

Sacred space

Beloved person,

What is sacred for you? Is that a place, a feeling, a gathering? Where do you go when searching for peace, meaning or connection? Maybe it is a courtyard in a busy city, the forest, an old church or a quiet room in your house. Maybe it is just a place within yourself that you can't point to on a map, but one you can feel when you dare to slow down and listen.

People have been travelling for centuries – sometimes literally, sometimes within themselves – searching for sacred space; from the caravan routes through the desert to the pilgrimage path to Santiago de Compostela. These journeys all tell the story of the same longing: a longing to become whole, for direction and connection. Sometimes such a sacred moment arises spontaneously: during a walk where you are touched by the sound of a woodpecker, by a child that unconditionally crawls into your arms or by a song that touches you at what, for you, is the right moment.

*'When I feel lonely and alone / I always look at the sea / And with all the ships on her back / I sail along in my thoughts... / One with the sea.'*¹

One with the sea, with the motion of life itself. Perhaps that is the core of sacredness: the awareness that we are all part of a greater totality, from a stream in which we come and go, like 'the water evaporates, becomes rain, then a river and returns once more to the sea. We all flow within the same source, free ourselves and flow back again.'² Sometimes life feels greater than ourselves. Sacred space is then something that transcends us; from that perspective a peaceful feeling can arise within you, during situations in your life.

Going to a sacred place requires courage. It sometimes means coming to a standstill, being confronted with old convictions or painful experiences from the past. Judgements about yourself or others can block access to those sacred places. Yet there also lies an invitation in this: are you safe with yourself? Can you look at yourself in the mirror with love, despite all that you are and all that you are not (yet)? Here lies a gateway to internal peace.

In that meeting with yourself also lies the key to the meeting with the other. Sacred places do not only originate in isolation. Wherever people share their stories about what is sacred for them – their rituals, symbols, values – something new can arise: a shared space of mutual understanding, compassion and connection.

What is sacred to you is not necessarily sacred to the other. A church, a stadium, a concert hall, a kitchen full of memories. Sacred places are personal and relational. Sometimes they can be shared, sometimes you can only respectfully stand next to each other. Because, only when we have an eye for each other's sanctity can space to truly connect emerge. It is then that a sense of community grows. Not by becoming more uniform, but by recognising what is of value to the other, even if you experience this differently yourself. Interfaith meeting is essential for this. Each person carries a unique gateway to the sacred within. When we open these gates to each other, we discover potential universal longings: for love, justice, peace. That meeting requires courage and vulnerability. It invites us to let go of the idea that our own truth is *the truth*.

Perhaps that is the task for these times: amidst all the noise, to search for meaning. Not on a quest for absolute certainties – because '*If there was only certainty, and no doubt, there would be no mystery*'³ – but daring to live in the mystery. In the not-knowing, the searching, the listening. Sacred space arises where people live attentively. We can breathe there. We find direction there. And perhaps also: peace.

We all carry a centuries old story with us in which people before us searched for their path. Sometimes stumbling, sometimes determined, but always searching for meaning. We are a part of that history. That can give comfort but also requires responsibility. Because how do we want to continue? It gives us strength to know that there were many before you and us who exemplified this. It gives us the courage to continue to travel on our path and to explore new roads. Courageously underway, towards peace that the world so desperately needs.

With a warm-hearted greeting,

Gladly your sister and brother,
Jill Ekhart and Hans Bleijerveld



Attention for those who have gone before us

On 15 August, in the Netherlands, we will stand in silence to remember the end of the Second World War and all the victims of the war against Japan and the Japanese occupation of the former Netherlands East Indies.

¹ First line of the song *De Zee (The Sea)* - John Ewbank/Trijntje Oosterhuis, via:

<https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Trijntje-Oosterhuis/De-Zee-Live>

² Susan Smit: *Alles wat beweegt (Everything that moves)*, publisher Lebowski, 2024

³ Quote from the film *Conclave*.