

**SHINE**

When Chasing Sacred Spaces Goes Dark

By Jamie Weil

# Chapter One: Seeing Your Beauty

*You can't change the way the wind blows, but you can adjust your sails.*

- Anonymous

When I met Anthony, he was 17 and full of life. He met us in a café in sunny Laguna Beach, California, and could hardly wait to take my youngest son with him around the beauty that the stunning California Coast has to offer.

The ocean was Anthony's first love. The way the white waves crashed into the high rocky cliffs made his eyes beam. The way the cerulean waters sparkled in the sunshine drew him toward it. The committed way the waves crashed into the shore over and over again offered dependability he struggled to find in his life. Anthony carried that ocean glimmer in his Soul. When he talked about the sea, his eyes flashed like sun diamonds dancing on the water.

He wanted to take Jordan on an adventure that day, chasing sacred space. We weren't sure exactly what that meant, but at the end of the day, we could tell they found it exploring cliff houses under construction, beaches with the breeze blowing just right, an Uber bill that would blow your mind. The pictures Anthony took that day showed how he saw the world, how he saw this space between land and sea, and how he wanted to share that.

The shots he took of Jordan, also a lover of the sea, warm my heart to this day. Anthony captured Jordan's Soul, and when someone sees the beauty of your child's Soul the way you see it, you can't help but love that person deeply.

Jordan went off to college and Anthony ended up leaving Laguna Beach, moving away from his first ocean love. I ran into him in a store far from the ocean in Northern California where he was selling shoes. We hugged and talked about going to lunch. That sparkle that came with the ocean had left him. I could feel that. On Mother's Day that year, he wrote me a note. He told me I was a good mother, that I should know that, and that he really wanted to read my book *First Break*, my first young adult novel about a protagonist in the throes of a psychotic break who also found peace in the sea. I told him I would buy him lunch, and I would bring him a signed copy.

Things got busy. I was in the middle of making a docuseries on youth mental illness that I was extremely passionate about getting quickly to a world of teens I felt were being ignored and hurting. Teens like Anthony. Days piled on days until months had gone by and I heard rumors Anthony had turned to substances to cope with his sadness. Meanwhile, Jordan went off to study in Italy and they lost communication. Early November, Jordan sent a message from Milan with a screen capture of social media exchange: *Anthony is dead?*

I went down the social media rabbit hole and found Anthony's last post which came on Halloween night. It was a meme of The Joker with the words, "As soon as I tried to get help with my mental health, they tell me to come back in two months." The picture shows The Joker going into an emergency room, being turned away, then getting hit by a car. As I read through the thread of traumatized teens, I felt my heart drop to the bottom of the ocean.

Sadness and regret pushed my face in the sand until I nearly suffocated. My son, oceans away, would not be able to properly say goodbye. I had not made good on our lunch plan and taken Anthony my novel. A beautiful life lost. I wrote a blog that day that would be my last one for quite some time, words to honor sweet Anthony and all the Anthonys of the world: Souls that so clearly had a light sparkling, Souls that lit up in those sacred spaces they loved, Souls I wanted to see shine. Now, I return to this writing space to contemplate this question: what is sacred space? What do we think of when we hear those words? Are they spaces we chase, and in this chasing, miss them entirely?

There are those sacred spaces that are related to historical or spiritual links. We think of Machu Picchu with its journey up many stairs. We think about Camino de Santiago, the long walk people take to get more clarity on who they are in this world and space. We think about Sedona's Boynton Canyon where Cucina Wo/Man sits, morphing with the time to hold simultaneous space for both Divine Feminine and Divine Masculine. We think of Mount Shasta in California's North, a magical mountain people are called from all over the world to come and live near. In fact, a poll of Mt. Shasta's residents will have many saying, "The Mountain just called, and I ended up here. It's the weirdest story." We think of the Big Island of Hawaii with its incredible Kealakekua Bay where bones of royalty sleep in the steep cliffs that hug the bay and create a space for the best snorkeling on the island. Mauna Kea, on that same island, has long been a battleground between the sacred and science. Science fights for more observatories, while the native Hawaiians fight for their sacred space to practice ritual and connect with Spirit. And we can't mention sacred space without thinking about Jerusalem where so many faith paths intersect, and so much conflict floods that intersection.

Sacred spaces, then, can be places defined by all these different bits of land where others have swarmed, where many have found stories that help them understand themselves better, and where there is often conflict at one time or another. Or, in Anthony's case, it can simply be a place in nature, an ocean so large and powerful, that meets the sand over and over again, a reliable friend. It can be a forest, a rose garden, or a kama sutra moment between lovers where everything else falls away, just for that moment.

The important piece: each person must learn where to find their own sacred space. Each of us has a sense of where ours is when we arrive on this planet. For Anthony, this was the ocean, but he fell away and couldn't find his way back in time. We must do everything we can to build and claim our sacred space. This must remain a priority.

This isn't optional. It's mandatory. Each person has a sacred space and it is each of our responsibilities to figure out where ours is for the sake of our own peace, as well as the peace of the world. Only when we figure out where this space is within our own Soul and psyche, will we find the peace we seek. Only when we figure out where our sacred space is, will we figure out how to charge ourselves up with the power we need to get where we're meant to go. Each person comes to this planet with a direction, a secret treasure map dictated by their own desires and sensibilities, and on some level we all know intuitively what that is. But life is the great distractor, and we are taught by our cultures, by our family of origin, by our social constructs of religion, political tribes, educational institutions what to believe, what will make us full and happy, charged up to travel more miles. Only when we get going, sometimes well on down the road, do we realize we left the charging station too early.

Where is your sacred space? Is it in your own backyard? Is it in someone else's? Is it in nature? In a bustling city? Is it in a habit, or substance, or quick fix that doesn't serve you?

Where is the place you feel most at peace? Figuring this out is not an extracurricular activity. It's mandatory. The importance of asking yourself this question, and answering it, is truly a matter of life and death.

Not asking the question brings you to a place you've always been. It's said that 90% of each day is a result of early programming that is so unconscious, you don't even know why you do what you do. You go to sleep on the same side of the bed every night. You get up. You go to the bathroom. You follow more or less the pattern from the day before. That entire 90%, directed by subconscious programming from the first 6 years of childhood, dictates the day, the week, the month, the year. The 10% of space that is conscious can help you create a container for the other 90% and understand why you do what you do. As you begin to understand--and you will with focus, intention, and practice--you will begin to understand not only why it's important to identify your sacred space, but also why it's so important to tap into it.

Where to start? Think about your earliest memory of being really happy. For me, that's the water. My earliest memory, still in diapers, is knocking down all the magazines off a bookshelf into a huge "swimming pool" and pretending to swim in them. My next memory is filling an old huge tire with a tarp over it with water and making a pool for my friend Laurie and I to play in during the hot Northern California summers. Finally, from about 2 years old on, I could be found underwater from early morning to late night in the above ground pool in my backyard building mermaid caves with floats. My sacred space? The water, specifically the ocean, and even more specifically, underneath the water in the ocean. It's where I am most me and if it's been too long since I've been there, I need to recreate it

some place else. I keep Dr. Teale's in business with the multiple bags of salts I pour in my bath to make my own ocean when I can't get to one.

What is your earliest memory of feeling happy? Identify that. Write about it. Spend time with it. Embrace it. Who were you with? Where were you? Identifying this unique truth can be the first step to uncovering your sacred space.

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*Light Lift 1: Root Yourself Here*

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Stand, preferably with bare feet on the grass, with feet shoulder width apart, hands at your side with fingers spread and facing the same way you are facing. Close your eyes. Breathe in deeply through your nose and fill your belly with that air. As you exhale, imagine a strong trunk dropping down through the center of your body and sinking all the way to the core of the earth. Feel the strength of this pull to the earth. You have come to this planet for a specific reason and feeling the connection between your feet and this central trunk dropping down through your center is a great way to remember that. Let the earth support you. Grounding yourself in this way doesn't take long and can make a huge difference in the way your day rolls out.