

## **CEREMONY FOR RELEASING A VOW**

There are times in our life when releasing a vow we have made, consciously or unconsciously, is the appropriate skillful means. This may come about through various circumstances, which may include the following:

1. We have made a vow for a specified period of time and it has been accomplished. For example, I took a vow to walk everyday for 2016. When the year is over, I will release this vow.
2. When we have taken vows that no longer apply. For example, we took marriage vows and are now divorced. Many people go through the legal dissolution, but not a vow dissolution.
3. When we realize that we have been carrying a “negative vow.” For example, we have been unconsciously carrying a “vow” that we have long outgrown and it no longer serves our growth or life’s purpose.

Only do this ceremony when you are truly ready to release the vow.

### **Preparation for Vow Releasing**

It is best to spend some time planning the ceremony. You may wish to consider the following;

1. Consider the time and place. Select a place where you will be uninterrupted for a period of time. Since the ceremony involves entering into silence/stillness, reflection, and speaking out loud, be sure to set aside a block of uninterrupted time. Since you will speak out loud during the ceremony, select a space where your privacy is respected. You may wish to hold the ceremony outdoors.
2. Clarify and state succinctly the vow you will be releasing. Write it down. For example, “I, (your full name), release my vow to feel unworthy as my response to life’s challenges.” Or, “I, (your full name), release my vow to

respond with fear and resentment whenever anger arises as my primary response to \_\_\_\_\_.”

3. Think about what you may need to use during the ceremony: Paper and pen, bowl for burning, candle or lighter, tissues. If you wish to speak into a stone, be sure to have one. You may wish to set up an altar specifically for the ceremony: an image? water? candle? flower? tissues? something that represents the situation? If using an altar, it is best to set up an altar specifically for this purpose, which will be dismantled completely after the ceremony is completed.
4. Is there a poem and/or chant and a dedication that you may wish to offer during the ceremony? If so, have it ready regardless if you use it or not.

### **Vow-Releasing Ceremony**

Here are the primary elements of the ceremony.

1. Set up your ceremonial space. Be sure it is clean. Or select an outdoor space.
2. Prepare yourself by wearing clean clothing.
3. Light your candle, etc.
4. When you are ready, say: “I will now begin the Ceremony to Release my Vow of \_\_\_\_\_.”
5. Purify yourself and the space around you and in all the ten directions. You can do this by using incense smoke, sprinkling water, smudging sage, offering flower petals in all directions, standing in the wind, and so forth. Be creative.
6. Sit silently for a few minutes or longer until you are ready to begin.

7. Invite spiritual guardians as witnesses. For example, the Buddha and specific Bodhisattvas, Earth Goddess, any spiritual figure or archetype you feel close to. Be aware of who comes!
8. Speak your vow out loud and begin a reflection on it. This reflection can take as long as you wish. Give yourself enough time to return to silence and let whatever needs to arise to arise. Your reflection may include the following:
  - How you came to pick up the vow
  - What purpose the vow has served in your life
  - What effect the vow has had in your life
  - Why it is time to release the vow
  - What do you need to say to anyone who was involved in your vow? Perhaps you picked it up in response to someone's actions or perhaps someone suffered from how this vow lived through you, however unconsciously it may have been.
9. Write down whatever you feel is important to record. Be succinct.
10. When you are done, return to silence and see if anything else arises. Welcome all that arises — everything that arises has a place in the releasing. Don't dismiss anything.
11. When you are ready, burn the paper. Be sure you have set up a bowl and that it is safe. Or, if you spoke into a stone, you may bury the stone or throw it into the ocean. Or you may crumble up your note and throw it into the ocean. Be creative.
12. Now that the vow has been released, speak out loud what you wish for yourself in this releasing. Is there a new vow that has emerged? Are there people you need to thank? Is there someone you need to speak to who has appeared in the ceremony? If so, take time to do this.
13. Offer a chant with dedication or a reading if you have planned to do so.

14. Return to silence and stillness for a few moments. Or maybe you wish to do a little gig!
15. Thank your witnesses. When you are done, say, “The vow releasing ceremony is now concluded.”
16. Dismantle your altar and leave no traces.

You may use all or parts. Sometimes when we have prepared well, the ceremony is focused and short because we have done most of the work beforehand. Of course, anything can arise once we are in ceremonial mode.

Gessho.