

Sacred Places of North America: Past, Present and Future

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Summary

In North America, the identity of natural sacred places was nearly lost with the massive immigration of European peoples which began in the 1500's, causing tremendous hardship to native peoples, and provoking a psychic disconnection between the people and the land in general. This paper provides a summary of Native American concepts about spiritual places in the United States and discusses some of the data which support their existence as a subtle power of nature, available to all people, if nature is properly respected. Current land use controversies involving identification and protection of sacred places are discussed, and proposals for future preservation and management are offered, based on the results of the Spirit of Place symposiums produced by the author. The recognition and proper use of sacred places is supported as a core process of developing an ecological conscience to help guide all other ecological actions.

Résumé

L'immigration massive de peuples européens qui s'amorça en Amérique du Nord vers les années 1500 faillit faire perdre leur identité aux lieux sacrés, causant d'énormes problèmes aux indigènes et contribuant à créer une cassure psychique entre la terre et ses habitants en général. Le présent article résume les concepts utilisés par les indigènes américains en rapport avec des lieux spirituels; il discute de données qui suggèrent que leur existence représente un pouvoir subtil de la nature, accessible à tous à condition qu'on le respecte comme il convient. Il parle aussi de débats actuels concernant l'utilisation de terrains liés à l'identification et à la protection de lieux sacrés. Finalement, il propose des solutions devant permettre de sauvegarder et de gérer ces derniers, ceci en se fondant sur les résultats de symposiums sur l'Esprit du Lieu organisés par l'auteur. Le respect et l'utilisation adéquate des lieux sacrés sont considérés comme un processus central au développement d'une conscience écologique devant contribuer à guider toutes les autres actions dans le domaine de l'écologie.

1. Introduction

"Draw not hither", says the Lord to Moses, "put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground", declares the *Bible* in Exodus, 3, 5.

According to mythologist Joseph Campbell (1974),

"The idea of a sacred (place) where the walls and laws of the temporal world dissolve to reveal wonder is apparently as old as the human race".

The names of many of these special places are familiar to us - Delphi, Palenque, Lascaux, Lourdes, Mount Fuji, Mount Sinai, Mecca, Jerusalem, Mount Omei, Tai-Shan, the Ganges River and Stonehenge are just a few of the more famous places of numinous power which dot the surface of the earth to which people assign the term "sacred".

"Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane" - the act of manifestation of the sacred being called a "hierophany" or an appearance of non-ordinary reality according to Mircea Eliade (1961, 12).

As we seek to create a new environmental conscience and consciousness from which to solve environmental problems and build a sustainable society, we need to understand just what is a consciousness of ecological sustainability, for clearly modern society does not have such a mindset, and what makes it work. Throughout history all traditional sustainable societies have had an acute awareness of certain places being sacred. Normally these places are the central focus of cultural values and meaning, as well as the physical anchors for myths, legends, ceremonies and rituals. Modern society, based so heavily on a Newtonian-Cartesian mechanistic paradigm, tends to desecralize everything, including the earth.

If we look to the land use concepts and policies of the nations of the world, the startling fact arises that the United States of America and Canada do not have a well-established legacy of sacred places. There are places of historical significance - battle-grounds, old homes and churches, cemeteries, archeological remains of earlier times, and special monuments - but none of these by themselves are said to be places of sacred *power* which manifests as a result of nature alone, and not simply a product of human work and design. There also are numerous parks, monuments, reserves, and wild areas which are set aside. The rationale for preservation of these islands of pristine natural features is usually explained in terms of unusual flora and fauna and perhaps natural scenery. At no time do we use the term "sacred" to describe the significance of a place as a justification for its preservation. This is in sharp contrast to the American Indian culture which sees the landscape as being dotted with special places of spiritual value and power; a view which is in keeping with nearly all other nations around the world that still have a strong connection to the cultures of their ancestry. For the last decade I've been engaged in a study of sacred places of American Indian peoples (Swan, 1990, 1991, 1992). The purpose of this work has been twofold: 1) to better understand place consciousness through the senses of a more environmentally sensitive culture; and 2) to seek to understand just how the earth wisdom of American Indian peoples can be helpful to modern society to learn to live in better harmony with nature.

2. What is a Sacred Place?

Just what is a sacred place? A thing or a place becomes sacred ultimately in the human mind when it becomes perceived as somehow being able to energize within us those feelings and concepts which we associate with the spiritual dimensions of life. Sacred places fall into three general categories. One type is the interior of a religious

building like a church, a temple, shrine or mosque. These interior spaces aren't necessarily associated with any other greater sacred condition, although some are, such as the great cathedrals of Europe which are built on top of old pagan worship sites, and still have the original bubbling springs as their basements. One of the greatest differences between ancient and modern sacred architecture is that modern sacred architecture tends to take place without serious consideration of the spiritual significance of the ground on which it is built. In our modern secular world, the siting of sacred buildings tends to have a more economic or political origin than a spiritual one.

A second category involves a place where the larger world is called into harmony with the greater whole through sacred design, a "microcosm of the macrocosm" as Joseph Campbell (1974) put it. Examples of such sites would be the solar-lunar observatory on Fajada Butte at Chaco Canyon, the "Woodenhege" circle of poles at Cahokia near St. Louis, Missouri, or the medicine wheel stone circle in the Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming.

A third type of sacred place is one which may be marked by some human structures or art work, but which derive their sacred identity from nature itself. For many traditional cultures which are threatened by developmental pressures from modern society, places of this latter category are the most difficult to defend as their identity is based on a perceptual reality which goes beyond what contemporary society believes is possible. In this paper I want to focus primarily on sites within this latter category, especially those which are held as being sacred to Native American peoples - Alaskan Eskimos, Aleuts, American Indians and Polynesians - because these kind of sites are least understood by modern secular society.

3. Sacred Places in the Native American Culture

Working among the Navaho for many years, Franz Newcomb and Gladys Reichard (1965, 69) relate:

"...locality is of the greatest importance to the Navaho. Names of people, of animals, of dangers, names of arrows, of lightnings and plants, have power when known and properly used. Even so the names of places are charms. As the modern writer or dramatist gives his work setting, so also does the Navaho myth. Whenever a protagonist meets someone who is more powerful, the first question he must answer is 'where are you from?'"

Every culture has its organizing and energizing symbols which are translated into mythic themes to regulate and direct daily life. The landscape to Native Americans is a rich tapestry of myth, magic and meaning, as Native Americans tend to anchor their myths through associations to specific places. Mount Taylor in New Mexico is a special place where mortals can more easily access the spiritual realms, according to Hopi and Navaho tribes, much like Mount Fuji in Japan and Mount Olympus in Greece. The windswept rocky brown hills which stretch out into the Pacific Ocean just west of Santa Barbara, California, today called "Point Conception", is to the Chumash Indians the "Western Gate" - a place where human souls enter and exit from the earth plane. At the Shark and Turtle Rock near the village of Vaitogi in American Samoa, it's said that if children of the village come out and chant a special chant, a shark and a turtle will surface offshore and swim in a circle for several minutes, acknowledging an ancient legend about self-sacrifice in times of food shortage. Living in a world with such mythic anchoring makes myths come to life and serve as a constant reminder of the

cultural agreements which create the standards of the day. The two realities, the temporal one and the mythic realm, become less distinct and more and more the living landscape becomes a place of magical spiritual power.

Of all the mythic tales of the American Indians, one of the most beautiful is the Hopi Indian creation myth, which also offers us an explanation of sacred places. In the beginning, it is told, Tiowa, the Creator, saw a need to have a guardian for the earth, and so he assigned the task to Spider Grandmother. Descending to the earth's surface, Spider Grandmother saw she would need help, and so she reached down and picked up two handfuls of earth. She spit into her hands, and instantly two handsome young men appeared, one named "Poqanghoya" and the other named "Palongwhoya", who became her helpers.

Spider Grandmother and the twins sat in meditation for a time to link their minds, and then Poqanghoya journeyed north to the North Pole, where he began to work his special magic, the power which gives structure and form to life. Then Palongwhoya went to the South Pole. He made his prayers, and in the stillness he heard a distant, slow rhythm, which he began to beat out on his magical drum. The distant sound was the heart beat of Tiowa, and when the two beats were in perfect harmony, a surge of life force energy came shooting down to the earth. It struck the navel of the earth, the South Pole, and went on down and down until it came to the crystal at the very centre of the earth. Striking this crystal, the energy then shot out in all directions, channelled by the structural magic of Poqanghoya. The reflected life energy then popped from the earth's crust, bringing the planet to life. At some places this life energy is more abundant. These are the sacred places, the Hopi say. They call them the "spots of the fawn" (Waters, 1965).

According to the Hopi and other Indian peoples, sacred places enable humans to stay in closer touch with various spiritual realms, which are the roots of health, healing, meaning, creativity, and the basis for personal power. In the traditional reality, true power is a manifestation of spiritual attunement.

Just how does one know that such and such place is one of these sacred vibratory centres? Two of the most common ways to identify sacred places according to Indians I've interviewed are from personal experiences in dreams and waking states, and animal behaviour. Sacred places have more energy, and this energy tends to influence your mind as well as what goes on there. Animals are especially good indicators for they aren't encumbered by our modern system of beliefs and attitudes. In the Indian cosmology, everything is connected to everything else and each person and family have a special set of kinship ties to nature which are shown through unusual associations with animals. For a raven, an eagle, an owl or an osprey to appear at a certain time, especially when making a pilgrimage to a special place, is seen to be an act of communication with the Creator, the animals serving as special messengers for the higher force. In addition to their biological values, Indians and other tradition peoples see animals as affirmations of themselves and the spirits, which perhaps is one reason why few animal species have been driven extinct by the actions of Indian people (Campbell, 1985).

Sacred places are believed to have the ability to help people become more closely linked with spiritual realms and be more energized and inspired. The churches of modern society differ in shape and design, but the artifacts within call to mind a unity of experience which is common among all such buildings of the same faith. In the Indian mindset, all sacred places are vessels to make contact with the Creator, however, the

actual form and nature of the places themselves vary considerably. The following is a list of categories of Native American sacred places which I have become acquainted with over the last 15 years through interviews with Indian people all across the U.S. The categories have been developed according to what kinds of sacred function or quality they are seen as manifesting.

4. Categories of Sacred Sites

4.1. *Burial Grounds and Graves*

The deceased have a continuing relationship with the living, according to Native Americans. Grave sites then represent tangible linkages between the two worlds, and are sacred. The location of such sites is determined through a variety of divining techniques, and range from distant locations from any habitation to the Samoan practice of burying their dead in special places in their yards. The sites themselves range from simple pit graves and stone cairns to elaborate mounds, such as those found by the thousands throughout the Eastern half of the United States, some of the most dramatic being in Wisconsin.

4.2. *Purification Sites*

Purity of mind, body and spirit is seen as being essential to taking on power arising from alignment with spiritual realms. Methods of purification include bathing in special springs and rivers, fasting, prayer, rituals, sweat lodges, and isolation in wild places. In all tribes that I know, there are special places where such purification rites are undertaken.

4.3. *Healing sites*

Health in the Native American view results from living a life of continual alignment with the many realms of the cosmos. To "walk in harmony and balance on the Earth Mother" is a commonly used phrase to describe following one's intuition to maintain or to regain health in Indian culture. Illness occurs in the Indian view when we fall out of harmony with nature and the Creator, who works through nature. Healing then requires restoration of intuitiveness, as well as removing any physical and mental symptoms of illness. The following are some of the most common types of healing sites:

a) Springs or other bodies of water, such as Coso Hot Springs in California or Indian Hot Springs in West Texas. Here muds, mosses, and rocks, as well as waters may be used to heal.

b) Ceremonial sites are places said to be especially suited for performing healings, and often may be associated with unusual landforms, such as Navaho sand painters use in their designs.

c) Meditational sites typically are isolated locations where people go to pray and fast, and by being in that place they may experience healing. At Chimayo in New Mexico a simple Catholic church marks the place where Indians for centuries have come to be healed. The power in part is said to arise from the earth there, and to pre-

serve this tradition, some floor boards have been removed to allow people to take away some sacred earth.

4.4. Special Flora and Fauna Sites

Certain herbs and animals are said to have special powers. Groves of virgin red cedars in the Pacific Northwest are said to have special powers which go beyond utilitarian uses of the trees for building materials, musical instruments and traditional clothing. The peyote cactus, the Jimson weed, and various mushrooms having hallucinogenic properties all have sacred values. In a similar fashion sage and sweet grass taken from special places is used to make smoke smudges which are used for purification. Deer, elk, wolverine, buffalo, moose, eagles and other animals also have special powers, and the places where they live and are taken have special meaning. Often, Indians say, an animal seems to act as a guardian of a special place, and these animals are special and sacred. At an ancient rock altar in the Sierras which I visit, a marmot family has lived there as long as I and the Forest Service rangers can recall. The marmot sits proudly on the stone outcropping like a watchman, announcing his work with loud cries to all who approach like a watchdog.

4.5. Quarries

Certain stones, gems, crystals and minerals have special powers, and where they come from makes a difference because they bring with them a harmonic linkage to their place of origin. The deep red catlinite sandstone bowls of medicine pipes which come from Pipestone National Monument in Minnesota are an example of sacred stones from a special place.

4.6. Vision Questing and Dreaming Places

In dreams and visions, the voice of the Creator speaks most clearly, Indian culture asserts. Bear Butte in the Black Hills of South Dakota is a famous vision questing place for Plains tribes. The hills above Santa Barbara, California, have hundreds of caves once used by Chumash Indians to seek visions, some of which have been recorded in extraordinary rock art paintings and carvings.

4.7. Mythic and Legendary Sites

The association of certain places with various myths and legends is a way to help recall the meaning and value of myths, much like we line our walls with photos and paintings. The giant Sleeping Bear sand dune on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan in Michigan is an example of such a site, which supposedly marks a mother bear waiting for her cubs to swim ashore.

4.8. Temples and Shrines

Human-made structures marking sacred places are found throughout the U.S., ranging from simple circles of stones in the Great Plains to the thousands of mounds found throughout the South and East. Perhaps the most striking is the quarter-mile-long Serpent Mound earth effigy in Southern Ohio, which is the largest serpent earth effigy in the world. It is important to understand that sacred structures mark sacred places, they do not make them sacred.

4.9. *Spiritual Renewal*

Harney Peak in the Black Hills of South Dakota, like Mount McKinley or Denali in Alaska, and Mount Katahdin in Maine are examples of places of special inspiration value which can be traced back far before modern recreation uses. Just as Christians have Jerusalem and Muslims have Mecca, Indian people have special places which seem to be touchstones of renewal.

4.10. *Astronomical Observatories*

The Bighorn Medicine Wheel stone circle which sits on the shoulder of Medicine Mountain near Sheridan, Wyoming, the solar-lunar observatory on top of Fajada Butte at the mouth of Chaco Canyon, and the circle of wooden poles found at Monk's Mound just across the river from Saint Louis, Missouri, are all examples of ancient astronomical sites. In earlier times, science and spirit were woven together into a whole rather than arbitrarily separated. Observatories provide a structuring rhythm to organize the year's activities, as well as determine the best times to hold certain ceremonies.

4.11. *Historical Sites*

Places which are associated with historical events enable us to feel a closer affinity with the past, such as the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde. What took place in the past has an influence on the sacredness of places today.

4.12. *Sunrise Sites*

Certain places which afford an unobstructed view of the rising sun are used as ceremonial places by many tribes, paying tribute to the Grandfather Sun who comes from the east and his influence in our lives. Often such sites may be marked by petroglyphs or other ceremonial structures.

4.13. *Fertility Sites*

On Ring Mountain in Tiburon, California, there is a large serpentine boulder which has numerous circular and two hemispheric-opposing petroglyphs etched into its dark green surface. It's said that the Coastal Miwok tribe originally made these markings as part of fertility rites, when couples would walk up to the rock and carve in the soft stone, making figures which symbolized the female genital organs. Then they would rub the fine green powdered rock on their skin to enhance fertility.

4.14. *Baptismal Sites*

At several places in Hawaii there are volcanic stones with bowl-shaped impressions in the top. History has it that these shallow basins are traditionally used to bathe young children as they are being given names or otherwise being blessed. A related type of site are places where the placenta from a child's birth is buried in the ground or hung in a special tree.

5. Weaving Culture, Consciousness and Place Together

The Salish tribe of the Pacific Northwest has a term "skalalitude", which refers to a sacred state of mind when all things are in balance and the spiritual dimension of life seems to predominate consciousness, which results in "magic and beauty being everywhere". A Jungian analyst might use the term "numinous" to describe the same state of mind. Skalalitude arises through multiple contact with different sacred sites, each of which has a special purpose associated with its unique powers.

The idea of right consciousness arising from multiple contacts with sacred places is found through Indian culture. The Hopis of the Southwest conduct major ceremonies of their annual cycle to invite the kachina spirits, which live in the San Francisco Peaks, to join in the life of the villages for a few months of the year. In agricultural tribes, the ceremonies help to establish the ties to the sacred mountains for most, although special spiritual leaders visit other sacred places in the area to conduct special non-public ceremonies.

In contrast to the Hopis, the Lakota or Sioux of the Great Plains once moved in an annual migrational pattern between Wyoming and South Dakota, following the buffalo and the spiritual forces. In the winter they rested in the winter campus of Wyoming. In the spring, they journeyed to Harney Peak, "Hinhan Kaka Paha", the highest place in the Black Hills, to conduct the "welcoming back the thunders" ceremony associated with spring rains. Then they journeyed to the sacred meadow, "Pe Sla", in the heart of the "Paha Sapa" or Black Hills, to conduct the "welcoming back all people in peace" ceremony. From there in late summer they travelled to "Mato Tipila" or Devil's Tower in Wyoming to conduct the Sun Dance. Each of these ceremonies was tied to a special place whose spirits favoured the success of the ceremony at a special time. Each of the ceremonies was in turn conducted by a special family or clan whose special medicine made that ceremony most successful. And, this pattern of migration also followed the path of the annual buffalo herd migrations. It is an extraordinary example of people and nature living in harmony together aided by appropriate spiritual practices tied to place (Goodman & Red Bird, 1977). Similar annual patterns of ceremonies and rituals linked to special places can be found throughout the Indian peoples of North America.

6. Recognizing Sacred Places

There is a considerable confusion and controversy today about the sacred places of North America, as native peoples seek to assert their identity and reclaim their heritage and lands, and modern society moves along with developmental forces. One of the most important steps forward in terms of establishing the legitimacy and nature of the American Indian religion was the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978. The main thrust of the act is:

"... that henceforth it shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right to freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut and Native Hawaiians, including, but not limited to, access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonial and traditional rights" (P.L. 95-341, August 11, 1978).

The key phrase in terms of sacred sites is "access to sacred sites". Implementation of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act immediately called for the Federal Government to undertake a study of just how this act effects policies and programs. Completed within a year's time following the passage of this act, this study found two general kinds of problems associated with sacred places, one being guaranteed access. The second problem concerns defining just what is a legitimate sacred site.

The American Indian Religious Freedom Act seeks to resolve these problems by having land managers consult with "native traditional religious leaders" to determine which sites on federal lands are sacred and how they are used. The difficulty with this approach is determining just who is a legitimate traditional religious leader. In many cases, several different groups assert that they are the "real" spokespeople for a tribe or band, claiming others to be invalid. The problem is further complicated by the sensitive nature of the information requested. Some religious leaders do not wish their religion to be made public. When they do, they want their statements kept confidential, and so it is difficult for other tribal members or the public to determine just which places have been declared to be sacred and why. The problem is further complicated by the difficulty of determining who is a legitimate Indian. Few full-blooded Indians exist in many tribes, and simple physical inheritance doesn't necessarily mean that a person is a tribal religious leader. Just what "blood" is necessary to make a person a legitimate spokesperson? The percentage varies from agency to agency, but in Texas, people with five percent or more Indian blood may legally possess peyote for ceremonies (Sewell, 1983). All too often, the loudest and angriest voices are the ones heard, and in many cases the legitimacy of these people to speak for the legacy of native traditions is questionable. Among people whose truest spiritual tradition is to speak from the heart, hatred is not a spiritually-aligned motive for action, yet all too often these days native issues fall into a vicious quagmire of emotionality which breeds antagonism and fattens attorney's pockets by prolonging conflicts more than by seeking the truth and working to harmonize people with nature and each other.

Even with these problems, progress is being made to protect sacred sites associated with Native American religions. The U.S. Navy has granted Native Hawaiians access to certain sites on governmental lands to perform ceremonies. In a similar fashion the Shoshones and other tribes who have long used Coso Hot Springs for healing may do so on a permit basis, even though the springs are located in the middle of the China Lake Naval Weapons Centre. Bear Butte in the northeast corner of the Black Hills of South Dakota is a vision quest site used today by many Indians, as well as being a South Dakota state park. Park authorities have tried to make a number of policies to insure that vision questing can continue, although at times controversy has flared up about restricting access to both Indians and tourists.

To balance these positive steps, a 1988 U.S. Supreme Court decision concerning the opposition of Native Americans in Northern California to the construction of a logging road near a sacred site, Doctor Rock, in Del Norte County could not support the Indians' claims that the road (the G-O Road as it is called for it connects the communities of Gasquet and Orleans) should not be built. Writing for the 5-3 majority opinion, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor said: "Even if we assume (the road) will virtually destroy the Indians' ability to practice their religion, the Constitution simply does not provide a principle that could justify upholding their (legal) claims".

This decision essentially says the Supreme Court cannot guarantee protection for Native American claims of sacred places, even with the 1978 American Indian

Religious Freedom Act. Current legal opinions feel this means that Native Americans have now joined the other races of North America in not having any legal grounds to insure protection for sacred places in nature. Land questions then will have to be handled on an individual basis. As more and more people from different ethnic backgrounds settle in the United States, the old division between "white" and "red" people no longer has as much meaning or accuracy. Increasingly, the issues will need to be how to honour and respect traditional cultures *and* share the land in an equitable fashion which respects all peoples, for in the near future Caucasians will be a minority race in many parts of the U.S.

7. Values of Sacred Places to All: the Need for Research

The concept of sacred places in nature dates back to the earliest of human times. For most cultures down through the ages, these special places of spirituality have been the cornerstones of consciousness and culture. My own research suggests that when modern people can set aside the restraints of contemporary culture, they too step into situations where the natural power of places does manifest in their lives (Swan, 1990). Recent measures being taken to protect American Indian cultural heritage and preserve the ongoing practice of the American Indian religion are important steps toward preserving the priceless heritage of this cultural group. Yet there is a question which is raised by acknowledging sacred places which goes far beyond heritage preservation. Can certain sacred places in nature have a special spiritual value to anyone regardless of race, creed, or heritage? The evidence of history, as well as the wisdom of many elders' circles, assert that the sacred places are there for the good of all peoples, as a touchstone of creativity, inspiration and health.

In contrast to tribal psychologies which see the interaction between people and nature as the root of health, healing and meaning in life, our modern behavioural sciences have little to say about how the mind and nature interact. Survival needs have encouraged indigenous peoples to develop perceptual sensitivities to places which we deny exist or have value, at least until recently. Recent research on migratory behaviour in birds, fish and insects suggest that they orient a good deal in response to subtle environmental fields of the earth (Becker & Selden, 1985). A growing body of data assert that people also possess similar orientation abilities, but seldom are aware of them, at least consciously. Other research shows that at least some sacred places possess unusual soil, geological formations, air ionization and water chemistry (Taylor, 1981). Viewing this data, it seems very possible that the special ambiance we sense at some sacred places is at least partially attributable to environmental conditions there which in turn are capable of influencing our lives. Acute burn treatment wards in some hospitals are now immersing patients in special environments with high negative air ion content and strong positive electromagnetic fields, which is exactly the field conditions found at certain sacred places, such as some of the sacred "breathing mountains" of the Hopi, according to physicists Elizabeth Rauscher (Swan, 1991). Martin Marietta Aerospace engineer James B. Beal informs me that he has been consulting with Japanese firms on creating optimum environmental fields in special stress reduction centres in Japan, and that the fields have many of the same characteristics as those found at natural sacred places (Swan, 1991).

Another approach to studying the significance of place is to look at case histories of unusual experiences which people report having at special places, especially people who have not previously used any hallucinogenic substances and have had no expecta-

tion of a place having any sacred power prior to their experience. In the last decade I've gathered over 200 of these experiences, which clearly point toward some places having an apparent ability to trigger some people entering altered states of awareness (Swan, 1990, 1992). Carl G. Jung (1964) called this power of place to trigger extraordinary experiences, "psychic localization", a concept which deserves far more serious attention in behavioural scientific research as we search for better ways to harmonize our lives with nature in these times of ecological crisis. There is a gaping whole in modern psychology, and this void is our understanding of how the mind and nature interact. The sacred places within us, in many ways, are as unknown to many people as sacred places in the world around us.

Right now all across the U.S. many sacred rites long revered by Indian peoples are being threatened by proposals for mining, logging, dams and development. Less than a century ago Indians were hunted down and killed, and serious efforts were made to eradicate their culture. Today, we are finally beginning to respect the ancient wisdom of Indian peoples and their rights to preserve their culture. What the research on sacred sites shows is that Indians and other people who live close to the earth may well possess knowledge about the subtle values of places which could make a big difference in our lives. Our sophisticated scientific instruments are beginning to affirm that some places are special and their ambient fields are capable of entraining with our minds to actually change us from the outside in. With their keen environmental awareness, native people can help modern culture recover its own heritage, for all of us, regardless of our origins, are descended from people who not that long ago understood in their bodies, bones and minds what the power of place is and why sacred places have continued to be so important throughout human history.

A global society does exist, but it is the uniqueness of each spirit of place which diversifies and grounds us, if we are willing to pay attention to its gentle voice. These voices need especially to be heard in an North American culture which is such a melting pot of traditions searching for a way to create a new, better life.

Place is a power which works on people and through them to make them unique and give them identity as communities. North America has a legacy of sacred places in nature and we must come to appreciate them and learn from what the spots of the fawn have to teach us.

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