



# Indie Shaman chats to: Sacred Earth Activism

*Indie Shaman editor, June Kent, talks to Christa Mackinnon and Jonathan Weekes, founders of Sacred Earth Activism.*



*How did you meet and what inspired you both to start Sacred Earth Activism?*

We are both professional teachers of shamanic, animistic and Earth-centred spiritual practices. As part of this work, we have, on an individual level, been involved in environmental consciousness-raising for many years.

Inspired by what we saw at Standing Rock in the US, where activists in 2016 and 2017 resisted the Dakota Access [oil] Pipeline using ceremony and prayer, we met with others in our field to discuss how ritual and sacred practice might support environmental activism elsewhere too. This included the issue of fracking here in the UK, which was a pressing one at that point. But somehow the time wasn't quite right.

A couple of years later, Jonathan and I met again during Extinction Rebellion's (XR's) London action week in April 2019. Separately, we both held ceremonies alongside, and in support of, the direct actions taking place. We realised that we both still felt called to bring the ceremonial into the ecological and political change movement and that's when our discussions began about forming Sacred Earth Activism.

From our experiences of being involved with XR, particularly during the action weeks in London, it became clear that the time was now right to support these change efforts with ceremony and ritual. Sacred Earth Activism was formed as a way of including the sacred within direct action in a range of different ways.

*What would you say are the main aims of Sacred Earth Activism?*

Our overall aim is to bring the sacred into the change movement. As US lawyer and author Van Jones says: "It's in that convergence of spiritual people becoming active, and active people becoming spiritual, that the hope of humanity now rests."

In other words, the goal is to encourage spiritual people to become more active and activists to include more of a spiritual component in their work. We do this by:

- Collaborating directly on the ground with different change movements, which includes XR, the Stonehenge resistance camp, Right to Roam campaign and Water is Life movement. This involves offering ceremony, prayer, ancestral work and other Earth-centred spiritual practices to complement

their wider actions.

- Bringing activists together with indigenous and shamanic teachers, wisdom-keepers and elders via our annual conference and periodical online talks.
- Holding a monthly free Zoom gathering, offering space for interested people, such as activists, ceremonialists and campaigners, to come together. We share information about issues and actions, plan, exchange ideas and just generally network.
- Working with a core group of international Sacred Earth Activism members on international events and issues. This includes supporting indigenous resistance movements, doing ceremonial work and giving talks at conferences. We also react to world events, such as the war in the Ukraine, by offering peace ceremonies.



*Both of you have taken part in demonstrations, including the one organised by Right to Roam on Dartmoor and, Jonathan, I believe, has been involved in direct action for the environment in London (including being arrested for obstruction near Downing Street)? Do you think changes in legislation - such as the new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act which came into effect in April 2022 - have made direct action and public demonstrations more difficult to organise and participate in and/or made people more fearful of taking part? Or do you think it has actually had the opposite effect to that intended?*

Yes, both Jonathan and I have been involved in direct actions, which as well as those mentioned earlier include Rights for Rivers and activities around G7 meetings. Jonathan was even arrested for obstruction near Downing Street in 2019, which resulted in a long, drawn-out court procedure, although he was finally cleared of all charges in 2022.

The new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, which came into force in April 2022, has considerably reduced everyone's ability to protest, giving the police and justice system powers that directly impact on our human right to do so. The latest example of how these new powers can be misused was the arrest of a very small group of anti-monarchists during the Coronation – even though they apparently did nothing illegal. They were simply trying to protest peacefully far away from Hyde Park, the Mall and the Royal family but were prevented from doing so.

Most people recognise that this legislation was introduced as a reaction not only to the widespread and active climate movement and Black Lives Matter protests, but also with an eye to the future. Governments around the world are expecting more upheaval as the worsening impacts of both the climate and ecological crises are felt, financial and social inequality increases and the gap between the global south and north widens.

Another aim of the legislation was also to deter people from using their right to protest, or more



particularly from organising resistance. Unsurprisingly then, organisers can now face heavy fines. But people playing drums or blocking roads, which are normal occurrences at marches and protests, could now be prevented from doing so as they may be considered to be causing 'noise' or 'obstruction'.

Although so far it seems that such deterrents aren't working too well, it's still early days and we don't know yet what will happen if these new powers are used more extensively.

The upshot of all this is that some people already feel more reluctant to get involved in direct action, which is the desired effect. But it is also spurring others on, heightening tension and highlighting the element of conflict that already exists in activism in the process.

For those of us standing up to protect the Earth, it has also become more vital than ever to resist the harm being done to our right to protest. The idea is that although our disconnection from nature has already caused so much harm both socially and environmentally, this new heightened tension and conflict will only generate higher levels of disconnection.

So we encourage people to develop positive actions that highlight what we are standing and calling 'for'. Unfortunately, this government's oppositional response to protest is shifting the focus in many activists' minds back towards what it is we are protesting 'against', which is very different.

*What do you think are the main issues facing us at the moment environmentally and spiritually? Actually that's rather large question! So maybe I should rephrase it to 'What are the main issues Sacred Earth Activism are focused on at the moment?'*

Much of the harm that we as humans have inflicted on the environment is because we have lost our sacred relationship with the Earth, the land and other-than-human life forms. So we feel it is important to address this situation in our efforts to generate change. While many people's direct action is inspired by a love of the Earth, it is very easy to become disconnected from that in the heat of the moment. So our ceremonies are intended to ground people back into connection with the Earth and remember our interconnectedness with all life. As a result, our key focus is on:

- Including ceremonial and ancestral work in events organised by ecological movements and inspiring activists to take part in, and create, their own ceremonies.
- Bringing people together through our regular gatherings. We see the change movement as a web and so part of our work is to help weave it by connecting people with initiatives and with each other.
- Organising conferences to bring activists and wisdom-keepers from around the world together to clarify the connection between the spiritual and concrete action. The next such event is likely to



*In Hyde Park where Jonathan and quite a few people from SEA held a 6 day vigil and were visited by the Red Rebels*

take place this winter.

- Offering a programme of 'fireside stories and ceremonies' in the near future to support indigenous communities around the world.
- Starting to develop a training programme for people who want to include sacred, earth centred offerings into their activism.

*What can people do – individually and within their communities – if they feel the need to 'do something' but are unable, for any reason, to take part in direct action and public demonstrations?*

We often invite people who cannot, or do not want to, participate in direct actions to join us in prayer and ceremony to show solidarity with the activities taking place. We either offer Zoom meetings in which we create ceremonial space together and/or we invite our wider community to do so individually or in smaller groups.

But people can also support those involved in direct action by offering prayers or undertaking other sacred practices before and after the action takes place. Such practices can be really helpful in enabling activists to remain grounded and connected both during and after what can be a stressful event.



Just as important is for individuals to support consciousness-raising by helping members of their community reconnect and heal their sacred relationship with the natural world. Examples here include honouring the sacred when taking part in the meetings or planning sessions of local environmental groups to help them gain an awareness of the wider web of life and our interconnectedness with it. Another is to spread information about actions and campaigns, which they can learn about, and get involved in, via our gatherings.

*How can people find out more about Sacred Earth Activism and get involved*

Our monthly community gatherings can be attended by anyone who is interested in this work. Further details are available on our website at <https://www.sacredearthactivism.org/>. We also have a Facebook group, which is an open forum for people to share information about the causes and actions they support as well as connect with other members of the wider Sacred Earth Activism community. This can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/sacredearthactivism>.

### **Biographies**

**Christa Mackinnon** is a psychologist, therapist, medicine woman, shamanic teacher, author and speaker. Previously working internationally for over 25 years as a complex trauma specialist and lecturing at various universities, she shifted her focus to ancient wisdom teachings, apprenticing to indigenous shamans in South America and learning from contemporary shamanic teachers in North America, Europe and Asia. Christa is the author of three books, including the ground breaking *Shamanism and Spirituality in Therapeutic Practice* and the bestselling *Shamanism: Awaken and Develop the Shamanic Force Within*. Websites: <https://christamackinnon.com/> and <https://www.womenweavingchange.com/>

**Jonathan Weekes** is an experienced spiritual teacher, ceremonialist and sacred activist. He has shared his work all around the UK, connecting people with the land through ceremony and sacred practice. Influenced by training contemporary shamanic practice and Druidry, as well as learning from indigenous teachers in the Ecuadorian Amazon, Jonathan believes that healing our connection to the land, to the ancestors and to the sacred will be fundamental in bringing about the change needed in the world. Website: <https://www.spiritualrewilding.co.uk/>