

Essay on the Nature of Intangible and Tangible Sacred Things

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sacred (LME). adj. 1. Consecrated to or considered especially dear to a god or supernatural being. b. Dedicated or appropriated exclusively to a particular person or purpose. (L17)... (New Shorter OED)

My definition of a "sacred" thing is focused firstly on the intangible sacred. An example of an intangible sacred thing to me is my relationship with my spiritual 'helpers'. I guess some people would call them 'angels', or the 'holy spirit', or some such; I don't know enough about them to stick a label on them (and, in fact, I believe that labeling is a bad idea as it limits what you can think they can do). What I do know of them is that I've noticed their presence for several years now, although at first I ascribed things to coincidence. In the last couple of years it has seemed more and more that I would know things to say to troubled people that I corresponded with over the Internet - things that made no logical sense to me based on what these people had told me - and that it would turn out to be exactly what these people would need to hear.

Since the time that I became attuned to Reiki (cf. <http://reiki.stewardspiral.net/>), I have felt this sacred presence even more, and have been able to use it for physical healing as well, both for myself and others.

One problem is that one person's sacredness may be another person's absurdity and may make no logical sense to anyone. However, sometimes the intangible "sacred" may make a little more sense - or at least not seem so insensible - when contrasted with the tangible "sacred".

A tangible "sacred" thing, to me, is an artifact that has the special purpose of relating a person or persons either to their chosen deity or to some abstract value that they hold especially dear. In western society, "sacred" is usually used to refer to items connected with the Judaeo-Christian God; numerous of the Christian Churches have rituals and/or items called "sacraments"; and Roman Catholicism has items which are considered sacred, but less sacred than sacraments, called "sacramentals". However, other things can be held sacred as well. In the U.S. Declaration of Independence, for example, the signers pledged their "sacred honor".

Some sacred things are, objectively, phenomena; it is the intentional act of classifying them as "sacred" which place them subjectively in the realm of artifacts. One may regard a personally felt relationship with supernatural beings as sacred, for instance; or the relationship with a phenomenon such as the Earth. In 1855, when Chief Seattle was asked to sell the land of his tribe, he said: "Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people." (<http://www.letsfindout.com/subjects/america/chief.html>) Oftimes what is most sacred to a person is indescribable in language to other people; the famous mythologist, Joseph Campbell, repeatedly pointed out that religion is "misunderstood poetry"; and T.E. Lawrence, in his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, says:

"The prophets returned from the desert with their glimpse of God, and through their stained medium (as through a dark glass) showed something of the majesty and brilliance whose full vision would blind, deafen, silence us, serve us as it had served the Beduin, setting him uncouth, a man apart. The disciples, in the endeavour to strip themselves and their neighbors of all things according to the Master's word, stumbled over human weaknesses and failed. To live, the villager or townsman must fill himself each day with the pleasures of acquisition and accumulation, and by rebound off circumstance become the grossest and most material of men." (*Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, by T.E. Lawrence, Anchor Books, NY, NY, 1991, p. 42). It may be, that for all we try to define the sacred so that it is accessible to others, that the true sacred is a very personal thing, ultimately incommunicable to others.