

ENCOUNTERING THE SACRED



**MY
CONSCIOUS-
NESS HAS
OUTGROWN
MY PRACTICE.
NOW WHAT
DO I DO?**

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To enter the sacred requires us to think in a different language. When we see the world as sacred, we think about it differently. We hold it in our minds with gentle hands; our very description of the world around us affirms the worth of other creatures and the wonder of life.

My consciousness has outgrown my practice. Now what do I do? When I do magical work, I begin by “creating sacred space.” But *can* I create sacred space? I love the process of grounding, casting a circle, and speaking to the elements; but I am appalled at how easily I accept the idea that I can, with my human rituals, “create” sacred space.

My consciousness has outgrown my practice. Now what do I do? Sometime last year, I realized that I have been ritualizing in a way that was contradictory to my deepest beliefs. I have been ritualizing the belief that I create Sacred Space. And then, to take my arrogance one step further, when my rituals and rites end ... I release the sacred. I give it permission to go back to where it came from.

I understand the history of my practice. I understand the slow evolution from *evoking* the elements — the essential spirit of air, fire, water and earth — to *invoking* them. *Evocation* is a summons, a command. The old texts say that one evokes a “lesser” being, such as an elemental; one *invokes* a “higher” spiritual form like a Goddess or a God to witness or bless our rites and magical work. Respect for earth, life, and egalitarian values were what drew me into earth-based spirituality. So deeply did I embrace these values that I was barely aware of the conflict between belief and practice. Ritual practices that were filled with “summoning” and “commands” evoked the very hierarchy that my spiritual philosophy wished to heal.

When I consider the history of religion, I can see that when humans lived in a less technological world, our daily life informed us of how powerless we were in the presence of nature. In these times, we wanted our Shamans to have power over the air, fire, water and earth. We wanted them to be able to *command* and *direct* the elements so that we could all step out of fear and spend a moment in a well-constructed illusion of control. When the balance shifted and we became more powerful in relation to the natural world, our earth-based spirituality began to embody a *respect* for the elements. In my ritual work, I wanted to express my respect for nature. And, so, *evoking* gave way to *invoking*.

In my circle, magic words that could “summon,” “conjure” and “call thee up” changed to words of prayer and reverence. We began to discard memorized invocations and instead spoke from our hearts to the life force around us. We *invited* elementals to be present by speaking to the sacred spirit of life and nature. “Be here now” became “Thank you.” But still, although I knew that my intention was to stop time and honor the wholeness of life and nature, those who watched me work as a Priestess still saw me ritualize the belief that I was, however respectfully, “creating sacred space.”

My consciousness has outgrown my practice. Now what do I do? I don’t believe that I create sacred space; I believe that space is sacred, life is sacred, and at times I can invoke an awareness of the sacred *within myself*. I can invoke an appreciation of life, and of my awe-filled respect for my community and our willingness to work together at the edge of magic.

A circle of people who gather to honor life, growth, and each other is certainly sacred. The circle that I cast when we are together isn’t to keep malevolent forces out or even to hold the group energies in; it is to acknowledge that we are taking time to work together in a mystical way. It is to invoke our attention and unify consciousness as we move together into mythic work and magical thinking.

Casting the circle brings us together in body, mind, focus, and intention. It connects us to each other and to the intention of the work that we are going to do together. A group of people in spiritual communion who focus on the same intention do indeed intensify and contain energy. A touch moves around the circle. Our eyes all join in the same imagining. Together, we focus on one thing, one sound, one image. Our attention is invoked. The Circle is Cast.

Into this circle, we invite air, fire, water and earth. Into this moment, I invoke my own awareness of the ever-present mystery of life. How can I ritualize my awareness of the breath of life, the spark of spirit, the awesome depth and mystery that is called soul and, finally, the privilege of being alive? How can I ritually conjure and call up my awareness that the earth is also a living force?

The breath of life moves as the winds. Energy and life-force are generated by the solar fire and reflected in our small earthbound flames. The great depth of “soul” is pictured in the many mysterious forms of water. And, finally, I acknowledge the land and earth as a living body. I know



how I invoke my own awareness of “the sacred” but I have not yet discovered how to ritualize my experience of invoking awareness within myself and opening to the moment.

My consciousness has outgrown my practice. What do I do now?

I ask you to help me. Please join me in discovering and inventing a ritual practice, a way to ritualize opening to the sacred that is ever present, and invoking our awareness of the wonder and magic that lives in the world around us.

— Cynthia Jones

What if, when we step into the ritual area in the dark humid night, when we circle around the heat and light of fire, when we stand in the breezes that blow around the whole of the earth ... What if we are the ones invoked by the ever-present elements?

Invoking the sacred, invoking magic. Do we really believe that it is our invocation of the elements that gives them the power of magic, that they need us to invoke them to make the Circle sacred? No, I don’t believe

that we do. We know that it is *we* who come to *them* with reverence and respect, to learn from their varied forms and listen closely to their secret wisdom.

I believe that we invoke from a deep place of thirst in our souls for connection with this Sacred Circle that is always cast, always sacred, without any help from us. For aren’t we the ones who have drifted from a state of harmony into the confounding myths of our lives? Stepping from the mundane back into that perfect state — where the seasons sing in our souls and the sun and moon tides flow freely in our blood — is a great magic.

What if magic matters?

In the circle, we honor the elements. But what need do the elements have of our recognition? Quantum physics holds the key: the act of observation changes the behavior of matter. Ahhh ... we matter! If in our recognition of the elements we choose to see the sacred, then our recognition also becomes an act of reverential wonder ... of magic! In moments of mutual recognition, magic is worked.

What if the elements — alive in the bird and bush, in the rock and wind, in the stream and storm — call to their likenesses in us? When we step into the circle, what if we are the ones invoked?

Feel yourself called into the Center of Magic. Air whispers sweetly to our breath to join the sighs of the night. Fire recognizes itself in the heat created by energy-creation and transmutation in our very cells. Water slips and slides closer to its kin in our blood-full bodies. Earth is pulled by the magnetic force of minerals sprinkled in our bones.

For the elements, there is no hierarchy. Earth does not decide to pull some rocks to her breast and not others. Rain does not decide that some flowers are worthy of its life-giving renewal and others are not. What if the moon does not call only to the waters in the depth of the ocean, pulling only them to and from the shores? What if the moon calls to all water in every living thing that has a drop of this stuff of life in it? What if fire calls to fire, bone to bone, and breath begets breath in a circle of inhalation and exhalation?

What if the elements and forces of the world do not ignore us, and they are not dispassionate toward us? If we are a part of them, then let us step into the connection. Let us consciously heed the call of the elementals, which invokes those parts of our Selves already engaged in the cosmic spiral dance. Let us pay attention to and let us be highly aware of the pull of gravity, the rush of wind deep into our lungs, the heat of fire on our skin that calls to the heat of our passion. Let us listen to the tides and rains that swirl on earth and in air, calling to the tides of our blood and the rain in our own breath.

What if we stepped into the Circle Already Cast, called to it by the elements that simply wish to dance with their kin who reside in us. And not because we're human, but because we, also, are elemental. What if sacred calls to sacred without judgment or value, but because life is life? And what if it makes our very bones dance and transform and be reborn?

Like calling to like, and nothing more or less than this ... let our magic be that of tuning in at the elemental level, of joining the feast already served. It is not our table to prepare — it is a table that has always been and will always be. Let us sit at it with the rest of creation, in that place that gives us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to pound with passion and bodies to resound in harmonic union with like bodies of the universe.

Feel the air dancing in your breast and blood, suffusing it with life, bringing scents and stories from the world over. Feel it blow away preconceptions and billow with the breezes of possibility and inspiration, singing new songs in full voice.

Feel the fire from the belly of earth tug at your gut, where fires burn at a cellular level. Feel fires of passion rise in your heart and in your soul, the very belly of your being. Feel the fire transform, destroying that which no longer serves in this space and time. Feel it clear the way for new growth to emerge, to take hold and remake you, newly tempered.

Feel the waters of the worlds swirl and calm you. Feel them evaporate and rain down, carrying you along in a rushing stream of desire, love, bliss, fear, ecstasy, rage. Feel how the water erodes your firmest structures to create fantastic formations and softer edges. Feel it recreate the landscape of your emotions.

Feel the earth invoking you, calling to your body. Dance on the ground with the wildness of the wolves running in the pack, feel the iron in your blood pulled by the force of gravity, sense the minerals in your bones communing with the stones and guided by stars. Feel the desire to bring your dreams into life sweep through you.

How many ways do the elements call to us? What is the voice of Air, the beckoning of Fire? The answers to these questions will inform our rituals and seduce our souls, opening us up to the sacred union.

And when our rituals are over, it is the elements who will whisper to us, "Stay if you will, leave if you must, but we are always dancing with you."

No, they do not thank us for coming. Does the field thank the seed for falling in it and taking root? But the elemental dancers are also the dance itself ... and the dance loves all its dancers. So, in ritual, can we join the dance in a conscious and intentional way? Can we do it to be open to the sacred, to allow the sacred in us to

respond and join in the dance that is always in motion?

I believe in magic. I believe we can.

— Jennifer Wilson ▲

WHAT IF — WHEN WE STEP INTO THE CIRCLE, IT IS WE WHO ARE INVOKED?

Cynthia Jones, with Patricia Storm, co-founded Diana's Grove, where the spiritual practice is dedicated to developing healthy communities and relationships. Through the Grove's Mystery School and other programs, magic is promoted as aligning yourself with life-sustaining practices so that you can invoke within yourself the ability to act according to your deepest values and live your dreams into reality. Cynthia is currently seeking a publisher for her Mystery School books that use mythology as a foundation for this mystical approach to maximizing human potential. You may reach Cynthia Jones by emailing cynthia@dianasgrove.com or write to: Diana's Grove, P. O. Box 159Salem, MO 65560

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