



Chapter 1

Enter the Forest to Find Your Sacred Place

Your sacred space is where you can find yourself again and again.

—Joseph Campbell

Entering the forest is the first step on our journey to discover our woman within. That first step, crossing the threshold into the unknown, is a symbolic letting go, a death of sorts to who we once were, in order to encounter the woman we are meant to be. Our true potential is hidden in the depths of the unknown landscape stretching out before us. The forest shimmers with both the light and the darkness, where the conscious, known parts of us play with the unconscious, shadow aspects of ourselves.

We all have times in our lives when we need to enter our forest. For some women this comes after a major event, like a divorce, loss of a friend or family member, birth of a child, loss of a job or beginning a new job, to name a few. Even when things are going well for us, we need to find that still, sacred place inside of us where we can deepen and enrich our lives. Going into the

forest consciously gives us a chance to discover new paths through what otherwise may seem like a very dark and scary passage. Some women are hurled into their forests through episodes of depression and anxiety and wake up to find they are entangled in a place that feels hopeless.

These times require us to sit still and listen to what the forest has to say. Whether we enter the forest consciously or unconsciously doesn't matter. What does matter is that we spend time in the forest so we can find what is needed in our lives.

As we move into the forest we will find places of inner darkness in order to work through our doubts and fears. This is an opportunity to begin to understand who we are and to choose paths to our unique selves. Each of us has an inner myth based on what we believe about ourselves. These beliefs may be lies told to us by others that we have taken on as real. To break free of these falsehoods requires a journey away from who we think we are into the depths of "who we really are." During this journey, we will experience living our personal myths as we seek guidance from our dreams, imagination, and reflections and listen to the mysteries of the Earth.

As Joseph Campbell states, "If you follow a path made by someone else's footsteps, you go astray. Each of us has to find our own way." Don Jones, in his book *Wisdom for the Journey*, says, "When you come to a fork in the road, travel both ways in your imagination until you know which one belongs to you."

I invite you to choose a path in your forest and take a journey to discover your sacred place. There may not be a clearly marked path, and all you see is undergrowth and tangled vines. This may be an example of how your life feels right now, so realize that the way to your sacred place is through this seemingly impossible undergrowth. Know you have all the skills and wisdom you need to cut through

the obstacles and make your own way. With each step the next step will reveal itself to you.

Take a few deep breathes and read the following visualization slowly, pausing at the questions to form images in your mind.

Imagine yourself in a forest. What does your forest look like? As you walk through your forest chose a path that feels right to you. After you have chosen a path through the forest, stroll down your path and wonder how your life will be different when you get to know yourself as a whole, complete, magnificent woman. After some time, your steps quicken as you begin to sense the possibility of discovering more about yourself. You know that the answers are inside you. You just need a place to explore and discover all your inner treasures.

Ahead in the fog you see the faint outline of a building. You can't quite see it, yet in your heart you know this is the place where you can discover and celebrate your wholeness as a woman. You take a deep breath and your steps become purposeful and steady. Your excitement heightens as you get closer and closer.

As you get closer you are see the most amazing architectural structure. It may be a cathedral, a palace, a mansion, a castle, a temple, a church, or some other magnificent configuration. Instead of a structure you may just see a clearing in the forest full of magical shadows and light. The image gets clearer the closer you get, and seeing it you know that this is your sacred place where you can discover your essence. What is your structure made of? What shape is it? How many windows, doors, and floors does it have? Does it have spires or turrets or towers? Is it round, square, or angular? Is there a wall or a moat around it? What color is your sacred place? What makes your place special and unique from any other place? Take all the time you need

to see this place you have discovered in your forest. Imagine all the treasure and mysteries it holds for you to discover. Breathe deeply and take in the magnificence and beauty of this symbol that represents your sacred place and holds the wonder of your woman within.

This place is a symbol of a private, secure refuge. Symbolic thought opens the door to an immediate reality for us without weakening or invalidating it. The psychological mechanism that transforms energy is the *symbol*, according to Carl Jung. Symbols act as transformers. They transform energy in ways that better our lives and create new ways to behave in the world. Therefore, by accepting this symbol of who we are, we can transform our inner landscapes and how we walk through our lives.

Every symbol holds a treasure. Our sacred place is waiting for us so we can live a life of abundance that we deserve and not settle for less. Entering this place means we can be prosperous and have what we want and need in our life.

We can go to our sacred place any time we want to find answers to our questions and learn about ourselves. We can go there by getting a cup of tea and sitting down to write in our journal. We can close our eyes in the midst of a busy day at work and find ourselves in this place. Often when I am on a plane or riding on a train, I find this a perfect time to go to my sacred place and visit all those parts of me that are there to serve me. Even when there is chaos or a lot of activity around us, our sacred place is always there for us to enter. What is exciting about going here is we can visit any time, even every day! This is not a one-time journey. Every time we go there we gain new treasures and new insights. Each phase of our life, daily challenges, and upsetting experiences are all opportunities to return to our sacred place for answers, inspiration,

and new knowledge.

In the past, we may have listened to others' answers about what we need and who we are. It is now time to go home to ourselves, to discover how expansive our inner life really is. In this book, we will explore different areas or rooms of our sacred place, so either a building or a natural setting will work. This place is found inside our mind and heart and is ours alone to explore.

Every area or room of this place holds a special gift for us to take forward into our life. Teresa of Ávila, a prominent Spanish mystic, Carmelite nun, and theologian of the contemplative life, sees our sacred place as a brilliant diamond-like crystal castle with many facets. The diamond that we seek is within us. What we want is what we are. We want to be valuable. We already are. We want to be rare and precious. We already are. We want to be shining and multifaceted. We already are.

This journey is about finding the treasure of our true selves. When we seek for our deep personal truths, we need courage and willingness not only to commit to take the journey, but to commit to live our purpose and our mission from a grounded, strong place inside ourselves. This journey not only transforms us, it transforms those around us.

The Sacred Place of Our Wholeness

By making this journey into our sacred place, we are making a choice to live fuller, happier lives and take responsibility for creating something more meaningful for ourselves. If we feel our lives are empty and we have nothing of value, we are in for a big surprise. Everything that we discover in our sacred place is a wondrous part of ourselves waiting for us to claim. Our journey to our sacred place will be uniquely ours and unlike anyone else's. We may have been trying to fit into a mold that someone else has prescribed for us. In

this journey, we are our only judge, and we can spread our wings and soar with joy and anticipation into our sacred place.

We may fear that if we discover an unknown part of ourselves we will be overwhelmed, depressed, or numb. This is like the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale when she went to explore all the rooms of her castle and found the forbidden spinning wheel. She did not know how to use it, so instead of going to get help to learn how to properly use this instrument, she tried to use it, pricked her finger, and fell asleep (became unconscious) for a long time.

Many of us have pricked our fingers on forbidden thoughts, and instead of searching for help and understanding, we put these thoughts into our unconscious. By understanding our woman within we can dispel the doubts, the pain, the discomfort, and the lack of knowledge of being a woman. For example, when I first purchased my computer, my iPod, and my iPhone, I used only a small part of their potential. I had no idea how to use and access all the functions and programs that were available to make my work easier and more fun. So, through trial and error and asking for help, I began to claim the power of the technology. Discovering our womanhood is like learning to use new technology. We have the keys and buttons. We have all the memory. We have the inner complexity and power to create who we are. Whether by reading this book or attending workshops or going to counseling, we can learn how to use the tools and power that are already within us.

Light emanates from our sacred place. Perhaps we may have been like Sleeping Beauty and are just now beginning to awaken to who and what we are. In the Jewish tradition, the Sabbath begins when women light candles at sundown to invite the light of Spirit into their homes. This light invites us to awaken to ourselves and accept and acknowledge our wholeness.

Getting to Know Our Archetypes

On this journey we will develop a new understanding of who we are. In addition, we will experience changes in our bodies and souls. Knowing our expansive possibilities will make us better lovers, mothers, career women, and givers of our gifts in the world. Our goal is to live our lives consciously and learn how to balance all our energies to support us.

To enter our sacred place we cross a bridge. This bridge takes us from the external world of our forest to our internal world of ourselves. When we cross this bridge, we leave the world as we know it and enter our archetypal world. This is our opportunity to explore the aspects of our personal archetypes. The bridge connects the unconscious with the conscious. By getting conscious of the different aspects of ourselves, we can then be in control of our lives and not be carried by the sea of unconscious behaviors.

Exercise

Find a place and time, ideally in nature, where you can sit in silence without interruption. Take some deep breaths and let your body relax as you continue to watch your breath flow in and out of your body. Prepare your body and soul to enter your sacred place. Let this silence feed you as you listen to the whisperings of your soul. Let this become a practice that you can return to again and again. This is about finding your still point, your center, and your readiness to enter into your wholeness.

The time is Now. Take that first step, and the way will open up before you. One step at a time, one breath at a time, continue your journey home to your woman within by entering your sacred place. With these words, enter the sacred place within your being. Choose one of the entrances, open the door, step across the threshold, and enter.

*I enter the sacred place at the center of my being
with fear and excitement.*

I take my next step toward my woman within.

*I am one with my sacred place. I hold its beauty
and shadows within me.*

I am full of treasure and mystery.

I welcome the adventure of exploring myself.

I embrace the expansiveness at the center of my being.

*I stand in awe of my potential and all that is waiting
to be revealed to me.*

My heart is open and ready to receive all of who I am.

Rhonda Gaughan's Story

I spent a large part of my life avoiding looking within myself. I was terrified that if I opened the door and looked within there would be nothing there. I worked really hard at controlling myself and controlling my life. I had the illusion that control would keep me safe. I also worked really hard to attempt to figure out what others wanted from me, so I could produce what was expected of me and then ... I would be loved, accepted.

I lived with the impression that I had to work very hard to prove my worth. I had to justify my existence by doing enough. And consequently, I never felt I could do enough and as a result never felt enough.

Once I began the journey to look within—I have come to love and accept the many aspects of myself. Yes, the child part of me is terrified at times. She feels she is not enough. Not good enough. And she shows up at times when I am threatened or in fear of the unknown.

I have realized the more I can love and accept her, even in her vulnerability, the stronger I become. I was always afraid that if I appeared vulnerable—I would be hurt, killed, wounded. So at all cost I avoided getting in touch with my Inner Child. I have learned that my strength comes from my vulnerability. And I continue to work at fully accepting all parts of myself.

I used to have the impression of this huge vault door. Big, thick, heavy—locked. It was where I would keep my feelings and emotions hidden. Working on the perception that if I could only stay in control—control those around me—everything would be okay. As a result I totally lost touch with myself and my feelings. When I first began the journey of looking within I didn't even know what my feelings were. I didn't know how to identify what was going on for me. I had locked my feelings away for so long; I wasn't sure how to identify them and many times I was terrified to feel them. I have learned that the way out is through.

I now allow myself to feel—be with what is happening for me. Feel my feelings and get to the other side. I used to take the short cut. Pretend I wasn't feeling anything and get busy. I also was probably controlling someone or something. There is great power and strength in me to really see, feel, and be with what I am experiencing.

I grew up thinking I needed to discount, avoid my feelings. When I was twelve years old my brother was killed in an accident. He was fifteen years old. There was an unspoken rule within my family that said, "Don't talk about it." Still to this day, some forty-plus years later, my family does not speak about my brother's death. I have had an opportunity to speak about my brother's death, feel my feelings about this experience, and process my feelings. The feelings do not go away. Now I can be okay with experiencing my

loss. I feel sad that there was no shared experience of this loss for all of my family. My commitment is to move fully and authentically forward into my life.

My mission in life is to teach, guide, and inspire full and free authentic self-expression. What I know is that I have to first be willing to go there myself. I hold a belief that I will not be able to take anyone else to that place within themselves if I am not willing to go there within myself.

One of the most powerful parts of being involved with others who are on the same journey is the unconditional love and acceptance I feel. I have struggled with loving and accepting myself, and I am connected in community with so many women who love and accept me for who I am. All of me.

I spent much of my life in forceful Warrior energy. I thought if I came at others with big fierce energy—they would not look beyond the surface and see the vulnerability within.

I have learned to be with that vulnerable part of me and no longer have to meet every experience with this force. I was pushing others away when what I really needed and wanted was to be connected. When I quit fearing my own connection to myself, I could allow others to be in connection with me.

My internal Mother within was at one time very critical and judgmental. I would internally beat myself up for ... oh so many things—you didn't do that right, why did you say that—what is wrong with you. I have come to more of a place of nurturing, loving, and supporting myself. There are times the child part of me shows up and I realized what she is looking for is to be kept safe, to know she is okay, to be loved and accepted for who she is. I stay connected to that part of me and love her through whatever comes up.

When I look at the issues I face in my life, I show much more

love and compassion for myself. Life is my school for learning about myself and it takes practice. When I stay focused here—my life flows with grace and ease. I go into situations and new places with this intention—to flow with grace and ease. I release my resistance to learning and growing. I accept and go with the flow.