

#### IV. Create Sacred Time & Space for Yourself Everyday

Affirmation:

*I need the time and space to daily renew my celebration of life.  
This need for sanctuary is sacred to me.*

Sanctuary is never about ordinary time or space. It is about time and space made *extraordinary* by your own creation. It is about living in a timeless present, bearing witness to its *flow*, unfettered by immediacy. For this reason, the experience of sanctuary is fragile. The world is little concerned with the present, so your heart's desire must suffer, maybe a little, maybe a lot. You need to sacralize time in order to sacralize your life. You need to know that there is time and space in your day that is inviolable. And you need to know how to make it so.

The space given to sanctuary is like a "safe zone" for the soul. Do you have such space in your life? Is there a place or two at home or work or in your community in which you can seek a modicum of refuge? Adam Smith's wife, Sarah, once said that all she ever needed was a little room with a view. Such a simple desire. Not much to ask for a little contentment. Do you have access to just such a place each day? A place, much like the corner table at an outdoor cafe, in which you can gain a measure of perspective on life?

Sanctuary Work involves creating physical *and* psychological space in your life for your soul to simply *be*. Perhaps it is just a simple bench in nature, or a chair sitting in front of a large picture window looking out into a garden. In New York City, the many inner city gardens are inviolable places for neighbors to gather to garden, play dominoes, play with children, and just hang out. These are green sanctuaries in an otherwise sterile concrete jungle where people can practice *being human* — sharing joy, laughter, stories, wisdom, bonding with each other and the earth. Such settings are necessary "third places" between home or work or school. They are inviolable sanctuaries that even the gangs recognize by creating unspoken codes of ethics to not enter or vandalize.

The power of uncompromisable space in one's life is implied permission to feel wholly human and not some automaton driven by time, obligations, or fears. As pointed out in the previous principle of Sanctuary Work, we can more easily "put ourselves back together again" if we acknowledge our need for daily *wonder*, *healing*, and *celebration*. But this cannot happen if we do not state, pure and simple, "*I need the time and space to daily renew my celebration of life. This need for sanctuary is sacred to me.*"

Unfortunately, we live in a society where we perceive the opportunity for solace to be scarce. It is almost as if the soul is forced to be a pauper amidst seemingly widespread abundance. Part of the difficulty, realistically, may be limited living space or few opportunities to wander in nature. Another part may be attitude. But perhaps the most difficult part of creating sanctuary is our perception of time.

Time was once measured intuitively by the passing of the day or shadows, movement of the sun, or the sounds of nature. Today time is measured by nanoseconds — time that we cannot see yet it impacts us nonetheless. Technology was supposed to be the great emancipator of time, freeing us from work while giving us greater leisure. Instead, we have become emotionally enslaved to time, believing that there is a scarcity of it in our lives that must be resolved by a quest for more of it. The worldly sense of time, much like money or products, is in fact a commodity: we have it or we don't, we desire it or hoard it, we bargain for it or lose it.

This profane concept of time operates by its own Murphy's Law: the activities of the day expand to fill the time made available to them. Years ago, the phrase "time deepening" was coined to describe how many activities or experiences could be stuffed into a particular period of time: driving a car through traffic, sipping an espresso, talking on a cellular phone, all this while listening to a bestselling book on tape. The truth is, the more we wrestle with the world on its terms, the more powerless we feel about owning our own time and space to experience peace. At the same time we know we simply need a little space to ourselves to regenerate our spirit, it seems impossible for us to unequivocally grab enough time in the day for sanctuary.

We all know the result of only taking occasional time out from the demands of our busy daily schedule. It simply isn't enough. We find ourselves gradually wearing down, unable to stem the tide of weariness even when we love what we do. Even if we were able to use the better part of each weekend to nurture and replenish ourselves, which few of us do, chances are good that we would have a difficult time making it through the average workweek with body and soul fully intact. This is why it is so very important to find a way to regenerate our mind and spirit each and every day.

It may seem clearly out of the question for you to claim time for personal renewal on a daily basis, but if you find yourself automatically adopting a pessimistic point of view, consider the likely outcome. While you may be enthusiastic about your work and what you are highly skilled at doing, you simply will not be operating at your optimal level of efficiency or ease. In fact, you may be dragging yourself through the work week with an energy level that is far below your true capability, simply because you don't allow yourself time out from *doing*, to just *be*.

Consider the case of our dear friend Jean, who has been in a state of constant burnout for all of the twenty years or more that we have known her. Interestingly enough, Jean is doing less and less in her life, in the worldly sense, believing that she is actually being sensible and cutting back. But the fact of the matter is, she never feels any better about the dismal state of her stress level. She always feels exhausted, under pressure, worried about the things she's *not* getting to, and disappointed that her current intimate relationship is such a struggle. She often eats poorly and although she has been passionate about exercising, it's no longer enough to keep her going. In her mid-forties now, she has discovered she can't run on adrenaline and willpower anymore. Something has to change, but what? Jean feels so weighted down that even things that could be a source of peace, like gardening or seeing special friends, have become yet another obligation that threatens to fill her day that is already crammed full.

Jean is an absolutely wonderful person, as is her partner. We love them both dearly, and would really enjoy seeing more of them. But neither one of them is able to stop long enough to be very social or to really take stock of the real price they are paying for their obsession with being so productive. They nurture others through the heartfelt work they do, yet they have a very difficult time, for example, even stopping to eat dinner before nine or ten at night. Any gentle prodding on our part elicits ready agreement on one hand but a kind of guilty resignation on the other. Ultimately, the situation for them simply doesn't change.

If we were to prescribe three things to start Jean off on the road to greater peace of mind it would be these: 1) Daily meditation practiced faithfully morning and night (for even fifteen minutes), 2) A half hour walk every morning (not just the once a week barnstormer walk she and a friend take with flashlights!), 3) A good breakfast eaten at home (not in her car) and a carefully prepared, healthy dinner eaten slowly before 7:00 PM, with soft music (and maybe candlelight), *sitting down*, at the dining room

table with her mate. Even these three changes would transform Jean's life and significantly increase the harmony in her relationship. But our sense is that she is not quite ready to let go of her excuses for being unhappy. Once she decides she really *deserves* to be happy, she will find the way to create sanctuary in her life *every day*.

If you are like most people, your entry into sanctuary comes by eventually losing the battle with time. You enter world-weary and burned out. Yet this is absolutely your saving grace! Islands of time to replenish, salve, and uplift the spirit are really islands of grace that you *borrow from the day*. If sanctuary can do anything for you it can re-empower your perception that time *can* be something you own *without harming a soul!* When you plan your day to include sanctuary time, then this time becomes valuable — indeed, priceless — and uncompromisable. Ultimately, *the benefits of your sanctuary experiences expand to fill the time and space made available for sanctuary*, a more sacred application of Murphy's Law.

Actually, there is a central discovery most people have within sanctuary: *timelessness*. "Heaven in a flower; Eternity in an hour," William Blake so aptly reminds us. This sense of timelessness, where you "lose yourself" — your mental absorption with time or consequence — is one of the more addicting qualities of the sanctuary experience. We all have had such experiences in daydreams, one of the most accessible and spontaneous islands of grace in our day! But we have also known it in seashore walks, gardening, listening to beautiful music, or sitting with a pet in our lap.

Sanctuary is not about keeping time over the soul. Your soul is wiser than you think. When you give over your mind to a state of peace you step into a garden eternal. Yes, plan for sanctuary time. Yes, let it come to you spontaneously, if need be, as sacred space, a pause in the breath of life. However, know that this island of time, as grace within your day, cannot be *measured by time*. It is measured by the quality of the experience that has captured your soul. In many respects, the term "sanctuary time" is a misnomer. It should be known as the *sanctuary experience*. And as such, is truly sacred and worth fighting for.

Recite the affirmation for this Fourth Principle of the Sanctuary Path. It evokes the power of a strong need in your life. Don't give up without a fight for the time and space necessary to bring peace into your day. Your soul has simply borrowed your body, and thus time, to celebrate this Earthly existence. "Our bodies are our gardens, to which our wills are gardeners," spoke Shakespeare. Use all the will you can muster to create a psychological "sanctuary garden" both your body and soul can daily get lost in.

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Excerpts from forthcoming book: *Islands of Grace: Creating Sanctuary in Daily Life*. By Dr. Christopher Forrest McDowell and Tricia Clark-McDowell