

H.P. Lovecraft's THE STRANGE HIGH MONASTERY IN THE MIST:

A Pilgrim's Guide to California's Hsi Lai Buddhist Temple & Shangri-LA's Western Paradise

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Los Angeles & Hacienda Heights:

In the early morning hours, a strange mist—and an ill-fated urban fog—slowly creeps up the I-10 corridor, northeast of central *Los Angeles*. Gradually, but inevitably, this mist—and smog—masses against the *Puente Hills* which overlook the community of *Hacienda Heights*. White and feathery it steadily ascends from the valley depths of this “**City of Angels**,” forever heavenward, longingly towards its brothers in the clouds.

California Dreaming:

Suffused with a multitude of hopes and fears—unconsciously originating from within the shadowy caves of the great leviathan *Nagaraja*—the collective dreams of millions of souls venture forth to shape the surrounding **California mindscape**. And later, during tranquil rains upon the homes of writers, poets, and visionaries, the clouds scatter precious bits of those dreams, so that mankind shall not live without rumors of mystical secrets and magical wonders. These inexorable *dreams* are no less than the wonderful and inspirational thoughts that “**heavenly messengers**” eagerly tell restless dreamers, during blessed hours of the night.

Shambala, Hsi Lai Temple, & The Great Western Paradise:

Thus, whenever tales fly thick amidst the palaces of these angelic *Devas*—within vast astral cities, chanting sacred melodies learned from the Elders—these boundless eager mists flock to heavens, laden with wisdom and lore. And skyward eyes, gazing upon the tile roofs of **Hsi Lai Temple**, see only mystic whiteness and pristine luminosity; as if the monastery's rooftop were the rim of the world. It is whispered that *Hsi Lai* temple protects a secret entrance to immortal **Shambala**—sometimes amusingly called **Shangri-LA**—and that, perhaps, it may even be the heavenly gateway to the Great Western Paradise, itself. Yet, most auspiciously—for Californians—these heartfelt *dreams* of profound *lucidity* are sometimes accompanied by the lovely bells of beautiful *Dakinis*, ringing freely throughout vast aethereal spaces, amidst a grand celestial hierarchy: truly, an infinitude of astral realms and alternate realities, beyond human understanding.

The Puente Hills & A Sacred Mountain:

Nowadays, within the community of *Hacienda Heights*, the **Puente Hills** climb loftier and more curious, terrace upon terrace, till the great **Hsi Lai Temple** hangs in the sky like a hazy frozen wind-cloud. Alone it stands, like the mystical point of **Mount Meru**, jutting into limitless space. For it is there that Buddhists turn heavenward—wherein this mystic temple pours out blessings for ALL peoples—bringing wonderful legends and utopian memories of **Shambala** to a fallen world.

A Stairway to Heaven:

The monks of **Hsi Lai** look up at this **mystical mountain**, as *Kalachakra* sages look up at the pole-star—that heavenly hub of the earth’s “**Great Wheel**”—and time the night’s watches by the way it hides or shows the Great Bear, Cassiopeia, and Draco the Dragon. Thus, among denizens of Los Angeles, that sacred temple (or ancient Buddhist **Stupa**) is ONE with the firmament! Though, it’s sometimes hidden from them when the mist—or smog—hides the stars and the sun.

An Ancient Buddhist Monastery:

Some mountains the LA natives love—such as those whose grotesque *letters* profile the hills of *Hollywood* or, perhaps, the always inspirational skyline of *Mulholland Drive*—but this one they regard with apprehension, because it seems so holy and nearer to heaven. Legend has it that ancient Chinese explorers wept and Spanish Conquistadors crossed themselves when they first beheld this sacred site. And, greedy old prospectors believed it would be a much graver matter than death to climb it, if indeed it were even possible. Nevertheless, there is a **Buddhist Monastery** on that lonely hill and, at evening, people see strange lights in its small-paned windows. Allegedly, that ancient temple has always been there—in one form or another—incredulously betraying all manner of historical explanation.

A Mysterious Tibetan Teacher—The High Lama of Leng:

And, people say that within this ancient temple dwells a mysterious **Tibetan** who communes with those sacred morning mists—which indeed arise from unknown, unconscious depths. Some even say, he sees singular things amidst *Meru*’s higher heavens—and within the forbidden dreamlands of *Kadath*—during those magical times when the monastery’s roof touches the rim of all earth, and its temple bells toll free in the white aethers of these dream-filled astral reaches.

A Pilgrimage Site & Buddhist Pilgrims:

These things they tell mostly from hearsay, for that forbidding temple is rarely visited—except by the most devoted of **Buddhist pilgrims**. In fact, LA natives hesitate to train telescopes on it or even to photograph it. Bolder visitors, however, have indeed scanned it with jaunty binoculars, but have never seen more than its massive terracotta roof—peaked and tiled—whose eaves come nearly to its foundations; and the dim yellow lights emanating from little windows, peeping out from under those eaves, at dusk. Ironically, most tourists don’t believe that the same old **Lama** has lived within that ancient monastery for hundreds of years; but, they cannot prove their heresy to any true Angeleno.

The “Terrible” Bon Protector:

Even the old **Bon Sorcerer**—who talks to leaden pendulums in bottles, buys groceries with centuries-old gold, and keeps primitive stone idols in the yard of his **Bon Temple** bungalow—can only say these things were the same when his grandfather was a boy. And, this must have been inconceivable ages ago, when Spanish overlords were the Governors of His Majesty’s lost Province of Alta California.

A Clueless Professor:

Then, one summer, there came a philosopher to Los Angeles. His name was **Christopher Kurth**; and he taught many ponderous things at the **University of Philosophical Research** (residing on Los Feliz Boulevard, next to *Griffith Park*). With his lovely wife and two romping sons, he came. Though, his eyes were weary with seeing the same things for many years, and thinking the same well-disciplined thoughts. Predictably—during these lonesome reveries—he often contemplated wistful “*California dreams*,” amid the pleasant mists of that stone-crowned summit of *Mount Lee*. And sometimes during these meditations, he tried to imagine that he could *astrally* project himself into their white world of mystery—particularly, whenever he visited the prodigious misty overlooks surrounding the beautiful *Santa Monica Mountains*.

A Secret Meditation Practice—*Dzogchen* or “Tibetan Zen” [See Appendix C]:

Morning after morning he would **meditatively** sit on those *Hollywood* cliffs and look out over the world’s rim at the cryptical *aethers* beyond; listening to spectral bells and wild cries of what might have been seagulls. Then, when the mists would lift—and the Pacific would stand out prosy amidst the smog of many impatient commuters—he would breathe deeply and meditatively descend towards *Hollywood Boulevard*, where he **mindfully** threaded the star-covered walkways, popularly known as the *Walk of Fame*. He would then climb up and down Hollywood’s famous hills—taking time, especially, to study the crazy tottering gables and odd-pillared doorway of a mysterious place called **The Magic Castle**. This secretive place is actually a cloistered magical academy; which has, in fact, sheltered many generations of starry-eyed magicians. He even talked with that terrible *Bon* sorcerer, who was not fond of strangers. Though, he was eventually invited into his fearsomely archaic cottage, where low ceilings and wormy paneling hear echoes of magical *evocations* from Tibet’s fabled *Book of the Dead*; as well as disquieting *Chod* exorcisms, in the dark small hours of the night.

Tales of The Great Buddhist Temple & its Secret Mandala [See Appendix B]:

Of course, it was inevitable that the Professor should take an interest in that strange Buddhist **Temple** amidst the clouds—resting upon the fortuitous uplift of LA’s nearby *Puente Hills*—which has, indeed, forever been one with the mists and firmament. Above the community of *Hacienda Heights*, it hung; and always, its mystery sounded in whispers throughout the whole of Los Angeles’ sundrenched houses, shining buildings, and busy highways. That infamous *Bon* sorcerer inevitably recounted the tale that his father had once told him: of a lightning bolt that shot, one night, upwards from that mysteriously peaked monastery and into the low-hanging clouds, which contained still higher heavens. And, Grandma Kurth, whose tiny Hollywood bungalow was completely covered in vines and ivy, whispered something her grandmother had heard second-hand: About shapes that materialized out of those wonderous mists, intentionally entering the hallowed inner precincts of its most sacred **Pagoda**—that is, within its private *memorial complex* located at the far, upper end of the temple. Allegedly, this place contains a secret **Mandala**—and astral gateway—that was purposefully set close to the utmost edge of the monastery—towards the sky—and glimpsed only by the most holy of monks.

A Terrible Resolve:

At length, being avid for strange things—and held back neither by his fellow Angeleno's apprehension nor by the summer tourist's usual indolence—Professor Kurth made a terrible resolve. Despite a disciplined upbringing—or, perhaps, because of it: for humdrum lives breed wistful longings for the unknown—he swore a great oath to finally brave *LA's* great eastern hills and visit that strange golden Temple in the sky.

Very plausibly, his saner-self had reasoned that this place must be tenanted by people who doubtlessly approach it from nearby *downtown*—along the lengths of the I-10 and the east 60 corridor. Though, probably they lived in *Hacienda Heights*; knowing how much the Chinese preferred habitation within their own community—and likely, being unable to find enough room within *LA's* central *Chinatown*.

Traveling to Hsi Lai Temple:

The Professor planned an indirect, circuitous route along the cliffs of the *Santa Monica Mountains*—thus avoiding the heavier traffic of the *California* freeways—eventually, out to where the *Puente Hills* rose up curiously to consort with celestial things. Contemplating this impending solitary journey, he was fairly sure that few westerners had tried to visit this place or to purposely intermingle with the local population. Nevertheless, eastward and south it rose—well over a thousand feet—to overlook the enormous valley of greater *Los Angeles*, so that only the date remained as an obstacle to his fateful pilgrimage.

One early morning in March—while residing in *Venice Beach*, near *Marina Del Rey*—Professor Kurth set out to find a path, unhurried and indirect, to that inaccessible pinnacle. He worked his way gradually eastward, along the *Hollywood Hills*, past the *Catalina Bar and Grill* and *Vibrato Grill Jazz Clubs*—popular hipster locales—where his friends would often meet him, whenever they visited *Los Angeles*. And likewise, whenever fellow travelers wished to tour the *Santa Monica Mountains*, which give such a lovely vista of *LA's* skyline—across the unseen course of the *Los Angeles* river below. Indeed, looking out over this great valley sat this seductive temple, high above its surrounding *urban sprawl*. Fortunately, he discovered several charming and shady roads twisting thru *Bel Air*, *Beverly Glen*, and *Holmby Hills*; but there was no real road in the eastward direction he wished—except of course, the high jagged ridgeline of *Mulholland Drive* itself. Wooded mansions and luxurious properties crowned these lofty peaks, perched there precipitously, overseeing all of *Hollywood* beneath. But, these strange mansions bore no sign of habitation, not even gardeners, nor straying vagrants; but only tall palms and giant trees—and tangles of *Oleander* and *Bougainvillea*—that even the first Spaniards might have planted.

As he traveled eastward, eventually passing *Universal Studios* and the famous *Hollywood Sign*, he slowly approached that strange high monastery in *Hacienda Heights*—gradually reaching ever nearer to the sky. Unfortunately, as he drove, he found the traffic more and more congested; till he wondered how the dwellers in that mysterious place ever managed to reach the world outside—and whether they came often to the world of ordinary men? Then, the traffic eventually thinned and far above him, on his right, he finally saw the hills and antique roof and spires of **Hsi Lai Temple** ahead.

Hsi Lai Temple [See Appendix D]:

The Temple was dwarfed from this vantage point, but he could just make out the roofline behind its freestanding **Main Gate** (beneath which, rumor said, unknown caves or burrows lurked). Ahead, lay a **Grand Staircase**. Above this was the monastery's **Central Gate**, resting on the rectangular hill of the **Monastic Cloister**—that mysterious place which carefully encircled the broad peak of the main Temple's **Buddha Hall**. The road abruptly ended, as Professor Kurth grew dizzy at his seeming loneliness amidst the clouds and sky. There, the road opened into a large, vacant parking lot. North of him was the frightful precipice, towering above the vast plains of *Los Angeles*; south of him, a vertical drop of over a thousand feet, emptying into the Los Angeles river. As he walked the encircling **road**, suddenly an abiding feeling of deep reverence—and even fear—washed over him; so that he had—unconsciously—let himself down by his hands and subsequently dropped to the ground in prostration. Thus, as he (uncharacteristically) abased himself, he nearly crawled up the stairs of Temple's **Sub-Gate**—in (unwitting) deference. Indeed, it was as though he had magically passed through some sort of portal or membrane—as if remembering a scene from a previous life. Unexpectedly snapping to his senses, he instantly understood that this was the way truly devoted pilgrims—ritually approaching the monastery—journeyed to this hallowed temple located precariously betwixt earth and sky!

Ritual Circumambulation—The Great Mandala & The Nine Levels of Consciousness [See Appendix B]:

When he finally gained his composure—and stood upright—a morning mist (and smog) was gathering. But, he could still clearly behold the lofty and hallowed **Temple** in front of him: Walls as sturdy as solid rock and a high terracotta peak standing bold against the milky white of LA's vapors. And looking for secondary access, he perceived that there was no entry on the far, closed-off end—namely, that secret gateway described in lurid tales about this place—but instead, only a couple of small lattice windows (with dingy bull's-eye panes) constructed in the ancient fashion. All around were clouds and soft tinkling bells, but he could see nothing except the whiteness of illimitable space. He seemed utterly alone amidst these Hacienda Heights, standing next to this strange but awe-inspiring Temple. Nothing seemed to be moving within the temple complex, and there wasn't a single car in its parking lot. After looking for closer parking in vain, he finally walked back around to the front—where he saw that the monastery's perimeter walls stood flush with resolute firmness, upon the hill's stony base—so that entry seemed impossible, save only thru the Temple's **Main Gate**. As he gazed upon this uncanny site, he felt a slight apprehension that mere novelty could not wholly explain. Likewise, it seemed to him very odd that tiles so ancient could still survive or that bricks so old could still form such a solid edifice.

As the mist thickened, the Professor overcame his initial reluctance, finally deciding to ritually **Circumambulate** the Temple: starting with the **North**—which symbolically represents humanity's "*five senses*"—and then, moving **West**—representing our "*sixth sense*" or "*conscious mind*"—and next, moving **South**—which represents a special "*seventh sense*" or our inner aspect of "*self-consciousness*"—and then, finally, moving to the **Eastern** side, which represents a mysterious "*eighth*" level, or our so-called "*collective unconscious*." As he ritually circled the enormous complex he tried each gate, but found them all locked. Paradoxically, he was vaguely glad that they were locked, because the more he saw of the monastery the less he wished to advance to that main **Central** place—symbolically representing that profoundly transcendent "*ninth*" level of mind, generally referred to as "*cosmic consciousness*."

Then a sound halted him. He heard a lock rattle and a bolt shoot open, and a long creaking followed as a heavy door seemed to cautiously open. This was obviously the monastery's **Central Gate**, built directly into the protective walls of the larger **Monastic Cloister**—and thus, standing further up the hill from the free-standing **Main Gate** and the still lower **Sub-gate**, near the mountain's base and encircling road. Alternatively, this main entry portal, standing at the very top of a massive flight of **stairs**, opened serenely onto a blank space of misty sky beyond—peering out and over the bustling city, far below. At last, there came a heavy, deliberate trampling from within the temple complex and Professor Kurth now heard the windows opening within the **Bodhisattva Hall**, at the very top of the grand staircase—first on the *north* side opposite him, and then on the *western* side. Next would come the *south* windows, under the great low eaves, on the side where he currently stood. Thus, they seemed to be emulating his previous ritual circumambulation, which he had fatefully concluded mere moments before. And, it must be said that he was all the more uncomfortable as he thought about this strange temple—on one hand—and this vacancy of vast ethereal space—on the other.

Strange Monks & The High Lama:

When a fumbling came in the nearer casements, he crept around to the *West* again, moving himself closer to the wall, beside the now open window. It was plain that the **monks** had just come home; but NOT from somewhere within the Temple, nor from any other place he could imagine. They seemed, rather, to have just suddenly appeared out thin air—as if dropped onto this spot by balloon or airship. At once, the Professor understood why so many weird tales had been whispered about the strange monks of **Hsi Lai Temple**.

Steps sounded again, and Professor Kurth then edged around towards the *North*; but, before he could find safe haven, a voice called out softly and he knew that he must confront his host, lest he appear to be an idiot or a common thief. Stuck out of the **Central Gate** was a great-bearded face whose eyes were, indeed, phosphorescent with the imprint of unheard-of sights. But, the voice was gentle—and of a quaint olden kind—so that the Professor did not shudder when a brown hand reached out to help him into the impressive **Entry Hall**—a large, open area filled with gilded **Bodhisattvas** and ornately carved furnishings. The man was clad in the ancient Tibetan garments of a Master Lama and had about him an unplacatable nimbus of lore and dreams. This was, of course, the **High Lama** of Leng, of which he had already heard so many fantastic stories about. However, much to the amazement of the Professor, this ancient Tibetan seemed as though he ALREADY knew EVERYTHING worth knowing about HIM—and that he had, in fact, been expecting him for a long, long time. How strange, indeed?

A Secret Initiation & A Profoundly Important Teaching—The Adi Buddha’s *Supreme Message*:

The Professor did not fully remember all of the wonders he was told—or shown—or even who the Lama truly was, but says that he was both strange and kindly, and filled with the magic of unfathomed voids of time and space. He does, however, recall that as the Lama spoke, he used unfamiliar words—namely, terminology and concepts that sounded like they belonged to an extremely remote past or, perhaps, to some *future* dreamlike existence. So, as he took on the sacred mantle of his own personal **Guru**, the High Lama subsequently **initiated** the bewildered Professor into the profound Buddhist teachings of the **Dzoga Chenpo Tantra**. Incidentally, this key scripture is also known as the **Kunjed Gyalpo Tantra**—or even the **Kulaya Raja Tantra** (in Sanskrit). Either way, this primary text makes up the universalist core of Tibet’s sacred Vajrayana tradition. Besides, all three translations amounted to the same thing—namely, the “*Tantra That Teaches the Great Perfection as Samantabhadra’s Unobstructed Awakening*.”

Writing these essential instructions down as soon as possible, afterwards; Professor Kurth—to the best of his recollection—has endeavored to recount these sacred teachings, thusly. Note however, that the **bolded** lines—in the brief text that follows—essentially provides the scripture’s central message; and thus, this is the most important part. So, **read these bolded lines first!** Conversely, the rest of the material is (likely) derived from the Professor’s own mind, mindset, and upbringing. [Note: Please re-read the previous sentence again—and then see if this additional material helps with comprehension, or not.] Remember though, every “revelation” is interpreted through someone’s own unique brain, body, and nervous system. So again, what follows is roughly an “interpretation” of this *sutra*’s vital nineteenth chapter—that is, the **Adi Buddha’s Supreme Benediction**—hailing from the very heart of the **Dzogpa Chenpo Tantra**.

Note: This sacred scripture has been graciously shared with the West, especially through the continuing efforts of several great teachers and translators—namely, **Garchen Rinpoche**, **Dzogchen Ponlop**, and **Chogyam Trungpa**—and more recently, by **Karl Brunnholzl** in his 2018 book entitled, **A Lullaby to Awaken the Heart**. In fact, all four of these sources have been *blended*—in the spirit of *East-West* interfaith study—for a “*re-interpretive*” explanation of this essential teaching. Or, as Brunnholzl *poetically* portrays this essential message—specifically, as ***A Lullaby to awaken both heart and mind***.

THE ADI BUDDHA'S SUPREME BENEDICTION

The All-Good Father SAMANTABHADRA's Divine Prayer, Blessing, & Purpose for Life²

<PART I.>

GOD AS THE SUPREME BUDDHA: THE ONE, TRUE, and UNIVERSAL MIND

behind all of humanity's religions, and found within all peoples, and amongst all nations—and known by a myriad of names, forms, and wondrous manifestations.

Everything, all appearance and existence, samsara and nirvana, has but ONE ground—a single unified ground, but consisting of two paths, and two results—with two very different fruitions, karmically.

It is the marvelous, even Miraculous, display of existence as awareness and wisdom—and thus, of enlightenment itself—representing the higher, noble path of the Bodhisattva or Saint—as contrasted with ignorance and non-awareness—resulting in an unfortunate, lesser path of incessant suffering, error-thoughts, and misdeeds.

Through the Aspiration and Divine Blessing of the SUPREME BUDDHA¹ SAMANTABHADRA, may all beings Faithfully awaken and become fully enlightened Bodhisattvas and Saints. And, through this profound enlightenment, may your mind-stream finally come to rest, and take refuge, within that emblematic sacred ground of the blessed Holy Temple—representing that tower-like citadel of permanent sanctuary—known as the Dharmadhatu. This Heavenly realm of the Dharmadhatu is therefore the ultimate reality, which is truly the infinite ground of absolutely everything else—both of manifest existence, or what is seen, as well as that which is un-manifested, or unseen. Namely, an everlasting realm—which lasts forever and ever.

This infinite ground of existence is, ultimately, un-conditioned, un-composed, and uncompounded—devoid of materiality and mere finite manifestation. Which, indeed, is the correct and true definition of both Divinity and Spirit.

Thus, this self-arising expanse of Universal Mind, or Buddha Mind, is inexorably beyond expression, having neither the names samsara nor nirvana—and hence, utterly beyond ordinary or conventional names and forms.

If you fully understood this—through a profoundly intimate and intuitive Knowing described as *prajna* or gnosis—you would instantaneously actualize your intrinsic Buddha-nature—namely, your inner pristine essence, also known as Vajrasattva or 'Christ within you'—and you would already be a completely realized Buddha or a fully Awakened One.

Not knowing this, you are a being who wanders lost in *samsara*—within a seemingly endless *karma*-bound cycle of delusion and suffering.

Pray that all beings—within the Threefold realms of existence—may come to this wonderful realization and, thus, intimately come to know and experience the true meaning of this inexpressible ground—namely, that One, Universal Mind of God—lying behind, and hidden within, all sentient and manifest existence.

THE *FATHER AND SON* RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ADI-BUDDHA AND HIS 'REFLECTION' AS THE INNER *CHRIST*-LIKE VAJRASATTVA GURU.

I AM ...the SUPREME BUDDHA—revealed here as **the ADI BUDDHA¹**, or **SAMANTABHADRA³**, or **Kungtu-zangpo**, or **Vajradhara**, or **Maha-Shiva**, or **a myriad of other Divine appellations**—and **I am the ONE who knows**, naturally, **the reality of this Holy ground, which is free of causation and conditions... An infinite ground that is**, astonishingly, **just the Self-arising Awareness** originating from the very depths of **Nature, itself**—and thus, emerging from within the natural world of so-called people, places, and things.

It is that ground of Pure Consciousness that remains unstained by outer expression or inner thought—by the flaws of either superimposition or denial—and therefore, is never defiled by darkness nor obscured by inhumane and even inhuman **mindlessness**.

Thus, **this self-manifesting display** of Creation—demonstrating an archetypal Father-Son (or Mother-Daughter) relationship with its Parental source—**is inherently UNobscured and unblemished—and thus totally free of all flaws or defects. Indeed, this inherent purity** Miraculously manifesting within the ordinary world **IS** the Mystical (and secret) meaning behind **VAJRASATTVA** or **CHRIST**—the celebrated revealer of the Vajrayana Sacraments—a Christ-like **pristine clarity, forever dwelling within** the sacred heart of **all creation**.

And, if self-awareness remains resting in this place long enough—as if meditatively drifting into the deepest sleep, while Miraculously remaining wide awake—**this I AM state will gradually arise and ultimately abide, peacefully and unassailable—essentially—as intrinsic or primordial awareness, itself.** That is, as an inherent potentiality within all of existence, **existing at the very heart of all beings**—sentient or otherwise. **Through this process** of gradual unfoldment and purified awareness, **we too can become co-creators**—or Sons and Daughters—**of the living and evolving universe—and thus enlightened beings**, abiding always in a Mystical state of Oneness with God.

With this Revelation firmly in place, **there is nothing to fear—even if all the threefold worlds** were to suddenly and unexpectedly **be destroyed**.

There is nothing—and really, no thing—to fear and, ultimately, no attachments either. Indeed, **there is not even** a lasting **attachment to the five desirable qualities of the senses**—and to their pleasurable, but addictive sense objects, **which seem so central to** our ordinary, everyday **life**.

Indeed, **in self-arising Consciousness, free of all limiting thoughts and normal conceptions, there is neither solid form nor the troublesome five poisons of the *samsaric* round—just the bliss of initial wonder and final accomplishment. And also, a profound gratitude and lasting appreciation of the Magical dance and play (or *lila*) of blissful existence**—namely, of the Cosmic expression, **in-between the incessant creation and the destruction**—or the Alpha and Omega—of the universe—and yet paradoxically, that **of an otherwise everlasting Being**.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS THE FIVE ARCHANGELIC WISDOMS

...AND THE HEAVENLY HEIRARCHY⁴ OF THE FIVE BUDDHA FAMILIES.

Amidst the unceasing lucidity and clarity of pure Awareness—single or, at least, non-dual in essence—there yet intuitively arises the Archetypal display of THE FIVE WISDOMS. Remember, however, that these five Wisdoms are just separate and spontaneous manifestations of but ONE inherent and fully unified nature.

Gradually, through the Peaceful but inevitable ripening of these Wisdoms, FIVE Archetypal BUDDHAS naturally arise—and as a normal consequence, all the subtle attributes inherent within their respective BUDDHA FAMILIES likewise, gradually, manifest. Thus inexorably, according to an elaborate Heavenly hierarchy, the following Angelic beings inevitably emerge. First and foremost, the Supreme *Central* ‘White Buddha’ MAHA VAIROCANA (or Metatron). Second, the Great *Eastern* ‘Blue Buddha’ AKSHOBHYA (or Michael). Third, the Secret *Southern* ‘Yellow Buddha’ RATNASAMBHAVA (or Uriel). Fourth, the Great *Western* ‘Red Buddha’ AMITABHA (or Gabriel). And, fifth, the *Northern* ‘Green (or many-hued) Buddha’ AMOGHASIDDHI (or Raphael). Then—through the gradual expansion and Holy edification of each of these Archangelic Wisdoms—all forty-two of the PEACEFUL BUDDHAS finally manifest and subsequently, fully, emerge—each according to their given natures.

Likewise, through the inherent self-arising Power and energy of these Archetypal Wisdoms, the sixty (blood drinking) demonic or WRATHFUL HERUKAS also manifest.

However, despite this seeming appearance of duality, the ground of Awareness is always—at its core—ultimately never mistaken ...or wrong ...or confused ...or deluded.

I AM the PRIMORDIAL BUDDHA—the ADI BUDDHA—the first and the original Buddha of All that truly exists. I AM—as the Supreme Mind of Nature—simultaneously before, behind, and inextricably intertwined within this existential and Self-Aware universe. And through my aspiration and heartfelt blessing towards all living things, may all beings who wander in *samsara*’s tripartite realms, realize this natural Holy and wholly intuitive Self-arising Awareness! And thus, may your wisdom expand, and ever increase, and ultimately come to completely fill and uplift the universe—thereby, finally bringing this aspiration to accomplished fulfillment.

My emanations are unceasing and will thus continuously and forever manifest in billions and billions of inconceivable and unimaginable ways. Appearing in various helpful Heavenly or Angelic forms—thus manifesting in whatever peaceful or wrathful prompting is necessary—in order to help tame, train, guide—and ultimately, to enlighten all sentient beings.

Through my compassionate aspiration, may all beings within *samsara*’s three great realms—without exception—learn to permanently transcend these six states of *samsaric* delusion and suffering.

THE ADI BUDDHA'S SUPREME BENEDICTION

The All-Good Father SAMANTABHADRA's Divine Prayer, Blessing, & Purpose for Life

<PART II.>

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE ...& THE WAY OF TRANSCENDENCE.

From the very outset, you must **realize that most sentient beings are actually deluded because they do not recognize the intrinsic Awareness of this infinite ground—namely, the universal Consciousness** which supports and essentially animates the (so-called) material universe. **This fundamental** obscurity—being so obviously unmindful of what actually occurs—is, precisely, the very definition of **delusion**, ignorance, and unconsciousness. Indeed, it **is** exactly the state of ignorant **unawareness itself, and the chief cause of going astray.**

Next, **from this unconscious and deluded state** there slowly emerges a dim, shadowy cognizance of **primordial terror** and fear—an existential crisis, with profound emotional angst. And accordingly, from this indistinct cognition of underlying fear, **there arises a gradual separation of the so-called self**, from everything else. **And finally**, the almost inevitable **perception of others as the 'enemy'**—now, appearing real to this haplessly deluded 'self.'

Eventually, **through** the persistent intensification of **this unwholesome mental habit**, this tendency towards **'egoistic' separation** gradually **strengthens**. **And thus**, from these predictable *karmic* sequences (of thoughts and events), the round of **samsaric existence** inexorably **begins** to turn against this alleged 'self.' **This 'ego' crushing round of emotional and physical, suffering is** rightly called **the WHEEL OF SAMSARA**. Alternatively, in the West, this phenomenon is more popularly known as **'The Wheel of Fortune.'**

As a consequence of this seemingly inescapable round of suffering, **the so-called toxic kleshas of negative cognition and emotion inevitably emerge**—at **first**, merely a confused state of **Delusion** (a primordial ignorance regarding the true nature of consciousness), **then** the seemingly instinctive habit of fear-based **Avoidance**, which is subsequently **combined with** an equal and opposite **addictive** compulsion towards perpetual **Craving**. Eventually, **this threefold (or tripartite) habitual pattern** finally **develops into the** well-known set of **Five Kleshas**—otherwise **known as 'the human condition.'**

Unfortunately, over the course of a human life, **these typically negative states—the familiar Five Poisons—seem** not only **inevitable**; but also, apparently unceasing!

Consequently, you **beings** thusly **lack awareness, and suffer** in a senseless haze of ignorance, simply **because you are fundamentally unmindful of the true ground of existence**. And this—again—is ultimately the reason why you continually go astray.

Through my aspiration and prayer, may all beings finally **come to recognize your** inner, intuitive, and **intrinsic Awareness**. Unmistakably, **it is your innate un-awareness—this underlying cognate of ignorance and habitual delusion—which un-fortunately translates into such a tragic state of perpetual un-mindfulness—and all manner of distracted cognition!**

THE WHEEL OF SAMSARA & 'SAMSARIC' EXPERIENCE

OR THE SIX REALMS OF SAMSARIC CONSCIOUSNESS & 'CONDITIONED' EXISTENCE.

This unawareness of the true nature of existence **leads, inevitably, to the false labeling of things and events as somehow OTHER than oneself. And thus,** because of this fundamental ignorance, human perception naturally **tends towards dualistic and even antagonistic thinking**—and ironically, an addictive (but paradoxical) clinging to both self and others.

Both of these types of ignorance and unawareness—that is, **this initial underlying condition of ignorance, as well as the additional habit of dualistic labeling—is** consequently, **the central basis** for the inevitable confusion and delusion of all beings. Namely, of everyone existing under the crushing spokes **of the** so-called **samsaric Wheel—whether temporarily manifesting as,** or within, the **security-driven** realms of the **Animals**, the **power-driven** realm of the **Ashuras**, the pleasant **cornucopia-rewarded** heavens of the **Devas**, the **anger-filled** realms of **Hell Beings**, the **sensation-hungry** realm of the **Pretas**, or **hopefully** within the **love-nurtured** humanity of our fellow **Human Beings** (after all, Humans are 'social animals' and love is the glue that holds humanity together). Unfortunately, as a necessary consequence of our negative thoughts and behavior—and thus, as perpetual victims of such (self-inflicted) negative karma—samsaric beings tend to drive this experiential wheel ever downward, often towards a horrible Hell-like existence—and not only individually, but also collectively!

Through the Adi Buddha's prayer and aspiration, may all beings wandering in samsara **clear away this** thick, **dark fog of unmindfulness** and may the unfortunate obscurity of ignorance, hatred, and craving be dispelled. **Clear away** these clinging **thoughts of duality** and, thus, may this dualistic cognition be rightly understood and clarified through profound and perfected Wisdom. Again, may you finally come to **recognize your own intrinsic Awareness**, which has—paradoxically—**always been whole and complete, unto itself.**

'EGO' & PERSONALITY ...AS THE 'FOUNDATION' & HUB OF THIS WHEEL.

[Yesod, Heb.]

Know then that **if you do not clear away this veil of IGNORANCE, you will be utterly lost in a haze of dualistic thought.** Eventually, these dualistic—and antagonistic—thoughts will tend to create a miasma of **crippling doubt and confusion.**

Thus, from the emergence of this 'EGO'-based PERSONALITY—a dualistic turn of mind, which basically drives the Wheel of Samsaric existence—latent dualistic tendencies gradually but inevitably manifest and eventually come to full fruition. Accordingly, many destructive habits subsequently develop. Especially, an emergence of—**subtle and gross**—clinging and **attachment to people, places, and things—both consciously and unconsciously—**within our everyday waking, dreaming, and even transpersonal lives.

[Note: The underlying *klesha* of *ignorance*—and its accompanying self-absorbed '*egotism*'—pervades not only the foundation and central hub of this so-called *samsaric* wheel, but also pervades every spoke-like extension of this subsequent round of experience (and/or realms of existence). Transcending this unenlightened round of confusion and suffering—and fleeting pleasure—entails finding a 'stairway' or path up, out, or beyond this realm of *karmically* conditioned existence. Finding such a wondrous path (of enlightened freedom)—without arguing about the apparent reality or unreality of these 'conditioned' experiences—is what Buddhism is all about.]

HUMAN EXISTENCE ...of **fellowship and brotherly LOVE** (...and conversely, hate as well).

[*Tiferet*, Heb.]

Attachment to food, wealth, clothing, travel, home, friends, companions—the five **desirable objects** of sensation and perception—obviously, and quite **naturally, develops** within every human being. While often **motivated**—at least initially—**by** a profound sense of caring concern, fixation on **personal needs and the needs of our beloved family and social relations** gradually becomes more and more central to our daily lives. However, all **these HUMAN needs ultimately** cause us torment by inevitably **creating** a plethora of intensely **ADDICTIVE** longings and **DESIRES**, not to mention aversion and **FEAR-based concerns—or even worse, ANGERY reprisals**—specifically, whenever things don't go our way. Obviously, none this behavior proves beneficial to anyone.

Of course, **these are** all the temporary and mundane confusions, and worldly delusions, that are **naturally a part of the HUMAN REALM of existence**. However, since humans are intensely social beings, whenever **HUMANS are behaving at their best** they tend to offset any lesser negative traits **with** natural **benevolence, charity, and LOVE**. Indeed, this natural heartfelt fellowship and essential loving-kindness occasionally **provides** humans with **a glimpse of higher states of consciousness**—and more significantly, the key to transcending this addictive plane of existence altogether.

Unfortunately, most **HUMAN activities** are **usually centered on ADDICTIVE DEMANDS**—both **Grasping at desirable things and Avoiding undesirable things**. **And**, whether seen as positive or negative, **these 'addictions' are** of course **endless**. **Consequently**, there is no end to the subsequent **karmic actions**—either mental, verbal, and physical—surrounding this sort of dualistic experience and highly **conditioned psychic existence**. **Therefore, the Human realm often** (paradoxically) **serves as a sort of launch pad to other** kinds of experience—or **'realms of existence'**—typically **places** and **'head spaces'** **not nearly as happy** as this precious Human birth.

HUNGRY GHOST-like EXISTENCE ...as a **fixation on SENSATION** and desire.

[*Hod*, Heb.]

When the fruition of **clinging attachment ripens**, you beings are automatically and instantaneously **born**, and reborn, **as HUNGRY GHOSTS—or PRETAS**—and are, thereafter, subsequently **tormented by CRAVING, COVETING, and various forms of maddening DESIRE**.

Miserable, starving, thirsty, voracious, and relentless, **how sad is their pitiful experience of unending hunger and thirst**—of ultimately **unfulfillable human cravings?**

Through the Adi Buddha's prayer, **may** all you **DESIROUS and LUSTFUL beings, who suffer strong attachments, neither reject craving desire nor accept clinging attachment** to these desires. **Rather**, simply **let your consciousness relax into its own, intrinsic natural state**. Just **let go of this compulsion so your awareness can naturally abide**—again, taking its own pristine and natural place—**and thus, be able to hold its own against ADDICTIVE CRAVINGS**. **Hence, may you then achieve the perfect WISDOM of right DISCRIMINATION and may perfect discernment ultimately be attained**.

HELLISH EXISTENCE ...of intense ANGER and HATRED.

[*Malkhut*—specifically, the broken *Klippot* or ‘hellish realms’, Heb.]

Whenever the external objects of dualistic perception appear—with all its attendant antagonistic thoughts—a subtle cognition of FEAR-based consciousness also inevitably arises. This stirs up much danger and many profound troubles for both the self and others.

Through this latent tendency of fear—and habit of fixated AVERSION—a gradual unfoldment of HATRED ripens and, thus, an intense and focused ANGER begins to grow. Consequently, **this seething cauldron of RESENTMENT, ANGER and HATRED—inevitably—becomes ever more powerful—**subsequently, hijacking both the intellect and any positive emotions.

Finally, intense ENMITY and open HOSTILITY inexorably manifest openly, inevitably causing emotional viciousness, vilification, and violence—sometimes even blatant killings and murder.

When the fruition of violent AVERSION, ANGER, or AGGRESSION finally ripens, you beings will inevitably suffer in your own self-generated HELLS. And as such a HELL-BEING, you will suffer from a vicious boiling and burning ANGER and unending thoughts of REVENGE. Of course, **this is totally destructive to both self and others;** and, obviously, this is no way for humans to live.

Through the Adi buddha’s prayers, **may all beings, in the six realms, take head when strong ANGER arises—neither accepting, nor rejecting it. Instead, calmly relax into the tranquility of your own intrinsic, natural state—**neither adopting nor rejecting things—and seek to achieve the WISDOM of TRANQUILITY and the perfect CLARITY of a blameless lucidity. **Thus, may calm abiding—and a blissful return of perfect harmony—once and for all, break the chains of conditioned suffering—**freeing us to ultimately rise out of this pit of useless anger and despair.

HEAVENLY DEVA EXISTENCE ...or CORNUCOPIA-like abundance and enjoyment.

[*CHesed*, Heb.]

Whenever your mind becomes inflated, haughty, and full of PRIDE, there will arise a not unpleasant attitude of grandiosity and thoughts of success and superiority towards others.

As this PRIDE is born—and becomes ever stronger—you beings will, eventually, experience the frustrated suffering that comes from inevitable criticism, quarrels, struggles, and disputation. That is, despite a magnificent—but fleeting—air of confidence, superiority, and success—and a seemingly everlasting state of pleasure and personal power.

So, **when the results of dedication and good karma ripens, you beings are born, or constantly reborn, into the heavenly realm of the DEVAS—namely, the friendly godlike OLYMPIANS or the Archangels and Angels of myth.** And while this superiority, abundance, and satisfaction will—for a time—be immensely pleasurable, even these beings eventually come to experience transition, suffering, and change; and, finally a prideful relapse and downfall—thus, ultimately falling into lower realms of conscious existence.

Through the Adi Buddha’s prayer, **may those blessed beings who develop superior feelings of PRIDE, arrogance, and inflated minds, learn to let consciousness simply relax into its own natural state.** Let go of grandiosity and let your awareness abide so that it will be able to hold its own, in equanimity. May you thus achieve the perfect WISDOM of EQUALITY—and a true and lasting measure of mutual satisfaction and contentment.

WRATHFUL ASHURA EXISTENCE ...or the fixation of the **POWER**-hungry Titans.

[*Gevurah*, Heb.]

Through increasing the habit of **dualistic perception**—by praising yourself and denigrating others—the **competitive and quarrelsome mind will lead** inevitably to a state of constant **JEALOUSY** and competitive **STRUGGLE**. And through this unremitting struggle of **continual fighting and pain**, you beings will be reborn as an **ASHURA**—or one of the assorted **Titan-like** or **Demonic beings** of Greek and Indian **mythology**. Namely, **born into the** so-called **JEALOUS-god realm of the WRATHFUL TITANS**, where there is much **killing, injury, and mutilation**.

From the **overwhelming karma of all this violence** and killing, you beings will—eventually and **inevitably**—fall into the lowest **HELL realms**, as a natural consequence; **plunging into** ever **lower and lower states of increasing torture, suffering, and despair**, upon descent.

Through the Adi Buddha's prayer and aspiration, **when thoughts of contentious STRUGGLE, COMPETITION, RIVALRY, or JEALOUSLY arise**, do not grasp or repel them as enemies. Just **relax this habitual ENMITY and let your consciousness gradually abide, with ease**. Then, **let this air of pristine consciousness simply hold its own inherently pure and blameless state**. Thus, may you **achieve the liberating WISDOM of unobstructed ACHIEVEMENT and enlightened ACTION**—and a true sense of success, celebration, and **everlasting accomplishment**.

ANIMAL-like EXISTENCE ...of relentless (instinctual) **SURVIVAL** and **SECURITY** concerns.

[*Netzach*, Heb.]

By being **mindless, indifferent, distracted, careless, and apathetic**, all beings become **lazy, dull, foggy, forgetful, and bewildered**—that is, **essentially unconscious**.

However, **by being brutish and intellectually lazy**, you beings increase your **IGNORANCE**—thus, **eventually fixating solely on instinctive SURVIVAL and SECURITY concerns**, like thoughtless animals.

Thus, the unfortunate **fruition of this STUPIDITY will likely cause you to wander** around **helplessly and bewildered in an 'animalistic' state** of consciousness—and accordingly, **you will fall into realms of ANIMAL existence** as a result. This inferior situation is a **careless squandering of your precious human birth**, and no way for an intelligent human being to live.

Through the Adi Buddha's prayer and aspiration, **may all beings who have fallen into this dark pit of IGNORANCE—and UNCONSCIOUS bewilderment—be rescued** from this hapless state.

May the shining light of lucid mindfulness arise and help you to ultimately **achieve true WISDOM**—free of ignorance, compulsion, and divisive thought.

THE HOLY TRINITY_(OR TRI-UNITY) & THE SIX SPHERES OF 'CONDITIONED' EXISTENCE

ALL BEINGS, in all the **Threefold Realms**—namely, reality expressed as coming from either the Divine Father, the Holy Spirit, or this material realm of Sonship—are **potentially** identical to Saints and **Buddhas**—thus **equal to myself**—that is, **within the infinite, universal ground of sentience, memory, and conscious awareness** which Mysteriously permeates all three.

But, in your mindless confusion—and lack of understanding of this *true* ground—you beings become deluded and therefore go astray. So, heedlessly, **you engage in pointless actions—**meaninglessly **acting without real aims.**

Indeed, **these six karmic actions cause nearly constant BEWILDERMENT and DELUSION**, as if you were inhabitants **existing merely within a dream.**

I AM the Primordial Buddha—the first and foremost Buddha—always **here to tame, to teach,** and to train **all** these six types of **beings, through my countless emanations and diverse manifestations.** **Through unlimited blessings and beneficent prayers, I AM**—and will always remain—**your ever-constant light and faithful guide**—even during the darkest hours of depression or despair. **Through this Supreme Benediction, may all beings—without exception—awaken and ultimately attain enlightenment.** And therein, **may everything and everyone finally transcend suffering—and thus, eventually, awaken into the heavenly Dharmadhatu** at the very heart of existence.

A HO! Amen!

IMITATION OF GOD ...& THE WAY OF THE SAINTLY *YOGIS* AND *YOGINIS*.

Hereafter, and **from now on, whenever a very powerful *yogi* (or *yogini*)—with his (or her) lucid awareness and constant wakefulness:** thus, **radiant and free from bewilderment and delusion—recites this very powerful prayer and makes this extremely potent Aspiration,** then **all who hear it will likewise fully awaken** and achieve complete enlightenment—**potentially, within three lifetimes.**

During events such as a **solar or lunar eclipses, or during** unfortunate **catastrophes, or at solstice times, or the new or changing year,** you should **arise, visualize, and seek to evoke the Supreme Adi-Buddha.** Further, always **try to fully embody the universal I AM presence of Samantabhadra.** And if you **pray loudly, and recite this so that all may hear, then all beings—within all of the tripartite realms—may be freed and finally liberated from suffering.** That is, not only the existential suffering of our fellow human beings, but also the ever so subtle suffering of the godlike and angelic beings—not to mention, the obviously grosser forms of suffering felt by nearly everyone and everything else.

All this is achievable through the heartfelt prayer of a realized meditator and accomplished *yogi*. **Through the Adi-Buddha's Supreme Benediction,** and equally through the *dharma* efforts of the universal brotherhood of the true *yogin* (namely, that vast and helpful Buddhist *sangha*, residing nearly everywhere) **may all who wish swiftly attain enlightenment** and thus finally become *Buddhas*. **And through this force of enlightened activity—and, thus, ever-increasing happiness—may all beings likewise eventually achieve enlightenment, as well!**

THE MORAL OF THE STORY (AND OF THIS SCRIPTURE):

Whether or not you believe in the theological reality of the Adi-Buddha scripture—or its metaphysical realms of “afterlife” existence—**there is no denying that we actually reincarnate into these conditioned emotional realms** during the course of our normal waking (and dreaming) lives. In fact, we may even “reincarnate” into each and every one of these **conscious-emotional states** within the course of a single day—that is, second by second, minute by minute—from one hour to the next! Such is the **psychological reality** of our conditioned (*samsaric*) existence. Alternatively, Buddhism provides an enlightened path for potentially navigating these **existential** realms—with an ever-increasing **ethical** skill, **meditative** tranquility, and **philosophic** wisdom—thus, a providing truly liberating alternative to our normally chaotic and addictive existence!

Professor Kurth tried, as best as he could, to remember still more details of what he had been taught, but no further information disgorged itself from his feeble recollection. However, he did remember that the small **initiation chamber**—with its wide encircling **mandala**—seemed to glow somehow from a dim astral light. And, the Professor noticed that the far windows to the east were not open, but rather shut tightly against the misty aethers (encased within dull panes, like the bottoms of old bottles). And, that his bearded host now seemed amazingly young and energetic, but forever looked out from ancient eyes steeped in elder mysteries. And from epic tales of the magnificent things he related, it must be guessed that the California natives were—indeed—right in saying he had communed with the mists of the heavens and the clouds of the sky—ever since there was a town to watch this silent dwelling, from the distant valley below.

And as the day wore on, the Professor listened to still more rumors of olden times and far off places. He even heard how the kings of **Shamballa** had fought with blasphemies that wriggled out from the shadowy rifts of outer space. And, how the unspeakable pillared temple of **Hastur** is still glimpsed, at midnight, by lost souls—who unfortunately knew, by its sight, that they were truly lost. The past aeons of the **Elder Ones** were recalled. But, the host grew timid whenever he spoke of the dim first age of chaos, before the gods or even the Elder Ones were born: namely, *'when the Outer gods came to dance on the peak of Hatheg-Kia, in the stony desert near Ulthar, beyond the river Slai.'*

It was at about this point that there came a knocking on the door: That ancient portal of nail-studded oak, beyond which lay only an abyss of white mist. The Professor started in fright, but the bearded man motioned him to be still, and tiptoed to the door to look out through a small peephole. What he saw he did not like, so he pressed his fingers to his lips and tiptoed around and shut and locked all the windows—that is, before finally returning to that ancient **meditation seat** beside his guest. Just then, the Professor saw—lingering against the translucent squares of each dim window, in succession—an ominous black shadow, as this unwanted caller moved inquisitively about before eventually leaving. He was glad his host had not answered its meddlesome knocking. For there are many strange things in that great astral abyss—and the seeker of dreams must take care not to stir up or meet with the wrong ones!

Mists began to gather. First, little furtive ones under the table, and then bolder ones in the dark gilded corners. The bearded man made an enigmatic **gesture of prayer**, and then ritually lit tall candles in curiously wrought candlesticks. Frequently he would glance at the door, as if he expected someone. And at length, his glance seemed answered by a singular rapping, which must have followed some ancient or secret code. This time, he did not even glance through the peephole, but lifted the great oak bar and shot the bolt, unlatching the heavy door—flinging it wide open—thus, exposing both of them to the stars and mists of this great astral void.

Then the subtle sound of obscure harmonies, found therein, gradually floated into the room—namely, from the same boundless and archetypal depths that ALL dreams and memories of earth’s denizens originate. And, golden flames seemed to emanate from these aethereal beings, so that the Professor was dazzled—as he did them homage. Great **Maha Vairocana** was there, surrounded by his four **Conquering Buddhas** and their colorful entourage of **Bodhisattvas**. There, upon **Vairochana’s** crown, was balanced a vast and rainbow-streaked seat; wherein resided the blissful and awe-inspiring form of the Supreme **Adi Buddha**—Lord of the Infinite Abyss. Next, conchs from an attentive assemblage of learned **Knowledge-holders** gave weird blasts. And, beautiful **Dakinis** made strange sounds by striking grotesque resonant skulls and bones—originating from unknown lurkers, in dark ashen caves.

Finally, a resplendent and graceful **Vajrasattva** reached forth a helpful hand and lifted the Professor—and his host—into this vast Cosmic **Mandala**, where conchs and gongs set up a triumphant and awesome clamor. Thus, out into these limitless aethers, reeled that fabulous train: The noise of whose exultation was lost on earthlings, amongst echoes of Indra’s thunder...

* * * * *

All thru night—indeed throughout all of Greater Los Angeles—city folk curiously watched that lofty hill—that is, whenever the storm and mists gave glimpse of it. And toward the small hours of the morn—when the monastery’s windows finally went dark—they whispered of dread and disaster. Likewise, the Professor’s children and beautiful wife prayed the appropriate prayers of Catholic orthodoxy; and hoped that their lost traveler would borrow an umbrella, lest the rain be stopped by the morning light. Then, dawn swam dripping and mist drowned out of the Pacific. And buoys tolled, while sailboats bobbed solemnly in subtle vortices of these misty white aethers. At noon, when ethereal dakinis rang out over the ocean, Professor Kurth—dry and light-footed—safely descended from that mysterious monastery on the hill. And at long last, he finally returned his family residence: Except now, he had the look of far-off places in his eyes.

He could not recall all of what he had dreamed in that sky perched temple—and of that still nameless Lama—or even how he had found his way down that strange hill, by a path untraversed by others. Nor could he talk of these matters at all—save with the terrible Bon Sorcerer—who afterwards, mumbled strange things in his long white beard: Vowing that the man who came down from that hill was not the same man who went up. Moreover, that somewhere under its terracotta-peaked roof—or amidst those inconceivable reaches of mysterious white mists—there still lingered the immortal spirit of that strange and curious Professor.

And ever since that day—through the dull dragging years of orderliness and weariness—the philosopher has labored and eaten and slept and done—uncomplaining—all the suitable deeds of a citizen: Not any more does he long for the magic of farther hills, nor sigh for secrets that peer like sacred messengers from bottomless depths. The sameness of his days no longer gives him sorrow and well-disciplined thoughts have grown enough for his imagination. His good wife waxes older, but ever more beautiful; and, his children grow older and wiser and more useful. What is more, he never fails to smile appropriately—with proper pride and joy—when the occasion calls for it.

Likewise, in his knowing glance there is no more restless agitation. And, if he ever listens for solemn bells or inexplicable astral horns, it is ONLY at night—when dreams go wandering. He has never again visited that strange high monastery amidst LA's mystical clouds and sky; for his family disliked city living, and complained that the traffic there was impossibly bad. They now have their own terracotta-roofed sanctuary, where few city folk dwell—and where the neighbors are similarly older and tend to keep to themselves.

But, in Los Angeles strange tales still abound. And, even the Old Bon Sorcerer admits a thing untold by his grandfather. For now, when the wind sweeps boisterously out of the north—past that high ancient monastery (which is still one with the firmament)—there is broken, at long last, that ominous and brooding silence—ever before, the bane of fearful Angelenos. And, local folk tell of pleasing voices heard singing there—of a laughter that swells with joys beyond earthly joys—and say that, at evening, the little low windows are brighter than before. They also say that a fierce aurora oft comes to that spot, shining emerald-like in the north—and with it, a satisfying vision of accomplished perfection. And nowadays, that wonderous Buddhist temple hangs ever brighter and more fantastic—against a backdrop of wilder speculations of a new age. And, the mists of the golden dawn sometimes grow thicker nowadays. And, sailors are not quite sure that all the gentle seaward ringing is merely that of solemn buoys.

Though, most noticeable of all is the shriveling of old fears, especially within the hearts of younger Angelenos. Indeed, these youth grow ever more prone to listening, at night, to the north wind's faintly distant sounds. Moreover, they swear no harm or pain could possibly inhabit Hsi Lai Temple, for in these new voice's gladness beats—and with them, the tinkle of laughter and music. What tales these mists may bring to that haunted and eastern pinnacle they do not know; but now, they long to extract some hint of the wonders that knock at that monastery's cliff-yawning door—particularly, when the clouds are low and at their thickest.

Conversely, ordinary Californians listen with ever more dread—lest someday, one by one, the youth seek out that inaccessible peak in the sky. And thereby, learn what ancient secrets hide beneath that steep terracotta roof (which is one with the mists and stars). This seems to unfortunately multiply the hopes and fears of those distracted and unhappier denizens of Los Angeles. That those venturesome youth will come back they do not doubt; but, they fear a light may fade from their eyes, and a worldly will from their hearts. Thus, they do not wish for Los Angeles—with its incessant drive for success (and aspirations of social climbing)—to be dragged listlessly down the years; while voice by voice, this laughing chorus should grow ever stronger within that unknown and mysterious eyrie. That is, within that awesome and mysterious place where mists—and dreams of mists—stop to rest, on their way to still higher heavens.

Likewise, they do not wish the souls of their youth to leave the pleasant hearths and bungalows of downtown Los Angeles; nor do they wish the laughter and song in that rocky high monastery to grow any louder. For, as the voices which have come have now brought fresh mists from the west and new lights from the north; so, they say, that additional voices will bring more mists and more lights. Till perhaps, the Ancient Ones—whose existence they hint at only in whispers of fear (less the church parsons should hear)—may come out of the depths from unknown Kadath—from those icy wastes of Leng—and thus make their dwelling on that strange place—an abode so very close to these Los Angeles heights and the great valley below.

This they do not wish: For, to ordinary people, things not of this earth are simply not welcome. And besides, the terrible Bon Sorcerer often recalls what the Professor once said about a knock that this lone dweller feared. And of a fearful shape seen, black and inquisitive, from this strange astral abyss—conspicuously, through those old translucent windows.

All these things, however, the Elder Ones—alone—may decide. Meanwhile, the morning mist still comes to that lovely vertiginous peak—to that high ancient monastery, where seemingly none are ever seen—but, where the evening’s furtive lights suggest, and the north wind eagerly tells of strange revels within. White and feathery the mists come—from the wish-filled hearts of dreamers, to its brothers in the clouds—full of bright visions of paradise, originating from unknown and unconscious depths.

And, when tales fly thick within the realms of these ethereal Dakinis
—and conchs, within vast astral cities, blow wild tunes learned from the Elder Ones—
then, great eager vapors flock to heaven, laden with lore....

And, Los Angeles
—uneasily nestled within its wide vale,
standing auspiciously below that great eastern ridgeline—
sees ever skyward only a mystic whiteness,
as if that Temple’s rim were the rim of all the earth.
...As solemn temple bells toll freely
within the vast cosmic aethers of that wonderful California Dreamland....

H.P. Lovecraft's *THE STRANGE HIGH MONASTERY IN THE MIST*:

Rewritten by Rev. T. Christopher Kurth

Lovecraftian Mysteries:

Howard Phillips Lovecraft has often been referred to as the new American Poe. If you think of Lovecraft as a 20th-century update on the Gothic Horror and mysterious Classics of Edgar Allan Poe, then you'll truly understand what Lovecraftian terror is all about. However, H.P. Lovecraft also introduced Science Fiction—and even some genuine scientific knowledge—into the traditional horror and mystery genres. As the century progressed, this new style of writing came to be called Weird Fiction. While less respected by so-called serious writers, weird fiction is actually quite close to a more sophisticated literature known as Magical Realism—a genre that is quite popular today.

Lovecraft, however—while avidly writing about the supernatural—always claimed to be an atheist. Though, he did admit that the apparent realities of religion were probably connected to an afterlife continuation of our dreams and dreaming life—that is, after our physical form had dissolved back into the natural elements. This is why nearly half of his corpus is concerned with his Dreamland mythos. Although not nearly as well-known as his Cthulhu mythos, these obscure dream-based works are, in fact, very suggestive of eastern shamanism—particularly, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

Lovecraft & the Occult:

However, this is where H.P. Lovecraft's story truly gets weird! A few people have actually learned the terrible facts behind Lovecraft's strange vision of life, death, and The Beyond. Apparently—as Lovecraft himself later admitted—there is much more TRUTH lying behind his strange tales than anyone ever realized.

More incredible still, Lovecraft was allegedly initiated into these mysteries by a suspicious occult organization; which apparently revealed much of their secretive history—and magical workings—to this young, aspiring writer. Moreover, he was even encouraged to write about what he had learned—just so long as he claimed that everything they revealed to him was fiction. Evidently, this exceedingly ancient brotherhood—sometimes referred to as the *Dugpas* of Tibet—had decided that it was time for humanity to finally grow up and face the hard truths of existence—namely, that humanity was definitely not alone in the universe. And, that our universe—or multiverse—is actually far stranger than we ever imagined. However, in order to achieve this somewhat dubious enlightenment, humans had to first be exposed to these ideas gradually—so as not to cause widespread hysteria and panic. Then, once these ideas had been effectively introduced into our mass consciousness, men of science would come to realize that much of what had been formerly thought of as mere Science Fiction was actually quite real and indisputably true—Cthulhu's existence, for example. Ironically, Lovecraft was THE MAN this clandestine Order chose for such a peculiar but extremely important mission. And of course, this is why this long dead writer of existential horror is so significant today!

But, don't take my word for it. Just listen to how I learned the bizarre truth behind Lovecraft's tale *The Strange High House in the Mist*. Spoiler alert: It's completely true—only these mysteries are not just found in New England. Los Angeles, California, is also one of these strange places! But I'm getting ahead of myself. First, let me explain to you how I discovered *The Strange High Monastery in the Mist*.

THE ADI-BUDDHA'S ...GREAT UNIVERSAL MANDALA⁴: The One Truth, behind the many.

I'll finish this rather esoteric explanation with a brief discussion regarding my two-pronged **approach** to both Buddhism and interfaith study—(one) **secular** and (the other) **sacred**. This is sort of a **modern** reversal of the 'step-by-step discourse' described by the Buddha—that is, Buddha started with **religion** and, then, (gradually) worked towards **psychology**. However, my initial approach is **secular**—that is, scientific and psychological—in the tradition of **Aikizuki Ryomin's New Mahayana**. Then, after the Buddhist terminology and discourse becomes more comfortable, my focus starts to shift towards **Jungian** and **Tantric** mysticism—specifically, **East-West interfaith** study or a **New Vajrayana**.

I must confess, I think that **Carl Jung** may be the single most important **psychological** thinker in the entire Western philosophic tradition. Moreover, I've also gone far down the rabbit hole with regards to the Jungian **Archetypes**—i.e., what most people refer to as **angels** and **demons**. However, remember Jung's central axiom: Just because these 'entities' may be (primarily) psychological in nature, doesn't make them any less real (personally). Or, in other words, simply because we can't 'see' someone's demons, doesn't mean that they aren't still suffering in their own private hell.

So, I'll finish with a list of **Universal** favorites—unifying **East** and **West** into one great, universal **mandala**. Indeed, this was the original meaning of the word 'Catholic.' And, this universalist or 'perennial wisdom' was ultimately the goal of Jewish Kabbalah, as well:

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(= Kabbalah's **Blue** Father **Ayin** + **White** Mother **Eyn Soph**).

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...also, **White** Male + **Pink** Female **Avalokiteshvara**—**Gabriel** as '**The Annunciator**.'

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Beelzebub = **Black Shiva** 'The Destroyer' = **Mahakala** (Center Down).

Lucifer = **Vajrakila** 'The Tester' (Center Up + Downward ...central axis).

'Earthly' **Jesus** = A 'Worldly' **Nirmanakaya Buddha** (much like **Gautama**, himself).

APPENDIX A: **EXPLANATORY NOTES** ON “*THE GREAT ASPIRATION OF THE SUPREME BUDDHA.*”

THE ADI BUDDHA¹: The Sanskrit word **Adi** simply denotes that which is “First,” “Original,” “Primordial,” or “Supreme.” However, in the context of Vajrayana Buddhism, it importantly characterizes THE foremost honorific title of “**The Most Holy and Supreme Buddha**”—that is, the **Adi-Buddha**. Trying hard to avoid the metaphysical and regressive paradoxes surrounding the words ‘first’ or ‘original’—as well as the thorny theological issues surrounding the word ‘supreme’—the concept of the **Adi-Buddha** rightly refers to the primary, the deepest, and thus, the most profound TRUTH that can be said about existence!

And, what is this truth? Well, perhaps a notion borrowed from medieval alchemy explains this rather paradoxical idea best. Hermetic philosophers—the enigmatic Alchemists of bygone days—have always claimed that whenever scientists go looking for the most fundamental substance (or the most basic form of ‘Matter’) they will, much to their amazement and chagrin, discover that it is actually none other than MIND itself—moreover, it was always this vital intelligence staring back at them, all along. In other words, the quintessential *Prima Materia* (or so-called ‘First Matter’)—postulated by both physicists and philosophers—is ironically, really nothing more (or less) than CONSCIOUSNESS itself!

Although this playful metaphor is essentially poetic, rather than being a clear and concise scientific explanation; it beautifully captures the central idea behind the teachings concerning the **Adi Buddha**. Besides, we are essentially trying to talk about things that are truly infinite—and, INFINITE in every possible sense that word entails! So, other than a profound mystical insight (usually attained only through sustained meditative contemplation); poetic analogy may prove to be the best approach to this difficult metaphysical conundrum (and still deeper theological mystery). Indeed, it has been said that inspired art—that is, Art as ‘archetype,’ ‘poetic truth,’ or ‘mythopoetic literature’—is the genuine handmaiden to all TRUE religion. Ironically then—as the great Neo-Platonic and Tantric sages have always maintained—whenever you find one, the other is always close at hand. This may be the principal reason why the so-called secular world still remains transfixed by “the Good, the True, and THE BEAUTIFUL.”

THE SUPREME BENEDICTION²: Short of enlightenment itself, this penultimate Blessing (from the *Dzogpa Chenpo Tantra*) is God's wonderful message of inspiring "encouragement"—given freely to all, throughout all the realms of existence. Namely, it is God's supreme GOSPEL or "God-spell"—or, rather, His "Good News," intended for the edification of all beings. It is often translated and variously defined as "Supreme Desire," "Ambition," "Objective," "Goal,"—or more precisely, "**THE GREAT ASPIRATION OF THE SUPREME BUDDHA.**"

Viewed from a Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Christian perspective, this message simply refers to **God's Plan, hope-filled blessing, and ultimate goal** for His 'creation.' Interestingly, in Tibet, the Supreme Buddha—the **Adi-Buddha**—is personified as *Kun-tu zan-po* and is literally translated as the "All-Good Father." This idea seems, surprisingly, similar to a Judeo-Christian conception of God—especially, whenever God is described as resembling a 'Beneficent FATHER.'

However, from an orthodox Buddhist and Hindu perspective, it (somehow) seems wrong to call God—or the **Adi-Buddha**—the 'Creator' of the universe. This is because, according to Vajrayana Buddhism, the universe has always been here—at least in one form or another. So, the use of words like 'creator' and 'creation' seem a little problematic (at least for some theologians). Again, trying hard to avoid the thorny problem of 'infinite regress,' Hindu and Buddhist sages—as well as some Neoplatonist, Kabbalistic, and Christian mystics—have suggested that it is rather more accurate to view God and the Universe as co-extant (or in some way deeply co-existent). Likewise, according to the esoteric teachings of Jewish Kabbalah—after first "making room (or 'space') inside Itself"—God, then, organized (or 'created') the universe within the very CENTER (or 'belly') of His (or Her) own being.

In a similar fashion, Vajrayana Buddhism tends to view God—or more accurately 'Universal MIND'—as merely the flip side of the natural, material universe. That is, as not only the 'Mind behind nature'; but more precisely, the Self-Conscious aspect of the universe reflexively INTERTWINED within the (so-called) 'material' aspect. This profound insight—which is so accurately described in cognitive science (and artfully symbolized as a sacred 'Knot' in Tantric iconography)—is a rather important notion; which can in fact be found in all the various schools of Buddhist thought. Accordingly—at its essence—mind and matter are seen as intimately co-dependent and thus (may) continue to co-exist, in this tightly interconnected way, forever and ever.

In Tibet, this intimate interconnection is beautifully (and very conspicuously) personified as God (the 'Father') and Goddess (the 'Mother') in ecstatic—and perpetual—SEXUAL union (that is, throughout much of Tibet's sacred Tantric art). Moreover, since Buddhism grew out of the cultural milieu of ancient India, much of this teaching also applies to Hindu Vedanta—not to mention the nearly lost traditions of Himalayan, Mongolian, and Siberian Shamanism.

Perhaps, like in these earlier animistic religions, this is why the **Adi-Buddha** cannot help "**blessing**" our universe—namely, because the 'Universe' is actually God's 'body' and we are all merely playing our part (like 'cells' within some vast intergalactic super-organism) existing here (and there) and now (and then) within the overall backdrop of some immense panpsychist playground. So, while this may make for a long footnote, it's important to always keep this idea in mind—namely, the idea of 'co-dependent arising'—whenever reading anything about Buddhism. In fact, 'Tibetan Zen' or *Dzogchen* gurus claim that a true understanding of co-dependent arising is crucial to our eventual—but inevitable—enlightenment. Copyright © 2020 by T. Christopher Kurth

SAMANTABHADRA³: This is the original Sanskrit title for the **Supreme Adi Buddha** adopted by the first and oldest Tantric school in Tibet—namely, the *Ningma-pa* sect of the ancient Himalayan Vajrayana tradition. Incidentally, this Deity is symbolically depicted as completely naked and *royal blue* in color. Without getting into a (potentially controversial) history lesson, **Samantabhadra** (actually pronounced **Kung-tu zang-po** in the Tibetan language) is essentially the Tantric Buddhist equivalent of Hinduism's **Maha Shiva**—that is, the 'Ultimate Reality' or the **Supreme BrahMAN** of Hindu Shaivism (a yogic sect reaching back to the very beginnings of Indian spirituality).

Again, without getting into the various technical differences between Buddhism and Hinduism, **Maha Shiva**—especially when combined with His 'female manifestation' or **Shakti**—is necessarily at the very heart of all things 'Tantric.' According to Tantric scriptures—known simply as *the Tantras* (in both Hinduism and Buddhism)—**Shiva** personifies the 'Primordial Mind' behind Nature; whereas the **Divine Mother, Shakti**, characterizes and embodies the energetic force (or primordial power) driving the manifest universe.

In Hindu and Buddhist Iconography, this Primordial **Shakti** is typically visualized as *pure white* and (in accordance with contemporary interpretation) 'She' would (seem to) symbolize the blinding white flash of the 'big bang'—namely, the 'Womb-Matrix' of our evolving and unfolding creation (ironically, the sexual pun is especially apropos here, given the context; not to mention, the blatant sexuality present in most Tantric art). To state this a bit more succinctly, **Shakti** represents the orderly, organic, and essentially continuous emergence of Mind amongst (and even against) the background forces of material entropy.

The whole point of this metaphysical and iconographic system is that (at least in our present reality) you never find **Shiva** without also beholding **Shakti**—and more often than not, vice versa. Thus, in Tantric art **Shiva** and **Shakti** are regularly shown in intimate sexual **union**—the *pure white* creative **Mother** embracing the *deep blue* **Fathering** principle—forming a **sacred** (six-pointed) **star** ...or the ubiquitous *yantra* symbol (not unlike the Jewish 'Star of David'). Ultimately, the Divine play of **Mind** and **Matter** is THE central idea—and the openly glorified 'secret'—behind all the various forms of Tantrism, whether found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, or even Sufism.

Interestingly, this essentially 'Tantric' conception, also seems to be central to Jewish Kabbalah, certain forms of Christian mysticism, and Hermetic philosophy as well. In fact, these same ideas were likewise predominant within the Platonic and Neoplatonic academies (consider for example, the 'Ladder of Love' doctrine), not to mention being the foremost secret hidden behind the Greek Mystery traditions (namely, that Eros was actually considered to be Phanes—i.e., 'The Most Supreme Being'). Apparently, this spiritual and iconographic tradition is unbelievably old! Some scholars claim that it can be traced all the way back to the **stone age**—in fact, to the exact prehistoric **origins of religion** itself. This is probably why the **Adi Buddha** teachings are (rightly) considered to be incredibly ancient; even though, at least historically speaking, most Buddhist *Tantras* are of a relatively recent date. Specially, most of the Tantric teachings were written down about a thousand years ago. However, stone age petroglyphs seem to positively confirm their derivation from a prehistoric antiquity.

Although **Shiva** and **Shakti** have always been considered to be inextricably joined as a single, indivisible Sanctified **Unity**, each Deity has sometimes been worshiped separately—that is, within the ancient yet ever evolving milieu of Indian religious practice. For example, Hindu **Shaivism** is primarily centered on **Shiva** (who, among other things, symbolizes complete renunciation of worldly attachments). While conversely, **the Divine Mother** is the popular focus of India's **Shakti** cult (the 'Great Mother' Persona, who brings worldly blessings and Divine intercession for her many children—not unlike Judaism's 'Holy Shekinah' or Catholicism's 'Mother Mary'). Yet, even when one particular Deity is chosen as the primary focus of devotion, the other one is still present—even if only residing hidden in the background.

More often, the male and female forms of 'the One God' are simply used interchangeably (and this was appreciably long before our more modern notions of equality, feminism, or political correctness). Interestingly, in the *Great Perfectionist* literature of Tibet, the male and female symbolism is often switched, proving that it is the central Tantric idea of interrelatedness that really mattered (not sexuality or gender identification). Incidentally, the **female form** of **Samantabhadra** (or **Kung-tu zang-po**) is called **Samantabhadri** (or **Kung-tu zang-MO**), and it is **Her** name that is actually used to indicate the Supreme **Adi Buddha** in the original Evens-Wentz rendition of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

Comparably—as if in some inexplicable form of clandestine communion with Indian and Buddhist Tantrikas—Jewish Kabbalistic writers sometimes had the gender symbolism also suddenly switch—specifically, the **male** symbol changes from a *deep blue* (representing 'primal Mind') to *white* (indicating seed action & compassionate effort) and the **female** changes from a *pure white* (or the *light* of inception) to *red* (indicating *carnal* incubation & the inner-nurturing potential of the womb). All this happens symbolically, as creation characteristically moves from the Divine Spiritual and Intuitive Realms (of *Ratzon* and *Atzilut*) and into the lower Intellectual, Emotional, and Physical realms (of *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Assiyah*)—namely, as all this is carefully described in Hebrew Kabbalah.

Again, as if underscoring the primacy of this PERENNIAL story, these seemingly Archetypal ideas—combined with a surprisingly consistent iconography—seem somehow identical, even though they allegedly originated from very different locations and historical circumstances. Consequently, either Carl Jung's ideas regarding a 'collective unconscious' help to explain these remarkable similarities or, perhaps, there was much more communication (and hence, cultural exchange) via the silk road, than historians currently admit—of course, both explanations could be simultaneously true. Nevertheless, this Kabbalistic and Hermetic symbolism is so similar to that of ancient India and Tibet, it is hard to believe that there wasn't some form of direct communication between these divergent cultures. Either way, the idea of **Father-Mother God** can—unquestionably—be found (somewhere) within all human religions (even within those that claim to not be 'theistic') and that situation is not likely to change any time soon—that is, so long as human sexuality remains central to our continued existence as a species!

APPENDIX B: **THE ADI-BUDDHA'S ...GREAT UNIVERSAL MANDALA**⁴: The One Truth, behind the many.

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APPENDIX C: LAMA SURYA DAS & **DZOGCHEN MEDITATION** (a.k.a., *TIBETAN ZEN*).

Abbreviated Meditation Session (Source: A guided meditation from the Lama Surya Das meditative training manual, *Natural Radiance*):

*“Now, let’s focus on the main or ‘central practice’ of the Luminous Great Perfection of the Dzogchen teachings, themselves, called **Natural Meditation**. So, to begin with, after finding a comfortable seat, simply **BREATHE**. **Basic awareness**—especially, *breath awareness* or ‘breathing meditation’—is the most basic Buddhist meditation practice.”* This was Buddha’s own technique for attaining enlightenment, in this very lifetime—hence, *“we can’t do without it.”* Moreover, the Tibetan Dzogchen tradition uses the age-old ‘yogic technique’ of **Breath Awareness** (originally called *Anapanasati* in Pali) to harmoniously integrate Buddhism’s three main **Meditation** disciplines—namely, **Right Effort** (*Vayama* in Sanskrit & Pali), **Right Mindfulness** (*Smriti* in Sanskrit or *Sati* in Pali), & **Right Concentration** (*Samadhi* in Sanskrit & Pali)—in careful accordance with Buddha’s Eightfold Path (*Marga* in Sanskrit).

[Note: Read this guided meditation—which follows here, below—very, very slowly.]

Right Effort at training the five aspects of **Mind** in ‘**Positive Thinking**’ (or the five *Skandhas* in Sanskrit)—i.e., the ‘**Yes Man**’ approach):

*“Breathe, relax, and **smile** a little bit. ‘Smiling relaxes every bone in your body,’ as Zen master Thich Nat Hahn says. How delightful it is to be effortlessly happy, mindful, and calm.”*

Right Mindfulness towards the **Natural Body** (i.e., *Nirmanakaya* in Sanskrit; *Malkhut* & *Guf* in Kabbalah & esoteric Christianity):

First, *“bring mindful **awareness to the Natural Body**, to simply commence *this method of ‘natural meditation.’*”*

a.) **Right Mindfulness** towards ‘Outer’ **Bodily Sensations** (i.e., *Rupa* in Sanskrit; *Muladhara* Chakra; *Hod* in Kabbalah & esoteric Christianity):

*“Feel the more obvious **physical sensations**. Feel the butt sitting on the meditation seat, and any sensations you may feel in your legs, your knees, your back, your stomach, your chest, your shoulders, your neck, your face, your forehead, and your scalp.”*

a.) **Right Mindfulness** towards the **Subtle, ‘Inner’ Body** (i.e., *Rupa-Vedana* in Skt.; *Svadhishthana* Chakra; *Netzach* in Kabbalah & Christianity):

*Now, “tune-in a little and see if you can discern a little pulsing—not just of your breath, but of your metabolism, your pulse—at your wrists, in your groin, in your armpits, or in the temples of your head. Tune-in to the **subtle vibrations, energy, and sensations** of the physical form—the **inner body** and its subtle movements and **energy**—bringing you more in touch with the present moment, this moment, the only moment, right now.*

d.) **Right Mindfulness** towards **Mental Objects** of ‘Outer’ **Personality** (i.e., *Samskara* in Skt.; *Manas* Chakra; *Yesod* in Kabbalah & Christianity):

*“**Now-ness** is the essential Zen-like moment of Dzogchen. Just sitting, **mindfully—letting go** of the body and the physical sensations—letting it be, relaxed, and at ease, on your Buddha seat.”*

b.) **Right Mindfulness** towards ‘Lower’ **Feelings** (i.e., *Vedana* in Skt.; *Manipura* Chakra; *Gevurah* in Kabbalah & esoteric Christianity)

& the **Higher Emotions** (i.e., *Anahata* Chakra; *CHesed* in Kabbalah & esoteric Christianity):

*“**Let go** of your physical and **emotional struggles** and let Buddha do it, through you—just hand it over, surrender. Here, there’s nothing more for you to do, achieve, or figure out. Having arrived at the Great Perfection, just leave it as it is, and rest the weary heart and mind.”*

c.) **Right Mindfulness** towards the **Mind** (i.e., *Samjna* in Skt.; *Vishudda* Chakra; *Binah* in Kabbalah & esoteric Christianity)

& the **Higher Intellect** (i.e., *Ajna* Chakra; *CHockmah*—or ‘*Sophia*’—in Kabbalah & in esoteric Christianity):

*“**Realizing** the Natural great Perfection, **mentally see through everything** and choose to remain free, complete, and at home—luminous and unhindered.”*

e.) **Right Mindfulness** to the **Inner Conscious ‘Essence’** (i.e., *Vijnana*; *Surya* or *Hrit* Chakra; *Keter* in *Tiferet* in Kabbalah & Christianity):

*“Just **sitting, just breathing, and just being**—these are the three crucial points of Natural Meditation. Just sitting with the **Natural Body**—the *Nirmanakaya*. This is the **Buddha Body** of perfect embodiment (resting in the *Hrit* Chakra). Let it be—just sitting—with its innate perfection.”*

Right Mindfulness towards the Emotional-Reward Body (the **Samboghakaya** in Sanskrit;
Spiritual Assiyah-Yetzirah-and 'Lower' Beriah in Kabbalah & esoteric Christianity—i.e., the seven lower *Sefirot*):

*“Second, shift this mindful awareness to the breathing. **Natural Breath and Energy** is the Buddha’s Breath and Energy—the **Samboghakaya**, the **Enjoyment Body**, the **Energy Body**. Just breathing—let it come and go, let it be. Not breathing hard, not retaining your breath, let it flow like the tides—like the waves in the sea. Let the waves come and go, washing everything away. Breath is life—inspiration, expiration. **Spirit is life**—let it go, let it be, just breathing, natural breathing. Just sitting, just breathing—natural body—and natural breath and energy.”*

Right Mindfulness towards the **Transcendental Body** (the **Dharmakaya** in Sanskrit;
Atzilut & Ratzon in Kabbalah & esoteric Christianity—i.e., the upper three *Sefirot*):

*“And, third, Natural Heart-Mind. **Natural Mind** is Buddha’s Heart-Mind—**Dharmakaya**—Ultimate Reality, the **Totality**. Let it be. Let it go. Let it settle. Let it be. Mind—luminescent, vividly present—yet, not a thing—transparent, yet cognizant. In its own way, and in its own sphere, let it be. As water becomes clearer when you stop stirring and shaking it—and the mud naturally falls to the bottom (and its innate clarity emerges on its own)—the **innate** clarity and **lucidity** of the mind emerges when you stop stirring and shaking it with mental fabrications and conceptualizations... And, just let it be!*

Right Concentration:

*“Let the mind become more and more **calm** and **concentrated**—clearer and clearer—settling in its own sphere, in its own natural way.”*

Asana (Posture):

*“Let the **Body** settle—in its own way, its own place, and its own time—through just sitting.”*

Pranayama (Breathing):

*“Let the **Breath** and energy settle in its own way, its own place, and its own time—through just breathing. Natural flow, let it go, total flow, pure energy—with wonder and amazement, **EMAHO ...YES!**”*

Pratyahara (Centering):

*“Nothing more to know, thus turning within, let the heart-mind become naturally **Centered** and settle in its own way, in its own place, in its own time.”*

Dharana (Concentration):

*“Naturally focused and steady, **Concentrated** mind is Buddha mind—EMAHO. Your own mind is Buddha Mind—as it is said, wonderful!”*

Dhyana (Meditation):

*“Just **Meditatively** sitting, just breathing, just being. This is the inner meaning of the Triple Gem—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha—supporting the inner refuge of the **Dzogchen** meditator. Just relying on that, trusting on that—just **sitting**, just **breathing**, just **being**. Thus, letting everything else go, as it goes, and simply be—as it already is, in the natural state. This is the natural way of the **Natural Great Perfection**—the luminous, innate completeness of things, just as they are.*

Samadhi (Meditative Ecstasy—Transcendent, Nondualistic Experience):

*“Buddha said that there is **Nirvanic** peace ...in everyday things ...left just as they are.*

Integrated Meditation:

Right Concentration:

“Calmly leave it as it is, and rest your weary heart and mind,”

Right Mindfulness:

“Mindfully seeing through everything,”

Right Effort:

*“Remaining **Positively** unencumbered, luminous, whole, complete, and totally free.”*

Integral Meditation:

*This is the **integrated** practice leading to **insightful realization**—in essence, the **intentional** actualization of **inner peace** and **freedom**—which is always free and available.*

Re-Mindfulness (Satipatthana in Pali; **Smriti-upasthana** in Sanskrit):

*“If the mind wanders, as it habitually does—if you feel distracted, agitated (or for that matter, bored, dull, vague, or spacey)—gently use the leash of **re-mindfulness**. Remember what you are doing and bring the attention back to the present moment—to just **sitting** and **feeling** the physical **sensation**—or just **breathing** and being aware of the inhalation and exhalation, as they move in and out. And thus, just **being** personally present [in the *Skandas*]—[e.] consciously **wakeful** [Vijnana], [d.] **mindful** of one’s mental objects [Samskara], [c.] mentally **attentive** [Samjna], [b.] feeling **calm** [Vedana], [a.] energetically **clear** [Rupa-Vedana] and physically **grounded** [Rupa].”*

*“Thus, [e.] consciously use the leash of **re-mindfulness** to bring your **attention** back to the [d.] **objects of attention**—to [a.] what you’re **doing**, to [b.] how you’re **feeling**, and, [c.] what you’re **mentally paying attention to**: Namely, [a. ‘outer’] **sitting**, [‘inner’] **breathing**, and just **being** [a. thru e.]—then, let everything else go, as it goes, naturally. Let everything go by—let past thoughts and preoccupations go by—let future fantasies, plans, and imaginings go by. And let go of even present concerns and doubts—wondering what’s the good of it all, or what’s happening, or why are we doing this—and let it all just settle.”*

Anapanasati (Pali) **Concentrative Breath Meditation** (& the **AHHH Mantra**):

*“Whenever the mind wanders, merely re**focus** and place the **mind** on the **breath**, on the physical sensations. Observe the inhalation, while breathing in—follow it all the way in. Ride the breath all the way in and let everything else go. And, observe the exhalation, while breathing out—ride the breath, follow the breath all the way out. Watch it go—all the way out—and let everything else go. Releasing a little more with each outbreath—a little ego death—with each outbreath, letting go of it all. What a relief—AHHH!”*

Right Concentration:

*“Breathing in—calming, clearing, **relaxing**, and energizing the body, heart, and mind;”*

Right Mindfulness:

*“Breathing out, **letting go**, dropping tensions, and everything else;”*

Right Effort:

*“and **smiling**—AHHH! How sweet it is—the **Natural Great Perfection**—everything, just as it is.”*

Right Ethics—Speech, Conduct, & Livelihood:

“Nothing more to do, achieve, or figure out—EMAHO.”

Right Understanding & Resolve:

*“Become **aware** of awareness, itself. Awareness, aware of awareness—a nondual, uncompartamentalized wholeness and completeness—luminous, sentient openness.”*

The Path (of Wisdom-Ethics-Meditation) & the Meditative Goal are actually One:

*“A **natural meditation**. A joyous meditation. A **non-meditation** of pure presence and totality—emptiness, yet luminous with awareness—inseparable in The Great Perfection. Just seeing through things! Just seeing through—and seeing through everything, with ‘the eye of wisdom’: one moment at a time—moment after luminous moment—in this miraculous moment.”*

Anapanasati as the Key to Uniting the Conscious & Unconscious Mind:

*“One breath at a time, breath after breath, use the **breath** as an anchor to present **awareness**—to newness—and let everything else go passing by like flotsam and jetsam on the mind-stream of consciousness.”*

A Taste of Nirvana:

*“Just watching everything go by—enjoying the show, enjoying the view—with nothing more to do. You will, eventually, arrive face-to-face with True Being—our real home—then, you’ll realize you’ve always been a perfect Buddha, all along. **EMAHO—Yes, Yes, Yes!!!***

APPENDIX D: A GUIDED TOUR (AND THE ARCHETYPAL MEANING) OF A BUDDHIST TEMPLE.
—**HSI LAI BUDDHIST MONASTERY** IN HACIENDA HEIGHTS, CALIFORNIA—

On Wednesday March 9th 2016, we made our way to *Fo Guang Shan HSI LAI BUDDHIST TEMPLE*, in **Hacienda Heights**—not really knowing what to expect. Of course, we already knew that the temple was fairly big, but we weren't really prepared for just how big it actually turned out to be. The visual impact was made even more forceful by the fact that it commands the crest of a hill, protruding gracefully above the much lower valley of the Los Angeles I-10 and East 60 corridor.

Again, we've probably already said too much about the giant **Buddhas** and **Bodhisattva** statues that are found throughout these temple grounds. Indeed, it would take an entire book to explain their exact meaning, as there are literally hundreds of these 'deity forms'—and worse yet, each individual Deity has multiple names, due of the many cultures that Buddhism historically encompasses.

For clarification, we will give just one example (below), in order to drive home our main point.

However, it's all essentially philosophic and symbolic. Also, whenever helpful, we will try to make a meaningful correlation to the Judeo-Christian religious tradition.

[Note: Please skip this rather detailed attempt at a comparative religious synthesis. Rather, if you prefer, simply jump ahead to the main description of the temple itself—on the following page.]

We will try to describe one of the most popular Buddhist deities of Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan—namely, *Amitaba*—or *Amida* as it is better known in Japan. ***Amitabha Buddha*** is the ancient *Sanskrit* (Skt.) name for a **Peaceful Meditational Deity** that is actually quite similar to the Roman Catholic **Archangel Gabriel**. Incidentally, anything that can be said here about Catholicism can (almost always) also be found in Jewish Kabbalah. Thus, as an abstract general principle, the 'Red' colored 'Western' **Buddha Amitabha** stands for Enlightened *Perception* (*Samjna*, in Skt.) and *Higher Intelligence* [+6] (known as, *Parashiva*, in Skt.). But in practical application, ***Amitabha***—or ***Gabriel*** for that matter—represents, specifically, the **Wisdom** to know what is needed—and when action is actually necessary—and more importantly, when these actions are most likely to achieve their goal. Indeed, knowing all this is especially difficult in real life and can seem almost like a 'magical ability'—and even today, many people might still see it as such.

However, to complicate things even more, when this *Amitabha* 'principle' moves from passive stillness towards worldly action, it does so through the office of a **Bodhisattva** or 'Buddhist Saint'—just like in the Saints of the Catholic Church. And, since this original impulse towards *ethical action* is, ultimately, motivated by **Compassion**—and moreover, since *action* is most successful when guided by *compassion*—this Bodhisattva emanation is also sometimes envisioned as a compassionate female and is approached devotionally as a 'mother figure.' And if all that wasn't complicated enough, keep in mind that that this transformed Buddha emanation—or Bodhisattva Saint—has several additional names, other than that of *Amitabha* (as well as different names according to the particular language in which 'he' or 'she' is petitioned). Thus, in Sanskrit this **compassionate Bodhisattva** is called ***Avlokishtevara*** in Tibet and—sometimes 'he' or 'she' can also appear in female form as a **Tara** goddess—however, usually 'he' is referred to by the common *Tibetan* name, ***Chenrezi***. In *China* though, 'she' is more commonly called ***Kuan Yin***. And, in *Japan* 'she' is called ***Kannon*** (...and I forget the *Korean* name).

[As one can see from the previous, overly complicated example...]

Religions seem to be composed of a rather complex set of **philosophical** principles, not unlike a computer programming language. But, this particular programming language is used to train the mind—not run a business. And as in real life, sometimes the program is elegant and at other times it's complete trash—so, be careful what ideas you 'run' in your own internal CPU. Remember, California is a good place to pick up a bio-computer 'virus,' as it also seems to be the cult capitol of America. Nevertheless, we maintain that if you take personal responsibility for your own thinking (or meta-programming)—and apply some compassionate, yet critical wisdom—then you should have no trouble 'debugging' or '*separating the wheat from the chaff*,' as even the Bible says to do.

Before we move on, we would like to explain another big idea that is intrinsically implicit within every **Buddhist TEMPLE layout**. This 'big idea'—or 'archetypal model'—further drives home the concept that religion is really about training the heart and mind—and in this particular example, the body as well. Surprisingly, this overarching metaphor also expresses an underlying structure that not even many Buddhists consciously recognize. Specifically, the entire **MONASTIC complex** is designed to both symbolize and mimic **the human body**. Incidentally, this is also true for Catholic Cathedrals—and King Solomon's Temple, as well.

So, follow us as we move thru the **TEMPLE** with deliberate purpose, starting from the point that is farthest down the **HILL**—and thus, usually the farthest point south. [Note: we are going to include various numbers and organizational nomenclature. This is meant to keep everything straight, but please don't let it be a distraction. In fact, the [bracketed] *numbers* and *signs* correlate to *States of Consciousness* (as described in the book) by *Charles T. Tart*. This *number scale* (may have?) originated with Pythagoras and/or the Greek Neoplatonists, as they tried to make sense out of the diverse teachings from ancient Egypt, Babylonia, and even India. However today, this *consciousness scale* is now popular with many 'Fourth Way' groups—specifically, people associated with the works of G.I. Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky.]

So, without further adieu, as we approach this massive temple complex, the first thing that we see is the **SUB-GATE** (*So-mon*, in *Japanese* (Jap.)). [Sorry, we don't know the *Chinese* names.] This area symbolically stands for the *lowest states of consciousness* [96 or -24 ...or even -12, -6, -3, -1] that a human can have—and is associated with the colors *brown* and even *black*—and also with the various minor psycho-energetic *chakras* associated with the legs and feet. From here, we can only go upwards—and the monastery provides us with the opportunity to do just that!

Next, we encounter the **MAIN GATE** (*Sammon*, in Jap.). This gate is also called the **South Gate** (or *Nandai-mon*, in Jap.) because it is usually located in the southern most direction. It represents *lower physical existence* [-24 or just normal 24], which is also related to the lower *subconscious* mind. The Main Gate is associated with the color *red* and the *Base Chakra*—and is associated, in general, with the lower part of the human body.

From this spot, we walk out onto the field of *normal*, but *lesser states of consciousness* [+48 or -48]. In this case, 'the field' is actually a parking lot, but this is still completely in harmony with the underlying meaning of this basic metaphor. Either way, it represents the area of *the outer-directed mind*. This area is also divided into two spaces. The lower staircase, descending downwards, represents a trending of consciousness towards more or less *negative states* [-48 to -24].

Looking up the hill, though, we can now climb up the big **outer Staircase**—trending towards more *positive states* [+48]—all the way to the **CENTRAL GATE** (*Chumon*, in Japanese). The Central Gate actually presents the human *Personality* [48] and the two **Lion Guards**, on either side of the entrance, represent the principles of *affirmation* and *denial*. They have the same meaning as the Papal keys guarding the gates to *Saint Peter's Cathedral*; that is, what we say 'yes' to and what we say 'no' to, provide the 'Keys' to more *Heavenly states of Consciousness*. The Central Gate is also associated with the color *orange* (as well as the original *saffron* color of early Buddhist robes). It is in fact related to the orange *Navel Chakra* [+24], located just below our 'belly buttons'—that is, the practical, grounded basis of our personality.

Notice how this gate is built into the **MONASTIC CLOISTER**. This indicates that we need boundaries in order to protect what we hold as sacred; whether it's our person, our body, our mental health, or our family—or in this case, the sacred fraternity—specifically, the religious order of Buddhist monks and nuns.

In many Buddhist Temples the *left* (as in the '*left brain*' or '*male*' side) and *right* (as in the '*right brain*' or '*female*' side) form the distinct corners and boundaries of the monastic cloister, and are associated with two complementary **BUILDINGS** or **PAGODAS**, located on each end. "*A pagoda [was traditionally] a monument built to house the remains of Buddha, or something representing those remains. Originally, pagodas were the focal point of Buddhist belief, but they gradually took on a more decorative role.*" Either way, these two corner buildings or free-standing pagodas (and the buildings immediately next to the cloister wall, on either side) represent our *personae* and idealized *identity* [12]—this is, either a male or female persona—and the personal *boundaries* and *achievements* associated with a greater sense of identity and spiritual attainment.

As we pass from the Central Gate, into the interior open field of the monastic enclosure, we view an open space that symbolically represents *the human mind*—and the '*mind training*' necessary to become a happier, more mature, and hopefully more enlightened individual. We've even read that the vast array of **paving stones** supposedly represents individual thoughts and the grass or weeds, growing in between them, were once trimmed by hand in order to drive home the necessity to trim down our own personal '*mind weeds*'—and to cultivate our spacious garden of happy and healthy *states* of mind. This monastery probably gets so much human traffic that the grass turned to mud, so they most likely filled in the grassy areas with concrete and symbolically painted this narrow in-between space green.

Finally, we get to the **inner GRAND STAIRCASE**, representing the hard climb to truly *higher states of consciousness*. Note, at the very top of the stairs is a **giant INCENSE BURNER**. This symbolically represents the need to burn away our defilements and uncover that *Secret Holy Place* within our '*Heart of Hearts*.' In traditional monasteries, this place was also the location of the **Ordination Platform**—the exact place where new monks, priests, and nuns took their vows to strive for personal enlightenment (not only for themselves, but also to help others). These 'vows' are known as the *Bodhisattva Vows* and they have a very Christian ring about them (as already mentioned). This is a 'beautiful' and pivotal place (called *Tiferet*, in *Hebrew*) where the Holy Spark of God—or what Tibetans call, "*the crystalline mind of the vajra*"—resides in each and every one of us [+1].

This was often considered a ‘*Secret Chakra*’—called the *Golden, White, or ‘Clear Light’ Hrit Chakra*, in *Sanskrit*. This important *Chakra* plays a key role in esoteric *Tantric initiation* and is especially associated with the Buddhist Deity **Vajrasattva**. Compellingly, *Vajrasattva* is the Buddhist equivalent to *Christ* and this spot suggests the famous Biblical passage “*Christ in you, your hope of Glory*” (from *The Gospel of John*). After we lit our **incense** stick and purified ourselves with several prayers—or ‘holy thoughts’ symbolized by incense *smoke* on its way to heaven—we can then, finally, enter the main Buddhist sanctuary.

We slowly entered the **MAIN HALL** (*Kondo* or *Hon-do*, in Japan)—also known as the **BUDDHA HALL** (or *Butsuden*, in Japanese)—thru massive doors. “*The Kondo, the main hall of a Buddhist temple, houses the statue of Buddha, the holiest object in the temple.*” But, just before entering this sanctuary, we noticed that this ceremonial opening was flanked by a large monastery **bell**, on one side, and a massive **drum**, on the other. Inside—and center stage—is *the main image of the fully enlightened mind*—the massive golden **statue of THE GREAT BUDDHA** [+1]. This large ‘devotional space’ is obviously associated with the *Heart Chakra* [+12] and thus—according to this popular *chakra* scheme—also symbolized by the color *green*.

In this particular monastery, probably due to the crush of tourists, we were not allowed to advance any further. However, this is also symbolically significant, as deeper and deeper penetrate into the monastery actually signifies the attainment of *higher and more refined states of consciousness*—states that are usually only reached by *adepts, monks, and yogis*. So, this **inner enclosure** can be thought of as the place where only the most serious students of the Dharma may enter—that is, the place where monks and nuns should dwell.

In a traditional monastery, just north of the Main Hall and off on the left-hand side, is the **Senior Monk Hall** (the *Hombu*, in Japan). This is the ‘Head Quarters’ of the monastery [6], where the senior monks and priests reside and run the day-to-day administrative operations of the temple complex.

The next large building on the central axis of the monastery is the great **ASSEMBLY HALL** (*Kodo* or *Hatto*, in Japan). “*The Buddhist scriptures are [specifically] read here.*” Thus, this is an important place of intellectual contemplation and philosophical debate. “*This hall is [also] used for meetings, lectures, and discussions.*” Through hard *intellectual work* [6], it is here where the adept comes to truly understand the teachings of the Buddha and eventually becomes a Dharma master. It is logically associated with communication and the *Throat Chakra* [+6]—and subsequently the color *blue*.

Again, on the left-hand side, just north of—or ‘attached to’—the Senior Monk Hall is the **Abbot’s Quarters** (*Daiho-jo*). This is the place where the Abbot resides, as a “*living Master of the Dharma*” [+6]. Symbolically, this means that if the student works hard enough, he or she may even become an Abbot, themselves.

Next, in many temples—especially within Japanese Zen monasteries—along the top central axis of the complex is the **Monastery Kitchen** (*Kuri*, in Japan). Although a bit too esoteric a description for most people, the kitchen actually has a massive iron **cooking vessel**, which is subsequently placed over a large **fire pit**. This large cooking pot was thought to symbolize the bubbling and churning of our *unconscious minds*. Indeed, this aspect of our minds is usually out of our control and can be quite negative [-3], as in persistent nightmares. However, through the diligent purification of our thoughts, it can also bring forth untold bounty—as in creative new discoveries that we may never have realized were inside us [+3]. Thus, from this esoteric understanding—that is, of the role and symbolic function of a Buddhist temple—we may come to envision this place as a sort of *Third Eye*—that is, a source of *unconscious insight* which, while not always pleasant, usually tends to prove very useful. As such, it may be equated with the *Ajna Chakra* [+3]—and the *dark color of indigo or deep purple*. Thus, **monastery food**—as well as the wisdom teachings themselves—were also considered to be “*food for thought*”—both for the *conscious* mind and for the *unconscious*, as well.

Finally, at the very *crown* of the monastery’s central axis, sits the **LIVING RELIC HALL** (*Reima*, in Jap.). This place served several different functions according to various specialized rituals and traditions. Most often, it was a **Shrine** or **Mausoleum** housing the physical remains and teaching scrolls of past Buddhist Masters. Indeed, the greatest Masters were considered “*living embodiments of these teachings*” and, as such, this place would obviously be associated with the *Crown Chakra* [+1]—and a ‘halo’ of profound “*spiritual attainment!*” This is symbolized by the colors *white* or *gold* (and sometimes even *pink*)—but more often, by a cascade of *rainbow light*. Rarely, but in some instances, the mummified corpse of a past Master was placed in a special (viewing) mausoleum while still seated in meditation, wearing full ceremonial garb. They were—and still are—thought to be continually present, at least in spirit, in order to help all beings attain enlightenment—and thus, final release from worldly suffering.

In the more esoteric traditions, such as Vajrayana Buddhism, this place served as the location for special *Tantric Initiation rites*. As such, it often encloses a **Secret Hall** sometimes filled with so-called **Wrathful Buddhas**—that is, the powerful ‘tuff-love’ or alter-ego versions of the more lovable Peaceful Deities. Often there would be a special **fire pit** for a Buddhist version of the *Vedic fire ceremony*—known in Japan as the *Goma fire ritual*. Alternatively, this hall was more properly placed—according to this archetypal scheme—where the kitchen was located. Either way, these Wrathful Buddhas represent the last *obstacles* [-3 and -1] to be overcome—and thus, the various *powers* to be transformed and mastered—before finally entering enlightenment, ourselves. Indicating that we must all face our ‘*inner demons*’—sooner or later—if we truly want to grow spiritually. And, if we succeed in doing so, we may prove to be dharma-holders of a rare and precious *mind training system*: a profound philosophical tradition and ethical brotherhood—and even a *yoga-based psychotherapy*—that has remained unbroken for several millennia.

THE ADI BUDDHA'S SUPREME BENEDICTION

The "All-Good Father" SAMANTABHADRA's Divine Blessing & Life Purpose

An east-west interfaith interpretation of *The Aspiration of Samantabhadra*.
Including a pilgrim's guide to California's Hsi Lai Buddhist Temple
and a discovery of Shangri-LA's Western Paradise

by Rev. T. Christopher Kurth

Note: This Buddhist teaching is based on a combined synthesis of several translations of *The Aspiration of Samantabhadra* by Garchen Rinpoche, Dzogchen Ponlop, Chogyam Trungpa, and Karl Brunnholz's book, *A Lullaby to Awaken the Heart*. Alternatively, the entertaining 'wraparound' tale is based on H.P. Lovecraft's *The Strange High House in the Mist* conflated with a true-life personal adventure.

APPENDIX E: **JAZZ TRIPPING IN LA—SPRING BREAK 2016—TRAVEL LOG**

SUNDAY EVENING JAZZ DINNER—MARCH 6TH

LA DRIVING TO THE BEAT

On Sunday, March 6th 2016, the entire Kurth clan got up early—at least early for us—and drove six hours due west, straight into **Venice Beach, California**. Spring Break traffic was already apparent, as we drove single file all the way to **Los Angeles**.

Upon arrival in Venice, we checked-in to the **Su Casa** Oceanfront Suites and quickly changed into our finest evening clothes, as we prepared for an enjoyable night out at LA's famous Jazz Club—the **Catalina Bar and Grill**—located on the always popular **Sunset Strip**.

NUE SAX AT CATALINA JAZZ CLUB

Known more simply as the **Catalina Jazz Club**, our dinner reservations at **Catalina Bar and Grill** included a front row booth, excellent food, and a ritzy nightclub performance by **Bobby Caldwell**. Caldwell, in addition to singing several of his famous *classic songs*, also graciously showcased a rising new star of the adult contemporary music scene, the Jazz saxophonist **Andrew Neu**. They both performed at the top of their game and Mr. Neu even stayed late to meet and mingle with club patrons, well after the performance. Note, when planning our trips, we always make sure to see the very best things first—and so, we simply can't recommend this ultra-cool destination enough! Check it out, we know that you'll dig it just as much as we did.

SUNDAY NIGHT—MARCH 6TH

SUNSET STRIP-ING

As the night was still young, we decided to explore **Beverly Hills** and the historically famous—and sometimes ‘infamous’—**Sunset Strip**.

A CASE OF BLUES AT THE **MARMONT HOTEL**

Our first destination was the **Chateau Marmont** Hotel, temporary home for such writers as *The Great Gatsby* author *F. Scott Fitzgerald* and the notorious gonzo journalist *Hunter S. Thompson*. This hotel was also the (1970) temporary home of rock singer *Jim Morrison* (who almost died here) and the (Bungalow 3) location where the comedian and popular ‘Bluesman’ *John Belushi* (actually) did die of a drug overdose, in 1982. We miss you John! And we remain truly blue—even after all these years—over the tragic break-up of the original **Blues Brothers** comedic team. And still more recently, over the closing of the ever-popular Hollywood **House of Blues**. Brother *Dan*, what the hell happened—that spot was tribute to both of you?!

VENERATING THE PINK TACO

The next stop was the infamous **Pink Taco**. Not only is this destination a bold *Santeria*-like statement of Hollywood’s official color, but it is also a celebration of such famous Hollywood bombshells as *Jayne Mansfield* and the aging, yet ageless billboard beauty *Angeline*. We admit that we stopped here partly out of rebellion, as this was the restaurant that the Scottsdale Arizona City Council drove out of town, claiming that the name was ‘offensive to women.’ Our hometown really missed out on a great restaurant and, by the way, who the hell doesn’t want to celebrate the best part of the female anatomy? And, if you will pardon this short editorial: Given that our culture has already gone to the insane extreme of corrective vaginal plastic surgery, it seems like a blatant celebration of the ‘pink taco’ might just be the right antidote to this kind of cultural madness.

MEETING **GEORGE JETSON** AT THE UNION 76 **GAS STATION**

Next, trying to mix necessity with pleasure, we made a quick stop for gas at Jack Colker’s vintage space-age architectural oddity, the **Union 76 Gas Station**. This great little place is both a popular Hollywood film location and a great example of *George Jetson*-like 1950s architecture. And, it really does look good when all lit-up at night! But, like the neon Vegas image it conjures, not so much by day.

BEWITCHED AT THE BEVERLY HILLS **WITCH’S HOUSE**

A slight detour into **Beverly Hills** provided our favorite impromptu backdrop for the entire trip—the famous **Witch’s House**. This time around, we finally remembered to visit this little gem on Walden Drive—and it ended up being my *Bewitching* wife’s favorite free destination. Indeed, I have always suspected that she may secretly be a real-live *Samantha*. However, I guess that would likely make me that rather clueless husband, *Darrin*.

LATE SUNDAY NIGHT—MARCH 6TH

VIBRATO VIBES IN BEL AIR

Next, we made a whirlwind visit to LA's other ultra-famous jazz club, *Herb Alpert's Vibrato Grill ...and Jazz* Restaurant. This was originally my first-choice destination, since everyone in our family likes *Herb Alpert's* trumpet driven 'south of the boarder' music. Indeed, this 'Mex-Cali' jazz is now a generational experience in our home, since my father began playing *Herb Alpert & the Tijuana Brass* in the late 1960's—and now, my kids have grown up listening to *Herb* well into this new millennium. In fact, this is one of the main reasons why I love Jazz, as it has a kind of staying power not evidenced by the somewhat ephemeral and radically 'faddish' rock scene. Of course, only time will truly tell, but my bet is on instrumental Jazz ultimately outlasting all the other styles. That is, say, given a thousand more years of musical development. If only we could all live long enough to validate such an extravagant prediction as this? Well, if there is any way that humans can learn to cheat death, then it will probably happen right here in youth-oriented Los Angeles—undoubtedly, with some of that outrageous **Bel Air** money.

As already mentioned, **Vibrato** was actually our primary destination, but at the last moment we learned that the actor-singer *Ronn Moss* was performing. My wife and I grew up liking his hit songs—like "*Baby Come Back*"—as he was originally from the rock band *Player*, but we were really on a mission to hear some Jazz ...and preferably, only instrumental Jazz! When we finally arrived at the club, Ron was actually finishing up his evening appearance, but it was still fun to see him in person and finally visit this stylish and hip dinner destination. **Vibrato Jazz Club** will definitely be our primary destination the next time we visit Los Angeles (which it, indeed, was in 2017). Note however, that most LA clubs are closed Mondays (and be aware that some places are also closed on Tuesdays) so be sure to plan your nighttime activities with this Los Angeles peculiarity in mind.

MUHOLLAND DR-IVING...TO A DAVID LYNCH DREAM

Finally, we closed out our busy night with a late-night, roller coaster-like car ride along LA's famous **Mulholland Drive**. This road always provides an amazing **view** of the **city**—not to mention the entire **valley**—and it is one California destination that is simply not to be missed! Unfortunately, everyone was getting tired so we finally meandered down one of this road's many descending **canyons** and made our way back to our oceanfront hotel in Venice. Despite some stormy thunderclaps, we finally fell asleep—a sleep that lasted well into the rather noisy and blustery next day. I dreamt that I was trying to explain some crazy movie plot to my Dad, only to wake up with the realization that sometimes it's better not to try to explain directors like Quinton Tarentino and **David Lynch**, at all.

MONDAY MORNING—MARCH 7TH

VENICE BEACHFRONT

We woke up to chairs clattering, as it was a very windy day, and to the sound of drug addicts arguing, as we were residing rather close to a drug rehabilitation center. However, this is **Venice Beach** (and not Malibu) so it's all part of its charm, as they say. And, this sort of crazy diversity is rather charming, at least up until it gets dangerous. However, we have no complaints and would recommend this place to anyone—so long as they realize how different this area is compared to, say, Santa Monica, just a few miles north. Thankfully, we did notice a rather continuous—all day and all night—Police presence, which seems to be working out well, as the Venice **beachfront** was calm and peaceful, despite the bustle of human activity.

VENDORS AT VENICE BEACH

Ironically, the 'human activity'—on this particular day—was rather sporadic, due to the morning's storm winds that actually reached hurricane speeds for a short time. The winds, at their very worst, had the beach sand hitting our bare skin to the point where it actually hurt, quite a lot. Finally, around one o'clock, the winds died down and about half the **street vendors** were still open—thus demonstrating capitalism in action. Our older son, David, bought a lucky *ceramic skull statue* (\$20) and I purchased a *skull mug* (\$10)—so we are ready for a real Mexican-style 'Day of the Dead' celebration. I also bought a *Laughing Buddha rosary-necklace* (\$4), in preparation for our final destiny or, should we say 'destination' (Note: We will eventually—and inevitably—talk about our *Buddhist temple pilgrimage*; but later on, towards the end of this narrative). However, this day was the least crowded we've ever seen Venice Beach, but that was just fine because we had only one destination in mind; and fewer people meant a much shorter wait time...for the weight line.

MUSCLE BUILDING AT MUSCLE BEACH

...& MEETING HOMELESS CELEBRITY BILL PETTIS

Our younger son, Adam, was the one who actually wanted this Venice Beach vacation. And, it was to celebrate his personal achievement that we decided to stay near **Muscle Beach** in particular. We all agreed with his vision and his Grandmother gave him \$500 to help make it a reality. Specifically, Adam—who was already well over six-foot-tall—in the course of just over ten months, lost about 65 pounds and totally transformed his physique into that of a young **Arnold Swartzenegar**. So, in celebration, he justifiably wanted pictures of himself doing some 'heavy lifting' at the Muscle Beach **Weight Lifting** Pen—the exact place that inspired him to try out this new sport on our previous 2015 visit.

While Adam was **pumping iron**, we met a homeless guy sitting on the park bench near the weights—named **Bill Pettis**—who once lifted with **Arnold** back in the 70s. After looking him up on (what he called) our “computer phone,” we discovered that he had even held the world record for the largest arms (biceps) and that he was also part of the founding staff at the very first **Gold’s gym**. Unfortunately, those were much better days for Bill, as he now suffers from alcoholism and senior dementia. We figured that he deserved a few bucks (\$10) for his cool story, but only if we could get our picture taken with him. He agreed, and we got a fascinating historical flashback—as well as a cautionary tale—in return. If he just “uses it to buy alcohol,” as they say; then we merely consider this as substitute ‘pain medication’ for an absentee social support system. He does seem to do okay for himself, but this is probably because he gives the immediate area a sort of Venice-style ‘celebrity presence.’ I might even say he’s an ‘unofficial Mascot,’ but I don’t want to make light of the serious homeless problem that every American city seems to be taking for granted. Surely, the U.S.—with its intellectual and business capitol—can think of a better way to deal with this particular problem. Incidentally, we later learned that Bill finally passed away, a few months later, after we had met him.

On a lighter note—but, now, with a somewhat guilty feeling—we left the weight lifting arena to do a little more **shopping**. Adam, true to form, bought a *bodybuilding t-shirt* (\$10) and we bought him a *bodybuilding towel* (\$15). I also bought my wife, Julie, an official *Venice Beach tie-dye* T-shirt (\$20). Then, we jumped into our Suburban for a quick tour of the famous **Venice canals** and bridges, as well as taking a quick look at **Marina Del Rey**.

MONDAY EVENING—MARCH 7TH

LOVING THE NECROMANCE

Not leaving in time to beat the horrendous LA traffic, we gradually—and we mean very gradually—inched our way up to Hollywood in order to visit a unique natural history-inspired store called **Necromance**. This was David's pick and it did not disappoint. Although, we arrived with only 40-minutes to shop—and we could all tell that the staff really wanted to go home—we still managed to buy a few cool things. For example, David bought a real *alligator head* (\$15) and I bought a grim *Buddhist skull-mala* bracelet (\$5)—a constant reminder to use our time wisely, as well as not to drive too crazily! I also bought a *porcupine quill* for old-fashioned ink writing (\$3) and David almost bought a beautifully preserved and framed *vampire bat*—in honor of his favorite author, **Ann Rice** ...of course. At the last moment however, he decided to save his money for something bigger. If we had a little longer to shop, we probably would have purchased more, as the more we looked the more cool stuff we seemed to discover. They even sold *human bones*, but since we're not Voodoo sorcerers, we eventually moved on.

INVADING THE EL CID

We subsequently made our way over to the famous **El Cid** restaurant and live **entertainment venue**. Our purpose for visiting this destination was twofold. First, we wanted to try and take a quick peak at an authentic *flamingo dancer*. And second, we wanted to scout out this famous dinner venue for our next visit to LA. This place really looks great and so we plan on returning for a fun-filled evening of Burlesque (during our next holiday visit).

CTHULHU'S CRASHED STARSHIP AT FRY'S ELECTRONICS, BURBANK

Our next two 'Disneyesque' destinations were meant to be a goofy surprise for our kids—and it indeed proved to be a hilarious detour—before finally settling down for the night. We made a 'Hollywood-themed' Sci-Fi **pilgrimage** to the Burbank **Fry's Electronics** to see the famous *crashed U.F.O.*, with scampering *alien invaders* variously placed throughout the store. And most importantly, the *giant Cthulhu-like octopus* busting thru the main wall! Hell, the store decorations—alone—are reason enough to go out of your way to shop at this particular Fry's, not to mention the fact that this enormous—or should we say, 'gia-normous'—store has something for absolutely everyone. Children, of all ages, will—definitely—not be disappointed.

MONDAY EVENING—MARCH 7TH

CRASHING A NORTH HOLLYWOOD FILMING AT **THE C.I.A.**

After paying homage to the great *Cthulhu* at his Burbank Fry's temple we, appropriately, made our way over to the **C.I.A.** for full disclosure. Although the initials are intentionally provocative, in this particular case they stand for the **California Institute of Abnormal Arts**. This place is a celebration of the '**Freak Show**' aspect of our **carnival** culture—in other words, just like North Hollywood! Upon arrival, our entire family walked in thru a propped open door and directly into what appeared to be a **haunted house**—with a cast of characters that looked like they were straight out of the **Adams Family** movie. Walking with determined purpose—since we really needed to find a restroom—we had, apparently, blundered directly onto a live **film set**, only to have the **director** scream out “I thought that this was closed set!” Yes indeed, while in Hollywood, the Kurth family managed to crash a **Hollywood filming**! We could even see ourselves on the teleprompter. The friendly owner, dressed in a '*Columbo*-style' trench coat (he must be former C.I.A. or, perhaps, a 'flasher'), greeted us and apologized with amusement, explaining that the location was temporarily closed for filming. Since our family looked as out of place as these Adam's family actors, the whole episode had all of us laughing out loud. However, we must insist that we are the real Adam's family! No stupid costumes for us—except for Buddhist robes. But to be honest, Buddhist robes can look pretty freaky out of context—trust me, I know. I was supposed to wear this 'man-dress' for an entire year, as part of becoming a Buddhist priest (which, by the way, pays next to nothing). Today, we still maintain, that wearing Buddhist robes takes a lot more hutzpah than walking around in Goth makeup! But hey, at least they're all black—and everyone has heard that 'black' will never go out of style ...right?

MONDAY EVENING DINNER—MARCH 7TH

JAZZ JAM AT **THE BAKED POTATO** in LA (3787 Cahuenga Blvd, Studio City, CA)

Now, after all the hectic city driving—note, we did decide not to do so much stuff in one day, the next time around—we finally settled down for the Monday Night **Jazz Jam** at the **Baked Potato**. This hip (instrumental) jazz venue has been around forever and obviously got its name from its main dinner entre ...right? Actually, a baked potato does constitute the main item on the menu—in fact, there are well over two-dozen ways in which they prepare this celebrated dish. For example, I got the *Philly Cheese Steak Potato* (\$18), Julie got the *Broccoli and Cheese* (\$12), David ate the *Hot Dog and Sauerkraut Potato* (\$13), and Adam picked the *Maple Ham and Corn and Pineapple Potato* (\$16). The portions were enormous and the food was excellent so we were all relaxed, happy, and humming along—while all sitting next to each other—with our rumbly tummies now comfortably full. It just doesn't get much better than this.

And just when we thought that it really couldn't get much better, it did get better—much, much better! I don't drink much alcohol so I can say with sober recollection that the **Monday Night Jammz** session was some of the best instrumental Jazz—and Jazz-Rock Fusion—that I have ever heard, period! The rest of my family concurs with my opinion, but I've heard much more Jazz than most folks. Although I'm not a musician—however, Adam plays the guitar (and has even played some saxophone) and David plays the keyboard—I can honestly tell you that this sort of music (and not the secondhand ganga smoke) is all I need to really '**get high**'—and that's really point, isn't it? This kind of music is amazing! And, that high 'aesthetic' feeling reminds me why music is so closely associated with religion. Simply put, instrumental music works by profoundly engaging the right hemisphere of the brain. Actually, this natural and healthy **right brain** 'entrainment' leads us, ultimately, into a light **trance**—with altered, happier states of consciousness, as a result. Vocal music can also help to achieve this altered state, but it is much less effective at doing so. This is because the lyrics reengage the left hemisphere—and thus, the more analytical 'talkative' brain—bringing us right back down to earth, so to speak. So, this is the real reason why **Jazz**—and that **Congo** drum beat—will ultimately outlast all the other less effective 'trance-formational' forms of music (including of course, EDM 'rave' instrumentals within this overall Jazz-Fusion concept ...or conception). Interestingly, this also suggests a truly objective aspect to both music and the aesthetic experience—which seems to hint at an actual underlying psycho-technology (just like *Pythagoras*, *Plato*, and *G.I. Gurdjieff* originally claimed). But, since this is merely a travel log, we'll leave it at that.

However, it would be a real disservice not to introduce those intrepid ‘psycho-acoustic’ technicians who made our sacred ‘trip’ possible. Apparently, the Baked Potato’s **Monday Night Jam crew** has been playing together for over fifteen years. But, what is really amazing is that some of the musicians cycle out of their spots, only to be replayed by ‘guest’ artists—that is, without missing a beat! Simply put, they play well together—really, really well. And after their last ‘official’ performance, any visiting or ‘traveling’ musicians can also take a turn at playing together—but, unfortunately, with less magical results. Ted Bezzy was one of those traveling *bass* players; and he told me that either the lead *guitar*, **John Ziegler**, “played” with **King Crimson** or that that he was “the guy with the King Crimson T-shirt.” I don’t know which, as the music was rather loud—but we’re not complaining. Either way, the other players were *Chris Roy* on *bass*, *Jamie Kime* on *guitar*, special guest *Joe Travers* on *drums*—and even a foreign guest on the *keys*, *Stephen DeReine* (sp?), who hailed all the way from France. By the way, I suspect that a Frenchman is an unstated requirement for all Jazz clubs. However, in all seriousness, France has gone a long way towards encouraging and preserving this important American art form.

As we’ve already mentioned, this was an amazing performance and an unexpected surprise! And, it was also the best entertainment value of the entire trip. We only spent \$120 dollars for four people (that’s \$30 per person) and that includes meals, drinks, tips, and cover charges for the musical performance. Visit this awesome dinner venue and cocktail bar, you won’t be disappointed... And, be sure to wear a hip looking beret. I know I’m going to wear one the next time, especially if I can embarrass my kids by practicing my outrageous ‘*Monty Pythonesque*’ French accent. Finally, although I wanted to stay and listen to the visiting **musicians** wield their mighty ‘axes’ a little while longer, Julie and the kids were getting tired so we made our way back to the beach for one last night in Venice.

TUESDAY **MORNING**—MARCH 8TH

JOGGING & KNIFE FIGHTING ON **VENICE BEACH**

The next morning, we got up early and checked-out of the **Su Casa**, meeting the friendly (Venezuelan?) owner in the process. He gave us the phone number of the mattress manufacturer of our comfortable hotel bed—indeed, this was the best mattress on which we have ever slept. We were planning to drive up the Pacific Coast Highway towards ‘the Malibu movie colony.’ Then, after walking Malibu Beach, we also planned to hike towards the nude beach at **Point Dume**. Our boyish cover story was that we just wanted to see the cliff divers and seals—really?

However, the weather was awesome, especially when compared to the day before, so we decided to stay put and have a nice relaxing **Venice Beach Day**, before heading off for more Hollywood nightlife. We spread out our **beach towels** and soaked in all the **sun** that our tender skin dare absorb—which of course, is always less than we think we should be able to handle. The boys went **jogging** and when they returned we all practiced *Kali Knife Fighting Drills* on the harder sand, next to the **surf**. Although **martial arts** usually attracts at least one patrolling Police car, our ‘performance’ was nothing compared to the naked guy next to us, wildly swinging a machete (sorry, that’s an old joke).

TUESDAY EVENING—MARCH 8TH

HOLLYWOOD MAGIC AT THE **MAGIC CASTLE HOTEL**

Having our fill of sun and sand, and even a little surf, we finally climbed back into our over-sized 'Garage Queen' and drove slowly towards **Hollywood**. Again, we left the beach around 3:30pm, which is still not early enough to beat rush hour so we had to take several alternate routes towards our next destination—that is, the **Magic Castle Hotel**. Deciding to ignore Siri's (?) insistent driving recommendations (I swear she sounded a little pissed off), we drove straight up into the **Hollywood Hills**—mountains, actually—so we could, then, ultimately descend downwards towards our hotel—that is, instead of fighting the traffic inundating the valley below. However, these roads were anything but straight and reminded us of driving the ridiculously circuitous and somewhat nerve-wracking hills of San Francisco. The houses were beautiful, but the roads were, well, entertaining ...a bit like an amusement park ride—testing both our Suburban's breaks and transmission.

We circled the Magic Castle and decided that fitting our 'car' in the small parking garage was a magical feat that not even *David Copperfield* could pull off. However, the staff let us park (or, rather, squeeze in) out front, relieving us of yet another attempted parking miracle ...or debacle. In fact, the folks at the **MAGIC CASTLE HOTEL** were some of the happiest and best-trained hotel staff that we have ever met. This was a pleasant surprise and a clear departure from most urbanized folk, with their often flippant 'citified' attitudes. This hotel is sort of architectural 'magic trick' unto itself. Once an older apartment complex, the entire location has undergone a near miraculous facelift. The property now reminds us of Bermuda—painted **yellow** and beautifully remodeled—with a slightly **Art Deco** look. The place was clean and bedrooms were enormous—reminding us that this was once a person's entire house. Although the bathrooms could be bigger, the bedrooms were gorgeous and, yes, the bedroom door even locked. This can be important for any romantically inclined parents, with kids in tow. And, perhaps most importantly, the air conditioners worked. Indeed, obsolete air conditioners can be a big problem in LA (even in some of the best hotels), as the weather is usually quite mild, and most people simply don't bother much with their A.C.—except for the ones in their cars—until the very hottest days of the summer.

We once again changed into our finest evening wear and tried to smuggle our, now very well-dressed, teenagers into the actual **MAGIC CASTLE**, next door—the place officially known as the **ACADEMY OF MAGICAL ARTS**. First, after spending a small fortune in the diminutive and expensive **gift shop**, we had hoped to have the boys take a brief walk thru the castle, but this is simply an impossible trick to pull off—at least at night. The *magical owl* statue has been instructed not to open their **secret door** to anyone under 21, so the boys went back to the hotel and the hotel staff graciously ordered them a **PIZZA** for **DINNER** ...And they even delivered it, with some additional **DESERT** treats, directly to their hotel room door. How's that for good service.

MAGICAL DINNER TUESDAY EVENING—MARCH 8TH

THE MAGIC CASTLE ...A TRUE MAGICIAN'S NIGHTCLUB

Although I wished that our boys had been able to join us for this truly magical experience, **THE MAGIC CASTLE**'s secret 'entry portal' (bookcase) definitely opened up into what was a **ritzy BAR** room scene, with a **grand staircase** leading to **fine DINNING** overhead. This place was indeed a private **NIGHTCLUB** for practicing *magicians* (and their rich **patrons**)—we only got in because we were staying at the Magic Castle Hotel, next door. The men were well dressed and the women's dresses were exceedingly low cut and skimpy. This clearly was an adult playground and not really a place for kids—however, there is a Sunday Brunch (open to all ages) and even a separate room for a *Houdini Séance* (but only for private party reservations of exactly ten people). In addition to our **DINNER** for two, we had tickets for a large-scale **professional stage show** that combined **STAGE MAGIC** with an excellent **COMEDY ACT**. In addition to the main performance, there were several other shows on other, slightly **smaller stages**—and even some little 'close-up' **magical parlors**, strategically placed throughout the clubhouse. The entire structure itself is a case study in *illusion* because—like *Snoopy's* doghouse—the inside of the clubhouse doesn't actually seem to fit into the outside skin of the building. I suspect that they have carved out the side of the mountain so as to fit most of the structure underground—but who knows, maybe it's real magic. The final surprise of the evening was an unexpected meeting with the actual *founder* of the Academy, *Uncle Milt*. He talked about the early days of Hollywood lore; and how he had rustled together the interior bar and woodwork, to give the place its distinctive look. Since we thought that he had already passed the veil, perhaps we should consider this meeting as a close encounter of the supernatural kind. Wow, what a wonderful achievement to leave to posterity. We love this place and we love you—Milt—for making it possible! What I can definitely say about this magical experience is that, without a doubt, this was one of the coolest and most unexpected nights of my life—no exaggeration! I had no idea what to expect going in, as the Magic Castle was my son David's destination of choice. I knew very little about *stage magic* and *the art of illusion*. Rather, my interests are more in the area of what magical performers call **mentalism** (and what parapsychologists describe as so-called 'claims of the **paranormal**'). However, we soon discovered that there was a much larger overlap between these two subjects than we first expected—and now, my wife and I have surprisingly discovered a new family destination! In fact, we are actively planning a way to return to the Castle in order to take part in the **Séance**, but we need ten people (care to join us, enquire below?).

When we finally returned to the Magic Castle Hotel next door, we found our older son fast asleep (and also hard to move off of our private bed). Our younger son, who likes automobiles, was (of course) watching [Top Gear](#). This time, we all planned to sleep in late!

WEDNESDAY MORNING—MARCH 9TH

DETECTIVE STORIES AROUND **RAYMOND CHANDLER'S SQUARE**

The next day we went out of our way to thank the wonderful Magic Castle Hotel staff—something that we have never gone out of our way to do before—and then, we gradually made our way down **HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD**. Weeks before our Los Angeles trip, we spent several nights in preparation, reading select passages from *Raymond Chandler's detective stories* and also those of *Michael Connelly*—both famous mystery writers and L.A. residents. These two authors do an excellent job at capturing the 'atmosphere' and 'attitude' that is Los Angeles. So, in addition to the many movies already using the city itself as a backdrop, Chandler and Connell go one step further, allowing us to more intensely feel like we already 'know the city,' so to speak—as if we were recalling a distant 'past-life' remembrance of once living in the surrounding environs. Then, on a whim, I decided to check the internet for any special memorials or locations specifically associated with either one of these two authors. There wasn't one for Connelly, at least not yet—unless you want to include his fictional *Inspector Bosh's* desk, within the **L.A. Police Department**. But there was in fact, one location already commemorating Mr. Chandler—**RAYMOND CHANDLER SQUARE**. Unfortunately, upon closer inspection, we discovered that this destination—at least for now—only refers to the busy intersection of **Cahuenga Ave** and **Hollywood Blvd**. Although not much to look at just yet, it does provide some sort of tangible foothold for remembering the life and accomplishments of this talented writer and former loyal city patron.

The little bit of **reading** we did was merely a parental attempt to foster a child's love of **literature**. And, to introduce them to a few interesting **books**, hoping to get them 'hooked on reading.' *Ray Bradbury* once said, "You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture, just get people to stop reading them." This was, and still is, a prophetic warning—especially, in our current age of 'sound bites' and 'text messaging' (however, more on Ray Bradbury later). As we drove up North Vermont Street, past the former location of *Chatterton's Bookshop* (now called the *Skylight*), we recall just how poignant Bradbury's quote seems, and how ephemeral and constantly changing both culture—and cultural geography—can actually be.

NOONTIME WEDNESDAY—MARCH 9TH

PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY ON LOZ FELIZ BOULEVARD

Our next destination is really a return to a spot that I had haunted, at least physically, about thirty years earlier—namely, the **PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY** on Los Feliz Blvd. As a high school student (many years ago), I had first discovered **Manly P. Hall's** giant tome, ***The Secret Teaching of All Ages***, while poking around the basement of a friend's house. It wasn't really his book (he wasn't very interested in it, at least); but instead, it originally belonged to his mother, who was then studying to be a minister at Unity School of Christianity—a large 'monastic-like' complex in Missouri, also known as Unity Village. Although Mr. Hall had no formal connection with Unity (at least, to the best of my knowledge), they shared a similar approach to religion and Biblical exegesis—an approach that is not new, but is now typically referred to as a '**metaphysical** approach' or simply as **symbolic** interpretation. And again, although it's really not at all new—***Philo Judeaus*** and ***Origen*** had almost identical approaches—it can be exceedingly rare, especially during times of religious fundamentalism. The central idea is basically **universalistic**, in that it claims that truth, wisdom, and genuine religious experience belong to no one, exclusive religion or philosophy or particular race or nationality—that indeed, there are many paths up the same mountain and that we are all in the same boat together. Manly P. Hall's book was pivotal and this place was special, because it first opened my eyes to the study of **philosophy** and **comparative religion**. It also kindled my desire to learn more about **Freemasonry** and to eventually become a Master Mason. In fact, this finally happened, nearly twenty years later. And moreover, just a few years ago, my wife also helped to encourage (and transport) both our boys to our many **DeMolay** meetings and activities—that is, the young men's branch of Freemasonry. And, we believe that (at the very least) it helped both boys develop much needed social confidence and some skill with public speaking. Although we could go on and on about this subject—suffice it to say that a quick stop at the Philosophical Research Society was an absolute must.

So, taking a detour from our primary destination, that is exactly what we did. And, after purchasing a biographical DVD (\$20) about Manly P. Hall from the PRS **Bookstore**, we started to look around the premises only to run serendipitously into Mrs. **Lana Shaughnessy**, the daughter of Obadiah Harris—that is, the current President of PRS. Lana then introduced us to Mr. **John Chase**, who just happened to be walking by, and he let us into the main **auditorium** and proceeded to give a short talk about the place, the founder, and the mission of the society. Then Lana brought us up to meet her father, Obadiah, in Mr. Hall's original **office**. Dr. **Obadiah Harris** proceeded to talk about his personal relationship with Mr. Hall—and shared with us how much he really misses him. He finished this heartfelt remembrance with a Buddhist prayer—and a **Bodhisattva's Vow** to enlighten all people—while lighting a stick of incense and placed it inside an authentic Japanese **Butsudan** (altar). This scene was very moving and surprisingly apropos, as our very next stop was a tour of the great Buddhist Temple in Hacienda Heights.

These are the sort of connections and meaningful synchronicities that we just couldn't possibly have planned ahead for—indeed, life can be much stranger than fiction. Little did we know at that time, that this was the place we were really supposed to be, not at some exotic foreign temple, completely unknown to us. Indeed, there was more authentic feeling and devotion in this short exchange, than in all the other friendly people we met, later, at that exceedingly enormous monastery in Hacienda Heights.

DEATH OF A **PHILOSOPHER**: AN UNEXPECTED **MURDER MYSTERY**

To put an even stranger wrinkle on this series of events, we were soon to learn—just about an hour after passing thru our last destination at **Raymond Chandler Square** (again, referring to that writer of famous detective stories)—that **Manly P. Hall** was actually **murdered** in a stranger than fiction real-life murder mystery. I wish that we had been more shocked by this revelation, but this was L.A. And this is exactly why **Michael Connelly**, a former crime scene reporter, calls Los Angeles "*the City of Bones.*" Indeed, death can take us at any moment so remember to "*Be vigilant and seek awakening, as if your hair is on fire*"—specifically, as this Zen saying urgently advises! Upon departing, I realize that in a strange way Mr. Hall has been an unseen, unacknowledged mentor in my life as well; and I miss him too—then, I likewise silently repeated the heartfelt Bodhisattva Vow. He was indeed a good man—in fact, he was probably too good for this world.

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON—MARCH 9TH

PROLOGUE TO A BUDDHIST PILGRIMAGE

My wife and I have spent our whole life trying to find a religious community where we feel at home. We thought we found it within the **Unitarian Church**; but we eventually discovered that most of the membership leaned towards *atheism* (and whatever political cause was popular, at the moment). We understand *skepticism*, and we admire an honest admission of *agnosticism*—who the hell knows, for sure, about ultimate metaphysical assertions—but, neither of us would call ourselves ‘atheist.’ Both of us have, honestly, had what we would call genuine *religious experiences*, so the search continues.

Unity school of Christianity has also been one of our favorites, but—and here’s where the *skepticism*, honest *agnosticism*, and just plain *common sense* come in—we simply don’t take religious scripture to be literally true. Whatever else this means, it definitely means that any sort of religious *fundamentalism* is completely off our radar. **Scripture**—and that’s any scripture, belonging to any tradition—is more ‘poetry’ than prose, and it’s simply impossible to take it as straight forward historical narrative. Unfortunately, we found that most people involved with Unity—as well as, nearly all other **Christian** sects and denominations—take the Biblical stories to be both ‘symbolic’ and ‘factual’—that is at some point, literally true!

Judaism, with its concept of multiple levels of interpretation—the so called *PaRDeS* concept—however, comes much closer to our position. Unfortunately, too many Rabbis still maintain that the surface story is somehow ‘factually’ true (so God comes off seemingly having a bad temper and a penchant for primitive tribal taboo). Or to put it another way, Jews should just follow the 613 rules and observances—even if they seem a bit primitive (and sometimes even a little silly)—namely, just to be on the safe side. Or more likely, out of a need for group identity and cultural survival. Because the sacred core of Judaism—that is, Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah—is so very interesting and profound, we were tempted to put up with all the extra baggage—but finally, only tempted. However, we’re still waiting for an updated version of Judaism—Judaism 5.0, so to speak! By the way, we’re talking about *allegorical* and *metaphysical* mystics and philosophers—such as Philo Judaeus and Origen—not the ‘red string’ and ‘Kabbalah water’ crowd.

Let’s put the record straight—miracles or not—any real **God** would simply want us to evolve—to finally wake up—and to treat each other well. That’s it, really, in a nutshell. ‘It’—the Ultimate ‘**I AM**’ Mind, both within and beyond nature—does not especially care about the details—only Principles! In fact, this is what **Torah**—or ‘the Law’—actually means. Ironically, this is also the exact meaning behind both the Hindu and Buddhist interpretations of the *Dharma*, as well. In other words, the so-called details of material existence are really just the creative surprises and diverse joys of innovation—as well as the natural and spontaneous developments of a vibrant, living, and evolving creation. Either way, as sentient beings, we are obviously not supposed to murder each other, etc. Nor should we burn ‘heretics’ and ‘witches’ in the name of God; nor any other ‘God concept’ as well. Far, far too often **religion** is actually just disguised **politics**—but they are not really the same thing, no matter how much we may tend to confuse and conflate them. So why, you may ask, have we divulged such a personal and potentially controversial narrative (as this) in a simple travel log? Well, the answer is actually quite surprising—and it’s probably the best possible lead-in to our next topic and destination. However, be patient, as this will all make sense in a moment.

SOMA'S BIG **BUDDHA** HEAD

There has, to the best of our Knowledge, only been one religious founder that has gone so far out of his way to define what is really authentic and **real** about religion—and the '**religious experience**'—and then put everything else about 'religion' in its proper place (which is sometimes the trash can). And, that person was the **BUDDHA**. No, we're not saying Moses didn't try to do this or that Jesus also didn't do this—they likely did—but we are saying that they didn't bulletproof their teachings against bullshit as well as the Buddha did. And note, some bullshit still found its way in, anyway. Indeed Buddha, during his lifetime, already saw people radically misapprehending his message. But as they say, you can lead a 'wind horse' to water, but you cannot make it think! For example, Buddha did not really want any 'graven images' to be actually worshiped—especially his own—and this position was maintained faithfully, more or less, for nearly two hundred years. Eventually however, this original **Buddhism** ultimately mixed with **Hindu** devotionism—as well as with other local indigenous traditions. However, some scholars say this mixing was already going on from the very beginning—indeed, some evidence suggests that it probably happened fairly early. Either way, the end result of all this mixing was a form of Buddhism called '**Deity Yoga**.' This quasi-Hindu form of devotion to (a complex pantheon of) 'Buddhist Deities' is, now, the central practice of **Tibetan** (Vajrayana) **Buddhism**; as well as within most **Chinese, Korean, and Japanese** Mahayana temples, as well. Conversely, it's not that Buddha was completely against this sort of devotion, it's just that the 'devotional map' is nothing like the territory—Zen-like pun fully intended! If a follower does not actually realize this, then they are truly committing 'the sin of idolatry.' This, of course, is also the enlightened position of Zen Buddhism—and note, this was the tradition in which we were actually initiated (i.e., the Rinzai Branch; however, I'm even more impressed by Dogen Zenji's ideas). Of course, a hardline defense against any form of 'idolatry' is still an absolute and inflexible demand of Abrahamic leaders like Moses and Muhammad, but we feel that they may have gone too far in the other direction. Now, to finally answer my dear Aunt Soma: No, we do not worship a big Buddha head—and yes, she actually used those exact words. And, if she thought that was true about us, then we suspect most Americans probably think that way, as well. [However, see final section on 'Giant Easter Island Heads & Modern Tiki Bars']

BIG **BUDDHIST MONASTERY** IN HACIENDA HEIGHTS, CALIFORNIA

...OR GETTING A NATURAL HIGH AT **HSI LAI**

Having explained why we both like and respect **BUDDHISM**. And, probably going too far out of our way to explain why we are making a Buddhist **pilgrimage** to this allegedly 'pagan shrine'—as a few of our fundamentalist neighbors might portray it—we will now try to describe our visit to **the largest Buddhist Temple in North America**. To begin however, remember that the 'Buddhist Deities'—first and foremost—stand for abstract 'Principles' (of course, this is probably true for all other religions, as well), so everyone should be adequately forewarned and forearmed against worshiping 'false idols.' Thus, we made our way to *Fo Guang Shan* **HSI LAI BUDDHIST TEMPLE**, in **Hacienda Heights**, without incident—that is, with no unexpected lightning strikes from on high.

HSI LAI BUDDHIST MONASTERY IN HACIENDA HEIGHTS, CALIFORNIA:
A GUIDED **TOUR** (AND THE ARCHETYPAL MEANING) OF A BUDDHIST TEMPLE.

—**HSI LAI BUDDHIST MONASTERY** IN HACIENDA HEIGHTS, CALIFORNIA—

On Wednesday March 9th 2016, we made our way to *Fo Guang Shan HSI LAI BUDDHIST TEMPLE*, in **Hacienda Heights**—not really knowing what to expect. Of course, we already knew that the temple was fairly big, but we weren't really prepared for just how big it actually turned out to be. The visual impact was made even more forceful by the fact that it commands the crest of a hill, protruding gracefully above the much lower valley of the Los Angeles I-10 and East 60 corridor.

Again, we've probably already said too much about the giant **Buddhas** and **Bodhisattva** statues that are found throughout these temple grounds. Indeed, it would take an entire book to explain their exact meaning, as there are literally hundreds of these 'deity forms'—and worse yet, each individual Deity has multiple names, due of the many cultures that Buddhism historically encompasses.

For clarification, we will give just one example (below), in order to drive home our main point.

However, it's all essentially philosophic and symbolic. Also, whenever helpful, we will try to make a meaningful correlation to the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, as well.

[Note: Please skip this rather detailed attempt at a comparative religious synthesis. Rather, if you prefer, simply jump ahead to the main description of the temple itself—on the following page.]

We will try to describe one of the most popular Buddhist deities of Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan—namely, *Amitaba*—or *Amida* as it is better known in Japan. **Amitabha Buddha** is the ancient *Sanskrit* (Skt.) name for a **Peaceful Meditational Deity** that is actually quite similar to the Roman Catholic **Archangel Gabriel**. Incidentally, anything that can be said here about Catholicism can (almost always) also be found in Jewish Kabbalah. Thus, as an abstract general principle, the 'Red' colored '**Western**' **Buddha Amitabha** stands for Enlightened *Perception* (*Samjna*, in Skt.) and *Higher Intelligence* [+6] (known as, *Parashiva*, in Skt.). But in practical application, **Amitabha**—or **Gabriel** for that matter—represents, specifically, the **Wisdom** to know what is needed—and when action is actually necessary—and more importantly, when these actions are most likely to achieve their goal. Indeed, knowing all this is especially difficult in real life and can seem almost like a 'magical ability'—and even today, many people might still see it as such.

However, to complicate things even more, when this *Amitabha* 'principle' moves from passive stillness towards worldly action, it does so through the office of a **Bodhisattva** or 'Buddhist Saint'—just like in the Saints of the Catholic Church. And, since this original impulse towards *ethical action* is, ultimately, motivated by **Compassion**—and moreover, since *action* is most successful when guided by *compassion*—this Bodhisattva emanation is also sometimes envisioned as a compassionate female and is approached devotionally as a 'mother figure.' And if all that wasn't complicated enough, keep in mind that that this transformed Buddha emanation—or Bodhisattva Saint—has several additional names, other than that of *Amitabha* (as well as different names according to the particular language in which 'he' or 'she' is petitioned). Thus, in Sanskrit this **compassionate Bodhisattva** is called **Avlokishtevara** in Tibet and—sometimes 'he' or 'she' can also appear in female form as a **Tara** goddess—however, usually 'he' is referred to by the common *Tibetan* name, **Chenrezi**. In *China* though, 'she' is more commonly called **Kuan Yin**. And, in *Japan* 'she' is called **Kannon** (...and I forget the *Korean* name).

[As one can see from the previous, overly complicated example...]

Religions seem to be composed of a rather complex set of **philosophical** principles, not unlike a computer programming language. But, this particular programming language is used to train the mind—not run a business. And as in real life, sometimes the program is elegant and at other times it's complete trash—so, be careful what ideas you 'run' in your own internal CPU. Remember, California is a good place to pick up a bio-computer 'virus,' as it also seems to be the cult capitol of America. Nevertheless, we maintain that if you take personal responsibility for your own thinking (or meta-programming)—and apply some compassionate, yet critical wisdom—then you should have no trouble 'debugging' or '*separating the wheat from the chaff*,' as even the Bible says to do.

Before we move on, we would like to explain another big idea that is intrinsically implicit within every **Buddhist TEMPLE layout**. This 'big idea'—or 'archetypal model'—further drives home the concept that religion is really about training the heart and mind—and in this particular example, the body as well. Surprisingly, this overarching metaphor also expresses an underlying structure that not even many Buddhists consciously recognize. Specifically, the entire **MONASTIC complex** is designed to both symbolize and mimic **the human body**. Incidentally, this is also true for Catholic Cathedrals—and King Solomon's Temple, as well.

So, follow us as we move thru the **TEMPLE** with deliberate purpose, starting from the point that is farthest down the **HILL**—and thus, usually the farthest point south. [Note: We are going to include various numbers and organizational nomenclature. This is meant to keep everything straight, but please don't let it be a distraction. In fact, the [bracketed] *numbers* and *signs* correlate to *States of Consciousness* (as described in the book) by *Charles T. Tart*. This *number scale* (may have?) originated with Pythagoras and/or the Greek Neoplatonists, as they tried to make sense out of the diverse teachings from ancient Egypt, Babylonia, and even India. However today, this *consciousness scale* is now popular with many 'Fourth Way' groups—specifically, people associated with the works of G.I. Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky.]

So, without further adieu, as we approach this massive temple complex, the first thing that we see is the **SUB-GATE** (*So-mon*, in *Japanese* (Jap.)). [Sorry, we don't know the *Chinese* names.] This area symbolically stands for the *lowest states of consciousness* [96 or -24 ...or even -12, -6, -3, -1] that a human can have—and are associated with the colors *brown* and even *black*—and also with the various minor psycho-energetic *chakras* associated with the legs and feet. From here, we can only go upwards—and the monastery provides us with the opportunity to do just that!

Next, we encounter the **MAIN GATE** (*Sammon*, in Jap.). This gate is also called the **South Gate** (or *Nandai-mon*, in Jap.) because it is usually located in the southern most direction. It represents *lower physical existence* [-24 or just normal 24], which is also related to the lower *subconscious* mind. The Main Gate is associated with the color *red* and the *Base Chakra*—and is associated, in general, with the lower part of the human body.

From this spot, we walk out onto the field of *normal*, but *lesser states of consciousness* [+48 or -48]. In this case, 'the field' is actually a parking lot, but this is still completely in harmony with the underlying meaning of this basic metaphor. Either way, it represents the area of *the outer-directed mind*. This area is also divided into two spaces. The lower staircase, descending downwards, represents a trending of consciousness towards more or less *negative states* [-48 to -24].

Looking up the hill, though, we can now climb up the big **outer Staircase**—trending towards more *positive states* [+48]—all the way to the **CENTRAL GATE** (*Chumon*, in Japanese). The Central Gate actually presents the human *Personality* [48] and the two **Lion Guards**, on either side of the entrance, represent the principles of *affirmation* and *denial*. They have the same meaning as the Papal keys guarding the gates to *Saint Peter's Cathedral*; that is, what we say 'yes' to and what we say 'no' to, provide the 'Keys' to more *Heavenly states of Consciousness*. The Central Gate is also associated with the color *orange* (as well as the original *saffron* color of early Buddhist robes). It is in fact related to the orange *Navel Chakra* [+24], located just below our 'belly buttons'—that is, the practical, grounded basis of our personality.

Notice how this gate is built into the **MONASTIC CLOISTER**. This indicates that we need boundaries in order to protect what we hold as sacred; whether it's our person, our body, our mental health, or our family—or in this case, the sacred fraternity—specifically, the religious order of Buddhist monks and nuns.

In many Buddhist Temples the *left* (as in the '*left brain*' or '*male*' side) and *right* (as in the '*right brain*' or '*female*' side) form the distinct corners and boundaries of the monastic cloister, and are associated with two complementary **BUILDINGS** or **PAGODAS**, located on each end. "*A pagoda [was traditionally] a monument built to house the remains of Buddha, or something representing those remains. Originally, pagodas were the focal point of Buddhist belief, but they gradually took on a more decorative role.*" Either way, these two corner buildings or free-standing pagodas (and the buildings immediately next to the cloister wall, on either side) represent our *personae* and idealized *identity* [12]—this is, either a male or female persona—and the personal *boundaries* and *achievements* associated with a greater sense of identity and spiritual attainment.

As we pass from the Central Gate, into the interior open field of the monastic enclosure, we view an open space that symbolically represents *the human mind*—and the '*mind training*' necessary to become a happier, more mature, and hopefully more enlightened individual. We've even read that the vast array of **paving stones** supposedly represents individual thoughts and the grass or weeds, growing in between them, were once trimmed by hand in order to drive home the necessity to trim down our own personal '*mind weeds*'—and to cultivate our spacious garden of happy and healthy *states* of mind. This monastery probably gets so much human traffic that the grass turned to mud, so they most likely filled in the grassy areas with concrete and symbolically painted this narrow in-between space green.

Finally, we get to the **inner GRAND STAIRCASE**, representing the hard climb to truly *higher states of consciousness*. Note, at the very top of the stairs is a **giant INCENSE BURNER**. This symbolically represents the need to burn away our defilements and uncover that *Secret Holy Place* within our '*Heart of Hearts*.' In traditional monasteries, this place was also the location of the **Ordination Platform**—the exact place where new monks, priests, and nuns took their vows to strive for personal enlightenment (not only for themselves, but also to help others). These 'vows' are known as the *Bodhisattva Vows* and they have a very Christian ring about them (as already mentioned). This is a 'beautiful' and pivotal place (called *Tiferet*, in *Hebrew*) where the Holy Spark of God—or what Tibetans call, "*the crystalline mind of the vajra*"—resides in each and every one of us [+1].

This was often considered a ‘*Secret Chakra*’—called the *Golden, White, or ‘Clear Light’ Hrit Chakra*, in *Sanskrit*. This important *Chakra* plays a key role in esoteric *Tantric initiation* and is especially associated with the Buddhist Deity **Vajrasattva**. Compellingly, *Vajrasattva* is the Buddhist equivalent to *Christ* and this spot suggests the famous Biblical passage “*Christ in you, your hope of Glory*” (from *The Gospel of John*). After we lit our **incense** stick and purified ourselves with several prayers—or ‘holy thoughts’ symbolized by incense *smoke* on its way to heaven—we can then, finally, enter the main Buddhist sanctuary.

We slowly entered the **MAIN HALL** (*Kondo* or *Hon-do*, in Japan)—also known as the **BUDDHA HALL** (or *Butsuden*, in Japanese)—thru massive doors. “*The Kondo, the main hall of a Buddhist temple, houses the statue of Buddha, the holiest object in the temple.*” But, just before entering this sanctuary, we noticed that this ceremonial opening was flanked by a large monastery **bell**, on one side, and a massive **drum**, on the other. Inside—and center stage—is *the main image of the fully enlightened mind*—the massive golden **statue of THE GREAT BUDDHA** [+1]. This large ‘devotional space’ is obviously associated with the *Heart Chakra* [+12] and thus—according to this popular *chakra* scheme—also symbolized by the color *green*.

In this particular monastery, probably due to the crush of tourists, we were not allowed to advance any further. However, this is also symbolically significant, as deeper and deeper penetrate into the monastery actually signifies the attainment of *higher and more refined states of consciousness*—states that are usually only reached by *adepts, monks, and yogis*. So, this **inner enclosure** can be thought of as the place where only the most serious students of the Dharma may enter—that is, the place where monks and nuns should dwell.

In a traditional monastery, just north of the Main Hall and off on the left-hand side, is the **Senior Monk Hall** (the *Hombu*, in Japan). This is the ‘Head Quarters’ of the monastery [6], where the senior monks and priests reside and run the day-to-day administrative operations of the temple complex.

The next large building on the central axis of the monastery is the great **ASSEMBLY HALL** (*Kodo* or *Hatto*, in Japan). “*The Buddhist scriptures are [specifically] read here.*” Thus, this is an important place of intellectual contemplation and philosophical debate. “*This hall is [also] used for meetings, lectures, and discussions.*” Through hard *intellectual work* [6], it is here where the adept comes to truly understand the teachings of the Buddha and eventually becomes a Dharma master. It is logically associated with communication and the *Throat Chakra* [+6]—and subsequently the color *blue*.

Again, on the left-hand side, just north of—or ‘attached to’—the Senior Monk Hall is the **Abbot’s Quarters** (*Daiho-jo*). This is the place where the Abbot resides, as a “*living Master of the Dharma*” [+6]. Symbolically, this means that if the student works hard enough, he or she may even become an Abbot, themselves.

Next, in many temples—especially within Japanese Zen monasteries—along the top central axis of the complex is the **Monastery Kitchen** (*Kuri*, in Japan). Although a bit too esoteric a description for most people, the kitchen actually has a massive iron **cooking vessel**, which is subsequently placed over a large **fire pit**. This large cooking pot was thought to symbolize the bubbling and churning of our *unconscious minds*. Indeed, this aspect of our minds is usually out of our control and can be quite negative [-3], as in persistent nightmares. However, through the diligent purification of our thoughts, it can also bring forth untold bounty—as in creative new discoveries that we may never have realized were inside us [+3]. Thus, from this esoteric understanding—that is, of the role and symbolic function of a Buddhist temple—we may come to envision this place as a sort of *Third Eye*—that is, a source of *unconscious insight* which, while not always pleasant, usually tends to prove very useful. As such, it may be equated with the *Ajna Chakra* [+3]—and the *dark color of indigo or deep purple*. Thus, **monastery food**—as well as the wisdom teachings themselves—were also considered to be “*food for thought*”—both for the *conscious* mind and for the *unconscious*, as well.

Finally, at the very *crown* of the monastery’s central axis, sits the **LIVING RELIC HALL** (*Reima*, in Jap.). This place served several different functions according to various specialized rituals and traditions. Most often, it was a **Shrine** or **Mausoleum** housing the physical remains and teaching scrolls of past Buddhist Masters. Indeed, the greatest Masters were considered “*living embodiments of these teachings*” and, as such, this place would obviously be associated with the *Crown Chakra* [+1]—and a ‘halo’ of profound “*spiritual attainment!*” This is symbolized by the colors *white* or *gold* (and sometimes even *pink*)—but more often, by a cascade of *rainbow light*. Rarely, but in some instances, the mummified corpse of a past Master was placed in a special (viewing) mausoleum while still seated in meditation, wearing full ceremonial garb. They were—and still are—thought to be continually present, at least in spirit, in order to help all beings attain enlightenment—and thus, final release from worldly suffering.

In the more esoteric traditions, such as Vajrayana Buddhism, this place served as the location for special *Tantric Initiation rites*. As such, it often encloses a **Secret Hall** sometimes filled with so-called **Wrathful Buddhas**—that is, the powerful ‘tuff-love’ or alter-ego versions of the more lovable Peaceful Deities. Often there would be a special **fire pit** for a Buddhist version of the *Vedic fire ceremony*—known in Japan as the *Goma fire ritual*. Alternatively, this hall was more properly placed—according to this archetypal scheme—where the kitchen was located. Either way, these Wrathful Buddhas represent the last *obstacles* [-3 and -1] to be overcome—and thus, the various *powers* to be transformed and mastered—before finally entering enlightenment, ourselves. Indicating that we must all face our ‘*inner demons*’—sooner or later—if we truly want to grow spiritually. And, if we succeed in doing so, we may prove to be dharma-holders of a rare and precious *mind training system*: a profound philosophical tradition and ethical brotherhood—and even a *yoga*-based psychotherapy—that has remained unbroken for several millennia.

At the closing time, as we departed this wonderful temple, we reconsidered our Los Angeles pilgrimage and—even now—suspected that this holy place would prove to be a truly lasting memory—even when the others had faded. With this thought in mind, we finally drove to our much more affordable hotel (sitting near the freeway) located on Hacienda Boulevard. And, while having a bite to eat on the back hatch of our trusty Suburban—as Adam spilled protein powder all over the inside of our car (like we ‘magically predicted’ that he would)—we pondered what to do next on, this, our final night in L.A.

WEDNESDAY EVENING—MARCH 9TH

LITTLE TOKYO & A PEACEFUL PIECE OF ZEN

After showing our boys the big Chinese temple in Hacienda Heights, we wanted to show them the Japanese temple more closely allied with our training and lineage ...so, we drove to Little Tokyo, in Downtown Los Angeles. This area is easy to find, but we approached it from the south, thru the warehouse district. Unfortunately, one wrong turn put us in one the creepiest neighborhoods that we have ever seen. We had taken a wrong turn, once before—that is, one night we accidentally drove into Compton, only to have to turn around because a dead German Shepard blocking the road. But, that crazy scene still didn’t look like this particular street. Here, there were hardly any streetlights and everything was spray-painted black—no designs, no recognizable graffiti, and no other colors—just solid black. It simply looked like a kill zone!

We quickly changed directions and things got better, almost immediately. Already, the homeless people looked much better dressed and they actually pulled expensive roller-type suitcases behind them, as they walked about. We soon realized that they weren’t really ‘street people’; but rather, they had just gotten off one of the buses at the central bus station. After, some giggles, we approached the outer edge of **Little Tokyo** and, then, made our way to the **Zenshuji Soto Mission**. Fortuitously, the main gate was wide open, even though it was dark and no one was inside. We got out and I gave a short, but fairly detailed, lecture about the meaning behind the large **Kannon statue** and then we made a traveler’s wish—and (\$3) donation (for orphans)—while standing in front of the long row of **Jizo statues**. Then, upon returning to our car, we noticed that the big gate had closed, possibly trapping us inside. Taking a deep breath, like our Zen teachers have instructed us to do, we were happy to discover that the gate automatically opened as we forcefully ran it down—I mean, as we slowly approached it, of course. We didn’t expect to have our nerves tested, like this, twice in just a few minutes (don’t forget the previous wrong turn), but those are the ‘joys’ of urban living. No wonder we all desperately need some sort of Zen training—Shit!

WEDNESDAY EVENING—MARCH 9TH

BLADE-RUNN-IN-G INTO THE BRADBURY

After a whirlwind tour of Downtown Los Angeles, we set out to take a look at the famous **Bradbury Building**. Not only is this a unique architectural masterpiece—a sort of one hit wonder from the largely untrained draftsman-architect, George Wyman—but it has also served as a film location for countless movies—the best example probably being that of the memorable noir ‘Sci-Fi’ detective movie, *Bladerunner*. Because of these various science fiction associations, the building’s name has also been conflated with that of the famous author, **Ray Bradbury**. So, in addition to having a ‘public square’ actually named after him, this building also seems to stand as a tribute to this adopted child and ultra-famous L.A. resident—people will remember Ray Bradbury, long after other more notable stars have faded. This fact is made all the more ironic, since some builder recently decided to bulldoze Ray’s yellow colored suburban house and then thought twice about it after heedlessly knocked it down—but, hey, at least you can still buy pieces of it on the internet stamped, of course, with the recommended burning temperature of **Fahrenheit 451**. On an even more macabre note, the Bradbury was the building from which *O.J. Simpson* bought the stiletto knife that somehow, accidentally, killed his wife *Nicole*. Incidentally, the Bradbury is also featured in the detective novel *Angels Flight*, written by **Michael Connelly**. Regardless of your motivations, we all recommend a visit to this rare historic building—deep in the heart of this ‘City of Bones.’

WEDNESDAY EVENING—MARCH 9TH

A SHORT STORY AT RAY BRADBURY SQUARE

As we mentioned earlier, we are desperately trying to get our teens interested in **reading**. To that end, we have picked out a few great authors from each genre, with the hope that one of these **writers** would capture their attention and then—voilà—they would actually start reading for a change. And given our plight, we can think of a no better **author** than **Ray Bradbury** to encourage a lifelong reading habit. Anyone can find his short stories in print and even look them up on Youtube (or maybe even Librevox) for an audio reading of the same story—so that they can then follow effortlessly along with the narrator. This is ‘reading’ done the easy way and it’s a great way to get started. As an extra incentive, try standing on the corner of *W. 5th St. & Flower St.*—the place affectionately named **Ray Bradbury Square**—and then chant the following mantra (preferably to the beat of a tambourine): *“You don’t have to burn books to destroy a culture, just get people to stop reading them.”* Repeat this over and over, as we just did in this narrative, and maybe your kids will try reading just to get you to stop. Then, sit down on a park bench, put in some earplugs—if necessary—and then try actually reading one of **Ray Bradbury’s short stories** without Youtube’s assistance. We recommend that you do this until it gets dark or until *“Something Wicked This Way Comes.”* If the later eventuality happens, then we recommend that you apply some of the ‘knife fighting skills’ that you may have learned at Venice Beach or you can just throw a barbell at them. Or if you prefer, try the popular ‘homeless guy method’ of quickly disrobing and then wildly swing a machete around you—thus, ensuring your personal space. We’ve observed that this method works just as well if not better than pepper spray; but, it does have the unfortunate consequence of an obscenity charge—unless of course you’re one of L.A.’s ‘beautiful people,’ then it tends to lead to a date or perhaps even a Hollywood movie contract. Anyway, enjoy Downtown Los Angeles—like a real Angeleno—and try to do something that you wouldn’t normally do—this is ‘LA LA Land,’ after all—the place where dreams come true ...sometimes.

WEDNESDAY EVENING—MARCH 9TH

MAGICAL THINKING—AND WISH FULFILLMENT—AT **WALT DISNEY CONCERT HALL**

While enjoying downtown Los Angeles, we recommend a stop at the Walt **Disney Concert Hall** for a quick **photo-op**. This is one of LA LA Land's newest and hippest architectural oddities. Apparently designed by Yoda and the **superstar architect, Frank Gehry**, everybody seems to like this building—especially *Star Wars* fans. But even if you hate it, and we've never met anybody who did, it still makes one of the best photography backdrops that anyone could wish for. And go ahead and make that wish, after all this is a **Disney building!** The magicians at the **Magic Castle** told us that wishes made in front of this particular building have to come true—it's an immutable magical law or some whatchamacallit technical thing called a 'wish hole.' We can also attest to its 'wish granting' powers. We made a wish that we could be magically transported to Europe—in an instant—then we took our picture and, low-a-behold, there we were standing in front of a one-of-a-kind Frank Gehry building in downtown Bilbao, Spain. We showed everyone our photograph and told them about our magical journey. Our friends, after first checking our meds, tried it as well—and then went out and told everyone that they, too, were instantly transported to Spain just like us. Damn liars! I bet some people in L.A. have already tried that little piece of subterfuge. So, even if it looks like LA stole this design directly 'lock, stock, and barrel' from Spain, we think this is still the coolest building in Los Angeles. And, a perfect symbol for the 'break out of the box' post-modern architectural movement. Long live Frank Gehry ...and Yoda—even if all of these buildings actually look the same. 😊

DINNER WEDNESDAY EVENING—MARCH 9TH

CLIFTON'S CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

We finished our evening in Downtown Los Angeles with a visit to the perennially cool place to eat—**Clifton's Cafeteria**. Don't let the name fool you, this place is awesome and looks like a massive **redwood grove**. Apparently, it serves good food as well. However, we'll have to take the word of reviewers for that because we didn't pay attention to the time and, unfortunately, discovered too late that the kitchen had closed. This was made all the worse because we had walked around the **restaurant** looking at all the cool **trees, rocks, and stuffed animals**, while the kitchen was apparently still open. However, a great **Jazz band** and a 'happening' **bar** helped to save the night. Yes, even though we didn't plan for any Jazz this evening, we were lucky to hear a surprisingly good performance completely for free—that's Clifton's for you. In fact, during the Great Depression, the owner *Clifford Clinton* made it his mission to "...aid those who could not afford to pay ...he never turned anyone away hungry." This noble tradition, and Clifford Clinton's Christian Ethic, was one of the reasons why we wanted to eat here, in the first place. Indeed, when he was a starving writer, **Ray Bradbury**, himself, ate at Clifton's—because he didn't always have enough money to pay for food! Years later—in 2009—Mr. Bradbury celebrated his 89th birthday here, returning the favor by filling the place with a crowd of adoring fans.

Having arrived too late to eat, we were not deterred—we simply walked across the street, got a big bucket of KFC, and proceeded upstairs to enjoy the band. If the staff noticed, they didn't say anything because they could tell that we were a little disappointed at having missed out on dinner. We ordered several drinks to pay them back and sat down with our questionable 'fast food' next to the **giant three-story redwood tree** and enjoyed the music. Despite this setback—we were all famished—but we had a nice night of it, anyway. Although we forgot the Bands name, apparently, they play at Clifton's every Wednesday night, so look them up. For those of who may have eaten at Clifton's Cafeteria before, the restaurant has been completely remodeled and now looks better than ever. In fact, the bar area was as elegant—in a contemporary rustic sort of way—as any other jazz club that we have visited.

THURSDAY MORNING—MARCH 10TH

OCEANIC ARTS, IN WHITTIER (...OR, I COULDN'T THINK OF A WHITTIER TITLE)

On our last day in Los Angeles, we decided to use geography to our advantage and take a short drive down Hacienda Boulevard, and over to Whittier. This was David's pick, and this time we really were going to pay homage to great big **Stone Heads**—and **Tiki culture**—at the **Oceanic Arts** store and warehouse. Yes, today was Tiki cultural appreciation day for the entire Kurth tribe—and we had saved some money for this very occasion. We spent a couple of hours looking at an entire warehouse of genuine **Pacific tribal art**. As to be expected with all things Tiki, the authentic stuff co-mingled with more whimsically inspired **Tiki barroom art**—think **Shag** the artist, not the carpet. They also had a ton of **seashells** and **beach stuff**, as well as some **nautical-themed art**. And, they had some intriguing **maritime antiques**. There were also many **artistic displays** just showing off all the unique stuff that they had collected over the years. This was kind of like visiting a museum, except that you could buy an occasional item if the price was right. We loved the giant collection of **Tiki drinking mugs**—from all around America—and all over the world! In addition to selling their merchandise, this place also rents its massive collection to **moviemakers** and backyard **Tiki tycoons**. If you live in Southern California, then **Oceanic Arts** is the one stop shop for all your Luau needs. After looking—and touching—nearly everything, we finally made purchases. The prices ran from the ridiculously inexpensive to holy shit that's crazy expensive—but, most things were fairly reasonably priced. We each got a 'required' Tiki drinking mug. I purchased 'Merv,' a funny Easter Island head with Shiner's hat on top (\$20). Julie, also buying for both boys, got two mugs—one was either a green colored Cthulhu or a turtle drinking a mai tai (\$20) and the other was a giant Tiki totem-pole mug (\$20). David finally bought his 'big item'—a large, red colored glass ocean-float, hollowed-out and made into a hanging lamp (\$120). I almost bought a very reasonably priced **large collector's seashell**, but decided that it wouldn't make the car ride home without getting crushed. However, I was so happy with my ridiculous looking Easter Island statue head that I decided to put it on my home altar—just so Aunt Soma could get the last laugh!

So that was our 2016 Spring Break California Holiday in a nutshell. We decided that we really needed to write all this stuff down because we were tired of forgetting all the interesting details from our great—and often expensive—family vacations. Traveling is very expensive—too expensive to just forget all the fun and careful planning that went into it. So, this is now the 'standard form' of our vacation debriefings, so to speak. However, I've tried to make these recollections into interesting reading—otherwise, rereading this sort of thing can be a bit boring—especially, for anyone else (who didn't come along on the trip). Incidentally—in 2017—we finally visited the **Vibrato Jazz Club**, as well as **Universal Studios**—namely, to take an overdue refresher course in ritual magick and dreamwork at **Hogwarts**—but, that's another story altogether.

P.S.: I also didn't write anything about **the Cabazon Monsters** that we unfortunately encountered on our way home. This was probably because they were far too scary—and might deter us from ever leaving the house again (sorry, this is an inside joke—however, you can look this up if you're in need of a parting chuckle ...or disapproving sigh).

THE ADI BUDDHA'S SUPREME BENEDICTION

The "All-Good Father" SAMANTABHADRA's Divine Blessing & Life Purpose

An east-west interfaith interpretation of *The Aspiration of Samantabhadra*.

by Rev. T. Christopher Kurth

Note: This Buddhist teaching is based on a combined synthesis of several translations of *The Aspiration of Samantabhadra* by Garchen Rinpoche, Dzogchen Ponlop, Chogyam Trungpa, and Karl Brunnholzl's book, *A Lullaby to Awaken the Heart*.