

Meditating on the Wild Mountain, Entering Sacred Space

She lies open there, a breathing mountain, an oasis. Her green flanks rise out of flatlands, bay mud, houses, roads. Her flanks reach toward the wind, caressing; toward the fog, thirstily; toward the stars, yearning. Her flanks draw my eyes toward restful quiet ridges of silence, draw me out of freeway hum and into that other world. World of steep grassy meadows, hummingbird bush-covered culverts, chemise and untamed wind on high.

She is home to endangered Calliope Silverspot butterflies and invasive Scotch broom. She harbors secret crystalline formations in her rocks and caves. Vultures soar above her, and Red tails circle, their mating calls rolling across the uplifts.

I have walked her ridges in winter and summer, discovering tiny yellow wild violets, leaving offerings under broken stone. I have lain on her, breathing and dreaming. Her energy beckons and encourages me. Each time I visit the mountain, I know I will find something precious and delicate, memory or vision, to piece into my world.

On the north side, above a stream bed, a totem pole rises above the old Siplichichin Ohlone shell mound. It is there we gather for ritual and journey. It is there that the stored power of dreams and spirits speaking is strongest; it is there that we go to listen to the ancestors.

With each visit, we accrue knowledge, connection. The mountain has become a friend—entity to converse with, to listen to, to be with. We cannot approach the knowing of people born to a place and living in partnership with it, yet the mountain helps us to find our wild selves. It helps us to cleanse and heal, align and find balance.

It was on a visit just four years ago that I began to hear the mountain we call San Bruno speak. A group of us had hiked up a ridge and laid in a meadow, quietly meditating, then

painting. Finally we were instructed to write, quickly, without stopping, whatever words arose.

Here is what I heard:

I am the mountain. I grow Yerba Santa and yarrow out of my dry hardscrabble soil. I am warm inside, deep, bone-connected to the other mountains. Hidden springs course through my bones, flowing into the water that covers me and surrounds me. The bay lies across my body, filling my curves and crevices. My breasts and elbows make small islands; my nose and knees rise high up above the water. My bones connect me with all the other mountains; we are one. When our energy trembles and shakes, the creatures on top are buffeted like matchsticks and frightened.

I receive those who lie upon me, who breathe with me. Our veins merge in the letting go.

I am the old mountain, rising and falling through the eons in great breaths. I breathe in with the sea, heave with the tides. My breath is deep, my rhythm is deep, rolling across the whole earth, displacing continents. Stars burn my great breath as I exhale.

I am dry, parched. Disrupted on my surface, skin ripped into by bulldozers, roots torn asunder and replaced by foreign plants, unfamiliar to me, unhappy in my rocky clay soil.

Fog bathes me, cooling my surface. Feeding my growth. Bringing my spring water back to me on my breath.

I am solid. I am moving. I am mountain, I am bones. I am surface, I am deep. I am hard; I am soft, receptive. I am quiet, I howl. I see far, I am enshrouded. I breathe deep, I am suffocated. I am old, I am starting again each day. I have seen generations, and everything is new: each moment, each breath; each moment, each breath; each moment, each breath.

Afterwards, remembering these images transports me. Being transported, I breathe more deeply. Breathing more deeply, I enter my own silence. In that silence—appointments, lists, self-perpetuating monkey-mind franticness shed—I notice the unseen. I remember. I remember the shell mound on the mountain, the thousands of years of rhythmic respectful living the mound represents. I imagine the comings and goings from clam and mussel gathering in the tidal flats, the spectacular vistas the villagers had of other peaks surrounding the bay—Diablo, Hamilton, and Tamalpais—as they piled their shells high after meals. I try to

envision how to bring that tribal, group mind forth in us, so that planned development, a huge hotel complex, will be seen from the perspective of seven generations rather than short term profits.

The mountain is a vehicle for shifting my consciousness each time I drive by her, see her across the bay, or hold one of her stones. She is like a mandala, or a church: she represents the sacred. She is symbol of earth, simple rhythmic living, the kind of attention I want to bring to my life. I can walk her paths in meditation or journeying, transporting myself there. I can shift my rhythms to match her breathing. As I learn her rhythms, the old ways of the people, and I listen to her bones, I hear deeper wisdom. I weave it back into my life; I reweave the web, the tapestry of the world.

To be sacred, a place must be honored, treated with respect. It must gather and hold energy, be alive with the seen and unseen. Above all, a sacred place must be safe—for cells to open, boundaries to expand, what's normally hidden to come forth.

Sacred spaces help us access our own spirits. They offer us doorways through which we can pass, gateways to deepening our connections with nature and our elemental beginnings. Those connections lead us to wholeness; the more we experience the interconnectedness of our bodies and earth's body, the more we heal spirit.

Our intent is a key. Without conscious focus, we move through places, events, breath, life itself in a fog of inattention and distraction. When mind is disconnected from body, when physical blocks keep breath and energy from moving freely, when outer dissonance—noise, concrete, or frantic grasping energy—distracts concentration, we cannot be. And it is being—alert, quiet, reverent, open hearted, present—that allows us to walk the sacred road.

How do we make a place sacred? By removing diversions. By creating silence. By bringing our presence and breath to a point of stillness. By making offerings, and setting the context to “this is what is important about today” rather than “let's do this in the middle of

our busy lives.” By listening with our skin, touching with our energy field, feeling with our senses. By holding intent as we enter a sacred place. By drawing out the power of a place with love, courage, and attention. By inviting spirit and welcoming it fully.

Opening ourselves up to sacred space has to do with letting more in, and letting more through—no clutching, just observing. It is as if we open into a honeycomb fluidity of time and cellular memory, spread our cells so sadness breathes through and blows away in the wind, so light enters us.

Once we learn how to create and access sacred space, we carry the tools with us. Just this last spring, visiting a slough near my home—a place that is beautiful but has not usually exhibited the qualities of sacred space—I experienced the power of those tools in my meditation:

Centuries slow into eons as minerals and detritus filter down through sea water to ocean floor, building serpentine, particle by particle.

Among the stars, dust and gases explode, collide, in even slower cycles, creating the universe.

My breath goes slower, deeper, as I reach down with drifting particles; slower, deeper, as I reach up with the forming stars. Time takes on a new dimension as it expands into these vast spaces; my cells stretch with it.

I pull energy from the nuclear fission explosions in space, the tremendous creativity of world forming. I call that limitless creativity into myself.

Continuing to breathe up into sky and down into earth, I feel the pillar of light widening as my rhythm slows even more to match that of the stones and the stars.

Experiences like this lead me into what feel like different dimensions of time and space; they both teach me how, and give me courage, to let go of ego and live in balance.

Acknowledging, being in, and working in sacred spaces, I am learning to be a guardian warrior of the sacred earth: cleaning and balancing my own filaments of light energy; composting the contorted energy of others when I can; and working from the heart.

Each meditation on the wild mountain repairs Indra's net, the web of interconnection and interbeing that holds earth energies in balance. Each person who honors sacred space and works with the wild is helping to align the filaments of the web. In this way, we weave the sacred transformation of the earth.