

Embrace Your Sacredness

Affirmation

My Body is a Temple; my Mind is of the Divine; my Soul is Enchanted

The first step along the Sanctuary Path begins with lighting the lamp of your own sacredness. Your own sacredness is your first sanctuary. Your body is a place as worthy as any temple, a place in which the soul can dwell. Your mind just doesn't control your thoughts or will; it holds the intuition and intelligence of the Divine. Your soul is enchanted, a temple of the heart in which your wiser Self abides alongside your awe-filled Child of Joy. Within your sacredness is your connection to peace.

The world, however, sees you a little differently. It substitutes your soulful qualities with an account number, title, familial role, statistic, blood type or personality. It is all the same to society to simply call you "occupant" or "resident", as if "you" were some imperialistic occupier of your body and clothes. Such depersonalization has a way of keeping you from your own sense of sacredness. But it also possibly keeps your true Self hidden beneath feelings of shame, guilt, and inadequacy — the nagging thought that you ought to be somebody other than who you believe you are. Years ago I clearly saw this dis-ease in most of the people I saw in counseling. I learned quickly that the pundit Ogden Nash was right: people suffer from "hardening of the oughteries."

It is a sad world that blesses your entrance as a newborn with a proud name, yet hangs a numbered identification tag on your big toe as you are wheeled dead to the morgue. What happened along the way? Who crumpled up the blueprint for the design of your sacredness? I am reminded of an old Cherokee proverb: "When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced. Live your life so that when you die, the world cries and you rejoice." What a true sense of sacredness you would feel if you knew the world sorely missed your presence, even as you were welcomed in the arms of God.

So, what does it mean to embrace your sacredness? To answer this question you must imagine or visualize your sacredness everyday — the beautiful qualities of your soul that depict who you truly are and why you are here on Earth. In truth, you are the architect for your life, and you must challenge yourself to build a sacred hermitage — a lovely temple — of consciousness for your body, mind, and soul. It is within this sacred temple that you become the Keeper of the Flame of your Life.

The affirmation at the top of this page is perhaps your most important tool for embracing your sacredness. In many respects it is a holy mantra, for if you repeat it over and over again, you cannot help but *feel* your sacredness, not just know it as an intellectual exercise. Hundreds of books and scriptural passages support this first principle of the Sanctuary Path: the embracing of your sacredness. But you must be willing to put your feelings of sacredness into everyday practice. This is part of the devotion necessary to embrace Sanctuary everyday. Let's briefly look at the basic tasks asked of you to honor this principle in your life.

My Body is a Temple.

What if your duty was to caretake a temple — its grounds and interior? Undoubtedly, you would do so with utmost sincerity. You would daily sweep the walkway of leaves and debris. The lawn would be

freshly mowed, flowers deadheaded, shrubs modestly trimmed. You'd replaster the outside and occasionally repaint the sides and trim. Inside you would dust the altar, wash the windows, vacuum or sweep the floor, and tidy the seats. Perhaps you would keep a candle burning and light some incense. You would accept these duties with reverence and honor.

Indian Sanskrit has a wonderful word for temple — *mandir*. Take a moment and look in a mirror. What do you see? Has it ever occurred to you that the person you see in that mirror is the only one responsible for your life? This is a silly but profound thought. *You* are a sacred place, sacred being, *sacred sanctuary* for your soul. Breathe in and out this affirmation: *My Body is a Temple*. It is almost impossible *not* to see yourself as a worthy *mandir*.

Your body is merely a sacred temple with legs. Vietnamese Zen master, Thich Nhat Hanh says that it is most important to take refuge in yourself. It is not necessary to be religious here, simply practical. He suggests: “When you transform yourself into a comfortable hermitage, with air, light, and order inside, you begin to feel peace, joy, and happiness, and you begin to be someone others can rely on.”

When you look at yourself in the mirror, do you see the light of divinity shine through the cells of your bodily temple? Or are the windows of your soul boarded up with sadness, guilt, stress, and discomfort? Inhale deeply. Do you feel the purified air of hope, love, compassion, gratitude, and joy pour through the aisles of your heart. Or are you choked with helplessness, despair, or a preoccupation with survival or money issues? And now, look at your face very closely. How much does it reflect your mental state — do you look calm, serene, happy, at peace, or does your face show lines of world-weariness, worry, emptiness, tension, or grief?

Part of what it means to embrace your sacredness is to be the Keeper of your Temple. Your duty is to create and maintain, as Thich Nhat Hanh suggests, a comfortable hermitage in which both your soul and that of the world may find refuge. This is part of the effort of walking the Sanctuary Path.

When you embrace your body's sacredness as a *mandir*, you will do what is necessary to insure its solidity, unity, function, as well as appearance. In short, you will be conscious of being a trustee of its overall wellness.

Imagine that inside the temple of your body is a grand hall — the **Hall of Wellness**. In this hall of consciousness is your daily attitude to invest and reinvest in prosperous health. The return on your daily visit assures a *Wellthy Lifestyle* of physical prosperity. And the potential is that you may in fact die “young” at an old age. None of this means that you should strive for a perfect body temple. Impossible! Simple devotion to maintenance is better. Then your temple will withstand the tests of the world, and be a model by which others may be inspired.

So, one aspect of embracing your sacredness is to care take your physical sense of well-being in the same way you would a hall. You should be well informed and motivated to engage in your Hall of Wellness good forms of exercise for your body's age, make-up, and ability. You should have a comfortable bed in which you can get enough rest and sleep. The hall of your physical wellness should also feel healthy and vibrant, the result of daily taking in pure water, clean fresh air, and sunshine. And in a key area of the hall should be the fount of diet, where you demonstrate a degree of commitment to eat nutritionally well using natural and wholesome foods consistent with your age, body type, blood type, and spiritual path.

My Mind is of the Divine.

There is another great hall in your personal mandir. It is the **Hall of the Mind**. Sometimes you have to wonder who is really running the show in there. Here's how you can find out: pull up a seat, sit down, and close your eyes. Now see if you can stay focused on the inhalation and exhalation of your breath at your nostrils. Try it right now for a few minutes. What happened? Most likely after a few seconds you forgot all about your task and was totally absorbed in random separate thoughts, as if someone started a movie in which there was no cohesiveness to any of the frames.

It has been estimated that the average person has sixty thousand separate thoughts a day. I don't know about you, but I usually stop counting after the first few thousand, and that's before I've gotten out of bed! We don't need scientific evidence to prove or disprove it, the fact is, our Hall of the Mind is like Grand Central Station. It is noisy and busy, the Hall's door opening and shutting with a new visiting thought every second or so. The sage, Paramahansa Yogananda says that the mind is like an unruly child. You get the picture.

Added to this weight of unruliness is the fact that the mind is an incredible recycler. To experience time, the mind has to think of past and future. Each and every day many of yesterday's thoughts cycle back around, as do thoughts about tomorrow or anything else about the future. Is it no wonder that with so much clutter in the mind, you might feel a sense of separateness, literally pulled in a million and one directions? And do you wonder where, in all those thousands of daily thoughts, your divinity lives?

Imagine that you are able to stand in the hall of your mind unnoticed. You are able to recognize four distinct altars. It is your obligation to care take each of the following altars.

- **Judgments Altar** (perhaps cluttered far more with judgments, opinions, and criticisms than with love, compassion, and kindness),
- **Fears Altar** (overflowing with shame, guilt, anxiety, insecurity),
- **Desires Altar** (stacked high with desires)
- **Goals Altar** (a hodgepodge of both unclear, shallow, noble, and stupid ones)

In real life, a high proportion of your mental energy is expended toward moving around dozens of thoughts on these altars each and everyday. And you wonder what ever happened to your peace of mind! You need to vigilantly care take these altars regularly in the hall of your mind, clearing negative energies from aisles, sweeping up unworthy behaviors that clutter the floor, cleaning insecure ideas of the Ego that soot the altar, and throwing out self-centered thought-moguls that prevent you from loving and serving unconditionally.

The task is truly formidable and you need help: a different perspective on your duties.

Over 350 years ago, the French philosopher and scientist Blaise Pascal said: "All man's miseries derive from not being able to sit quietly in a room alone." Pascal was talking about the mind. Stilling the mind is about bringing more space into the hall. It is the first shift in perspective you need to clean up those four altars of thoughts you are so fond of entertaining.

Imagine now that there is a sacred place inside the hall of your mind in which you can simply *be*. Here you can just relax. In fact, you might just call it the **Relaxation Corner**. It is a special place of attention and focus that allows you to turn your back on your clamorous mind — to sort of be "in the Hall but not of it." You need to care take this part of yourself devotedly. You need to outfit it (yourself) with the

knowledge and strategies for limiting stress in your life. Such activities as yoga, walking, breath work, biofeedback techniques, prayer, journaling, meditation, gardening, holding a pet, daydreaming, or taking a leisurely stroll are highly beneficial in relieving mental indigestion.

Activities and experiences that are pleasant and relaxing are like little sanctuaries inside the busy hall of your mind. They may serve not only to give you peace but encouragement to seek experiences that foster creativity and intuition as well. But more than this, such experiences are your gateway to the mind of the Divine.

By becoming absorbed with the Divine, you don't necessarily lose your connection with the world and what makes you happy. Rather, you become more of One Mind, one overarching force that binds the universe together. Psychologist James Hillman concurs: "The soul of the individual and the soul of the world are inseparable, the one always implicating the other."

When we surrender to the idea that our mind is of the Divine, we step outside our human dimension of time and space into the realm of God or Self. The prophet Paul calls this "putting on the mind of God." The humble monk, God's "dishwasher" Brother Lawrence, speaks of "practicing the presence of God." The *Upanishads* say "the Self becomes the enjoyer only when he is united with the body, the senses, and the mind." There is a quaint story that makes the point here.

One day Dahinda came to a master and asked how he could find God. The master told him to go home and meditate on God as an island in his mind. "Ply the boat of your concentration to that island and you will find God," the master spoke. A few weeks later Dahinda returned distraught. "Master, help me! I no sooner enter the waters of meditation and I sink under the weight of hoards of thought-passengers who jump in!" The master replied: "Then imagine you are already on the island, standing on the shore, then you will find God." A few weeks later Dahinda returned again distraught. "Master, help me! I made it to the shore, but there was such a clamor in my mind, for all the thought-passengers made it too and their noise drowned out any hope of hearing God speak to me." The master replied: "Okay, I want you to concentrate on the image of God now. Everywhere you turn in your mind, there will be God. Concentrate on the image of God as a buffalo, that should do." Several months went by and Dahinda had not returned to the master, so the master set off to Dahinda's abode in the woods. When he arrived at the door he called out: "Dahinda, your master is here, please come out to pay respects to your visitor." At this point Dahinda replied from inside: "Oh beloved master, I sincerely apologize for not greeting you at the door. But you see, my horns have grown so big that I cannot ever hope of getting through the doorway!"

This is the great power and insight that one of the most important temple keeping aids can give us: meditation. The Indian sage, Eknath Easwaran likens meditation to a kind of spiritual screwdriver, intended for loosening identification with the body, mind, and your sensual relationship to the world. The screws are your senses and thoughts, and it takes long patient effort to loosen them, to release the tension that keeps you tightly connected to the world. Even Gandhi found the task practically insurmountable, saying it requires the patience of a man trying to empty the sea with a blade of grass.

Nevertheless, you should strive to still the mind. Sanctuary, as you might surmise, gives you a tremendous advantage in keeping the Hall of the Mind noble in spirit and intent. It puts thoughts and things in perspective and order. The Sanctuary Path allows your mind to find refuge in the Divine.

My Soul is Enchanted.

What makes the soul enchanted is its very engagement with the world. Sufi tradition tells of the soul given an opportunity to dance in the human body and, liking it so much, it did not want to leave. This is exactly your sentiment with the world. Your soul is attracted to beauty, affection, connection, and celebration; it is severely wounded by rejection, alienation, violence, and ugliness.

Within your sacred mandir is another great hall: **The Hall of the Heart**. And here there are two worthy altars to tend: the *Altar of the Sage/Saga* (in their male/female aspects of wisdom respectively) and the *Altar of the Child*.

Without a doubt, the ultimate value of sanctuary is to help you access your higher, wiser Self, the inner sage/saga, and to honor this in others. But sanctuary also allows you to heal and nurture the oft-wounded or rejected Inner Child. The very notion of sacred time and space is palliative to the soul. In such sacred moments of meditation, prayer, stillness, quiet observation, personal reflection, and communion, the hall of your heart begins to resonate with love, peace, reverence, compassion, and gratitude.

In truth your life is a sacred gift of enchantment to this Earth. You have something very special to offer. It is a multifaceted jewel that emits knowledge, wisdom, playfulness, humor, and celebration — a jewel that makes the world a more enjoyable place for the soul to dwell. To discover this divine gift amongst the Hall of the Heart is what makes the pursuit of Sanctuary in daily life more like play instead of work.

There is a small treasure of words placed directly in front of me as I sit to write each day. They were written by Caroline Adams and speak inspiringly to this first principle of the Sanctuary Path. Read them each day. You are assured of feeling that special embrace of your own sacredness. If you copy them down or give them to others for inspiration, please give her credit.

“Always remember who you are and why you are here, for you, created in love, are truly a spark of Divinity . . . and your most sacred task in this lifetime is to open fully to your Spirit, that you may find and use your unique gifts for the benefit of all . . . grow ever more deeply into your own inner wisdom . . . and learn to love yourself and those around you as compassionately as possible . . . and thus, shall your inner light radiate forth, spreading warmth and beauty wherever you go.”

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