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What Is Reality?

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What Is Reality?¹

John M. Lundquist

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The Real, or Reality, I take to describe the place where God dwells, the state of mind which he possesses, and the way he acts. I take the world, in the state of mortality it has known since the beginning of human history to be – in large part – the contravention of this reality, to be a place where God does not and cannot dwell, where his perceptions do not prevail, and where humankind acts in a way contrary to his desires. The primary question is and always has been: How to discover the mind of God.

Throughout history God has mediated his knowledge about the Real to humankind through various means: through dreams, visitations, and various degrees and forms of revelation to private individuals and to prophets. The scriptures contain an account of God's dealings with humankind and are a historical record of his revelations to prophets, or, in other words, of his transmission to them of knowledge of the Real.

It is my contention that the temple has been the means which, throughout history, God has used as the primary vehicle through which to pass on to humankind knowledge concerning Reality; that the temple is the paradigm *par excellence*, the pattern by and through which humankind has learned (1) where God lives (represented in the temple by the innermost sanctuary, the most holy place); (2) how one arrives there (the ritual process – rites of passage – the ordinances); and (3) what life there is like (a paradisiacal existence without evil and death, represented in the temple

by actual or artistically produced springs, lush gardens, trees of life, etc.).² It is in and through the temple that people have gained the greatest and most significant knowledge about Reality.³

In the biblical tradition, as well as in many – if not all – cultures of humankind which have known or still know the institution of the temple, a far-reaching commonality of architectural symbolism, ritual practices, and religious symbolism has been noted.⁴ Two features of this common tradition that are particularly relevant to my thesis here are that temple practices are revealed to prophets by God (the absence of prophecy within a religious community is commonly taken to be a sufficient explanation for the absence of full temple practices in that community)⁵ and that the central feature of the revelation is an architectural plan which is itself an imitation or a model of a temple which exists in heaven.⁶

I have stated above that Reality consists in part of the place where God lives. The innermost sanctuary of the temple, the most holy place, is a model on earth of the place where God lives. He does not live in the earthly temple's most holy place – this is clear from the Hebrew text of Exodus 19:18, 20, where the Lord descends out of heaven onto the mountaintop. He lives in heaven, the Real, but offers a glimpse into heaven through the earthly most holy place, where his presence is experienced by the prophet or the king on special occasions.

In or near the most holy place are arranged architectural and natural features which symbolize what I have elsewhere called "the Primordial Landscape": (1) the cosmic mountain (the most holy place of the ancient Near Eastern temple was thought to be located directly over the primordial hillock, the "Rock of Foundation" in the biblical tradition, the first ground to appear after the waters of chaos had receded, where earthly creation first took place; this hillock became the mountain, the archetype of the built

temple), (2) the waters of life, and (3) the tree of life.⁷ These features symbolize the beauty and pristine purity of creation and of God's dwelling, as well as the saving gifts of the temple. Ultimately, the temple and its symbolism represent the eternal life that is the main characteristic of Reality.

Heaven is, as it were, one vast "temple without walls," because God's presence fills that space, and the temple is, by definition, a *model* of the place where God dwells. But he does not dwell permanently in the earthly shrine. He reveals the knowledge of how it should be built (Exodus 25:8-9), according to the pattern of heaven itself. The highly organized contact with this earthly temple throughout history thus gives God's people knowledge of heaven, of the Real, and instills within them the desire to live ultimately in that place. They realize that this world is for the most part far removed from the Real, from the place where God dwells, from his perceptions and actions.

But how is the Real, or heaven, to be reached? The answer to this is to be found in the mountain, the archetype and prototype of the built temple. Exodus 19 points us conveniently and profoundly in the right direction. The way up the mountain involves ritual, or rites of passage, through which the prophet mediates knowledge of the Real to the people who have been prepared by this ritual to approach the holy place.

Initiation ritual is to initiate a journey to the center. In many of the great religious traditions of humankind, the gods are thought to live on a mountain, or to descend from heaven to a mountain, there to meet those who have made the arduous journey to the center to be instructed. The mountain is the center because it was the first place of creation, the central place in the universe from the perspective of the adherents of that religious tradition. It is the vertical pole connecting the heavens with the earth, the navel of the earth. To become one with God, one must

join him at the mountain. The journey to the mountain and the ascent of the mountain once one has reached its base are arduous, difficult, and fraught with danger and obstacles. Here we are introduced to the labyrinthine nature of initiation.

The journey to the center involves three kinds of movement: *around* (the practice of ritual circumambulation possibly originates in the necessity to circle around a mountain, as a process of reconnoitering, as one attempts to climb it), *up* (obvious), and *into* (moving ever closer to the center as one moves toward the summit). Herein we have the rationale for such temple complexes as Barabudur in Java—the initiate moves around, into, and up. These movements all find their origins in the very practical requirements of mountain climbing, which has always carried mystical overtones, even when viewed solely as a sport. If the mountain one is being asked to climb, as in Exodus 19, is perceived as the place to which Deity actually descends in order to meet with people, then the kinds of movement required to climb the mountain will themselves be enshrined and canonized.

One sees this clearly in connection with Mount Kailash in Tibet, the holy mountain *par excellence*, thought to be the site of the sacred mountain of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, anciently known as Mount Meru.⁸ The impetus to build sacred mountains, to erect structures that resemble holy mountains (the Old Testament Mount Zion in Jerusalem becomes likened to the mountain of God in the wilderness), will result in similar architectonic arrangements, imitating the topography of the mountain—this is so clear in the Hindu tradition of temple building—as well as the types of physical movement necessary to negotiate it: circumambulation, walking upward (the threshold of each successive section of an Egyptian temple rises in absolute level as one approaches the rear of the building),

and walking into the building toward the rear to the most holy place.

The difficulty of mortality, with its pitfalls and plateaus, is compared to the difficulty of climbing mountains, where the gods are to be found. Certain high points along life's path are commemorated and memorialized, formally and ritually, at the mountain and in the temple. Life for the religious person is an arduous journey to the center, with certain high points along this journey commemorated ritually through rites of passage: the passage to adulthood, marriage, introduction into the mysteries. The ultimate stage of one's journey, the ultimate rite of passage, is death. In the great formal canonical traditions—Hinduism, Buddhism, the ancient religions, many contemporary forms of culture (such as the American Indian), and to a lesser extent contemporary Christianity—this journey is commemorated in a physical way, in buildings with formal ritual. In the mystical variants of these traditions, the whole process is carried out in the mind of the traveler. The canonical traditions combine the physical with the metaphysical, the mystical traditions eliminate the physical.⁹

The temple is a visual representation of *all* the symbolism of the mountain, and thus the architecture reflects this symbolism in a thoroughgoing and repetitive way (e.g., the Pagoda structures of Indian, Chinese, Southeast Asian, and Japanese temple architecture, with the multi-level hipped roofs present on every building and gateway in the complex) and is a constant visual reminder that the visitor/initiate is engaged in a journey up a mountain, to heaven. It is this symbolism that we meet in Exodus 19-24: the difficult, arduous, highly charged, and dangerous (because of the sacredness of the place) preparations which must be gone through before reaching the point of readiness to receive knowledge about heaven, its ways and requirements.

Thus the purpose of life is to return to heaven, to the

Real. Knowledge of this place and its requirements is revealed periodically through prophets in temples. The laws, for example, are often revealed through a prophet or king in a temple setting.¹⁰ This process reveals the pattern of life: a difficult, arduous journey to the Real, assisted at various times by rites of passage that strengthen the person, leading, ideally, to even higher plateaus until the ultimate initiation, death, which will eventually bring the person into heaven itself. And here the *instructional* nature of the temple should be emphasized. The journey to the mountain, the ritual process, is accompanied by instruction about Reality which may take many forms: dramatic plays in which actors reenact the story of creation;¹¹ visual representations of the exemplary life and of life's course, as is the case of the sculptures representing the Buddha's life in the galleries at Barabudur;¹² verbal instruction, as was the case between Moses and the Israelites at Sinai (Exodus 19-24); or some combination of these.

During the historical existence of the human race the temple has offered a respite from the harshness and *unreality* of life, beckoning the devotee to partake of the waters of life which bubble up into the most holy place from the deep springs on which it is built (Ezekiel 47:1; Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:8; Psalm 46:5). Within a dark, misty, misleading world, the temple offers to the initiate a taste of paradise, so well exemplified by the formative dream, set in Liverpool, experienced by the great psychologist Carl Gustav Jung in 1927: After a difficult ascent to the top of a hill in a dirty, sooty city (Liverpool), he encountered "a broad square dimly illuminated by street lights, into which many streets converged." The city's quarters were arranged radially around the square. A round pool stood in the center of the square, thus creating the squared circle, the mandala configuration, indicating the location of the temple in the topography of the dream. A small island stood in the center of the pool. On the brightly illuminated

island, which stood out amidst the darkness that surrounded it, a magnolia tree stood. The tree seemed to be the source of light on the island. This combination of symbols, the "primordial landscape," provided for Jung the central message of his life, the central revelation: "Through this dream I understood that the self is the principle and archetype of orientation and meaning."¹³ He had reached the Center, the Real, the Ultimate, which provided him with the insight and strength to continue his life's arduous journey once he was no longer under the influence of the temple setting of his dream. As a matter of fact, as I have pointed out elsewhere, the main formative insights of Jung's life were all mediated to him either as a result of profoundly moving visits to temple ruins, such as the stupas of Sanchi in India, or in dreams that were saturated with temple symbolism.¹⁴

And why do people seek out this path amidst the difficulties and complexities of life? Mircea Eliade answers: "The profound reason for all these symbols is clear: the temple is the image of the sanctified world. The holiness of the temple sanctifies both the cosmos and cosmic time. . . . Religious man wants to live in a cosmos that is similar in holiness to that of the temple."¹⁵ The religious person wants to recover and return to heaven, the Real.

The paradigmatic nature and purpose of the temple is made clear in Paul's discourses on Christ's atonement and the temple in Hebrews 7-10. Each part of the Mosaic tabernacle is seen as a precursor to, and teacher about, the Savior. The ultimate holy place is clearly defined here in Hebrews 9:12, 24, and 10:19—it is the place where God dwells: "by his own blood he entered once into the holy place" (Hebrews 9:12), "but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24). Through his death the Savior passed into the presence of his Father, the real holy place of which the earthly is an imitation and a model. That there is a temple in heaven is

made clear in Revelation 11:19: "And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant." The temple on earth will continue to function during the Millennium, as is so dramatically demonstrated in Ezekiel 40-48, and in the chapters of Revelation which deal with the Millennium. The basic principle will still hold during the thousand-year reign of the Savior on the earth—the temple, with its most holy place, will serve as a reminder of the ultimate holy place, of the Real, of heaven where God dwells. But Revelation gives additional remarkable insight about heaven, the earth, and the temple. Following the resurrection and the judgment, "a new heaven and a new earth" are created, in which the heavenly Jerusalem descends from heaven to the earth, at which time God the Father himself will dwell on the earth with those worthy to be there with him (Revelation 21:1-3, 10). But now, in contradistinction to the historical plus millennial periods of the earth, when the temple existed as a copy on earth of the heavenly temple, a "piece of heaven on earth," there will no longer be any temple. The need for it will have disappeared with the presence on the renewed earth of the Father himself (Revelation 21:22). Heaven, the Real, will have been brought down to earth in the form of the New Jerusalem, and the entire city is now suffused with the saving, paradisiacal symbols that in the period of earthly history were limited to the rather smallish temple itself.

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb (Revelation 21:22).

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its

twelve kinds of fruit, yielding fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of nations (Revelation 22:1-2).

Thus, from the perspective of the scriptures, the world is a poor substitute for Reality, which is to be found in heaven, where God lives. Life's purpose is to return to this heaven. The difficult journey is made lighter by access to the temple, which mirrors Reality. Access to the temple is gained by rites of passage and by observing the laws of God, which themselves were revealed in the temple and are sanctified by it. The ultimate initiation, death, will, following the resurrection and judgment, bring the worthy into the presence of God, on an earth made heavenly by being turned into one vast temple. The symbol and its referent will merge into one. Reality will reign supreme.

Notes

1. Anyone in the scholarly LDS tradition who writes about the temple stands on the shoulders of Hugh Nibley, whose brilliance and personal example on this subject represent a beacon light to those who would follow. This article is a struggling attempt to show my indebtedness to the man who introduced me to this subject, and to the lifelong joy that its study has given me.

2. John M. Lundquist, "The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East," in Truman G. Madsen, ed., *The Temple in Antiquity* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 1983), 53-76.

3. I am taking an approach here which is remarkably close to, yet independent from, that of A. J. Bernet Kempers, "Barabudur: A Buddhist Mystery in Stone," in Luis O. Gomez and Hiram W. Woodward, Jr., eds., *Barabudur: History and Significance of a Buddhist Monument*, Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1981), 109-19. Kempers writes, for example, that "I frequently use in connection with Barabudur other words such as Reality (as opposed to the phenomenal world, the 'real' world of nonreligious people), Ultimate Reality, Absolute Reality, Totality" (p. 109). "The meeting of Reality and Man is a central element in many religions, in which, consequently, the most essential sanctuaries provide a meeting place for the Holy and the worshipper" (p. 111). "The sanctuary establishes as a fact that there is — always —

a relation between the world we live in and an Ultimate Reality which introduces meaning and certainty into our existence" (ibid.). "The major mystery expressed in Barabudur—both in its general layout, construction, and symbolism, and in its additional decoration and reliefs—is the meeting of the Holy and Mankind, enacted by the descent of the Holy—of Ultimate Reality, Totality—and the ascent of Man" (p. 112).

4. Hugh W. Nibley, "What Is a Temple?" and "Looking Backward," in Madsen, *The Temple in Antiquity*, 19-51; reprinted in CWHN 4:355-90. Lundquist, "The Common Temple Ideology"; John M. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology," in H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina, and A. R. W. Green, eds., *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 205-19.

5. Dennis J. McCarthy, "Covenant in Narratives from Late OT Times," in Huffmon, Spina, and Green, *The Quest for the Kingdom of God*, 90-94. See the comments by Yigael Yadin that were appended to David Noel Freedman, "Temple without Hands," in *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times* (Jerusalem: Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1981), 29.

6. Freedman, "Temple without Hands," 21-29; Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 211-12.

7. Lundquist, "The Common Temple Ideology"; John M. Lundquist, "Temple Symbolism in Isaiah," in Monte S. Nyman, ed., *Isaiah and the Prophets* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 1984), 33-55.

8. John Snelling, *The Sacred Mountain* (London: East West Publications, 1983).

9. For a good example of this latter point, see R. C. Zaehner, "Standing on the Peak," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 381-85.

10. John M. Lundquist, "Temple, Covenant, and Law in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible," in Avraham Gileadi, ed., *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration in Prophetic Thought: Essays in Honor of R. K. Harrison* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1988), 293-305.

11. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple?" 212-15.

12. J. G. de Casparis, "The Dual Nature of Barabudur"; Kempers, "Barabudur: A Buddhist Mystery in Stone"; Hiram W. Woodward, Jr., "Barabudur as a Stupa"; Alex Wayman, "Reflections on the Theory of Barabudur as a Mandala," in Gomez and Woodward,

Barabudur: History and Significance of a Buddhist Monument, 47-172. "The monument is only a framework for the sculpture": Jacques Dumarçay, *Borobudur*, ed. and tr. Michael Smithies (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1978), 31.

13. C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffe, tr. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Vantage Books, 1965), 198-99.

14. John M. Lundquist, "C. G. Jung and the Temple: Symbols of Wholeness," in Karin Barnaby and Pellegrino D'Acierno, eds., *C. G. Jung and the Humanities: Toward a Hermeneutic of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 113-23.

15. Mircea Eliade, "The Prestige of the Cosmogonic Myth," *Diogenes* 23 (1958): 12.