

VII. Give of Yourself to Bring Joy, Beauty, Hope and Peace into the World

Affirmation:

*I am a sacred flame willing to enlighten the world with
joy, beauty, hope, and peace*

Gandhi once received a letter urging world leaders to draw up a charter of human rights. “In my experience,” Gandhi wrote back, “it is far more important to have a charter of human duties.” This is the awareness we must ultimately come to along the Sanctuary Path: that just as we may believe we have the right for sanctuary, we also have a duty to be of noble worldly service.

The truth is, few of us are meant to renounce the world and become recluses. The soul’s love affair with life in all its beauty, joy, and travail is simply too powerful of a magnetic pull back into the world. The paradox is that just as the demands and pressures of the world naturally draw us into sanctuary, our soul is pulled right back out of its momentary respite to re-engage with the world.

Given this natural state of tug-of-war with the soul, I strongly believe that sanctuary mirrors that which we must give *back* to the world. This is the power of the affirmation to this Seventh Principle. In sanctuary, for example, we may feel peace. Therefore, we should see it as our duty to bring more peace into an otherwise chaotic world. In sanctuary, we may feel joy. Therefore, we should seek ways to bring this greatly missing need into other peoples’ lives. In sanctuary, we may become in touch with beauty, and certainly Nature can do with more uplifting care and stewardship that we may offer. Finally, in sanctuary we may perhaps feel more hope, and this is something of great value that we can inspire in others.

So, just as you are the Keeper of the Flame of your own life, it is your compassionate and reverent duty to do what you can to keep the Flame of the World. Otherwise, the concept of sanctuary risks becoming a temporary fix in your life and not a permanent fixture or hearth around which the world may gather.

What does it really mean when we say, “I want an Earth that is healthy, a world full of peace, and a heart filled with love?” I believe this statement opens up a dialogue between the heart and mind. It calls for a caring relationship between the world, and us so that our heart and mind unite with psychic and physical energy. Rudolf Steiner calls this process “heart thinking”: committing ourselves to build a bridge between our mind’s intellect and our heart’s emotion so that we think, feel, and act out of our full humanity. This is what is meant by *harmonic attunement* — within us, with the world, and with God.

When we further ask the question, “How can I serve the well-being of life on this planet, in whatever form it presents itself?” we are consciously seeking to find that charitable part of our soul in unconditional service. It borders on an insult to the very essence of the soul if we see the dismal conditions of life around us and do not choose to do something about it. As comedian, Bob Hope once said, “If you lack charity of the heart, you suffer from the worst form of heart disease.”

There is an Indian principle, *dana*, which beautifully conceptualizes this Seventh Principle along the Sanctuary Path. *Dana* means generosity — the act of giving *and* the gift itself. Consider that from the moment of our birth we are taking sustenance from our parents, relatives, friends, neighbors, and teachers. We receive the gifts of human contact as well as human creation. We enjoy the fruits of others’ work and the history of our culture: cities, roads, schools, churches, parks; literature, art, music, religion, inventions. And let’s not forget the incredible sustenance we receive from nature and animals!

In a gesture of reverent reciprocity, *dana* asks us to share our time, skills, talents, goods, and energy. By seeing our service as a gift to society and the natural environment, the quality of our work and involvement will continue to grow as well. Let me share how our family has embraced the spirit of *dana* in this Seventh Principle of the Sanctuary Path.

Tricia and I have been gardening together since 1981. When we continuously received the bounty of organic produce and beautiful flowers from our garden, we sought an opportunity to share our insights with others less fortunate. As it were, a nutritional gardening program at the university had received a grant to provide raised beds free of charge to the elderly in our community. Tricia volunteered and soon became the program's coordinator. When the grant money ran out we were undaunted and started our own nonprofit organization, the Garden Stewards Project. We expanded the opportunity for a free garden to low income families throughout the county. We also created a "can't fail" educational program complete with Master Gardener support from the county extension service. Each spring, for over eight years, Tricia directed a volunteer force of up to thirty people. The Project tapped deep into the community's resources for donations of wood, soil, amendments, plants, tools, and machinery to make it all happen. Work parties were organized over a one month period to get all beds built and planted — every one of them in a family's backyard. And we never paid ourselves a dime! Hard work? You bet! Exhausting! And it did its best to put a strain on our marriage at times. But you see, the Project had a motto: "Plant a seed of Hope. Nurture the Earth. Harvest your good Efforts."

The Garden Stewards Project had a checking account with little money in it. We didn't need much. We were investing energy and resources into the community, into peoples' lives, into the Earth; we touched wounded spirits, disabled, and old bodies; and we touched the hearts of children. We know this for a fact! We gave the homeless a connection with the abode of soil. We gave wheelchair bound people new hope for visiting nature. We gave the blind an opportunity to see with their hands the beauty of nature through flowers and vegetables. We watched children harvest with wild astonishment their first potato or carrot and taste the sweet tenderness of homegrown organic broccoli. We saw a single mother become re-empowered with success in her garden, enough so that she believed once again in her skill as an artist (now she is in great demand!). One volunteer became inspired to create a large community garden for those people without yards or those who relied on the county food bank for supplementary food.

After eight years the Garden Stewards Project had done its work, serving to inspire and seed similar efforts around the country and within our own community. It was time to reinvest in *dana*. You see, we had personally grown immensely throughout the process until, as a couple, we envisioned an even larger purpose of gardening — to provide sanctuary for the soul. Out of this vision the Cortesia Sanctuary Project was born, and has served to inspire, educate, and assist thousands of people around the world to create a sense of sanctuary in their lives. And now you too have become a beneficiary of our continued efforts to touch others and this earth with love and compassion.

Gandhi once said, "There comes a time when an individual becomes irresistible and his action becomes all-pervasive in its effect. This comes when he reduces himself to zero." In many respects, this is what happened in the Garden Stewards Project. Our personal efforts or sense of ego-fulfillment had been fully replaced by the empowerment of its participants, volunteers, community, and ultimately other offshoot projects in the region.

But what Gandhi is really suggesting is this: place all your talents, resources, time, and energy in a trust for the world. Be a trustee of yourself and the world. Take the whole world as your home, every child as

your own, and live in a way that will make *their* earth a better place. Continuously ask yourself: How much can I give? How much can I love? How much can I put my self-interest aside and work to remake my life, for the sake of the Earth, and the children who will inherit it?

The truth is, heartfelt stewardship can only exist in relationships, not just in platitudes or idealism. And it can only be initiated by releasing the tension of separateness. We can all relate to this tension of mistrust, fear, anxiety, loneliness, or the need to control others or defend ourselves (i.e. our thoughts, emotions, beliefs, possessions, etc.). But we can also relate to experiences in which this tension was replaced by feelings of unity, trust, and compassion. Such experiences dissolved any perception of distance, replaced instead by an overriding sense of love and harmony. This is the power, for example, of a person who is able to develop a trustworthy and respectful relationship with animals. It is the power of St. Francis embracing a leper in the road only to discover it was Jesus. It is also the power of a mate giving grace to the errors of a spouse in the form of forgiveness, thereby reaffirming a deeper sense of love, trust, and service to the relationship.

There is yet another Indian concept — *yajna* — that helps to clarify the work involved in this Seventh Principle. Traditionally *yajna* refers to religious rituals, but its application can be broadened in light of the Sanctuary Path as a measure of unconditional love and compassion. Wherever you find the earnest, loving, concentrated desire to bring people and resources together to improve the welfare of life on Earth, this is *yajna*. When you offer yourself up to the greater good, this is *yajna*. When you do this in cheerful harmony, without an eye for prestige, profit, or recognition, this is *yajna*, and such work contains within itself the secret of success. As your understanding deepens, you see more how your service toward making the world a better place to live is an offering, if not an offering to God. Your intentions become more pure, your ego's sense of insecurity or need for recognition lessened.

One of the difficulties of modern society is that it induces us to do things for material gain — for money, power, fame or comfort. Because of this, as Satish Kumar suggests, “we have been taking and taking from each other, from the environment and from our own souls, without any thought of giving back or of replenishment.” The Sanctuary Path attempts to put things back into perspective, as Saint Francis reminds us: “It is in giving that we receive.”

So, if you are inclined to feel helpless amidst society's constant change, perhaps you can find constancy in what you can give to your immediate surroundings. It is not enough to whine or feel that you are being dragged by your hair through life. Life is not so much about what you see it to be. The truth may be that you see life as you are. The act of giving empowers you as a generous steward, a compassionate Keeper of the World. It is the soil out of which mutual trust and respect can grow.

Ralph Waldo Emerson reminds us: *The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you lived and lived well.*

A personal sense of usefulness and honor is most measured by the quality of our relationships. Relationships — between humans, between humans and nature and animals — grow, deepen, and are replenished out of an investment and reinvestment of energy. Our family knows, for example, that every Spring we must reinvest our commitment to the garden. Similarly, we reinvest in our family by taking regenerating outings, if only to go to a movie or play badminton in the front meadow. When we feel too much tension arising between us, Tricia and I work to restore our equanimity through truthful and compassionate conversation. We take time everyday, and throughout each day, to replenish our spirit through meditation, laughter, and sharing our service to each other. We replenish our body

through regular exercise and by healthy diets. We sustain our friendships in the community by staying in touch. We find creative ways to share our knowledge and talents with others.

Such effort is really not extraordinary. Millions of people engage in replenishing activities everyday. But couched very consciously in an overarching life philosophy, such as that offered in Cortesian reverence for life or the Sanctuary Path, a sense of stewardship takes on deeper intent and practice. The unconditionality of reverence and respect for the human and natural world calls for a sharing and giving of our energy in the spirit of informed need and cooperation. This is stewardship at its best, when both hands are extended to offer service in its replenishing roles: restorative, regenerative, and sustainable.

Sadly, many people shake their fists at the world, wondering what ever happened to their due share of joy or happiness. It is hard to be of use to anyone with clenched fists. In a famous quatrain from the *Rubaiyat*, Omar Khayyam pleads:

*Oh Love, could thou and I with fate conspire
to grasp this sorry things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits
and remold it nearer to the heart's desire.*

The truth is, your heart's desire is not much different than anyone else's: the desire to live in peace, joy, and hope for a beautiful world. The power of Sanctuary is that it allows you to revision the world and find your path of least resistance. It allows you to raise your arms and both hands wide for embrace. Your reverence, non-judgment, and compassion are important tools in determining what special gift of joy, beauty, hope, and peace you can give to the world. Whatever your gifts may be — talents, skills, passions, connections, or prayers — allow them to rise up from your soul's deepest callings to life.

You may plant lovely flowers, reforest a clear-cut, steward a particular green space or roadside, or do any number of things to restore and regenerate the environment. You may volunteer in hospice care, help children in need, or serve in a food bank or soup kitchen. You may help in a wildlife rescue organization or lead a neighborhood beautification project. You may become a foster grandparent or youth mentor. You may simply tend an altar for the world in your home, offering daily prayer for the wellbeing of the earth.

Eknath Easwaran reminds us: “When we sit down to meditate in the morning, we are not just remaking ourselves. We are remaking our families, our community, our nation, and, in the end, our entire world.”

Such is the effort of Sanctuary: to re-sacralize ourselves, to re-sacralize the world. Watch yourself come full circle in these Seven Principles of the Sanctuary Path. To engage in Sanctuary is never-ending in this regard. It is a sacred hoop of consciousness and reciprocity in which your center is found within the center of the world and your daily thoughts and actions wherever your daily journey leads you. The Bagavad Gita reminds us that “by performing work selflessly, a person worships the Creator who dwells in every creature. Such worship brings that person to fulfillment.” (Ch 18, ver. 46)

Wake up to the full glory of being human on this planet, a sacred flame illuminating and being illuminated by the world. This Earth is perhaps the most incredible sanctuary in the universe. We take too much for granted. The air is free and so is the sun and water we are vulnerably dependent upon for life. Like fish in a bowl that are thirsty, we too easily forget that we live in the good graces of the Earth everyday. We go looking to satisfy our hunger for life within our peculiar human inventions. We go searching for the musk of sanctuary that eludes us until someday we discover it to be within our very soul as Peace sleeping. When we awaken from our ego's dream of insecurity and separateness, we are

certain to find the face of God in everything we do, every species we meet, and every human we see. At that moment, it would be impossible to disregard this incredible Earth Sanctuary and not choose to do whatever we can to ensure that peace, joy, and beauty is found around every corner and in every heart.

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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