

WALKING BETWEEN WORLDS

PULSE OF SPIRIT
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DAVID KARCHERE is a speaker and workshop leader who assists people to renew their Primal Spirituality—an experience that virtually all human beings know at birth, and that ideally grows as they mature.

This past Sunday, I climbed the Glastonbury Tor through near gale force winds. I am leading a tour through Southern England with sixteen other people, *Discovering the Magic of the King Arthur Legend*. Looking out over the mists on the plains below, some of us held the sword Excalibur high, piercing the oncoming air. It was a powerful moment.

We have visited the Chalice Well Garden, Stonehenge, Wells Cathedral, Cadbury Castle and Tintagel. In their own way, they are each a shrine to the sacred.

Our journey has led me to consider the significance of sacred sites—places that evoke the deepest human experiences. I notice that some walk through such places, camera and travel brochure in hand, taking selfies in front of monuments that are millennia old. Others travel through the outer landscape, reading it as a map to an inner experience. For some, a site held sacred to them is an opportunity for deep meditation and a ritual of transformation.

What are the elements that lead to a deep human experience of the sacred in a certain place? Here are four elements that often contribute to the experience:

Physical presence. The Glastonbury Tor is a large, steep hill that rises out of the Somerset Levels. Below, there are pastures that were covered by water many centuries ago. The Tor is a remarkable feature in the landscape, visible from miles away. It is a beautiful site but, more than that, it has an energetic presence that can easily be felt. It is said to lie on a ley line that runs through that part of the country.

In the Chalice Well Garden, waters from two separate sources flow through the flowers, shrubs and trees. One is rich with iron. The waters from these separate sources mingle in the Garden. They are sought by visitors for the healing energy they carry.

A humanly created physical structure built with a specific intention. Like many other similar structures, Wells Cathedral was created to induce a state of awe and upliftment. The high arched ceilings and the massive size of the building help to create that effect upon those who visit.

Stonehenge arises out of the Salisbury Plain like nothing else around it. Ancient pilgrims from as far away as Central Europe came to find healing from the giant stones and a sense of orientation in the solar cycle as the structure marked the coming of the winter solstice.

A story. Cadbury Castle is nothing like the common image of a stone structure with a moat, ramparts and turrets. Today, it is a tall hill with earthworks that were built to hold out invaders. Yet it is said to be the home of the real Camelot, King Arthur's shining city on a hill. As the story goes, this is the place of the Round Table, where Lancelot, Galahad and Merlin gathered around the King.

Glastonbury itself is known as a place of the ancient enchanted land of Avalon, home to the Lady of the Lake, and the place where Arthur was given the sword Excalibur.

Often the story surrounding a sacred site is a story of origin, such as the story of the origin of Camelot or the conception of King Arthur at Tintagel.

Ritual. People come to Glastonbury to climb the Tor. Sometimes it is a spiral climb, but most often it is a more direct climb to St. Michael's Chapel at the top. For some it is a walk up a hill like any other. For others the climb is a ritual and a meditation—an opportunity to enter the magic of the place.

Certainly at Reeds Cathedral, congregants share in the religious ritual of the Anglican Church. At Stonehenge, druids celebrate the solstice.

I encourage you to use these four elements of sacred sites to enter the inner sacred landscape more deeply.

In the story of Excalibur, it is Merlin who leads Arthur to Avalon and the Lady of the Lake with the sword. My favorite telling of the story describes it like this, beginning with the words of Merlin:

In one part of this forest (which is, indeed, a very strange place) there is a certain woodland sometimes called Arroy, and other times called the Forest of Adventure. For no knight ever entereth therein but some adventure befalleth him. And close to Arroy is a land of enchantment which has several times been seen. And that is a very wonderful land, for there is in it a wide and considerable lake, which is also of enchantment. And in the centre of that lake there hath for some time been seen the appearance as of a woman's arm—exceedingly beautiful and clad in white samite, and the hand of this arm holdeth a sword of such exceeding excellence and

beauty that no eye hath ever beheld its like. And the name of this sword is Excalibur—it being so named by those who have beheld it because of its marvellous brightness and beauty. For it hath come to pass that several knights have already seen that sword and have endeavored to obtain it for their own, but, heretofore, no one hath been able to touch it, and many have lost their lives in that adventure. For when any man draweth near unto it, either he sinks into the lake, or else the arm disappeareth entirely, or else it is withdrawn beneath the lake; wherefore no man hath ever been able to obtain the possession of that sword. Now I am able to conduct thee unto that Lake of Enchantment, and there thou mayst see Excalibur with thine own eyes. Then when thou hast seen him thou mayst, haply, have the desire to obtain him; which, an thou art able to do, thou wilt have a sword very fitted for to do battle with.

“Merlin,” quoth the King, “this is a very strange thing which thou tellest me. Now I am desirous beyond measure for to attempt to obtain this sword for mine own, wherefore I do beseech thee to lead me with all despatch to this enchanted lake whereof thou tellest me.” And Merlin said, “I will do so.”

*The Story of King Arthur and His Knights
Howard Pyle*

Merlin symbolizes the magician within each of us. He is that conscious internal guide who can lead us to the empowerment that comes when we enter the inner landscape.

It is Merlin who guides a person to not only

walk through the outer landscape of a site but to see and touch the magic available. So this capacity of conscious guidance into the inner landscape is key to the opportunity that is present in a place that is a shrine to the sacred.

In everyday life, a person is often so busy using their conscious capacity to navigate the outer landscape, that they have little resource left to even notice the inner landscape that is every bit as present, and even more real than the outer factors of their life. Beyond the navigation of the most obvious levels of a person’s geographic reality—how to get to work and home again, how to find a new place, or simply how to find the keys in your own house—most of us are navigating relationships. We are navigating our financial life and our professional life. So often in Western culture, the fixation on these features of the outer landscape leads to disorientation when it comes to the inner landscape.

A sacred site offers the opportunity to reapportion the use of conscious attention so that there is less being used to navigate the outer landscape and more apportioned to navigating the magical world within that landscape. You still need enough outer awareness to walk around, not falling off the cliffs of Tintagel or tripping over the shrubs at the Chalice Well Garden. But if you don’t experience this shift in attention, you may be at a sacred site but you are just walking around.

A full-on encounter with the inner landscape can momentarily make a person incapable of navigating the external landscape. For me, there came a time when I was so overcome by the awesome

awareness of what I was seeing of an inner reality that I stumbled about until I dropped to my knees and sobbed. In a place in which it was safe to do so, I allowed myself to be consumed by the reality I had come to see. Before long, the vividness of that inner sight receded and I was again able to move through the physical world. But the encounter has never left me, even to this day.

There are two features of the conscious guidance to which our own inner Merlin leads us: nothingness and somethingness. Nothingness is simply the unformed field of awareness. It is the “darkness upon the face of the deep” spoken of in the Creation story in Genesis. This is the nothingness of the field of Creation that we hold with others. It is also the void in our own soul. It is the unformed space for all that has not yet happened in our life—all the people we haven’t met and all that has yet to happen with people we already know. And just like the deep of space, it is not really empty. It is just unformed.

Living into that nothingness, we are inviting its activation. The darkness and void is welcoming the creative spirit that calls it into the process of Creation. The spirit of God moves on the face of the waters and there is light—somethingness. That light manifests very simply for us as human beings as a flow of creative awareness. Our own consciousness lights up with thoughts and feelings born out of the void. That awareness begins to create a new future.

A tour of sacred sites, such as the one I am now in the midst of, is a special opportunity to invoke these experiences. Yet the same opportunities are regularly available to us.

Anyone can create an altar or shrine on their bedroom dresser. It could be something as simple as a photo and a place to burn incense. In the outer landscape around us, there are already shrines to an inner, sacred reality. It could be a statue, a plaque, a fountain, or so many other things. Each time you or someone else acknowledges the significance of such a place, its power as a portal to the unseen world all around us is magnified. Each time it is ignored, its power is diminished.

Where I live at Sunrise Ranch, the Little Chapel is such a place. We enter it often to chant and to pray. The story of its creation is legend. The Little Chapel was built by Lloyd Arthur Meeker and other early pioneers at Sunrise Ranch. They halted work on the project when they felt that there was more vibrational work that needed to be done by the little community that was present at the Ranch at that time. As the vibrational work progressed, the Chapel was completed.

Living in New York City years ago, the Empire State Building was a shrine to me. Each time I saw it I was reminded: “I live in New York City.” Looking at its classic architecture, I thought about how this was my city and, even with all its problems, I embraced it. It was a place where my grandparents had lived and where my father was born. It was a place where people from around the world have come to find a new life. New York City changed for me when I saw it that way. I prayed on its streets and worshipped in its parks and museums.

Perhaps reading these words has been a ritual for you that has transformed the place where you are sitting from just a place to

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some kind of chapel—a portal to a deeper level of reality that always surrounds us, but which can be obscured by the human penchant to fixate on the worries and concerns of the outer landscape. Who is

interested in refocusing their conscious attention so that, like Merlin, we gain the ability to walk between worlds?

David Karchere
dkarchere@emnet.org
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