

SINGING THE SOUL OF THE WORLD

Mar 7, 2022

By Stephanie Rutt with a postscript by Tom Cowan.

*Then one day I knew if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. God is everywhere.*

—Alice Walker from *The Color Purple*



Some thirty years ago, my husband took me deep into the Maine woods to introduce me to wilderness camping—I who’d never even been RV or tent camping! But on that first wandering trek, we discovered a very remote, could–it–be–possible? spot on a raised knoll that overlooked a lake on one side and a pond on the other. It could only be reached by water, if you knew exactly where it was, or by an old logging road that was rarely maintained. For many years, every summer we’d sneak away to our secret spot (yes, after that first trip, I was hooked) which we came to call “our special place.” Then, several years ago, we returned to discover something very different—yet equally wonderful, perhaps even more so, in a way I could have never imagined.

As we followed the river toward our spot, we started sensing and seeing what seemed to be a kind of chaos in the woods rather than the peaceful, undisturbed feeling we’d always had in the past. Then, as we came up on the knoll, I paused . . . my knees started to shake and I could feel my heart collapsing deep into my chest. I couldn’t move—for how long I don’t know. A violent storm had come through. Limbs and downed trees were scattered everywhere and, most profusely, two beautiful trees laid uprooted and still across the waters of our pond.

Yes, this is the wilderness. Still, my heart broke for the Spirit of this place. As I sat at the pond’s edge, where every year before I’d removed my clothes to wade in to be baptized by its cool depths, I thought about how our Mother is simply reflecting back to us, through fires, droughts and floods, tornadoes, storms and hurricanes, our long disregard for her, our pervasive inability to live as if every stone, tree, and animal is our kin in this sacred web of life—and our seemingly innate failure to recognize that when any part of this web, tenderly cradling the Soul of the World, is torn . . . we all bleed.

So, I asked myself, “What can I do here, today?” And I instantly remembered that harmony can only be restored through reciprocity—a willingness to engage in the great dance of give and take with all of life. For so long, this special place had filled, healed and enlivened my soul. Now it was my turn . . . to give back, to merge with the Spirit of this place to help restore it through the offer of my love—that devotional love not contingent upon weather conditions or circumstance; a love that is so neutral it becomes wide, so still, so deep it can touch the sand, stones, rocks; the marsh grasses, plants, trees; the ants, fish, birds, and speak to them in their language. A love that permeates yet lives outside the confines of time and space, and yet is more real, visceral, eternally present in each moment than we could ever fathom—yes, a love fully capable of making our arm bleed if we cut a tree.

And so, I sat quietly at the edge of the pond and sent my prayers on the windy breath of the Great Spirit into the Spirit of this place. I called to the Spirit of the turtle, who had long been the guardian of these waters, but he did not emerge. I thanked him for his long service over the years and sent prayers of hope that he might be well. I thanked the Spirit of the two downed trees for having kept watch over the pond for so many years. I thanked the Spirit of the water for providing a resting place for the trees whose Spirits could now seek new forms over time. I imagined my love as a sacred stone dropping into the center of the pond sending out a soothing balm and, soon . . . I heard myself singing . . . a kind of lullaby known only to the Mother . . . as my body gently rocked, back and forth, and my soul merged with the Spirit of this place.

And I became slowly aware of that deeper, wider love, now fully cradling my human heart, leaving me whole with a more tender love than I had ever felt for this place. For now, as the lullaby continued to sing and move me, we found silence and stillness together in the fullness of love’s reciprocity where there is no beginning or end. And some sense of completeness filled my soul.

“Thank you for this blessed opportunity to serve you, to love you, as you have so loved us and given to us all these years.”

And as we walked out, my heart was light as it continued to be sung . . . and suddenly I could hear the song of the stones, trees and dragonflies echoing back in reply . . . and, together, our song filled the Soul of the World.

And I was glad.

**POSTSCRIPT**

**The Great Song**by Tom Cowan

There is a current, deeper than we are, that carries us along.  It moves through all levels of reality and keeps the cosmos in order.  We experience this current in various ways.  One way is to call it the Song of Life, the Music of What Is Happening, a current of song that opens into the invisible world that lies alongside the ordinary world of our daily lives.  This current has been expressed as the Songlines, the Dance of Shiva, the Music of the Spheres, the fairy Music of the Sidh, the Choirs of Angels.  Taken together these make up the Great Song, which in Celtic cultures is called the Oran Mor, a term that some people use for the Creator as well as Creation.

We hear this Music in our hearts, where it rises as our heart song, sometimes joyful, sometimes sorrowful.  The human heart hears all forms of this Music, and in mysterious ways we intuitively recognize that we are part of the Great Song.  We are touched by a sense of harmony, whether the melody arrives in a minor or major key.  When there is dissonance, we cringe, instinctively knowing that the deep current of Life flows toward harmony, and seeks to correct itself when dissonance occurs.

Shamanic practice allows us to hear the Song of Life from different perspectives, as we explore various realities.  Shamanic practice helps us to understand the universe, the earth, and ourselves.  It allows us to participate consciously in the Great Song.  For this reason, shamans everywhere work with sound, be it drumming, rattling, clicking sticks, praying, chanting, or singing.

Yes, when dissonance occurs, we cringe.  As shamans we hope to bring the melody back into harmony.  The Shamanism without Borders program in the SSP calls shamanic practitioners together to tend troubled areas around the globe, and work to restore health, harmony, and well being where it has been disrupted.  We can work in teams for this, or we can work alone.

Stephanie Rutt’s account, “Singing the Soul of the World,” is a strong and tender example of participating with the disruption that drastically altered a landscape she loved.  While grieving for this area that held special importance for her and her husband, she tuned into the sad vibration rising in her heart and it became a song of love and remembrance for this area.  Her description of how she responded to the violent force of nature that radically altered the peace and calm of her “special place” is a wonderful teaching about how we can approach places of turmoil and suffering when we engage in the work of Shamanism without Borders.

If the universe is a Great Song then we are melodies within that Song. If we want to express reciprocity for the joy and comfort the earth has given us, we should sing our songs of love and gratitude back to the earth in places where the violence in nature or the harmfulness of human activities has caused great suffering.

It is important to remember that a song only exists when it is being sung. It is not sheet music, disks, tapes, or internet streaming devices.  Only when a human voice sings is the song present and alive.  An old riddle asks, “Can you tell the dancer from the dance?”  We might ask in that same spirit, “Can you tell the singer from the song?”  If the Oran Mor is both Creation and its Creator, we can take comfort in knowing they both exist, and that our songs are a part of it.  We can take comfort in knowing we are both the singer and the song. We sing and are sung.

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### **STEPHANIE RUTT**

Stephanie Rutt is Director of the Tree of Life School for Sacred Living, and Founding Minister of the Tree of Life Interfaith Temple in Amherst, NH. She received her DMin from Andover Newton Theological School, now Andover Newton Seminary at Yale, where she graduated with honors. She's the author of five books, as well as the interfaith curricula program for the Tree of Life Interfaith Seminary, and she has appeared on the TEDx stage.

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#### **5 COMMENTS**

1. 

[**Susanne Donoghue**](https://shamanicpractice.org/member-directory/susannedonoghue/) on March 8, 2022 at 10:05 am

I can only say Thank you, Thank you, Thank you. I have been led over and over to sing peace, love and harmony back to the earth, to relationships, to past lives, even to history, and now Ukraine. I have been brought to nearly a standstill by doubt and fear that I am losing my mind. Spirit used this to give me new confidence, and I am filled with great gratitude. Thank you.

1. 

[**Margaret Barry**](https://shamanicpractice.org/member-directory/mysticalireland/) on March 8, 2022 at 1:02 pm

Thank you all and I feel like Suzanne. I started reading this and just started slowly weeping. My mother earth my friends in Ukraine and everyone else. I can just picture the world weeping right now and your words inspired me to keep going on. Even just for another day. thank you all.

1. 

[**Sky Otter**](https://shamanicpractice.org/member-directory/skyotter/) on March 9, 2022 at 5:48 am

Yes yes yes. Thank you.

1. 

[**Simon Kariuki**](https://shamanicpractice.org/member-directory/simon/) on March 15, 2022 at 5:22 am

Thank you Stephanie for your inspiring article. The writing has explanation on how to respect the spirits of a particular area in order to be effective in your work. Moreover, I have learned from you that Shamanic Practice helps us to understand the Universe, the Earth and Ourselves. At the same time you have explained how Society for Shamanic Practice helps us to tend troubled areas around the world, and work to restore health, harmony and peace where it has been disrupted. This is a very new teaching you have given me and I appreciate your training so much.

1. 

[**Wendy Wilkerson**](https://shamanicpractice.org/member-directory/wendywilkerson/) on March 16, 2022 at 6:02 am

What a beautiful, loving, heartfelt way to give back to our sacred Mother. Thank you for sharing your experience. This is something we all may easily do: to quiet our minds & simply connect to the energies around us. Only then, may we stop the “bleeding” & heal our wounds.