

Embrace the Sacredness of the World

Affirmation:

*I want an Earth that is healthy, a world at peace, and a heart
filled with love. I want my life and every life to count.
How can I serve toward this end?*

An important part of following the Sanctuary Path is to be a reverent Keeper of the Hall of the World. The word *steward* literally means “keeper of the hall or place.” As you learn to embrace your own sacredness, you begin to see the world with the same need. You discover that to see and embrace the world as sacred gives you the opportunity for deep abiding relationships. It gives you a sacred place to dwell. Here your soul is enriched by heartfelt connections with nature, cultures, people, animals, and places. Each is a potential sanctuary that you can enfold into your soul, just as each may give you necessary sanctuary.

To embrace the sacredness of the world you must use your own embrace of sacredness as a reference point. Just as you are aware of your duties as Keeper of your divine flame, you must tend the flame of the world. Earlier I talked about the temple of your Self, within of which are altars to tend. I want to extend these concepts to the world. I believe the symbol of the Hearth is a valuable reference point for your reverent stewardship.

The hearth is an ancient concept we are all somewhat familiar with. Most likely we associate it with a fireplace. But more broadly speaking, the hearth is a gathering place, a safe place of communion. We know exactly what this feels like when family and friends gather to share special time together, tell stories, eat good food, engage in handicrafts and games, or simply laugh.

In this one word — Hearth — you see several words that remind you of a more noble way of living and being of service on Earth. First, there is the word *earth*, to remind you that this Earth Sanctuary is a self-regulating being itself worthy of honoring. You also see in hearth the words *ear* and *hear*, to remind you of your human duty as Keeper to listen to and be aware of the needs of all beings, species, and spirits. The word *art* is also there to remind you of that which seizes and arrests the human soul — the artistry, craft, and beauty that is Nature and the creative expression of humans. And finally, there is *heart*, as in *heartfelt*. It is truly the feeling and thinking heart that can remind and lead you continuously to a higher Self that is hopeful, reverent, gracious, humble, honoring, courteous, and respectful toward all beings. Thomas Kempis in his *Imitation of Christ*, gives inspiration for this duty when he says: “If thy heart were right, then every creature would be a mirror of life and a book of holy doctrine. There is no creature so small and abject, but it reflects the goodness of God.”

The truth be told, the soul is a hitchhiker in life: a wanderlust. It is on a sustained pilgrimage to sort out beauty, inspiration, and joy. Of course, the journey is not perfect. There is suffering, fear, and disappointment. That is why it is so important to see sacredness in life. It gives the soul hope, a refuge of faith.

The great naturalist, John Muir was on a lifelong pilgrimage to the many sacred hearths of nature. It is reported that those who joined him on a hike were often subjected to a ten hour journey to go only one mile! Seeing Nature as a great sanctuary, Muir once proclaimed: “Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike.

Ralf Waldo Emerson was a frequent companion on John Muir's outings. Once, upon seeing a mighty Sequoia, he nudged Muir and whispered, "The wonder is that we can see these trees and not wonder more!" On another walk, Emerson commented: "Every rational creature has in Nature a dowry and estate. It is his if he will."

We need occasional inspiration from great souls on our own excursions into the Hall of the World. They allow us to see sacredness through other eyes. They give us another perspective on the Hearth of Life, this dowry and estate of Earth we call home.

To embrace the sacredness of the world *is* to invite it into your life reverently. By reverence is meant both an attitude and a behavior that treats everybody and everything with deep respect and honor, *as if they were sacred*. This sounds like a noble idea perhaps for saints or mystics, but how can the common person do this to any modicum of success every day? You already have the knowledge, just by embracing your own sacredness. But a perfect place to begin is right where you live.

For example, if you walk through our house at Cortesia you will see numerous altars. Upon these will be tokens of Nature, gifts from friends, or works of our own craft — a bird nest, shell, smooth stone, dried leaves, bones, ceramic bowl, handmade card, among many more items. Each altar seems to create its own personality. Hanging from rafters are dried herbs and flowers. Plants cascade down from stands and ceiling hooks. Natural crafts and sculptures abound. Our house is only about 900 square feet, most of it one large room downstairs, and the walls are mostly large glass windows and doors beckoning Nature to come inside. People come and don't want to leave. They call it the Hansel and Gretel House in the Woods.

We know what visitors experience: our deep bond with Nature and Life. Eventually they depart, but not without taking many ideas on how to embrace more of Nature and Life into their own living space. The bond we feel with Nature is celebratory, playful, and filled with immense gratitude. It is this gratitude that sees us as mere Guests visiting the many realms of Nature. But it is also a gratitude that embraces our role as an honorable Host who invites the presence of the world — humans and Nature alike — into our life.

When you begin to see the sacredness of the world and others in your life, you notice temples and hearths all around. These are sacred places, people, and beings, much like you, who are worthy of respect. Sure, some are not so appealing as others. In fact, there are some people, animals, or places in Nature in whose vicinity you would not be caught! Cruel persons, for example, can hardly be justified to receive your reverence. This is a tough call, and calls for the mustering up of a tremendous amount of compassion and strength of acceptance. At such moments you need to embrace the mentorship of another being in the world, Gandhi for example, who can give you courage to still see an evil person as sacred through the practice of non harmful thinking (ahimsa). If you think this is impossible, consider in his dying breath Gandhi's final gesture to his assassin, wherein he chanted his lifelong mantra, "Rama, Rama, Rama," signifying "I love you, I bless you, I forgive you."

Embracing the sacredness of the world also acknowledges that there is a form of vibratory consciousness present in all things. It is the great mystic Hildegard de Bingen who once said we are but "feathers on the breath of God." She was referring to the fragile existence of our consciousness cloaked in many physical forms of creation. We are all God's play, and we are all at play in the temples of the Lord.

A number of years ago, I had a fascination with Darwin. My interest stemmed from a desire to argue his theory of evolution, at least for myself. I thought it was too scientifically cold. But I discovered that he observed the world with the undying fascination of a child totally at lost in play. In fact, he felt the world to be unequivocally sacred. Once, at the sight of a tropical forest, Darwin exclaimed: “No man can stand here without feeling that these woods are temples filled with the various productions of the God of nature and that there is more in man than the breath of his body.”

This is the leap of faith we are asked to make in this Second Principle of following the Sanctuary Path: that everything has a form of consciousness imbued with sacredness. As Arthur Eddington once commented, “Something unknown is doing we don’t know what.” Who can question some intelligent force alive in, say, the seed of a maple tree? Therein lies the blueprint of its response to life: sun, shade, encroachment, pests and water. Or how about a bird that leaves its summer nest, almost on cue, to fly thousands of miles to its winter home? Or even the special fungi that seeks to knit an interlocking webwork beneath the forest floor to secure its aboveground forest tenants? Consciousness, therefore, is not an exclusive human trait. Consciousness takes the form of its owner, and it serves their potential toward actualization.

I want you to see the many temples that make up life on Earth. I want you to see the world as a sacred Hearth. This is part of your Sanctuary Path: to construct a sacred hermitage for the world to dwell — inside your heart and soul — and to tend this Hearth reverently. For, it is here your perception of the world will gather each and everyday. It is here you will find a little isle of grace — and peace — amidst the very world of people and Nature you tend.

It is not possible to continue on the Sanctuary Path without profoundly honoring your interdependency with the world. At least not in a superficial way, like “Yeah, yeah, okay I share the planet with others, and I don’t want to see the place go down the tubes, or see people suffer and stuff.” No, your interdependency is a partnership of consciousness locked in a web of life. Mind, matter, energy — this is the stuff of the phenomenal world. It is your make-up and all around you. So, you cannot divorce yourself from the daily responsibilities of stewardship within this great Web of Life.

Part of your responsibilities as a planetary steward is to see beyond the physical side of life; you have to see into its heart. It is not enough to see people, animals, and plants as physical aspects of creation; you have to see the spark of Divinity in them. In short, it is not enough to *see* the world; you have to *see into its underlying unity*. Otherwise nothing makes sense, nothing holds together, and you are left with no way of judging wise choices from foolish ones in matters of stewardship.

Part of the soul’s longing is to re-experience paradise: a perfect world, or at the least a place, where peace and harmony exists between all. Read the affirmation to this Second Principle. When you embrace this affirmation and the Second Principle of the Sanctuary Path you begin to realize that paradise comes in little moments of grace in response to your engagement with the world. *You* make the world what it is by your perceptions. By embracing the sacredness of the world your experiences become a new type of longing — a longing to change yourself for better and to do what you can to make the world a more beautiful and peaceful place to live.

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