

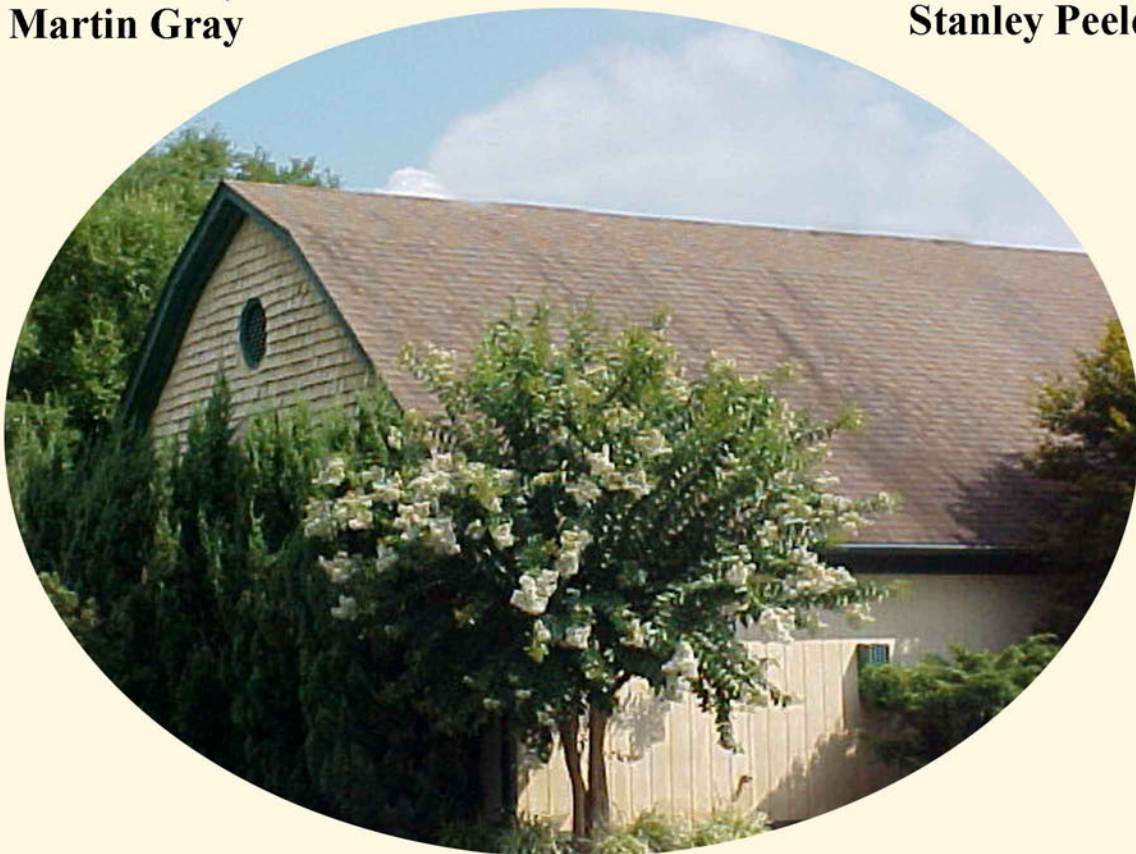
# *Spirituality & Community*

*September 2005*

*www.spiritualityandcommunity.com*

***The Power of Place***  
Martin Gray

***Pain***  
Stanley Peele



***The Spirituality of Buddhism***  
Excerpts from the *Sutta Nipata*  
and *The Eight Realizations of Great Beings Sutra*

***The Four Horsemen and Angels in the Dishwashing Liquid***  
Kurt Venables

***The Wild Honeysuckle***  
Philip Freneau

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# Who We Are

[www.spiritualityandcommunity.com](http://www.spiritualityandcommunity.com)

**Welcome!** Seeking spiritual fulfillment? True happiness and mental wellness? Well, that's what we're all about. Spirituality & Community is a magazine, web site, and online community for those seeking answers to life's deepest questions. ***We are dedicated to promoting spirituality, true happiness, mental wellness, and appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.***

## A New Age of Light

***Our focus is spirituality, which we view as an inner search for happiness and fulfillment.*** We are concerned with what lies within the heart. ***We believe that within everyone lies a pure love that we call the Light or the Lord within. We believe that one must open one's heart to the Light to attain spiritual fulfillment and that only this brings true happiness and mental wellness.*** The Light is the essence of humanity. ***Ultimately, we find our way by casting our gaze inward.*** We will search this inner world over until we find our home:

***We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding***

***We believe that mankind is entering a new age, an Age of Light.*** We see a growing spiritual crisis in the world today. Our culture has brought us unprecedented material well being, but we seem further away than ever from true spiritual wholeness. We also perceive an increase in mental health issues in our society and believe this to be linked to spiritual detachment. Many wander endlessly in search of the material gratification that will bring them happiness. Many have lost faith in religions and traditions. Others sincerely believe in traditional religions but remain unfulfilled spiritually and unhappy. Unfortunately, too many are so close-minded they refuse to ask what is missing from their lives. Yet, many hunger for spiritual wholeness and are searching for answers. ***We believe that we are entering a new age of enlightenment in which genuine spiritual progress will be made and that spiritual development depends upon a genuine appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.*** An appreciation for diversity of belief provides us with a fresh view of the beliefs of others, allows us to take from each set of beliefs that which rings true, and enables us to synthesize a personal spirituality that makes sense for each of us. When we view the beliefs of others with our hearts, we see truth shine through. We look with the highest regard to traditional beliefs and religions for guidance, and we also look forward. ***We believe that the past is not the end but the beginning.***



## What We Do

*Spirituality & Community produces a magazine and encompasses an online community. Both aspects serve as the basis for bringing together those who share our aspirations and beliefs, to meet each other and exchange ideas.* We provide many opportunities for exploring spirituality and communicating with others:

- Spirituality & Community magazine*
- Features on the site*
- Online chats* (as interest arises)

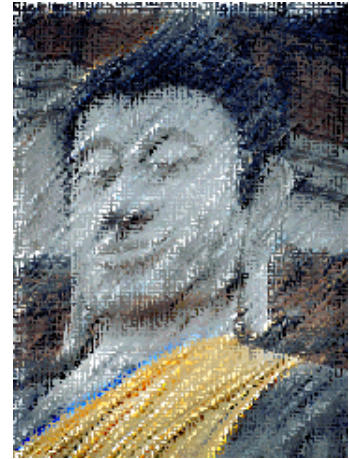
The magazine is based on a Reader's Digest® type model. It is comprised primarily of reader submitted material. It is the primary mechanism for a member to both explore spirituality and communicate his or her ideas to others. Features are also posted on the site. When interest is sufficiently high, we will hold chats online. *We sincerely hope that you will find truth within, and we wish you only the best on your own personal journey!*

# The Spirituality of Buddhism

## Excerpts from the Sutta Nipata and The Eight Realizations of Great Beings Sutra

Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, was born in northern India around 560 B.C. While originating in the Hindu (actually pre-Hindu) culture, Buddhism is not generally considered an offshoot of Hinduism (at that time, Brahmanism). In addition, Buddhism may be variously described as a religion, a philosophy, or perhaps a “non-theistic” religion. Note in the following that Dharma, or Dhamma, roughly translates to “truth”. For more, see:

<http://www.buddhismtoday.com/chung/index-eng.htm>.



### Sutta Nipata I.1 Uruga Sutta The Snake

The monk who subdues his arisen anger  
as, with herbs, snake-venom once it has spread,  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.

The monk who has cut off passion  
without leaving a trace,  
as he would plunging into a lake, a lotus,  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.

The monk who has cut off craving  
without leaving a trace,  
as if he had dried up a swift-flowing stream,  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.

The monk who has demolished conceit  
without leaving a trace,  
as a great flood, a very weak bridge made of reeds,  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.

The monk seeing  
in states of becoming  
no essence,  
as he would,  
when surveying a fig tree,  
no flowers,  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.  
The monk with no inner anger,  
who has thus gone beyond  
becoming & not-,  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.  
The monk whose discursive thoughts are dispersed,  
well-dealt with inside  
without leaving a trace,  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.  
The monk who hasn't slipped past or turned back,  
transcending all  
this complication,  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.  
The monk who hasn't slipped past or turned back,  
knowing with regard to the world  
that "All this is unreal,"  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.  
The monk who hasn't slipped past or turned back,  
without greed, as "All this is unreal,"  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.  
The monk who hasn't slipped past or turned back,  
without aversion, as "All this is unreal,"  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.  
The monk who hasn't slipped past or turned back,  
without delusion, as "All this is unreal,"  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.  
The monk in whom there are no latent tendencies  
-- the roots of unskillfulness totally destroyed --  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.

The monk in whom there's nothing born of distress  
that would lead him back to this shore,  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.  
The monk in whom there's nothing born of desire  
that would keep him bound to becoming,  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.  
The monk who's abandoned five hindrances,  
who, untroubled, unwounded,  
has crossed over doubt,  
    sloughs off the near shore & far --  
    as a snake, its decrepit old skin.

**Sutta Nipata I.8**  
**Karaniya Metta Sutta**  
**Good Will**

This is to be done by one skilled in aims  
who wants to break through to the state of peace:  
Be capable, upright, & straightforward,  
easy to instruct, gentle, & not conceited,  
content & easy to support,  
with few duties, living lightly,  
with peaceful faculties, masterful,  
modest, & no greed for supporters.  
Do not do the slightest thing  
that the wise would later censure.  
Think: Happy, at rest,  
may all beings be happy at heart.  
Whatever beings there may be,  
    weak or strong, without exception,  
    long, large,  
    middling, short,  
    subtle, blatant,  
    seen & unseen,  
    near & far,  
    born & seeking birth:

May all beings be happy at heart.  
Let no one deceive another  
or despise anyone anywhere,  
or through anger or irritation  
wish for another to suffer.  
As a mother would risk her life  
to protect her child, her only child,  
even so should one cultivate a limitless heart  
with regard to all beings.  
With good will for the entire cosmos,  
cultivate a limitless heart:  
Above, below, & all around,  
unobstructed, without hostility or hate.  
Whether standing, walking,  
sitting, or lying down,  
as long as one is alert,  
one should be resolved on this mindfulness.  
This is called a sublime abiding  
here & now.  
Not taken with views,  
but virtuous & consummate in vision,  
having subdued desire for sensual pleasures,  
one never again  
will lie in the womb.

**Sutta Nipata II.1**  
**Ratana Sutta**  
**Treasures**

Whatever spirits have gathered here,  
-- on the earth, in the sky --  
may you all be happy  
& listen intently to what I say.  
Thus, spirits, you should all be attentive.  
Show kindness to the human race.  
Day & night they give offerings,  
so, being heedful, protect them.  
Whatever wealth -- here or beyond --  
whatever exquisite treasure in the heavens,  
does not, for us, equal the Tathagata.  
This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Buddha.  
By this truth may there be well-being.

The exquisite Deathless -- ending, dispassion --  
discovered by the Sakyan Sage in concentration:  
There is nothing to equal that Dhamma.

This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Dhamma.

By this truth may there be well-being.

What the excellent Awakened One extolled as pure  
and called the concentration  
of unmediated knowing:

No equal to that concentration can be found.

This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Dhamma.

By this truth may there be well-being.

The eight persons -- the four pairs --  
praised by those at peace:

They, disciples of the One Well-Gone, deserve offerings.  
What is given to them bears great fruit.

This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Sangha.

By this truth may there be well-being.

Those who, devoted, firm-minded,  
apply themselves to Gotama's message,  
on attaining their goal, plunge into the Deathless,  
freely enjoying the Liberation they've gained.

This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Sangha.

By this truth may there be well-being.

An Indra pillar, planted in the earth,  
that even the four winds cannot shake:  
that, I tell you, is like the person of integrity,  
who -- having comprehended  
the noble truths -- sees.

This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Sangha.

By this truth may there be well-being.

Those who have seen clearly the noble truths  
well-taught by the one of deep discernment --  
regardless of what [later] might make them heedless --  
will come to no eighth state of becoming.

This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Sangha.

By this truth may there be well-being.

At the moment of attaining sight,  
one abandons three things:

identity-views, uncertainty,

& any attachment to precepts & practices.

One is completely released  
from the four states of deprivation,  
and incapable of committing  
the six great wrongs.

    This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Sangha.

    By this truth may there be well-being.  
Whatever bad deed one may do  
-- in body, speech, or in mind --  
one cannot hide it:  
an incapability ascribed  
to one who has seen the Way.

    This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Sangha.

    By this truth may there be well-being.  
Like a forest grove with flowering tops  
in the first month of the heat of the summer,  
so is the foremost Dhamma he taught,  
for the highest benefit, leading to Unbinding.

    This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Buddha.

    By this truth may there be well-being.  
Foremost,  
foremost-knowing,  
foremost-giving,  
foremost-bringing,  
    unexcelled, he taught the  
foremost Dhamma.

    This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Buddha.

    By this truth may there be well-being.  
Ended the old, there is no new taking birth.  
dispassioned their minds toward further becoming,  
they, with no seed, no desire for growth,  
the prudent, go out like this flame.

    This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Sangha.

    By this truth may there be well-being.  
Whatever spirits have gathered here,  
    -- on the earth, in the sky --  
let us pay homage to the Buddha,  
the Tathagata worshipped by beings  
human & divine.

    May there be  
well-being.

Whatever spirits have gathered here,  
-- on the earth, in the sky --  
let us pay homage to the Dhamma  
& the Tathagata worshipped by beings  
human & divine.

May there be  
well-being.

Whatever spirits have gathered here,  
-- on the earth, in the sky --  
let us pay homage to the Sangha  
& the Tathagata worshipped by beings  
human & divine.

May there be  
well-being.

## **Sutta Nipata II.4 Maha-Mangala Sutta The Highest Protection**

I have heard that at one time the Blessed One was staying in Savatthi at Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's park. Then a certain deva, in the far extreme of the night, her extreme radiance lighting up the entirety of Jeta's Grove, approached the Blessed One. On approaching, having bowed down to the Blessed One, she stood to one side. As she stood to one side, she addressed him with a verse.

Many devas and humans beings  
give thought to protection,  
desiring well-being.  
Tell, then, the highest protection.

*The Buddha:*

Not consorting with fools,  
consorting with the wise,  
paying homage to those worthy of homage:

This is the highest protection.

Living in a civilized land,  
having made merit in the past,  
directing oneself rightly:

This is the highest protection.

Broad knowledge, skill,  
well-mastered discipline,  
well-spoken words:

This is the highest protection.  
Support for one's parents,  
assistance to one's wife and children,  
consistency in one's work:

This is the highest protection.  
Generosity, living in rectitude,  
assistance to one's relatives,  
deeds that are blameless:

This is the highest protection.  
Avoiding, abstaining from evil;  
refraining from intoxicants,  
being heedful of the qualities of the mind:

This is the highest protection.  
Respect, humility,  
contentment, gratitude,  
hearing the Dhamma on timely occasions:

This is the highest protection.  
Patience, composure,  
seeing contemplatives,  
discussing the Dhamma on timely occasions:

This is the highest protection.  
Austerity, celibacy,  
seeing the Noble Truths,  
realizing Unbinding:

This is the highest protection.  
A mind that, when touched  
by the ways of the world,  
is unshaken, sorrowless, dustless, at rest:

This is the highest protection.  
Everywhere undefeated  
when acting in this way,  
people go everywhere in well-being:

This is their highest protection.

**Sutta Nipata IV.10**  
**Purabheda Sutta**  
**Before the Break-up of the Body**

"Seeing how,  
behaving how,  
is one said to be  
at peace?  
Gotama, tell me about  
-- when asked about --  
the ultimate person."

*The Buddha:*

"Free from craving  
before the break-up  
[of the body],  
independent  
of *before*  
& *the end*,  
not classified *in between*,  
no yearning is his.  
Un- angered,  
un- startled,  
un- boastful,  
un- anxious,  
giving counsel unruffled,  
*he* is a sage,  
his speech  
under control.  
Free from attachment  
with regard to the future,  
not sorrowing  
over the past,  
he sees seclusion  
in the midst of sensory contacts.  
He can't be led  
in terms of views.  
Withdrawn, un-  
deceitful, not  
stingy, not  
miserly, not  
insolent, in-  
offensive,  
he doesn't engage in  
divisive speech.

Not intoxicated with alluring things,  
nor given to pride,  
he's gentle, quick-witted,  
beyond conviction & dispassion.  
Not in hopes of material gain  
does he take on the training;  
when without material gain  
he isn't upset.  
Unobstructed by craving,  
he doesn't through craving  
    hunger for flavors.  
Equanimous -- always -- mindful,  
he doesn't conceive himself as  
equal,  
    superior,  
    inferior,  
        in the world.  
No swellings of pride  
are his.  
Whose dependencies  
don't exist  
when, on knowing the Dhamma,  
he's in-  
dependent;  
in whom no craving is found  
for becoming or not-:  
    *he* is said  
    to be at peace,  
        un-intent  
        on sensual pleasures,  
        with nothing at all  
        to tie him down:  
one who's crossed over attachment.  
He has no children  
    cattle,  
    fields,  
    land.  
In him you can't pin down  
    what's embraced  
    or rejected,  
        what's self  
        or opposed to self.

He has no yearning  
for that which people run-of-the-mill  
or priests & contemplatives  
might blame --  
    which is why  
he is unperturbed  
with regard to their words.  
His greed gone,  
not miserly,  
    the sage  
doesn't speak of himself  
as among those who are higher,  
    equal,  
or lower.  
    He,  
conjuring-free,  
    doesn't submit  
    to conjuring,  
    to the cycling of time.  
For whom  
nothing in the world  
is his own,  
    who doesn't grieve  
    over what is not,  
        who doesn't enter into  
        doctrines  
        phenomena:  
*he* is said  
to be  
at peace."

## **The Eight Realizations of Great Beings Sutra**

As the disciples of the Buddha,  
Constantly within the day and night  
Sincerely chant and study  
The Eight Realizations of Great Beings

### **First Realization**

The universe is inconstant and irregular.  
Territories are hazardous and fragile.  
The four realms are nothing but suffering and emptiness.  
The five aggregates are selfless.  
Creation and termination transform and vary,  
Fake and unreal, without control.  
The mind is the source of evils.  
The form is the assembly of crimes.  
Observing all in these manners,  
Gradually one parts from the cycles of life and death

### **Second Realization**

Excessive desire leads to suffering,  
The cycles of life and death, and the consequent weariness  
Are rooted in greedy desires.  
Lessen one's desires and eliminate ulterior motives  
And the body and the mind will be at ease

### **Third Realization**

The heart knows not and accepts not satisfaction  
It is only concerned with excessive wants and pursuits  
Which increases and lengthens one's evils and crimes  
Bodhisattvas are not like this  
They are constantly mindful of satisfaction  
They are peacefully content in poverty and abide by discipline  
Wisdom is their only karma.

### **Fourth Realization**

Laziness causes downfall  
Constantly exercise concentration and self-improvement  
Break the evil of worry and distress  
Conquer the four demons  
And leave the dark world of hell

**Fifth Realization**

Attachment to the cycles of life and death is foolish  
Constantly be mindful of the Bodhisattvas  
Expand one's learning and accumulate one's knowledge  
Increase and mature one's wisdom  
Master the skills of discussion and debate  
Teach and enlighten all  
Through this way, bring forth great joy for all

**Sixth Realization**

When one complains frequently in poverty and hardship  
Evil karma are accumulated all over  
Contribute and donate like the Bodhisattvas  
While doing so, be mindful of enemies and love ones  
Let go of guilt over past evils  
Do not hold grudge other evil people

**Seventh Realization**

The five desires bring about misery  
Although being a common person  
Do not be tampered by worldly pleasures  
Be constantly mindful of the three garments of monks  
And the tile bowls which are the instruments of the Dharma  
Aspire to leave the common house life  
Abide by the Way and be innocent and pure  
Let one's noble actions excel high and afar  
And be compassionate to all

**Eighth Realization**

The cycles of life and death burn hot  
The degree of suffering and aggravation is measureless  
Exert the Mahayana heart  
Completely and earnestly assist all  
Be willing to substitute on behalf of all living beings  
To endure sufferings of measureless amount  
So that all living beings  
Attain absolute great joy.

These eight items  
Are the realizations attained by all the great Buddhas and Bodhisattvas  
Concentrate and improve on exercising the Way;  
Be compassionate in practicing wisdom;  
Ride the vessel of the Dharma  
To the shore of Nirvana  
On return to the cycles of life and death  
Assist in the liberation of all living beings  
The fore mentioned eight items  
Will educate all  
Such that all living beings  
Comprehend the pain of the cycles of life and death  
And give up and part from the five desires  
To refine their hearts to accommodate the holy Way  
If the disciples of the Buddha  
Chant these eight items  
Between each and every thought  
Crimes of measureless proportion will be destroyed  
And the pleasing Bodhi will be attained  
The Sambodhi (wisdom of Buddha) will be speedily reached  
The cycles of life and death will be forever broken  
And one will constantly remain in happiness.

# Pain

Stanley Peele

Much has been written about how to deal with pain. Some Buddhist writers have suggested that our normal reaction to pain is to internalize it. That is, when we feel pain, we think of it as something which is happening to us alone. "Ow! That hurts! This is bad. This is dreadful. I don't like this. Alas!"

Then, in experiencing this pain as individual and unique to us, we descend into sadness, despair and anger. We allow the pain to overcome us. Our spirit, our energy, decreases.

These writers suggest that if we can think of the pain as universal, something that is experienced by everyone; that we can lift ourselves from despair. The Dalai Lama writes, "Without pain there is no compassion."

Yet this is only a part of the truth. As pain increases, it lowers all our energies. It lowers our spiritual energy. As it increases it overcomes us, until we lack the energy to think of spiritual things. There is only the pain. (Pain comes in many ways: a tragedy, the loss of a dear one, being put in prison, being fired, being sued in court - - on and on.) Pain can be so intense that we can fall into a dark pit; without hope, love, or compassion.

In 1988, when I was taken to the Emergency Room for chest pain, I was in an utterly dejected and miserable condition. I was not mean to people, was cooperative and would answer questions. Yet my energy was so low that the thought that "God loves me" did not even occur to me. I was an illustration of the phrase, "Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter here."

This condition is a part of life. It is real. Therefore, we should not forget this part of life when we philosophize, when we preach, or when we write. We should not pretend that it does not exist, nor should we gloss over it.

Many people forget this. Dr. Wayne Dyer is a fine speaker. Yet he forgets this. He teaches us how to connect with "the source and says, in effect, "I tell you, if you will do this my way, it will ALWAYS work!" Not so. Not so. His way, although inspired, is only one way. It does not work for all people; nor does it work in all situations.

\*

When we are in that dark pit, God is with us. Although we may not be aware of it, the connection to Him can be even stronger than those times when we are healthy and content. That connection exists on many dimensions. There are many ways of accessing that connection. Here are two:

\* 1. The Bottom of the Pit.

When we sink down into this dark pit, we can sink to the very bottom. Then there is nowhere to go but up. Then we can experience a glorious blaze of light that completely extinguishes the pain. We can rise up in spirit and leave our physical bodies. In that moment we no longer feel the pain, for the pain is only in our bodies. Our bodies are not who we are. We are eternal souls.

And in that moment we become fully aware of the presence of God. We feel His touch. He is always with us. Yet, we had to experience great pain in order to open ourselves to him! Hallelujah!

\* 2. When We Recover.

Most of us miss this opportunity. We feel relief and joy as our lives return to normal. We want to forget the pain, fear and travail.

Yet if we will relax and look back at the pain fearlessly; and give thanks for the whole experience, a new strength may come to us, a new life. It can be a better, deeper, wiser more compassionate life. How do we find this new life? One way is to say a simple prayer to God, a prayer in six words:

"Thank you God for the pain."

Mean it! Believe it. Make that prayer a part of your life. "Thank you God. Thank you for the pain. Thank you for everything." Let the thought become a constant companion – with every step you take, with every breath.

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# The Power of Place

## Pilgrimage and the Allure of Sacred Sites

by *Martin Gray*



Photograph courtesy of SacredSites.com © 2005 Martin Gray

Since the dawn of human time people have described certain places as being holy or magical, as having a concentrated power or presence of spirit. Ancient legends, historical records and contemporary reports tell of extraordinary, even miraculous happenings at these places - the sick are healed, deities appear, artists receive inspiration, prophets see visions and sages attain spiritual enlightenment. It is a curious fact, however, that these sacred sites, so significant to human culture are so little known beyond their own religious traditions. Of enormous importance, they have received only limited attention from social anthropologists, cultural geographers and religious historians. Why this remarkable omission of awareness and understanding?

The story of the sacred sites, and certainly its finer analysis, is a journey through mythic realms and a witnessing of things that can be felt but not measured. Such matters, beyond the limits of possibility agreed upon by the establishment scientific community, are marginalized and conveniently disregarded. Additionally, a truly comprehensive study of the holy places inevitably introduces the student to deeper levels of their own being, territories sometimes frightening for overly rational minds. Yet the holy places and their mysterious spiritual magnetism call us to a deep exploration for they contain knowledge of vital importance to the well being of humanity and the planet we live upon.

In this short article I will share some of the understandings I have gleaned from twenty years of intensively studying the world's pilgrimage traditions and sacred places. The vantage point I bring to these investigations is three-fold: I examine the sacred sites as an anthropologist, visit them as a pilgrim, and photograph them as an artist. This multi-mode, objective and subjective approach, practiced at more than 1000 holy places in 80 countries, has allowed me to penetrate to the core mysteries of one of the world's most compelling enigmas.

Why do human beings make pilgrimages to sacred sites? How do we account for the historical fact - evident in nearly every culture and era - that sacred places have been and continue to be the most visited places on the planet? Two answers sometimes suggested are the momentum of religious tradition (an old condition) and modern day tourism (a recent effect).

The reasons for visits by contemporary tourists are easy to understand but give little insight into the enigma of the sacred sites or their power of attraction on human beings. Tourists find themselves at the holy places, not usually because of any spiritual interest on their part or that of the managers of their tour agencies, but rather because so many of the great pilgrimage shrines are repositories of monumental architecture and beautiful art. Being the sort of photogenic places that look enticing in tourist brochures and travel guide books, many sacred sites quite naturally draw large numbers of recreational tourists.

By contrast, pilgrims journeying to sacred sites for religious reasons are a far more revealing focus of study. There are several questions we can ask of these pilgrims. What is the root cause of their pilgrimage tradition? What is the original generator of the spiritual magnetism of their holy sites? What do the earliest myths and legends of their sacred sites reveal? Seeking answers to these questions we discover that there are several distinct categories of founding legends associated with the sacred sites. The examples are fascinating:

*Certain places were recognized by shamans and sages as manifesting or radiating a feeling of power, a sense of energy, a mysterious numinosity.*

*Spirits, elementals and angels were seen to appear and consecrate specific geographical sites.*

*Pilgrims reported miracles of healing and extraordinary answers to prayers.*

*Spiritual seekers attained sublime levels of metaphysical consciousness.*

Among the rich collection of foundation myths there are several common denominators, a crucial one being that nearly all the myths indicate that something extraordinary was seen or experienced by human beings. Various social anthropologists and cultural geographers, such as Turner, Bhardwaj, Nolan and Morinis have done valuable work in cataloguing the variety of founding legends but have usually terminated their studies at that level. Seldom have the behavioral scientists looked more deeply into the myths and symbols of the holy places, to inquire into the nature of the extraordinary phenomena that gave rise to the founding legends. This is a key insight into the unstudied condition of this great global phenomena: the specific myths that could help solve the riddle of the sacred sites remain unexamined because they are dismissed as being just stories, as being nothing more than simplistic and fantastic imaginations of preliterate and/or non-rational minds. How wrong this notion is! The founding myths of the sacred sites are actually descriptive metaphors revealing to the insightful student the character, quality or power of particular places. The arcane legends passed to us from archaic times are siren calls to our minds and souls, calling us to a new science and a transformation of human consciousness.

The really important question then - the unasked one - is how do we explain these extraordinary reports about the sacred sites? What unknown power could be causing the astonishing phenomena reported at pilgrimage places all over the world? Are they really miracles or are they simply unexplored realities? St. Augustine once said that miracles do not happen in contradiction to nature but only in contradiction to what we currently know of nature. Here lies the problem: we have not yet looked deep enough to comprehend the nature of the holy places.

That penetrating inquiry has been the passion of my life. Based on twenty years studying and visiting the sacred sites, I suggest that there is a definite field of energy that surrounds and saturates the immediate locality of certain pilgrimage places. Concentrated at particular holy sites is a subtle, multidimensional field of influence extending in space and continuing in time. How then may we explain the origin and continuing vitality of these site-specific energy fields? How is a power place a power place? What invigorates their undeniable spiritual magnetism? Thus far I have recognized twenty different factors that may contribute to the localized energy fields at the sacred sites. In the detailed writings on my web site, [www.sacredsites.com](http://www.sacredsites.com), I classify and analyze those twenty factors according to the following four categories:

- 1) The influences of the Earth.
- 2) The influences of celestial objects.
- 3) The influences of the structures and artifacts at the sacred sites.
- 4) The influences of the accumulated concentration of a charged field of psychic power deriving from the focused intention, prayers and meditations of millions of pilgrims over long periods of time.

In the category of the influences of the Earth, there are the geophysical characteristics of the sacred sites, including localized magnetism, gravitational anomalies, geothermal activity, the presence of underground water, ionization, ultrasound and radioactivity. Paul Devereux and the Dragon Project, having conducted more than two decades of exhaustive studies of the geophysical anomalies at sacred sites, present striking evidence that ancient people recognized the powers of specific sites and utilized them for a variety of therapeutic, spiritual, shamanic and oracular purposes. How archaic humans discovered these power places was by an intimate exposure to the feel of the land and its subtle energies. With this sense they felt those particular places on the living earth that expressed a more highly charged vitality. These pagan ritual sites became the locations of the first shrines and temples. Over hundreds or thousands of years and the process of continuing construction at the sites, these places became the most visited and venerated sites on the planet: the great pilgrimage centers of Jerusalem, Compostela, Lourdes, Guadalupe, Bodh Gaya, Banaras and Mecca.

The second category of factors contributing to the power of place regards the influence of celestial objects on the local energy fields of the sacred sites. For reasons only little understood, certain power places demonstrate regular periods of increase in their emanations of geophysical energies that seemingly correspond to cyclical movements of the sun, moon, planets and stars. Many ancient peoples were concerned with the movements of the heavenly sphere and this evidence is particularly abundant at the

oldest holy places. Over the ages of people living at or near certain power places, it was observed that there were cycles of increase and decrease in the power of place and that those periods were linked to the movements of specific celestial bodies. These periods of energetic increase, for example the solstices, equinoxes and various lunar dates, became the first festival times of prehistoric peoples (I am speaking here of regularly occurring events as opposed to irregular celebrations of the hunt). These festivals were earth-spirit ceremonies that actually predate agriculture (and correspondingly predate the less ancient agricultural myths that would later be associated with the earth-spirit festival dates).

The young science of archaeoastronomy (astronomy itself being vastly older) has brought to light remarkable evidence that a large proportion of the pilgrimage sites of deep antiquity are topographically situated to be in precise alignment relative to the position and movements of particular astronomical objects visible from each site. The most ancient science of our species, only recently being rediscovered, was the interweaving of terrestrial astrology and sacred geography. There is a great galactic symphony of subtle forces playing upon our planet by virtue of the cyclical orbits and particular positions of numerous different celestial bodies relative to the earth. The power places, because of their profound energetic resonance with different celestial frequencies, are ideal portals where humans may access those forces. The times most suited to interdimensional access at these holy places are the particular dates encoded in each of their founding myths.

The third category of factors contributing to the power of the sacred sites concerns the design, construction and ornamentation of the structures that humans have placed at the sacred sites. A particularly fascinating example is the *Sacred Geometry* used in the construction of the pyramids, temples, mosques and cathedrals at the sacred sites. Sacred Geometry is the formulating geometry evident in many facets of the natural world, such as sea shells, crystal structure and musical intervals. Numerous early cultures, observant of the mathematically repeating patterns of nature, sought to encode those same patterns and proportions in the architecture they created at the sacred sites. Similar to how the mathematically precise shapes of musical instruments create and enable specific sounds, the purposeful shapes of some (not all) sacred structures assist in the generation of specific fields of energy and influence. Contributing to and amplifying these fields of influence, shrine builders also made use of sound, light, aromatic substances, jewel-encrusted icons and gold/silver-plated sculpture. The German philosopher, Goethe, once remarked that sacred architecture is frozen music; this is a palpable reality for many visitors to the great pilgrimage shrines.

The fourth factor contributing to the power of the sacred sites is the most mysterious, the least understood. This is the accumulated and concentrated power of human intention. As photographic film (a small piece of earth) can record the energy of light, and as audio tape (another small piece of earth) can record the energy of sound, so also can a sacred site (a larger piece of earth) record, remember or somehow contain the energy and intention of the millions of humans who have performed ceremony at the holy place. Within the shrines and sanctuaries, countless priests, priestesses and

pilgrims have gathered for hundreds or thousands of years. Dancing and chanting, praying and meditating, they have continuously charged and amplified the etheric fields of love and peace, healing and wisdom. The megalithic stone rings, Celtic healing springs, Taoist sacred mountains, Mayan temples, Gothic cathedrals, Shiite Islamic ziyarats, Hindu Jyotir Lingas, Buddhist stupas and Egyptian pyramids are repositories of the concentrated spiritual aspirations and attainments of all humanity. Here, too, are the places where Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Zoroaster, Guru Nanak, Mahavira and other sages and shamans awakened to the deepest realizations of spiritual wisdom.

The vast numbers of pilgrims visiting the sacred sites, both historically and in contemporary times, are not conceptually familiar with the different factors contributing to the power of the sites. They are not visiting for such reasons. They come because it is the momentum of their religious tradition that draws people to the holy places. Buddhists go to the four major places of Buddha's life; Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Saranath and Kushinagar. Hindus visit sites sacred to gods and goddesses such as Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Saraswati, Shakti and Kali. Christians visit Lourdes, Rome, Jerusalem, Compostela and a host of sites associated with saints and the apparitions of angels. Taoists climb the sacred mountains of China; Muslims visit Mecca, Medina and the shrines of the Shiite Imans; and Jews go to the Western Wall and the shrines of great Rabbis.

Given my long fascination and familiarity with the power places, you might ask what is my philosophy regarding them? I believe it is highly beneficial for people to make pilgrimages to the sacred sites because of the transformational powers available at the sites. These legendary places have the mysterious capacity to awaken and catalyze within visitors the qualities of compassion, wisdom, peace of mind and respect for the Earth. The development of these qualities in more members of the human species is of crucial importance, considering the numerous ecological and social problems occurring in the world. At the root of all these problems may be found human ignorance. Human beings are out of touch with themselves (both their bodies and deeper states of spiritual consciousness), their fellow beings, and the Earth they live upon. The sacred sites and their subtle fields of influence can assist in the awakening and transformation of human consciousness and thereby in the healing of the Earth.

In closing, let me say a few words regarding what I have learned about how to approach and benefit from the sacred sites. The experience of a sacred place actually begins well before a pilgrim arrives at the site. First of all, choose an area of the world whose power places you would like to explore. Next, consult the categorized bibliography on my web site [sacredsites.com](http://sacredsites.com) which will give you the names of books (and other web sites) concerning sacred sites in the region of your interest. In the weeks or months prior to your journey, perhaps later in the evening when you are near dream state, read about the places you will soon visit and begin to journey to them in your imagination.

When you finally reach the immediate area or city of the pilgrimage place make the conscious mental effort to approach the shrine with the focused intention that you are going to plug into the power of place as you would plug an electrical appliance into a wall socket. This metaphor is very helpful to embody; it actually predisposes you to a more intense connection with the sacred sites. Then go to the site with a free and open mind. Maybe you will wander around first and then meditate or maybe it will be the other way around. Maybe you will take a nap or pray or play. There are no rules. Simply let the spirit of the place and your own being come into relationship and then let go to however that flows. If you want to learn a really effective way of plugging into the sacred sites and their energies, try the easy meditation technique shown on my web site.

The energy transference at the power places goes both ways; earth to human and human to earth. The wondrously magical living earth gives us tiny human beings subtle infusions of high octane soul food and as pilgrims we give the earth a sort of planetary acupuncture in return. True, the power places were mostly discovered in old times but they are still vital today, still charged and emanating a potent field of transformational energy. Open yourself to this power. Let it touch you and teach you while the planet is in turn graced by your own love.

# Spiritual Soup

Kurt Venables

## The Four Horsemen and Angels in the Dishwashing Liquid

The kids like to play a game in the kitchen while Tammy and I are washing dishes. If you squeeze the plastic bottle of dishwashing liquid while it is upright, loads of tiny bubbles come shooting out. I tell the kids that the bubbles are little angels, and the kids like to try to catch them. They're tough to catch; the faster you try to grab one, the faster it will move around your hand. To catch one, you have to move slowly and deliberately. Spirituality is kind of like that.

I believe that mental wellness, true happiness, only comes from spiritual fulfillment and that spiritual wholeness only comes from opening one's heart to the Light. I perceive four principal limitations that one need overcome to allow the love of the Light to completely fill the heart. These limitations, which I call the Four Horsemen, are: Close-mindedness and Misplaced Values, Selfishness, Arrogance, and Negativity and Stress. These modern scourges are interrelated and feed one another. The first horseman, "know it all" Close-mindedness, is like a gate through which one must pass in order to make any spiritual progress. One cannot progress if one refuses to learn. Close-mindedness is subsumed within the more general problem of self-deception. The worst lies we tell are the ones we tell ourselves. Some refuse to admit their limitations for fear of feeling bad. In truth, they will feel better in the long run, as they identify and begin to overcome their limitations and the Light begins to shine within their hearts. Again, however, one cannot expect to progress if one cannot



face truth. A related problem, also involving truth (or lack thereof), is that our culture places undue emphasis on relatively unimportant values to the detriment of those that truly merit focus; this includes materialism. The second horseman, Selfishness, is marked by the almost exclusive concern for oneself at the expense of others, which leads to alienation of others. This problem includes a general sense of alienation in our society. The third horseman, Arrogance, is an obsessive desire to be "better" than others, a desire to think of oneself as of a higher status than others. A form of self-deception, it functions as a perverse justification for selfishness, thereby aggravating that problem. Finally, the fourth horseman, Negativity, is a problem of poor mental outlook, unrealistic expectations, and inadequate coping with adversity in life. Negativity leads to stress, which also arises from unnecessarily adversarial interactions with others and inadequate coping with the demands of daily life in our fast paced world.

The antithesis, the antidote, to the Four Horsemen is what I call the Quartet of Angels: Truth, Love, Humility, and Optimism. Truth refers to a commitment to seeking spiritual truth. As referred to previously, many construct elaborate mental artifices to delude themselves. Such mental

gymnastics only obscure the true path to the Light. Spiritual progress can only come from an open-minded search for truth. A commitment to truth also includes understanding and focusing on values that truly bring happiness. The second angel, Love, refers to loving all others without the usual boundaries, such as loving only one's self, family, friends, etc. Love is the key to spirituality; the Light is pure love. True love brings true happiness. The third angel, Humility, means understanding that we are all morally equal, or equally worthy of love, and that no one stands above or apart from others. Finally, the fourth angel, Optimism, refers to a positive outlook on life and understanding that over-reacting to adversity in life is counterproductive to the primary goal of achieving happiness. As the Light fills the heart, it sanctifies the ordinary, and one more easily sees the beauty and wonder in oneself and the world.

By working within to overcome limitations and cultivate the right kind of feelings, we can become spiritually healthy as individuals. By working without, in our world, we can help to bring spiritual progress to our collective culture. I do

believe that we are entering a new Age of Light in which genuine spiritual progress is being made. Disconcertingly, however, I also see the four principal maladies discussed becoming increasingly manifest in our society. Those contracting these modern plagues are marked by hollowness, a lack of true joy. If a person is unhappy at best, it is not difficult for adversity to push him or her into periods of depression. While I do accept that genuine hormonal and neurochemical imbalances do exist, I truly believe that a large portion of the mental health problems in our society are the result of spiritual discord. If humanity cannot overcome the problems represented by the Four Horsemen, rather than entering a new Age of Light, we run the risk of entering a new Age of Spiritual Apocalypse. I do, however, see strong forces for good in this world, and we must work diligently to strengthen these forces. Cultivating a spirit defined by the Quartet of Angels is difficult. Spirituality is a lifelong process, both for individuals and the human race. Grasping angels is a tricky business, one achieved only by slow, deliberate progress.

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# *The Wild Honeysuckle*

**Philip Freneau**

(1752 – 1832)

Fair flower, that dost so comely grow,  
Hid in this silent, dull retreat,  
Untouched thy homed blossoms blow,  
Unseen thy little branches greet:  
No roving foot shall crush thee here,  
No busy hand provoke a tear.

By Nature's self in white arrayed,  
She bade thee shun the vulgar eye,  
And planted here the guardian shade,  
And sent soft waters murmuring by;  
Thus quietly thy summer goes,  
Thy days declining to repose.

Smit with those charms, that must decay,  
I grieve to see your future doom;  
They died--nor were those flowers more gay,  
The flowers that did in Eden bloom;  
Unpitying frosts, and Autumn's power,  
Shall leave no vestige of this flower.

From morning suns and evening dews  
At first thy little being came;  
If nothing once, you nothing lose,  
For when you die you are the same;  
The space between is but an hour,  
The frail duration of a flower.