



Spirit, Sweats and Ceremony

A rural sanctuary rekindles transcendent energies

BY TOM SOBOLESKI

In the harried lives many of us lead, we likely don't schedule enough time to simply slow down. We know that a recharge would benefit our well being, but our hectic pace often squeezes out time for the mind and soul. Happily, if you live along the shoreline, you aren't far from a place that offers a restorative respite for this dilemma.

Nestled deep in the forests of East Haddam, the non-profit Sanctuary at Shepardfields feels like the definition of the word "refuge." From the moment you enter the grounds, a sense of peace and calm soon overrides whatever prevailing mood you came with. In warm weather, soaring sunflowers stand like sentinels to greet you. Cackling chickens roam free. Birdsong delights your ears.

The staff's demeanor is calm and embracing. Indeed, they consider the Sanctuary a sacred space. Justin Good, co-executive director, explained that it's all in how one stewards the environment. He refers to sacred geometry: the idea that everything in the human and natural world has universal geometric elements within and between them. These forms are alive, Good says, "reflecting the workings of a deep and mysterious process at work in nature. We find sacred geometrical forms beautiful, peaceful and compelling because they reflect our connection to Source. They are pictures of our soul."

That intention is at the core of the Sanctuary's activities: healing the body, soul, and spirit by clearing away blame, guilt, and imagined external causes for one's ills. Good says, "A lot of suffering is self-inflicted. Our cause of suffering is not the world, it's how we respond, and our inability to control our thoughts and deal with fear."

To unclutter the mind and redirect your thoughts, the Sanctuary offers a spiritual meditation service every Sunday. A recent one began

with an exercise in learning to let go of stressors and anxieties. A series of segments progressed from breathing and listening to nature, to focusing on our own strengths and faults, to letting go of perceived hurts and adopting an attitude of acceptance and kindness.

To cleanse the spirit, the Sanctuary has a sweat lodge—a small dome made of branches and canvas that holds 10 to 12 people. A ceremony consists of heating several stones in fire until red hot, then taking them into the lodge and arranging them in a small pit in the ground. Participants then enter and sit cross-legged in a circle. "You pray to the divine and ask for guidance," says Good.

Sweat lodge ceremonies have a primary place in Native American culture. Ed McGaa, Eagle Man, who is an elder of the Oglala Sioux and an authority on Native American spirituality, christened the Sanctuary's sweat lodge last spring and will return in November to lead another ceremony.

The Sanctuary at Shepardfields offers classes and workshops in yoga, meditation, environmental issues, and spirituality. Upcoming October events include *The Chalice vs. the Blade: Rewilding for Domesticated Times*, focusing on the notion that the human race must return to a deeper engagement with the natural world. Other planned events: *Mandala Making*; *Zombie Quest* (run an obstacle course while being chased by zombies, Oct. 17); *Tantric Bhakti Workshop* (a daylong workshop combining Tantra with Bhakti yoga); *Halloween Samhain*, Oct. 31; and *Controlled Remote Viewing (CRV) Training*, a 3-day workshop Nov. 6–8. CRV is a proposition that you can sense distant or unseen things by unlocking your subconscious mind.

More information can be found on their website—oursanctuary.org. ●

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