

INTRODUCTION TO SACRED SPACES & CONSEQUENCES

AWG, 09/21/90; What is a sacred place? it is a place in which the gods dwell. When we create a sacred space, we build a place to which we hope to attract the gods to keep them in our midst. And one knows at once on entering such a space whether or not some god has chosen to abide there.

Yesterday I went into the chapel of a small collage town in Texas. Upon entering the space, I knew at once that a god had taken up residence there. The efforts of those who built it had been rewarded; rewarded in the greatest and most lasting way that any human effort can be rewarded: Bringing a god to dwell in our midst.

Philosophical Preface to Sacred Space and Time

AWG, 06/24/89; There is the objective world out there and there is the subjective world within, and there is the bridge or relation between the two. Only the relation is graspable. The 'out there' and 'in here' are given existence through the relation. An out there does not exist in relation to a knower. But who is the knower? The knower is a set of experiences or relations with the out there and a set of self-referential experiences within. Subject and object are the two ends of the relation. At the subjective end are attitudes and at the objective end are things. The mapping is not one to one. For one thing there can be many attitudes and there can be one attitude for many things. And there are some items which cannot definitely be assigned to either out there or in here. Is time out there or is it but a way we order things? Or do time and space themselves exist in both realms, being bridges and relations between knower and known?

If we consider time and space to be out there, then we can agree with the physicist that every instant of time and every point of space are the same. But if time and space are subjective, then experience says the quality of time and quality of space can vary. In the objective view time and space is meaningless. In the subjective view we can experience quality as attributes of time and space. Thus, any specialness of time or space is determined by the subjective, by the frame of mind, by attitude. Yet experience is that certain forms and certain sequences invoke certain feelings in us. Certain forms give (subjective) quality to space and certain sequences give quality to time. The forms are out there, and the sequences give quality to time. The forms are out there, and the sequences involve the out there. What then are connections between forms and space and between sequences and time? Should forms be equated to space and sequences to time? Some philosophers (e.g. Leibniz) have maintained space is but the gestalt property of forms. In this case space is purely out there and its qualities are transmitted to us through forms. The issue is then centered on the subjective qualities of forms and we may forget about space. Similarly, with time. We need only to be concerned with the subjective properties of sequences and forget about time and what it is. On the other hand, others have viewed space as having absolute independent existence. In this case we have the above questions concerning the relations between space and form to answer.

With this background, we leave the philosophical level and explore the feelings and attitudes invoked in us by our experience of forms and sequences.

On Sacred Space

AWG, Rev 03/16/94; What is it that sets off certain places from all others? When we enter a great cathedral, a venerated memorial, or an ancient temple or tomb, what signals us that we have entered a special sort of space? How is it that our thoughts, our focus and behavior are changed while in such a space and we are lifted out of our ordinary state of consciousness to a state of receptivity and responsibility not normally experienced?

Many years ago, before the various species of politically inspired violence descended on Southeast Asia—before the days of the Viet Cong, the Green Berets, The Khmer Rouge—I was fortunate in being able to explore some of the ancient temples hidden in the depths of the Cambodian jungle. Entering the jungle, I was consumed with a sense of awe and wariness, not so much from a fear of the present, a chance encounter with a snake or large predator, but from some forgotten past that had clung to the jungle over centuries and even millennia. A past that had faded and been forgotten but which was still searching for realization and completion, seeking somehow another incarnation to restore and consummate what had been lost ages ago.

What was but vaguely sensed in the jungle, trenchantly penetrated me as we suddenly came upon the ancient stones of Ankor Thom. We had entered into a sacred space, a space that demands full focus of our attention and paradoxically welcomed us into its essence while instilling in us a sense that we were trespassers. It was as though in coming here we were simultaneously interfering with and being incorporated into some mysterious process of reincarnation that was taking place in the crumbling stones. I found myself strongly desiring both to depart from the temple as quickly as possible and to remain in its presence forever. It is paradoxes such as this that are the vestibules of spiritual transformation and cognitive emergence. The power of the temple to inject an inescapable paradox into the depths of our psyches, was manifestation that it was truly a sacred place.

While somewhat dramatic, this is what a sacred place is about. It is a place that tells you in no uncertain terms that it is not like any other place and while you are in it you are not like you are at other times. As Micrea Eliade says in his “Cosmic Territorial Imperative “:

“The fact that living in the world has a religious value is a result of a specific experience of what can be called “sacred space.” Indeed, for religious man, space is not homogeneous. Some parts of it are qualitatively different from others. There exists a sacred space, and hence a strong, significant space. And there are others that are not sacred and so without structure, form, or meaning. Nor is this all: for religious man, this spatial non-homogeneity finds expression in the experience of an opposition between space that is sacred and all other spaces, the formless expanses surrounding it.”

“The religious experience of the non-homogeneity of space is a primordial experience. When the sacred manifest itself there occurs not only a break in the homogeneity of sacred space but also a revolution of an absolute reality, opposed to the artificial non-reality that resides in non-sacred space.”

Several attributes of sacred space have been described:

- Joseph Campbell says, “A sacred space is where time and eternity are in dialogue.
- Lama Govinda says, A sacred space is one which symbolically models the cosmos.
- Huston Smith says, “All sacred things must have their place. That being in their place is what makes them sacred, for if they were taken out of their place, the entire order of the universe would be destroyed. Sacred objects therefore contribute to the maintenance of the order of the universe by occupying the proper places allocated to them.”
- Indeed, it has been said by American Indians, that when the white man has destroyed the last sacred place, the world will end.

A sacred space is one that jars you out of automatic. Presents you with a paradox, giving you an irreversible event you can never go back again.

AWG, 03/16/94; Sacred spaces build faith, as Eliade points out. But faith also builds sacred spaces. The great temples, Cathedrals, shrines of the world derive directly from sacred space or indirectly from the faith created by space.

Some Scandinavian residents of Wisconsin wanted to build a small chapel in the style of the Old Stave Kirke of Norway. Over several years they learned carpentry, wood carving, Stained glass, and the basic symbolism of early Christian art. Finally, when they had completed their kirke, they looked on their handiwork with the joy of a job well done. But then they realized that not only had their faith built a chapel, but that the chapel had built them. They had to become worthy of the work to which they dedicated themselves. And there is a message in this for us at the Church of Incarnation, as we begin to rebuild our church. Let us commit so that as we rebuild a sacred space, it will rebuild us.

AWG, 03/16/94; It is known that Hindus go to their temples, not to worship or praise God. They go to the temple for darsan, which is to get a glimpse of god. In fact, the purpose of life is to collect darsan. They believe one's real worth and wealth is to be measured in how much of God one has collected or experienced. Their temples are designed and built to give glimpses of God.

Indeed, the form of a temple, church, or mosque reflects the theology of the religion that built it. We see in basilica form the religion that builds it. We see in the basilica form the theology of the western church, God transcendent enshrined in the high altar at the end of the apse. The protestant format, with no altar, the pulpit with its bible being central; the orthodox format emphasizing the vertical dimension, with the material altar hidden behind the iconostasis, forcing the focus upward to the Almighty directly above the nave. Each form provides a different experience.

AWG, 04/02/91; "All sacred things must have their place. That being in their place is what makes them sacred for if they were taken out of their place, even in thought, the entire order of the universe by occupying the places allocated to them."

From Forgotten Truth by Huston Smith p117 (Levi Strauss)
{ i.e. sacred objects in the right place create sacred space. This can also be said about sacred time. This in fact is what is meant by Kairos.

A sacred place is where time and eternity are in dialogue. (Joseph Campbell)

The reason that some of the greatest works of art are linked to places, I think, like Florence, Venice, Jerusalem, the four rituals, is that the making of place includes dance, theater, rituals, costumes, and architecture beautifully suited, all of which links to nature. Lawrence Halprin, landscape architect

But this is not the entire picture. Having eaten of the fruit of the tree, we participated in more than process. Animals live by process alone, but we have assumed further responsibilities. This means that process per se is not deterministic, but that branch points occur, and choices are to be made—choices that alter the course of evolution. Hence knowledge of good and evil.

In the subjective realm there are attitudes. In the objective realm there are things, their mappings are not one to one... For one thing that can be many attitudes and there can be one attitude for many things, All Specialness to time or place belongs to attitude.

Our usual view of a sacred space is one in which we feel elation, inspiration, peace or awe. But without the presence of the obverse side of the coin feelings of doubt, frustration, confusion and rejection, no paradox is generated. The true sacred space demands we attend it. We may disdain it or we may be enraptured by it, but we cannot be indifferent to it. We may shut it off but it does not shut us off. It is insisting we open to it. We may have many ways of avoiding its call—departure, disdain, intellectual denigrations, or criticism, --allowing us to discount it.

A sacred space cannot be recognized except that there be spaces that are not sacred. In going from one to the other we must perceive a change. It is this change that invokes awareness of dimension of reality. Sacred spaces reveal to us the presence of the great ocean of spirit in which we are imbedded, just as a presence of the great ocean air in which we are imbedded but which we ordinarily are not aware of.

"Trying to explain the sacred character of certain places and certain ties with new myths is fruitless."

Sacred spaces are of three types:

- 1) Chakras—power points of the earth

- 2) Locations in which the Feng Shui has altered the conditions so as to trap energy.
- 3) Places in which intentional Feng Shui has altered the conditions so as to trap energy

Manifestations of Sacred Spaces

- 1) Injections of ambivalence and paradox.
- 2) High energy
- 3) Symbolic isomorphy to the cosmos

Sacred spaces may be created

- 1) By ritual activity
- 2) Isomorphic symbolism to the cosmos
- 3) Feng Shui