



Meditation on Healing and Sacred Spaces

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When we look with depth and seriousness at the relationship between healing and sacred spaces, the commonalities that emerge show that they are inextricably linked. Healing is a broad term that can cover everything from a cut finger to a damaged planet. Rather than illustrating every point along this particular spectrum, let us explore two points of human healing, remote from each other: from the bruised knee to the broken heart of a girl we'll call Madeline.

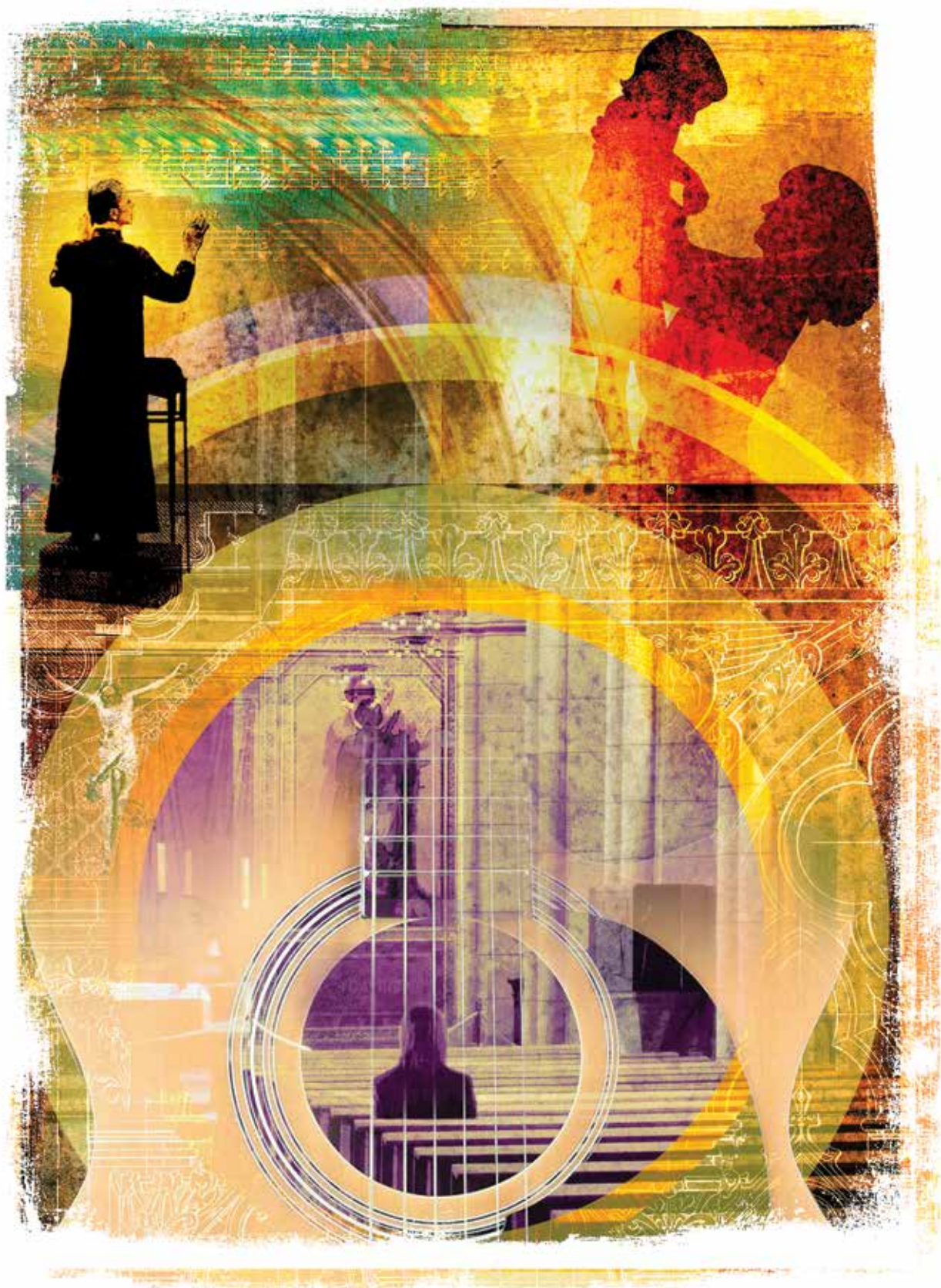
At age 6, Madeline plays outside and her mother is watching her. In an instant, she falls and bruises her knee. She cries and runs to mommy, who gives her a hug and tells her that everything will be OK. Mommy cleans up the scrape, puts a bandage on it, kisses the knee, and Madeline, no longer crying, runs out again to play. In this instance mom addressed two separate, but related issues: healing needed to begin both at the physical site of the scrape and within Madeline's emotional life. At the physical site, a fabric of skin cells became torn. Bleeding began, and a biological process of repair commenced. Leaving alone the physiology of skin repair, let us look briefly at the instant that this fabric of skin cells becomes "aware" of the breach.

There is a kind of communication between the cells of the skin that senses every kind of stimulation — temperature, pressure, irritation, pleasure and so on.¹ Some of the messages of this communication rise to the level of our awareness, but many don't. In this instance, pain is the signal sent to trigger awareness, but the signals that remain subtle are what we want to focus on right now. The fabric of cells that form our surface have a keen sense of integrity, one we can think of as a kind of harmonic sound, like a church choir ton-

ing a long, harmonious chord that alerts the cells that all is well. When there is a breach, the tone changes. Think of this in the same way as in a forest filled with birdsong, if a predator enters the space or if there is fire, the birdsong changes and all the animals are alerted.

Madeline is a strong little girl with sufficient reserves to heal once the process gets started. And it is not much for her skin cells to sound the alarm and for the necessary cells to begin this process of repair. It is just in this notification that healing begins. Think of this as a choirmaster taking

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out a pitch pipe and sounding a new note for all the choir members to tune to, in order to bring everyone back into the resonant key. But, for the moment, let us assume that for whatever reason, Madeline's skin cells don't get out the signal to repair. In such an instance, help can come from the outside, through that reassuring kiss from her mother; a prayer offered for her healing; a visit to a trusted pediatrician who treats her, places a hand on her shoulder, tells her she has been brave, and that her knee will be good as new in a week. In some way a substitute choirmaster can sound the appropriate pitch and bring the choir back into resonance.

Every form of healing is a variation on this theme. The nature and complexity of the tone will change, the nature and complexity of the choirmaster will change, but on every level, this is what healing is.

Young Madeline also became fearful and began to cry. Her mom gave her comfort and reassurance. In this instance, there was a similar bruise on what we could call Madeline's emotional body. With enough time, had she just been on her own, she would have stopped crying. But perhaps without the help from her mother, a scar might have formed on her soul — "play is dangerous" or "be afraid of sidewalks." But her mother served the purpose of choirmaster and sounded just the right tone to heal her daughter's emotional body, and all without a scar.

Now, Madeline is older, had her first boyfriend, and sadly, it did not end well. Madeline is heartbroken! She feels grief in her heart, longing in her body, loneliness in her loss, and aloneness in her soul — for who else could ever understand how hard it is to have lost at love? On each of these levels healing needs to come — at different times, from different people and from new experiences, each will resolve. At the right time a tone will sound and that part of Madeline's being will resonate, "Oh, yes, I remember now ...that feeling of wholeness, that feeling of belonging, that feeling of joy in life." A parent, a good friend, a trusted relative — saying the right words at the right time, or simply being present and supportive — these are the choirmasters that will aid in healing Madeline's heart.

But what is the first thing that Madeline does when she finds herself in anguish? There is an old

church not far from her home; a great old building with soaring walls, stained glass windows and great quantities of quiet. She goes and sits in an empty pew at a time when there is no service. She cries quietly for a time and then she stops, but she stays a while and in a way and without explanation she trades a bit of her grieving for a bit of solace. The walls and the light and the pews themselves seem to understand and are more than willing to enable this exchange.

Healing has begun and the choirmaster in this instance is not a person, but the combined intentions — the prayers — of hundreds or thousands of people who have contributed to this creation: a space where healing can occur. How is it that a space can serve as a choirmaster? Madeline will leave the church with the same areas of brokenness that she had when she first arrived. The dif-

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ference will be that she will have gained an overarching feeling of wholeness; a feeling distinct from her previous overarching feeling of brokenness. And in this broad and general sense, rather than in any narrow and specific sense, Madeline's condition begins to mend.

The idea that a space can be made to resonate is not news to anyone who has heard live music in an acoustically perfect concert hall. But as we have already noted there are resonances that are not limited to sound. The fabric of cells resonate; our hearts resonate; but there seems to be a chasm between physical resonance that can be explained by physics and resonances in living things that can be explained more or less by biology.

The laws of classical physics easily explain the parameters of resonance for a tuning fork or a concert hall. But there are kinds of resonances in all living things that are beyond what classical physics can describe. Biology can get us closer but ultimately there will need to be a new science, perhaps a marriage of biology, quantum physics, theology and a smattering of systems of medicine



practiced in China and India that, taken together, will give us a complete understanding.

Within the past 20 years some bricks have been laid in building a bridge to span this chasm. In the 1990s, Masaru Emoto suggested that emotional content was, in some way, captured and stored in water.² More recently Claude Swanson has written about some scientific findings hinting that within the spinning clouds of subatomic particles — those same clouds that quantum physicists view as containing only random distributions of the particles within them — there exist forces that freely interface with consciousness, imbuing those random distributions with higher patterns of order.³ And William Tiller and co-authors have written about many of the scientific experiments that he has performed, showing that trained meditators, meditating with a particular intention within a prescribed space or meditating on a chosen object, can imbue that space or that object with scientifically testable attributes that directly relate to those same intentions.⁴

It seems that in this sense, science is finally finding its alignment with religion — churches and monasteries; grottos and clearings within a forest, a treatment room in a doctor's office, or just a small study — with a chair and simple desk — what is important is that within a space, a particular intention is held again and again and again; over days and years, perhaps by a group of like-hearted people or maybe just a single soul.

The principles of repeated intention within a space do not imbue only sacredness. The aura felt inside an abandoned prison or a former asylum will, in different ways, test the fortitude of any visitor. And crime scenes where there has been violent loss of life need no series of repetition to leave these spaces feeling defiled.

So, it would seem sacred spaces should not have any “mixed use” that includes the careless expression of emotions. There needs to be a con-

sistency of mood, of purpose, of intention. The space must be made to feel safe and compassionate, but not overwhelming. In this way, a space can resonate a sacredness that can knit a broken soul. And like a choirmaster toning a heavenly pitch, it can signal the start of healing. If a healing process needs help from an outside source, it must come from someone, some thing or some space that can hold a particular vibration. And while a person with a compassionate heart and a capacious soul can bring a very specific kind of help, an object or space rendered sacred can set the tone for healing in the broadest possible way.

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NOTES

1. Marc Chanson et al. “Connexin Communication Compartments and Wound Repair in Epithelial Tissue,” *International Journal of Molecular Sciences* 19, no. 5 (May 3, 2018): 1354. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijms19051354>.
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4. William A. Tiller, Walter E. Dibble and Michael J. Kohane, *Conscious Acts of Creation: The Emergence of a New Physics*, (Walnut Creek: Pavior Pub, 2001), Chapter 6.

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