG
exhaust future come occasion save many beings
To save beings of numberless worlds

JA TA IL SHI SONG BUL DO
self other one time attain Buddha way (Tao)
You and I simultaneously attain the Way of Buddha.

NA-MU A-MI-TA BUL
Namu Amita Buddha
Become One, Infinite Time, Infinite Space Buddha

The first two of these three poems (there are as many as seven in a longer version of the Morning Bell Chant used in Korea) are in origin Zen poems composed in China some time around the 11th or 12th century. Both poems have a similar structure, moving from an expression of the emptiness and universality of original nature to an acute awareness of this present moment. The second poem is particularly successful in that it combines in its last line the poignant, just-now quality of the cry of the geese with the open experience of the vast emptiness of the sky. The absolute and the phenomenal become one; form is emptiness, emptiness is form. We can only attain this by "being with all beings without hindrance," as the first poem puts it.

The third poem, in the form of a vow, continues the theme of profound action in unison, plunging us together with all beings into Amitabul's ocean of vows to use every opportunity to work for universal liberation. The last line of the poem (which is also the last line, chanted to a different melody, of the Homage to the Three Jewels) expresses once more the experience of unity and mutuality in our practice. "Self" and "other," "you" and "I," are not separate, and our attainment of the Buddha Way, our enlightenment, can only be simultaneous.

Each of the poems is punctuated with a strike of the bell and followed by a repetition of the mantra Namu Amita Bul, framing each poem as a little meditation exercise, returning us to actual practice, and providing an efficacious moment in which to wake up.