

**Finding Sanctuary in Nature:
Healing Yourself and Others
By Jim PathFinder Ewing**

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The Tree of Peace has four white roots extending to Earth's four corners. Anyone who desires peace can follow the roots to their source and find shelter under The Great Tree.

—DEGANAWIDA (THE PEACEMAKER)

About one thousand years ago, a man called Deganawida (The Peacemaker) came among the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) and taught the people a new way of thinking. Although born a Huron, he brought peace to the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca nations by teaching the Great Law of Peace, or way of right thinking, which came to be known as the Iroquois Confederacy. This confederacy later formed the basis of the democracy emulated--however imperfectly--by the first colonists in America. This Great Law of Peace envisioned all men and women existing as equals, within one circle beneath the Great Tree of Peace, whose roots extended to the four cardinal directions and whose branches held an eagle that could see far into the future and warn of trouble. This image reflects the essence of right relations between all peoples.

When we develop right thinking, we become one with the tree of life, relating to all beings as leaves on this tree, our roots going deep within the earth, to all four directions, our limbs reaching to the sky, toward the Creator, our consciousness like the eagle with awareness of everything above and below, past and future. We are the Tree and we are the Eagle. We become one with everything and ultimately with the Creator.

Various cultures have names of their own for the Creator or for the sacred space where an individual is one with the Creator. In Sanskrit, the word for "sacred space" or "sacred altar" is yoni, which is also the name for the vagina, the place of birth. In ancient Hebrew, the name for the Creator is the initials of the four elements—fire, water, earth, and air—the basis of all things on earth: IHVH, or Yehovah. Among Native Americans, there are many names for the Creator, including the Great Mystery, the Center of All Things, the Great Spirit, and in Cherokee, u halo tega (the Source of All Power), Ona, or Yowah. The words yoni, ee-oh-vah, ona, and yowah share an intriguing similarity when spoken aloud.

Whatever name you choose to call the sacred space you create, realize that it has great power and when spoken aloud becomes an influential force in this world. It has power, however, only when spoken from the heart. Simply reciting words in rituals without the heart's intent is to revert to dogma that has no power. To speak with your heart and mind as one and to then act upon these words carries a certainty of faith that evokes the Powers of the Universe. In effect, bringing right thinking to ceremony involves going deep inside the self in order to reach up to the Creator. So, just as the tree of life has not only high

branches but also deep roots, go deep to reach high. And the deeper you go, the higher you can go.

Using right thinking to create sacred space and carry it with you wherever you go, thus being prepared to do ceremony, is like a spiritual journey. Hindus who go on pilgrimages call the sites they visit tirthas, a Sanskrit word meaning places where heaven and earth meet. Such pilgrimages are usually to a location where some great event has occurred or a god or goddess has been known to dwell. In the sacred space that you carry, the great event is your awareness of the world around you. It is awareness of sacred space, and the intent to enliven it with the Powers, that creates ceremony.

Individuals with such awareness and intent can tap this unlimited energy. Indigenous peoples throughout history sought “thin” places on the Earth where good energy was most intense and built medicine wheels or other monuments of earth or stone. Such places are lela waken (Lakota for very sacred), portals of power where the soul can be transported and ceremonies can be performed most effectively, by creating a sacred circle, inviting in the powers, and transforming the space through prayer.

Prayer is a dance between a person’s consciousness and the divine. When you pray, your intents are focused, reinforced by the power of ritual, which provides a framework for manifestation. However large or small the ceremony, the implications of this dance are vast—your partner is eternal, the dance timeless, as your intent spirals forward and backward in time. Your intent, your spoken words in prayer, should be an affirmation because the Heavenly Father hears these words and the Earth Mother brings forth blooms wherever seeds are sown. With your intent heard and nurtured in this way, Spirit can then carry it out.

Excerpted from the book,
Finding Sanctuary in Nature- Simple Ceremonies in the Native American Tradition for Healing Yourself and Others,

June 2007 with permission of Findhorn Press.

Available through Independent Publishers Group 814 N. Franklin St.,
Chicago, IL 60610. Orders: (800) 888-4741. www.findhornpress.com.

5% from the authors proceeds will be donated to Native American and other organizations dedicated to spiritual teachings.

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