Heart of sky heart of earth: The role of sacred mountains in world religions and primal traditions

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HEART OF SKY, HEART OF EARTH: THE ROLE OF SACRED MOUNTAINS
IN WORLD RELIGIONS AND PRIMAL TRADITIONS

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Masters of Science
University of Montana
1989

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March 9, 1989
Mountains are held to be sacred by most world religions and primal traditions. The human response to sacred mountains is exceptionally diverse. Sacred mountains appear as worldly deities and non-worldly deities; the abode of deities, demons, and ogres, tombs of the hallowed dead, temples and thrones, divine sources of water and life, and the embodiment of the unknown - the awesome and fascinating mystery. Cultures from around the world view sacred mountains as cosmic centers giving order and stability to their world, as axes linking together heaven and earth, and as places of pilgrimage revealing a deeper and more meaningful reality.

The symbol of the sacred mountain is a point of departure for the quest for a new relationship between human beings and non-human beings. This is particularly true for mountaineers and other outdoor enthusiasts whose participation with mountains are based on the real experience of fear and danger as well as beauty and grandeur. It is the discovery of both pleasure and dread which awakens a sense of the sacred. The constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion, as stated in the First Amendment and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, may provide the grounds to redefine and reinterpret mountains within the context of land management plans. Subsequently, sacred mountains provide the opportunity to peel away veneers of ego, pride, and petty self-interests and replace them with a practical moral consideration and compassion for other human and non-human beings.
CONTENTS

Abstract ii.

List of Illustrations iv.

Introduction 1.

Chapters

I. A Sense of Place 7.

II. The Connection Between Heaven and Earth 19.

III. Mountains as the Fountainhead of Creation and Re-creation 40.

IV. Mountains as the "Wholly Other" 60.

V. Sacred as a Land Use Category 75.

Notes 92.

Bibliography 102.

iii
**LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Sacred mountains as they appear in the Navaho mythical landscape</td>
<td>12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Stupa temples at Borobodur</td>
<td>34.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan</td>
<td>34.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Mount Kailas</td>
<td>42.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Mount Kailas at the hydrological apex of Asia</td>
<td>42.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>K2</td>
<td>61.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Special thanks to Scott Williamson for the pen and ink drawings and sketches.*
Introduction

Just as the alpenglow began working its magic on the sacred Himalayan peak named Kangchenjunga, a native Bhutia man approached our camp. He seemed bewildered by the sight of comparatively wealthy foreigners choosing to leave the security of their comfortable homes to backpack through his backyard. Then the old man just smiled and nodded his head while gesturing to the astounding grandeur of his mountain home. He viewed this scene every day, but we could tell by his affirmative smile that each day Kangchenjunga continued to inspire wonder and awe.

At that moment it occurred to me that the mountain was more than a stage of inert rock and ice on which we play out our self-amusing mountaineering sport. Instead, the mountain's conditioned occurrence and inherent perfection is indistinguishable from the daily activity of the old man's life. The radiant alpenglow on the mountain, as it was reflected in the old man's smile, helps explain, define, and interpret a land which is sacred—one that is special to the Bhutia culture. Together, the mountain and the people compose the world.

This revelation reminded me of my own relationship with mountains. Why did I undergo all the untold hardships and privation to travel to Kangchenjunga? What about the danger to life itself? How can I account for

1.
the mountain's awesome beauty and menace? Why do I choose to climb?

George Mallory's quick and evasive answer to why he chose to climb - "Because it is there" - invariably comes to mind. Although ambiguous, his famous reply has since become a cliché. Its meaning lies buried under an avalanche of petty self-interests and values. Perhaps no other answer captures our imagination quite as well. Wouldn't he be amused by the mystique built up around his reply? Although Mallory's reply is a mystifying answer to why people climb, it does begin to answer the question, "Why are mountains sacred?"

"Because it is there." Maybe the mountain is there in the imperative sense, its commanding presence towering over us. Its "thereness" is so close that it encompasses all our senses. There is no room to breathe or move from under its watchful eye.

Maybe Mallory's answer implies that a mountain is. After all, mountains have existed much longer than humans. A mountain is a great being and a vessel of cosmic power. It is alive. "Because it is..." Lama Anagarika Govinda describes a mountain's "isness":

"Mountains grow and decay, they breathe and pulsate with life. They attract and collect invisible energies from their surroundings: the energies of the air, of
the water, of electricity and magnetism; they create winds, clouds, thunder-storms, rains, waterfalls, and rivers. They fill their surroundings with life and give shelter and food to innumerable living things. Such is the greatness of a mountain.

But even among mountains that are sacred, there are some of such outstanding character and position that they have become the spiritual foci of the most ancient civilizations and religions of humanity, milestones of the eternal quest for perfection and ultimate realization, signposts that point beyond our earthly concerns towards the infinity of a universe from which we have originated and to which we belong."

Such is the greatness of a mountain. A mountain's presence overwhelms us. The mountains awake in us a sense of the sacred as reflected by the diversity of ways in which various cultures and traditions experience them. My answer to the question, "Why are mountains sacred?" is four-fold.

1. Mountains provide a sense of place. Sacred mountains as communicated through myths serve to sanctify, explain, define, and interpret the meaning of the land, in its particularity, and the meaning of the life of its inhabitants in relation to it.

2. Mountains connect heaven and earth. Sacred mountains provide a place where heaven and earth intersect.

3. Mountains are the fountainhead of creation and recreation. Sacred mountains are recognized for their
fecundity, a source of nourishment for both the surrounding nature as well as for the human soul.

4. Mountains exemplify the "wholly other". The awesome immensity and sublimity of certain mountains provide a setting in which we can discover our relationship with other beings.

It is as a counterpoint to our dominating, utilitarian culture that this work is being offered. My purpose is to provide a different perspective on mountains than the present distorted and unhealthy views that dominate our world scene. Our obligation is to discover and respect the sacredness in mountains. Consequently, federal agencies should give practical moral attention to sacred mountains in land management plans.

**Defining sacred mountains**

The etymological root of the word "sacred" is *sacer*, the Latin word meaning "to set apart". "Sacred" originally referred to something special, out of the ordinary, but not necessarily connected to a deity, spirit, or church. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the adjective as that which is "exclusively appropriated to some person or some special purpose,...place", as well as to a "god or deity", and hence "entitled to veneration or religious respect." In addition, the stem *sac* of the Latin word "sacer" has a nasalised form - *saco* - which appears in
Latin words such as *sanctus* which enters the English language as the words "sanctuary" and "sanction". To give sanctuary is "to place in safety; to afford protection or shelter." "Sanction" means "to render inviolable, establish, confirm."  

A sacred mountain, therefore, stands out from other mountains as having a distinct presence that is charged with religious meaning as apprehended by an individual or group of people. The question may be, "What do sacred mountains reveal that sets them apart from other mountains?" It may be their permanence, their height, their vastness, or their appearance when shrouded in mist or clouds, or the mysterious sound the wind makes in their gorges, or their ability to attract lightning, thunder, or negative ions. These attributes inspire an attitude of reverence. 

Mircea Eliade believes that people are aware of the sacred precisely because it "manifests itself as something wholly different from the profane."  

Eliade describes the distinction between the sacred and profane as a polarity often expressed as an opposition between real and unreal. The sacred introduces an absolute element or existence into the homogeneous, relative non-being of the profane world. Therefore, sacred mountains help provide structure, consistency, and order in the
world.

"The manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world. In the homogeneous and infinite expanse, in which no point of reference is possible and hence no orientation can be established, the hierophany reveals an absolute fixed point, a center." 7

Eliade describes the discovery of a fixed point as "equivalent to the creation of the world." 8 The center, or fixed point is at the heart of the meaning of sacred mountains as we will see in chapter one.

In Eliade's theory of sacred space, that which is sacred is manifested in the object itself. In the case of the sacred mountain, it is not the physicalness itself which is adored as a mountain, but it is worshipped precisely because it is a hierophany. This is somewhat paradoxical. "By manifesting the sacred, an object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself." 9 Sacredness saturates the physical object with power, reality, and meaning. This directly stems from our experience with the object and the resulting dialectical interplay. An object, understood as a hierophany, is inseparable from the sacredness irrupting from it.
Chapter I
A Sense of Place

The ancient Quiché people, who lived in the highlands of Guatemala, had in their possession a very special instrument, an ilbal, which means a "seeing instrument" or a "place to see". With it, they could see past and future events. This instrument was not a telescope, nor a crystal ball. It was a book. This book was their means of overcoming nearsightedness. This book is most commonly known as the Popol Vuh, but among other names for the book is Our Place in the Shadows. The following paraphrase from a portion of this book illustrates the importance of mountains in consecrating a place to live.

According to Mayan cosmology, the Mayan-Quichés did not have a home before the dawn came. Packing their gods on their backs, they began a long migration. The first ranking patron deity, Tohil, otherwise known as "Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth", was among them. Tohil said, "let us go on until we see where we belong." They journeyed on until they reached a mountain called "Place of Advice". The Quiché people along with other tribes held council at the summit. There, they identified themselves. Their gods spoke, "Here am I: I am a Quiché person, and you there, you are Tams, this will be your name," the Tams were told.

It was nearly dawn and the gods were becoming scared. "Give us places to hide.... Construct places where we can remain yours, your penitents, and sacrificers, and give one place to each of us," they said. After a search throughout the country, the quichés found hiding places for their gods.
god was carried to a hidden place that bears his name today. It was on a bare mountain that Hacauitz was hidden. Tohil was placed on a mountain which today is called Patohil.

The Quiché's remained on the mountain tops of Hacauitz and Patohil for the birth of the sun. The animals too had climbed the mountains from the rivers and canyons below. They all had one identity. Together they looked East expecting the rising sun. At last, the sun rose. Everyone was happy to receive its warmth. But the sun was so hot it dried out the face of the earth. All the gods except White Sparkstriker turned to stone. Only the god's genius remained to speak to the Quiché. With happiness in their hearts, the Quiché people began to make their home. The mountain on which they observed the dawning became their own mountain, their own citadel.  

There are two ways in which the myth refers to mountains as a power or force that helps to center and define the life of a human community. The result is a sharp, clear vision of the world for the Quiché people. First, every prominent mountain named in the myth is associated with a mythical event. Many of the gods mentioned in Mayan cosmology reside on mountain tops. Often the name of the god and the name of the mountain are synonymous. The mountain and its associated god become a genius loci imparting a spiritual presence and a source of divine inspiration.  

The genius becomes visible or audible by means of ritual. Through the mountain, the intangible or invisible life forces of a place become more readily

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communicated and more personal. Therefore, the relationship between the human beings of that place and the other beings is intensified.  

Second, the Quiché people are transformed into a coherent and articulated community. According to the myth, it was on a mountain called "Place of Advice" that the Mayan tribes were formed. It was there that individuals and smaller groups were brought together into a larger community. The myth is a way of bonding together large numbers of people who would otherwise have never come into contact. No doubt, the accompanying ethical, political, and social structures of a community are constituted by myth as well.

The mountain on which the Quiché people observed the dawning and in the shadow of which they built their homes stands as a beacon. The mountain illuminates a particular place which is apart from all others and which provides a sense of belonging at home. It provides warmth and security to individuals who are no longer alone but are members of a larger community, true inhabitants of the earth. And, it guides the Quiché people toward the numinous presence of life giving forces.

This Mayan cosmology is by no means an isolated case. Sacred mountains play an important role in other mythologies as well. The importance of mountains
as a means of providing a sense of place in primal traditions can be further explicated through mythical topography and toponymy. That is, detailed description of surface features (in this case, mountains) and the naming of those features are central to the structure of a place as passed down through the tradition of reciting stories and myths. As George Lubick says, primal traditions need "...to ritually recapitulate mythical toponymy and topography in song and prayer." This has the effect of continually recreating the place of inhabitation in the minds of the community.

Topography

One of the functions of sacred mountains is that they define the terrestrial boundaries of a place. This is particularly true for the Navaho Indians of the American Southwest.

Near and within the borders of the Navaho Indian reservation are six mountains which help define the space in which the people live. The purpose of these mountains is not limited solely to this function. In addition, these mountains serve as "protectors from illness as well as external enemies, (and) the source of the powers of shamans as well as teachers of song and other sacred knowledge to ordinary humans."15

There is a myth about these six mountains that de-
fine Navaho tribal territory. The following version is told by a medicine man called Sandoval.

"First Man and First Woman formed six mountains from the soil that First Man had gathered from the mountains in the Third World and kept in his medicine bag. As before, they placed Sis nájin in the East. Tso dzil in the South, Dook oslid in the West, and Débé ntsa in the North. They placed a sacred mountain which they called Cholí on the earth, and they made the mountain, Dzil naodili, around which the people were to travel...."16

Sandoval continues with a description of how Holy Beings entered these mountains. This resulted in some dissatisfaction and much trembling on the mountain's part. Then First Man and First Woman "dressed" them according to their positions on the earth. To "dress" a mountain means to provide for it prayers and chants. After the "dressing", the mountains were fastened to the earth with a variety of objects including a bolt of white lightning, colored clouds, a sunbeam, a stone knife, and a rainbow.17 It is believed that this is the proper method of creating these mountains and it will result in harmony among the people of the earth.

Figure A depicts these mountains as they exist in the mythical landscape. The English names and locations of these mountains are: Blanca Peak (Sis nájin), Colorado; Mount Taylor (Tso dzil), New Mexico; Humphrey Peak (Dook...
1. Sis nájin, East Mt.
2. Tso dzil, South Mt.
3. Dook oslid, West Mt.
4. Debé ntsa, North Mt.
5. Cholí, Sacred Mt.
6. Dzil náodili
7. Dotso, Mile Ely
8. Place of Emergence
9. First Growing Plants

Figure A: Sacred mountains as they appear in the Navaho mythical landscape
oslidi), Arizona; Hesperus Peak (Debh ntsa), Colorado; Gobernador Knob (Cholfi), New Mexico; and Herfano Mountain or Farmington Mesa (Dzil néodili), Arizona. The first four of these mountains represent the four cardinal directions and the last is the central mountain.

The creation of the boundary mountains by First Man and First Woman is the foundation of the Navaho culture. The creation is re-enacted during the construction of a hogan, the traditional Navaho dwelling. Through ceremony, the family hogan is consecrated as a sacred place. According to Trebbe Johnson, the poles, sticks, soil, and even the positioning of the fire ring are all representative of particular aspects of the original hogan - the six sacred mountains. Therefore, the Navaho family does not even have to be in sight of the sacred mountains to be reminded of their influence.

Several of these peaks have been desecrated. There is a uranium mine at Mount Taylor. Two of these sacred mountains are presently ski areas. Also, the sacred black mesa is strip mined. Where some see only new buildings and ski runs, the Navaho see the very heart of the world. Development on any of these peaks must be interpreted as sacrilegious due to their importance in Navaho mythology.

The role of mountains in both the Ayan cosmology
and the Navaho mythology is similar. Both account for the people's place of habitation, which includes everything associated with the earth both visible and invisible. Both myths function "to make the spiritual and natural world into one that can be seen and understood." Through these myths the place and the community are inseparably linked.

Toponymy

A quick look at any map of Montana reveals a wide range of names for mountains. Some names are descriptive such as Glacier Peak, Granite Peak, and Froze-to-Death Mountain. Some still retain their Indian names, such as Going-to-the-Sun Mountain, Morningstar Peak, and Poia Peak. But more often than not, mountains are named for, or by, or in memory of, a conqueror. Take for example the Mission Mountains. The "mission" attempted to replace the native religion with Christianity. So we have names such as Saint Mary's Peak. Likewise, Thirteen Eagle Peak has been renamed Mount Harding.

In primal traditions, mountains are generally named according to the roles they play in myths and legends. By so doing, they become something special. They become intimately connected with events that define a place. They function as a way of providing people with a more tangible and visible relationship with the origins of
their place. The names serve as answers to questions as "to why there is the coming into incarnation and the going out of incarnation, why there is the Dawning, the Noonday, and the Night." 

Here are a few examples of mountains named according to myths and legends. Citlaltepetl (the Star Mountain), Popocatepetl (the Smoking Mountain), and Iztaccihuatl (the Sleeping Woman) are all Aztec names for the highest mountains in Mexico. They are named after legendary deities. Chomolungma, the highest mountain in the world is another example. This is the Tibetan name for Mount Everest meaning "The Goddess Mother of the World". A mountain name may also be associated with the origin of a geographical or celestial feature as in the case of Mateo Tepee (Bear Lodge) the Kiowa name for Devil's Tower. Legend has it that seven sisters were chased up the tower by a bear and were later borne into the sky as the seven stars of the Big Dipper.

Particularly interesting examples of place names are found half way around the world in the Himalayan mountain kingdom of Sikkim. Until its recent annexation to India, it had enjoyed a great deal of isolation from Western influences. There, the place names reflect the traditions of the three main groups of inhabitants: the aboriginals who speak Lencha, a form of Tibeto-Burmese; the descendents of Tibetan tribes who speak Bhutia, a Tibetan dia-
lect; and Nepalese who speak Ghurkali, a Hindi dialect.25

In the proto-Tibetan tradition of the Bhutias and the shamanistic and totemistic aspects of the aboriginal inhabitants, the whole environment is alive with spirits. Central to these traditions is bLa or "lifepower". This Bhutia word is often used as a prefix. For example, it can connect the "lifepower" to a given place (bLa-gnas) or animal (bLa-sems-chan). One mountain monastery is called bLa-brang-dGon-pa or "Lama-Abode Monastery".26 Through this kind of naming process "fate and duration" of the place or a person is connected to the spirit world. Therefore, even the mountains take on a life of their own. It is no wonder that some of these aboriginal inhabitants claim that the mountains speak. They speak in strange ways, putting strange thoughts into the head, setting strange visions before the eyes, or filling the ears with sounds that don't appear to be there.

In Sikkim, mountain names often indicate the dwelling places of the gods. Take for example Kangchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world. The Bhutia people call this mountain Gangs-chen-mdsod-nga meaning "The Great Glacier of the Five Treasures".27 According to legend, it is the abode of the "God of the North and of the Wealth" who protects the five treasures: gold, silver, jewels, grain, and the holy books.28

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For the Lepcha speaking people, the mountain is called Kong-lucu meaning the "Highest Glacier". It is to the "Highest Glacier" that the Lepcha people trace their mythical origins. There, on the glaciers of Kangchenjunga, the primordial couple was born. Old chronicles describe the mountain more like a throne.

"Kong-lucu sits majestically enthroned, draped in white and silky cloud-curtains; the five peaks, clad in eternal snow, are its shimmering crown; the seven lakes at its feet are compared to cups containing water-offerings that are placed on altars before the images. The snow-covered rocks, to the right and to the left of the throne, are the white mountain lions roaring to the sky, their necks adorned with vulture nests."

The mythological realm of the Kangchenjunga divinity extends to other mountains as well. There are two acolytes Yapdu (yab-sdud) and Pauhunri (dPah-wo-hun-ri). Pandir is the "Kings Minister"; and there is the "Lord of Lightning" (s-kyes-bu-lung-btsan-thog-ri-rje).

When the Sikkimese gaze up at the frozen heights where trees and shrubs can't even grow, they are constantly reminded of a certain beauty and majesty the mountains impart through these myths. The human being takes in and imitates what he or she sees, silently memorizes this scene, and reproduces the image over and over, thereby creating a strong community bond.
The spirits and gods that live there help to explain the meaning of the people's own existence, and how to deal with the cold and wind.

As Theodore Roszak points out, the reality of primal peoples is polyphonic. Like a harmonic melody which contains multiple sounds, overtones, counterpoints, and resonances, a polyphonic reality depicts a more complex environment. Each object or action may produce more than one meaning. The primal peoples can see in the material mountain spiritual prototypes that their mind cannot translate into words (and which the Western mind is inclined to call superstition). However, whatever is so perceived is found to be sacred and the experience of the place is charged with authentic meaning.
Chapter II

The Connection Between Heaven and Earth

In the previous chapter, I mentioned the existence of a central mountain like the one in the Hebrew myth. It is a universal symbol in world religions and primal traditions. Mircea Eliade claims that "every inhabited region has what may be called a center, a place that is sacred above all." Traditional civilizations sanctify an unlimited number of "centers". "The plurality of 'centers of the earth' within a single inhabited region presents no difficulty." These centers may include a mythological cosmic mountain, a temple or shrine, or the center of a teepee or yurt. In the case of the yurt, the ritualistic function of the center is performed through the opening in the roof to let out smoke.

The central mountain serves the purpose of a giant surveyor's rod - its very presence gives coherence and form. It is here that the divine and profane worlds meet and communicate. In this chapter, I will explore the various ways a mountain may impress itself upon the human imagination, as a god or as the abode of a god, and how it serves in the capacity of linking heaven and earth.

Mount Meru

There exists in Hindu, Buddhist, and Tibetan Bon
mythologies an outstanding mountain. It is 84,000 miles high and is divided into thirty-three heavens. Incredible! Above its summit stands the pole star around which the sun, moon, and planets are believed to revolve. Mount Meru is often depicted as a massive downward thrust of cosmic energy that congeals into matter at the summit, then spirals downward into the continents and oceans spread at its feet. The progression through the various zones of vegetation growing on its flank has been likened to the hierarchic levels of the soul on its spiritual journey.

Hindus believe that at its very top is the palace of Sakra Devanorn Indra, the supreme god of the Vedic pantheon who governs the whole cosmos. It is equally a distinguished mythical place for the Buddhists. In their eyes, Meru is a cosmic mandala, a constantly revolving Wheel of Life through which one progresses through life to death, and on to rebirth.

There are other axial mountains. Some others are found in the traditions of the Iranians, Germans, Israelites, Christians, and the dyemies of Malacca. The axial mountain is a widespread symbol of the powerful contact between the divine and the human realms.

I want to suggest that, if the symbol of the axial mountain is to be the most effective, its image must be
physically manifested. That is, the indefinable qualities as well as the form and shape of the mythical mountain, must become reality. If Mount Meru had no geographical location, it would lose its persuasive significance as a way of uniting heaven and earth, and human beings would have a more difficult means of attaining its power. Therefore, we will next look at a few specific, historically significant mountains that are "in the shape of" the cosmic mountain. We will look at the role of a few mountains in the Christian tradition particularly Mount Zion and Mount Sinai, the role of mountains in the Japanese Shugendō tradition, and the man-made imitations of mountains - the Mesopotamian ziggurats, Tibetan stupas, and the Teotihuacan pyramids.

God's mountains

The Hebrew bible is full of instances where mountains embody both the natural and supernatural worlds. In fact, the most common word for mountain, har, appears in the Hebrew bible 520 times. It can refer to either a specific mountain or hill, or a complete range or region of mountains. Gib'âh is the second most frequent Hebrew term for mountain. It usually refers to a single hill and never a range, according to Robert Cohn. In addition to these two terms, there is the word "šîr" meaning "rock" which is often a synonym for mountain. Its meaning
often implies a notion of strength and security. It has been used as an epithet for Yahweh himself in his role as a protector. For example, Psalms 18:2 refers to Yahweh as "my šâr, my fortress, my deliverer."

There are a variety of ways in which mountains have been perceived in the Bible. In Palestine, Mount Tabor was an axial mountain. Mount Tabor represented the center of Palestine. "Tabor" may come from the root word "tabbur" meaning navel. The mountain did indeed join three territories - Issachar, Zebulun, and Naphtali - and was the fortress from which Yahweh waged war against the Canaanites.

Mountains have also been used as symbols of antiquity. They are the standard of permanence. For example, Eliphaz taunts Job, "Are you the first man that was born, or were you brought forth before the hills?" A psalmist claims that God is older than the mountains. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or even thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." Mountains signify the order and permanence of the created world.

The psalmist, David, was impressed by the power and strength of mountains. He had spent a lot of time in the mountains as a shepherd boy and was inspired to sing, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence does
In the New Testament, there are five mountains closely associated with events in Jesus' life. Mount Temptation is where he fasted for forty days and forty nights and wrestled with the Devil. The "Horns of Hattin" above the shore of the Sea of Galilee is where Jesus told of the Beatitudes. Mount Tabor is the mountain of the Transfiguration where "his face shone with the brightness of the sun and his garments took on the whiteness of light itself," as witnessed by Peter, James, and John. Mount of Olives was the scene of his ascension. Golgotha was where he was crucified.

These are only a few examples of biblical mountains which have been accorded religious veneration. Others may stand out for their height, their stability, their fecundity (discussed in chapter III), as a place of sacrifice, and as a place of vision. In most cases, the physical mountain helps to crystallize a religious experience or teaching. However, the "two pivots of biblical sacred history" are Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. These afford the best examples of mountains as the focal point of divine/human communication.

Mount Zion overlooks the holy city of Jerusalem. It is not much of a mountain in terms of elevation, but the biblical authors transform it into a formidable peak.
After all, it is Yahweh's dwelling place. "His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion." The psalmists mention Zion as the home of Yahweh many times but only in the present tense. Robert Cohn believes that this intent emphasizes God's eternal presence rather than King David's captured city of the historical past. Because Zion is God's dwelling place, the biblical authors intentionally exaggerate its beauty and height calling it "beautiful in elevation." Mount Zion is also described as a fortress from which he protects the city of Jerusalem. From these descriptions, Mount Zion emerges as a secure, lofty, and sacred mountain.

Robert Cohn finds that the mountain imagery of Mount Zion "expresses the paradox of Yahweh dwelling simultaneously in heaven and on earth." The image is of Yahweh's head in the clouds of heaven and his feet on earth. "At Mount Zion the boundary between heaven and earth is erased." This image is further explicated in Psalm 99 and Isaiah 66. Here the word "footstool" is an epithet for Mount Zion. "Exalt the Lord our God, worship at his footstool! Holy is he!" Also, "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool." According to Cohn, the footstool image, like the mountain, "expresses Yahweh's sovereignty extending from heaven to earth."
The book of Exodus contains a story about a mountain of God that bridges the gap between earth and heaven. Mount Sinai is the site of numerous encounters between men and God. The narrative begins in Exodus chapter three in the story of the burning bush. Moses chances upon Mount Horeb while tending to his flock.

"And the angel of the lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, 'I will turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt'."

In this initial episode, Moses witnessed a mysterious and awesome sight. He returned to his people, but the uncanny glow of the bush changed his sense of identity and mission. His initial experience with Mount Sinai enticed him to return and to introduce other people to this strange place.

On his second trip to the mountain he brought the people of Israel with him. On one occasion, he went to Mount Horeb because the people were thirsty. "Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock at Horeb and thou shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink," God instructed.

Later on, God told Moses to prepare the Israelites for a day of thronmany. One of the things he was commanded...
to do was to set boundaries to prevent the people from getting too close to the mountain.

"Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly....And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up."59

Soon afterward, God gave the Israelites instructions including the Ten Commandments. During this time, clouds obscured the mountain.

"And Moses went up on the mountain and a cloud covered the mountain. And the glory of the Lord settled upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. And Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights."60

The story definitely describes a mountain with spiritual power. It is like Mount Zion in this aspect. However, Mount Sinai is very different from Mount Zion in other ways.

Unlike Mount Zion, Sinai is located in the middle of a wilderness. It lies outside a settled area. It
is a mountain "out there" which can function as a pilgrimage site. Moses happened upon the mountain alone and was inspired by its numinous qualities. He then returned home and inspired others to make the journey to the mountain. The new pilgrims were a "mixed multitude" including those newly freed from slavery. The theophany and God's laws helped draw the people together and bind them to a covenant. The pilgrims returned transformed.61

A second way Mount Sinai differs from Mount Zion is that it is not the permanent abode of God. He stops in on occasion. Exodus 10:20 says that "the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai" as if for only the duration of the theophany. However, there is no uniform explanation of exactly how God is connected to the mountain. Likewise, when the cloud descends over the mountain, it serves the function of obscuring God's face from the people, while at the same time, makes his presence known to them. Cohn believes that these texts together "express the paradox of the transcendent becoming immanent, the omnipresent becoming localized."62 So it may be that the sacred mountain helps dispel dualism; not only the dualism implied in transcendence and immanence, or in omnipresence and localization, but the dualism of body and spirit, God and
man, or heaven and earth as well.

Moses' encounter with the burning bush is especially important. In the words of Rudolf Otto, this encounter is an example of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, "the awesome and fascinating mystery." (cf. chapter IV) This episode is mysterious because the bush burns but is not consumed. It is a phenomenon of the like Moses had never witnessed. The episode of the burning bush is literally fascinating. Moses draws nearer to investigate. He is in awe of the holy ground. In Exodus 3:5 God says, "Do not draw near, put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

*Mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is at the heart of the religious experience we will explore in chapter IV.

**Yama no kami: the "mountain divinities" of Japan**

Every student of classical Greek mythology will remember Mount Olympus where the gods passed the time in merry-making and laughter. They can picture Zeus presiding over his council from his gigantic seat, the amphitheater near the summit. An even better example of mountains as a connection between heaven and earth comes from Japan.

Mountains have impressed themselves upon the Japanese imagination as beings which are most often regarded as
kami (divinities or spirits). The kami may inhabit any part of nature - waterfalls, trees, rocks, or mountains. They may be present in anything. Even anomalies of the landscape and energy sources are signs of kami. Those particularly associated with mountains are called yama no kami. According to Byron Earhart, there is no secular, impersonal, or reified world in the indigenous Shinto tradition. The kami and physical aspects of natural phenomena cannot be divorced. They share the same reality. Earhart claims our Western conceptual framework and the nature of our language prevents us from understanding kami. "The mind is already perceiving, 'Ah, yes, the Japanese think that the mountain is sacred'; 'I see, the Japanese deify the mountain'... For (the Japanese) the mountain is sacred; it is kami (divine)."

A most outstanding example of yama no kami is Mount Fuji, meaning "fire goddess". It is a beautifully balanced volcanic cone rising to over 12,000 feet. Its close proximity to the skies or heaven and its particularly symmetrical shape intensifies the power and presence of kami. Hushinoro, a Japanese poet describes Mount Fuji like this:

"Lo! There towers the lofty peak of Fuji
From between Hai and wave-washed Saruga.
The clouds of heaven dare not cross it,
Nor the birds of the air soar above it.
The snows quench the burning fires,
The fires consume the falling snow. It baffles the tongue; it cannot be named. It is a mysterious god."

Because of its sacred qualities, all of Mount Fuji is a Shinto shrine, from below timberline all the way to the summit. It attracts a tremendous number of people. Thousands of people climb to the summit each year making Fuji an easy candidate for the most frequently climbed mountain in the world.

Although yama no kami are generally thought of as dwelling upon a mountain, they don't always stay there. During certain times of the seasons, they become detached from the mountain proper and become partially autonomous. For example, in Spring the yama no kami becomes ta no kami of the paddy fields. There they will remain for the duration of the growing season before returning to the mountain. Even when the kami change locus, they are still not separated from nature.

The sacredness of the yama no kami began with the indigenous Shinto tradition. However, there are several other traditions which view mountains as religiously significant. Taoist naturalism and Buddhist asceticism have also been influential. In fact, there has been such a proliferation of such beliefs that they have collectively been referred to as sangaku shinkō which means "mountain beliefs". They have also been called sangaku.
Before Buddhism was brought to Japan, mountains were worshipped from their base. Japanese scholars claim indigenous religious customs prohibited people from climbing. Such an activity was considered trespassing on sacred ground. Buddhism changed this notion. Legend says that Buddha himself climbed a peak thus altering the native belief.

Buddhism brought with it the notion that the mountain was perfect in itself and therefore revealed eternal truth. The Zen master Dōgen clearly had a deep love for mountains. In the thirteenth century, he founded the monastery of Ōheiji where ascetics practiced meditation as a way of discovering the eternal truths the mountains have to offer. "Those without eyes to see the mountains do not sense, do not know, do not see, do not hear this truth."

Slowly, the various traditions that regard mountains as religiously significant began to merge. The major organization centered on sacred mountains became known as Shugendō. This term means literally, "the way of mastering ascetic powers", but specifically refers to those powers associated with mountains. The practitioners are called yamabushi, "those who lie down (sleep) in the mountains."
Shugendō gained popularity. Many mountain headquarters began to appear by the thirteenth century for the purpose of ritualistic training in order to acquire transcendent power. This training often involves four steps.74

1. The yamabushi undergo purification to make themselves worthy to receive kami.
2. They climb a mountain, the seat of kami.
3. Through the act of climbing, they receive supernatural power through union with the spirits.
4. The yamabushi perform social and religious ceremonies with the purpose of enticing kami to agricultural regions where they heal pestilence and fertilize crops.

In recent times, Shugendō has suffered a decline. It was outlawed during World War II when the Japanese considered it a threat to militarism and nationalism.75 It has also been influenced by Western secularism and the theological reconception of God-over-nature or God-outside-nature. Still, pockets of Shugendō remain. A modified form is practiced on Mount Shasta in California.76

Mountains as temples, temples as mountains

The capacity of mountains to link heaven and earth also serves to make them an ideal place for temples and shrines. This seems to be particularly true in the case
Mountains and temples seem to go together. I remember counting the steps on my pre-dawn climb of Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka. The path to the summit of Adam's Peak, a sacred center for Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and Mohammedans, is lined with temples. Each of them provide a focal point for the spiritual aspirations of the pilgrims. A temple may mark the place where a crucial event took place like the site of Adam's footprint. A temple can also provide a pilgrim with the opportunity to pay homage to a particular saint or god.

There was one thing about these temples which caught my attention. Some of them looked like the mountain itself. They were solidly constructed with rocks and cement rising up like a dome shaped mound with perhaps a spire at the top. Although not necessarily spectacular, they were endowed with mountain symbolism. The tops of both the temples and the mountain seemed to point toward the sky, beyond the level of everyday mundane existence.

The classic example of a temple that looks like a mountain is the great stupa-temple of Borobodur in Java. (See figure B.) It is a man-made mountain consisting of nine storeys which pilgrims ascend for worship and chanting of sutras. It is a miniature version of Mount Meru. When the pilgrim reaches the top, he or she is symbolically at the center of the world. Individual
Figure B (above): Stupa temples at Borobodur
Figure C (below): Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan
temples throughout neighboring Bali are called merus thus repeating the mountain symbolism.

The ziggurats of ancient Babylon have a similar pattern. They are seven-storied towers symbolizing the seven heavens of the Babylonian tradition. They are also miniature replicas of the cosmic mountain. The Sumerian word for ziggurat is u-nir (hill) meaning "visible from afar". Like Mount Meru, the summit is reserved for deities. In the case of the replica, a local deity dwells in the summit room and becomes accessible only on festive occasions. Even in areas where suitable eminences do not naturally occur, ziggurats express the physical manifestation of Mount Meru.

The notion of a world mountain is also implicit in Buddhist monuments called stupas. These are prevalent in the Himalaya regions of Tibet, Ladakh, and Nepal. A stupa was originally said to house the remains of Buddha. Today, one of the functions of a stupa is to mark the spot where a sage or saint died and contains that person's ashes.

This is not surprising. The mountains of the Buddhist areas of the Himalayas have long been associated with the dead. Burial upon the upper slopes and summits is common. It is thought that the soul of the dead might more easily rise to the world above. In Tibet, the nomad's preferred method of body disposal is to hack the body to pieces.
and distribute them on a holy mountain summit. The vultures then swoop down to clean the remains.\textsuperscript{82}

My last example of temples resembling mountains comes from Central America. At Teotihuacan stands the Pyramid of the Sun. This pyramid is symbolic of a central mountain. The pyramid stands in the center of ceremonial avenues. It is also aligned with Mount Cerro Gordo, which it duplicates.\textsuperscript{83} (Refer to figure C, page 34.)

Not only is it the case that some temples appear as mountains, but there are several examples where people have referred to mountains as being temples. In North America, Yosemite illustrates this point best. The earlier explorers of Yosemite have hinted at the religious significance the Sierra range held for them. On his ascent of Mount Tyndall, Clarence King found that the mountains reminded him of cathedrals.

"The whole mountains shaped themselves like the ruins of cathedrals - sharp roof ridges, pinnacles and statues; buttresses more spired and ornamented than Milan's, receding doorways with pointed arches carved into blank facades of granite, doors never to be opened, innumerable jutting points with here and there a single cruciform peak, its frozen rock and granite spires so strikingly Gothic I cannot doubt that the Alps furnished the models for early cathedrals of that order."\textsuperscript{34}

John Muir also spent time in the "Range of Light" as he called the Sierra mountains. He was impressed
by their wild beauty and spearheaded the movement to establish Yosemite National Park. This movement was successful, but his efforts to prevent the Hetch Hetchy dam was not. He had nothing but scorn for those who flooded this lovely Yosemite Park valley.

"These temple-destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and, instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar. Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man."35

In his writings and in his conservation achievements, Muir seems especially prone to call the mountains the temples of God. Perhaps this is why one of his favorite peaks, Cathedral Peak, is located in Yosemite - the "sublime Sierra temple."36

At first glance, it may seem that the role of mountains and temples as the dwelling place of gods may actually divide the holy from the mundane. That is, one may argue that there exists a hierarchy where the profane is at the bottom of the mountain, and as one climbs upward, the holy and divine is reached. Therefore, the ascension symbols may remind people of their terrestrial inferiority. I believe that the hierarchy involved in ascension is a product of our own Western conceptual framework.

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I believe that the symbol of the mountain actually brings together, in the minds of observers, the seemingly opposite realms of heaven and earth. The mountain symbol unites the world. The four aspects, heaven, earth, divinities, and mortals are made visible. Rather than being separate modes, they manifest themselves together in various ways. A mountain summit offers both a vision of heaven and a broad perspective of earth. By ascending, we grasp a clearer perspective of the whole and our place is identified. The spiritual insight that they are connected is a part of the mountain experience we will explore in the next chapter.

A person cannot think of heaven or earth without the other. To do so is indicative of division and fragmentation. To aspire towards one while ignoring the other is a mistake. In at least two myths, people have tried to climb to heaven to escape mundane existence but failed. For example, the builders of the Tower of Babel, often pictured as a ziggurat, aspired to attain the kingdom of God but failed. Likewise, in Greek mythology the children of the earth tried to storm the abode of the gods on feet of clay. They tried to pile several mountains on top of each other but were defeated when Zeus buried
them beneath Mount Etna. In each case, people failed to recognize the mutual dependence of heaven and earth.

As Samuel Beckett says, "(t)he purpose of ladders is to convey the searchers to the niches. Those whom these entice no longer climb simply to get clear of the ground." Likewise, people should not climb mountains to escape the mundane. Rather, it is in our niches, the particularity of our place, that mountain experiences can be properly engaged and transformed.
Chapter III
Mountains as the Fountainhead of Creation and Re-creation

"The mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills will flow with it."

Every spring we witness the rebirth and expansion of the world. The world awakes from its winter resting. Everywhere life is renewed. Ice gives way to running water. Buds sprout from the ground. Their greenness is particularly pronounced after a winter of deprivation. Spring is the season of renewal, transformation, and rebirth.

In world religions and primal traditions, mountains embody eternal spring. They are recognized as the source of life. Plants and trees cover a mountain like a thin green skin. Rivers flow from the mountain fertilizing the plains below. This is made explicit in the relationship between the yama no kami of the mountains and the ta no kami of the paddy fields as we saw in the last chapter. The mountains, as the embodiment of eternal spring, are mysterious and therefore sacred. Perhaps this is why a mountain may symbolize the goddess Gaia herself - the whole network of creation - the "Mother Goddess of the World" as the Tibetans call Mount Everest.

Mountains have long been important in creation myths. The biblical cosmology describes pillars that support the heavens. In Genesis, Noah's ark came to rest on
Mount Ararat after the deluge, thus beginning anew life on earth.

Other mountains are noted for their fecundity. For example, the Hindus revere the Garwal Himalaya region as the divine source of the holy Ganges. The Hopi Indians, like the Japanese Shugendo, believe mountain spirits provide the needed water to grow their crops. Mount Patohil in Guatemala, important in Mayan cosmology, is recognized for its ability to create rain. The root word "toh" comes from the cholan tohakna meaning "the way in which the clouds join" and tohmel meaning "thunder." 

Perhaps the best example of a mountain known for its fecundity is Mount Kailas. Mount Kailas is located in Tibet at the hydrological apex of Asia. (Refer to figures D and E, page 42.) It is the source of several of Asia's largest rivers. The Brahmaputra, Indus, Sutlej, and Karmali rivers all radiate from Mount Kailas like spokes from the hub of a wheel. The water originating from the heights of Mount Kailas is the source of nourishment on which nature depends. According to mythology, the trees growing on Mount Kailas yield fruits as big as elephants. When they fall, they burst into streams of nectar fertilizing the earth with divine waters.

For Hindus and Buddhists, Mount Kailas is also the metaphysical apex of the world. Mount Kailas is the physical manifestation of Mount Meru, the mythological mountain. It serves as the physical representation of the throne
Figure D (above)  
Mount Kailas

Figure E (right)  
Mount Kailas at the hydrological apex of Asia

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of Shiva or as a gigantic mandala for the devoted Hindus and Buddhists respectively. Mount Kailas is a symbol of human regeneration and spiritual elevation.

It is not surprising that the same mountain can function as both the physical and metaphysical center of the universe. According to Richard Temple, "all the great religious traditions teach that both the universe and the psyche of man are measured against the same cosmic model. The universe and the psyche are the same and only differ in scale." In this case the cosmic model is Mount Meru physically manifested as Mount Kailas.

The reason the mountain is both the physical and metaphysical center, the place where mind and body meet, lies in the power of imagination. Etymologically, imagination is related to imago - a representation or imitation - and imitor, to imitate or reproduce. The image of a mountain has a tremendous effect on our lives. When we meditate on a mountain, absorbing its immensity and magnificence, we become part of what we see. The mountain image in our minds can then be repeated and reproduced. It opens us to a greater knowledge of the real, much in the way that the beauty of an opening rose can make our hearts "open." The image opens us to the process of choice whereby feeling becomes action. Creation, the dynamic involving world, affects and influences the re-
creation or rebirth of the human soul.

In our time as well as ages past, people have experienced spiritual rebirth and human regeneration while venturing among mountains. Human beings claim to be strengthened by their mountain experiences and return with an entirely new understanding of life. The key words here are "venturing among mountains". It is only through participation in creation that the image of the mountain becomes vivid. It is not formed in a vacuum or through disconnected logical argumentation. Henry Bugbee claims,

"...we become selves - truly ourselves - in willing participation in creation; that in so doing we discover the meaning of our responsibility in relationship with others; and that we cannot conceive of creation in terms apart from our participation in it."

According to Bugbee, it is only through solitude and communion with nature that nature gains significance and meaning for us. Through this participation, old conceptual frameworks can be broken down and new ones created. The sense of strength, happiness, and regeneration comes amidst concerns with heavy packs, hunger, danger, and frozen toes. It is in direct participation with mountains that these feelings originate.

"For the hallowing of the natural occurs only in and through our being radically recalled out of immersion in thoughtless ways, inadvertent cheapening of life, and the oppressive incubus of things-
taken-for-granted and threatening to go stale. Yet the recall in question cannot be acceded to in a recriminatory or condemnatory vein. It invites only candor and willingness and a foregoing of claims on which we may be wont to insist, a tendering of oneself;...not insulating or isolating one from the world in the withdrawal of sleep; but readying and reorienting one for participation in the world anew..."98

In Western civilization, "adventure" is the word often used to describe participation with mountains. Dictionary definitions of adventure emphasize "a hazardous or perilous enterprise" and "that which comes to us, or happens without design."99 Adventure, as the Western world normally understands it is spiritually poor, and this cheapens the mountain experience. The definition needs to be expanded so that the physical hazards and lack of security can give rise to vision and guidance in the spiritual sense, therefore evoking a change in attitude towards other beings. Henry Bugbee defines adventure in such a way as to allow for a spiritual change. Adventure for him means "setting out anew; to break with conventions in which life might have been constrained if not falsified; to exploration and discovery rich in promise of new beginnings and firmer foundations...."100

Next we will look at two kinds of mountain adventure, religious pilgrimage and secular mountaineering. The
two may be more similar than initial impressions indicate.

Pilgrimage

For centuries, pilgrimage to mountains was regarded as a necessity for the regeneration of the spirit and the quickening of cultural exchange. A pilgrimage is indeed an adventure. It is a milestone in a person's life. He or she leaves home and travels the dusty path to unknown lands. For some it is an obligation, something they must do at least once during their lifetime. For others, it is an act of purification. As an ancient Hindu scripture declares: "as the sun dries the morning dew, so are the sins of man dissipated at the sight of the Himalaya." 101

One such Himalayan peak that attracts thousands of pilgrims annually is Mount Kailas. Both Hindus and Buddhists make the arduous journey to Mount Kailas for the purpose of parikrama or circumambulation. 102 (see figure D). The parikrama is a thirty mile trek around the mountain. The highest pass on the route is at Dolma La which stands at 13,600 feet. For the pilgrims, the trek around the mountain involves sacred ritual. They prostrate themselves at the base of the mountain and bathe in the sacred lakes Mansarovar and Rakshas. These lakes are the reservoirs of the two streams of psychic energy -
forces of cognition and enlightenment, and the demonic or negative disposition respectively. At a lake below Dalma La is a pile of old clothes where pilgrims "wash away their sins" and prick their fingers to shed old blood. Then they start for home with a new vision.

Lama Anagarika Govinda describes such a pilgrimage.

"(It) does not follow a laid out plan or itinerary... does not have a fixed inner or outer purpose... but carries its meaning in itself, by relying on an outer urge which operates on two planes: on the physical and on the spiritual plane. It is a movement not only in the outer, but equally in inner space..."

I have travelled sections of the pilgrimage route myself. At least three things stand out in my mind that exemplify a pilgrimage. First, the path is arduous and fraught with perils. I have seen trails literally carved out of the mountainside. There is often only a crawl space between the rock wall and an abyss dropping thousands of feet in one sheer drop. The altitude takes its toll as well. Hindu pilgrims from the plains often complain of sickness, many coughing and wheezing in the thin air. The pilgrim may also encounter bandits, particularly in the nomadic region of Western Tibet. Dangers and hardships are the price the pilgrim pays for admittance to such a sacred spot. Some measure the
perikrama by the lengths of their bodies making the journey even more difficult. 106

The second interesting characteristic about pilgrims is that they are nearly always poor. Many that I observed carry few, if any, possessions and rely on the kindness of others for their survival. Many were old men who had completed their obligation to their family and job, then gave up their possessions to spend the rest of their lives in devotion to God.

The most obvious thing about pilgrims is their sheer numbers. Thousands are drawn together in one large "brotherhood". At nightfall, they pack into one small room of a resthouse. Each has barely enough space to lie down. This moving community puts all social structures aside, integrating peoples and customs. No longer is the pilgrim's sense of the sacred private. Rather, it is objectified into a collective observation.

From a spiritual point of view, the importance of the pilgrimage is the journey itself. The journey accentuates the contemplation of life and fills the imagination with the immensity and magnificence of such an undertaking. The hardships demand that the pilgrim endures the unendurable and accepts the unacceptable with patience. "Only the man who has been driven to an extreme, in fact, who has lost everything and has nothing left to lose, is ready for the final awakening." 107
According to Snelling, the pilgrim awakes from the arduous journey to the death of the "I": "the individual ego consciousness, the root of all our delusions and consequent woe..." The loss of the ego is not total abandonment of the self, but only an abandonment of the concept of ego as a distinct, exclusive self. The concept of the ego is replaced with a more all-embracing consciousness, one which demands respect and reverence for others. "That standpoint always seems to involve humility, the position of a self as participant in the infinite importance of things in contrast to a would-be appropriation of such importance." The pilgrims will eventually return to the place from which they have come and will carry the memories of the journey with them for the rest of their lives. The memories will continue to be a source of inspiration and strength. Yesterday's profane and illusory existence gives way to a new life, one that involves practical moral consideration and compassion for human and non-human beings.

The pilgrim is like the man in Plato's cave. He has to climb out and contemplate the light of the sun; then strengthened by its light, which he keeps in his memory, he returns to the cave to spread the knowledge he has learned. But who would believe him unless they too make the journey to see the sun - to the mountain?
"Mountain Gloom"

In Western civilization, as well, there have been examples of admiration of mountains and personal transformation resulting from participation with them. However, this was slow to develop, due in part to an imposing attitude of "mountain gloom".

In the early modern West and especially in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, an attitude of "mountain gloom" prevailed. Mountains were often considered as "warts and blemishes" and described with adjectives such as inhospitable, barren, and inaccessible. The distant peaks glistening in ice were awesome, not in beauty, but in menace. Demons and dragons lurked behind every corner ready to gobble up the unwary traveller. Stories about ghosts and terrible creatures prevented people from travelling to the mountain's icy heights. The present day names of some peaks still reflect these superstitions. For example, there is the Eiger in the Alps and the Ogre in the Karakoram mountains of Pakistan. Their formidable walls are still known for wreaking havoc on climbers and producing visions of man-eating monsters.

Are not demons and monsters just another way of expressing the fear and awe we today describe by calling the mountain sublime and beautiful? Are not they similar to the spirits that haunt the natural world of the indigenous peoples of Asia or North America? The difference,
I believe, lies in the maleficent intent of the "spirits" of mountain gloom. They reflect a physical world that is somehow overwhelming and evil.

This attitude stems from a widely accepted Christian tradition that emphasizes the utter transcendence of God, the spiritual over the mundane, and the demonization of nature spirits. In this case, a hierarchy exists in which God and spirit are above and beyond nature and human beings are somewhere in between.¹¹²

Such a dualistic tendency to view spirit and matter as mutually exclusive categories is dangerous. One may think that the essence of reality lies up in heaven somewhere, that the spiritual is absolutely and exclusively supreme, thereby abandoning the physical altogether.

An example of this dualism is expressed in the tension Petrarch felt upon reaching the summit of Mount Ventoux in fourteenth century Europe. On reaching the summit, he felt "delight and aesthetic gratification", but upon remembering what he read in Augustine's Confessions was

"...angry with myself for not ceasing to admire things of the earth, instead of remembering that the human soul is beyond comparison the subject for admiration. Once again as I descended, I gazed back, and the lofty summit of the mountain seemed to me scarcely a cubit high compared with the sublime dignity of man."¹¹³

The devaluation of matter is also used to justify an attitude of indifference towards physical objects.
Wendell Berry argues that the conceptual division between the holy and the world results in man's exploitation of the natural world.

"If God was not in the world, then obviously the world was a thing of inferior importance, or of no importance at all. This split in public attitudes was inevitably mirrored in the lives of individuals: a man could aspire to Heaven with his mind and his heart while destroying the earth, his fellow men, with his hands." 114

A latter example of this type of thinking is present in the Puritan's notion of wilderness - "according to which the absence of human works - habitations, developments, improvements - implies a diminished valuation of the land because of its lack of usefulness for human instrumentalism or civilization." 115 This is an American legend in which a culture vanquishes the evil forces of nature.

This prevalent attitude in Western civilization tends to preclude the very idea of sacred mountains. As Marjorie Nicolson reminds us, "We see in nature what we have been taught to look for, we feel what we have been prepared to feel." 116 So, when mountains are viewed with the supposition that they are inferior and alienated from the sacred, then they take on the appearance of so much recalcitrant stuff to be beaten into submission, or as "warts and blemishes" on the face of the earth.
Human beings may consider them "deformed", as Nicolson would say, because they don't measure up to presumed heavenly standards of perfection, symmetry, or regularity. 117

In Europe, it was only in the eighteenth century that the notion of "mountain glory" overcame "mountain gloom". 118 Their grandeur and majesty were rediscovered though not intellectually comprehended. Two factors in particular ushered in the shift in mountain perspective. The first is the writings of Romantic poets like William Wordsworth and Percy Blysshe Shelley who both wrote extensively about mountains. But it is the "Golden Age" of mountaineering that I find the most intriguing. Unlike many of the poets, the climbers experienced first hand the beauty, solitude, and the sublimity of the high summits and questioned the objectives of mountaineering.

Mountaineering

One man in particular was responsible for ushering in the "Golden Age" of mountaineering in Europe. His name is Horace De Saussure. In the 1770's, he announced that he would give an award to the first people to reach the summit of Mount Blanc, the highest peak in the Alps. This award led to several aborted attempts and a
gradual erosion of local fears and superstitions. Finally, on August 8, 1786, the summit was attained by Dr. Paccard and Jacques Balmat.119

Following the example of Saussure, subsequent climbers felt they needed a "reason" for climbing. The early climbs in the Alps had almost exclusively scientific objectives. This appealed to the public tremendously and was perhaps a continuation of the scientific interest and exploration that characterized Renaissance Europe. The emphasis was exploitive in nature. These early mountain adventurers studied the mountain flora and fauna, the movements of glaciers, the behavior of matter at high elevations, and they searched for minerals. Climbers learned their mountaineering crafts merely as a means to this end.

In "The Ascent of the Riffelberg", Mark Twain pokes fun at these scientific experiments. He shows that the scientific reasons for climbing were either a rationalization or an example of the irony of mankind's anthropocentric domination. He describes a ridiculous experiment of boiling a thermometer at various elevations which proved that the summit was actually lower than a point on the mountainside where the first measurement was taken. "Thus the fact was clearly demonstrated, that, above a certain point, the higher a point seems to be, the lower it actually is." Mark Twain claims that the
greatest achievement of these scientific experiments was that "the possibility of the impossible was demonstrated." On July 14, 1865, the "possibility of the impossible" was again demonstrated. Edward Whymper and a party of climbers stood on the summit of the Matterhorn, previously considered unclimbable. Its precipitous faces turned back no less than eighteen attempts. At last, human beings proved themselves victorious over a mere physical mountain, so they thought. The last of the major summits in the Alps was "conquered".

The excitement over the conquest of the Matterhorn was overshadowed by the disaster that happened during the descent. A rope broke sending four of the climbers to their deaths. It was this disaster that captured the attention of Europeans and became a milestone in alpine climbing history. It called into question the motivations and reasons for climbing. The flood of inquiries and letters centered on the reasons why people climb and whether or not the benefits outweigh the dangers. The resulting debate helped usher in the era of modern alpine climbing as a sport and marked the close of the "Golden Age".

During the "Golden Age", the ogre's grip on mountains weakened with each progressive climb. An unmistakable paradox began to emerge. As the public became confident in humankind's ability to dominate and control the mountains, individual climbers returned with a feeling of
minuscular impotence. Leslie Stephen, a skilled writer and climber of the "Golden Age" writes,

"The mountains represent the indomitable force of nature to which we are forced to adapt ourselves; they speak to man of his littleness and his ephemeral existence."

The "Golden Age" contributed to the Romantic era's pursuit of aesthetics. Tourists began to see the Alps as representing the timelessness of the earth and the immensity of creation rather than inert material.

Modern mountaineers have a variety of reasons for climbing. Some are more interested in their own technique or the operation of their equipment. Others climb for economic gain or prestige. Climbers often climb to experience qualities they do not find in their daily routines. For some, the silence found in the mountains is a catalyst for contemplation. For others, it is the vivid colors of alpenglow or the intensity of physical exercise. Climbing can also be just an end in itself, an art for art's sake.

According to Wendell Berry, climbing may be a pilgrimage - a secular pilgrimage.

"It takes place outside of, or without reference to, the institutions of religion, and it does not seek any institutional shrine or holy place; it is in search of the world. But it is a pilgrimage nevertheless because it is a religious quest.... It does not seek the world of inert material- ity, it seeks the world of the creation, the created world in which the creator, the
formative and quickening spirit, is still immanent and at work."\textsuperscript{123}

Mountaineering, as a secular pilgrimage, has several things in common with the religious pilgrimage to Mount Kailas. First, it involves a personal identification with a mountain which comes through devotion and active endeavor. Second, through climbing, one learns his or her strengths and weaknesses. The mountains do no lie, says R.L. Irving.

"And from the mountain we shall get nothing but the truth. It lays bare our weaknesses, while opening to us a source of strength. We learn from it the limit of our capabilities. Deceits and subterfuges and vanities, on which a man may raise himself higher than he deserves slip away."\textsuperscript{124}

Third, like the poor pilgrim in rags, the mountaineer is physically deprived but spiritually rich. For Gaston Rébuffat, the beauty and majestic silence witnessed from the summit is worth any amount of toil and privation.

"On the summit, on this piece of bare rock, we were poor. We had nothing to drink. We were poor. Yet we were rich. Rich with things that cannot be bought, rich with things that have no price."\textsuperscript{125}

Perhaps the most important similarity is the personal transformation - a feeling of being reborn - that comes from an intense mountain experience. Willi Unsoeld
describes an experience of religious rapture while bivouacing near the summit of Mount Everest during his 1963 West Ridge to South Col traverse:

"There was no space, no time, no sense of losing life. It did not matter whether this type of life was lost or not, for life as I knew then transcended all physical manifestations of body. I was looking over the arete into the other side of the universe, and could more fully view the life I was still a part of. I was wafted into the ethereal space around me.... Nothing mattered any more. This is not a pessimistic view of death, but an extremely optimistic view of life in its richest sense. I knew who I was, and I know what I was." 126

The experience described above involves traditional religious imagery of rebirth, purification, and mystical union. This involves the stripping of old facades and roles and a merging of the self with a more encompassing consciousness. His life takes on an entirely new meaning. It involves a sudden shift from one outlook on himself and the world to an apparently more gratifying one: "And I thought, once again, climbing is secondary; what is important is the man who is born in the course of the ascent." 127

The fifth way in which mountaineers and pilgrims are similar is that both have claimed to return a better or more virtuous person. In their memories, the vivid experiences live on and are passed on to others.

"...some moment in a smoke-grimed railway carriage, when in the pure morning air the far off cloud of Mount Blanc suddenly..."
hung above the mists as we rounded the curves...lives in our memories above a hundred more selfish, more poignant joys; and we feel that a world that can give such rapture must be a good world."  

Mountaineering is a vehicle for re-creation.

During a climb, a new person is realized in practice.
Chapter IV
Mountains as the "Wholly Other"

Among the great mountain ranges of the world, none is as famous for its wild and forbidding peaks as the Karakoram Range in Central Asia. Nowhere else do so many giant peaks rise from so small an area. The Karakoram Range is often described with superlatives - the highest mountains, the largest glaciers outside of polar regions, the biggest rock faces, and the swiftest rivers. There, near where the undefined and disputed political boundaries of Pakistan, China, and India meet lies K2, the second highest mountain in the world at 28,250 feet above the sea. (See figure F, page 61.)

This distinction alone is not what makes K2 unique. Rather, the mountain symbolizes the apex of remoteness, isolation, and the unknown, an arena dominated by the forces of nature in which human beings are but mere specks.

Why is such a great peak not named? This is because it is hidden away behind other giants and cannot be seen from any village. It is at least six days of difficult travel from any inhabited place. Explorers and topographers searched for a native name, but their efforts have been inconclusive. The names Chogori, Lamba Pahar, Dapsang, and Lanufahad have all been mentioned, but it is doubtful that any name existed prior to 1856 when the Great Trigonometric Survey of India entered K2 as a...
Figure F

K2
provisional designation in its log book, "K" stood for Karakoram and the peaks were numbered in a somewhat random order. This provisional designation stuck. Today, natives in adjacent areas are most likely to call the mountain Kechu (K2) or Kechu Kangri (K2 Ice Mountain). K2 has become the accepted name for the lodestone that pulls people to the mystery and awe of the Karakoram Range and exposes them to much that is secret and even sacred.

I first ventured to K2 in 1983. We were a small quixotic group, stripped of all nonessentials down to the core of life itself. We had no tent, boots, permit, or porters. We thrived on exhilaration, faith, unrelenting determination, and friendship. We had no routine, nothing to prove, nothing to conquer, but everything to gain.

My memories of K2 are vivid. Our first glimpse came as we crested a small hill at Concordia, a major bend in the Baltoro glacier. Thousands of tons of snow and ice hung from the precipitous south face of K2. The summit towered above us crystal clear against a deep blue sky, intensifying the wildness of the land we were in. There are also memories of fear and pain. We were cold and hungry. Our bodies rebelled against the one hundred pound packs we were hauling. The night embraced us with bone chilling cold and storm laden clouds. We were in an unknown region beyond the rim of experience.
and isolated from civilization.

The glacier on which we lived for two weeks began to take on the appearance of an enormous being. Its head swallowed up the house sized ice chunks and transformed them into seracs. Its stomach was riddled with crevasses and internal passages which expelled its waste as moraines. The creaking and booming of its voice added to the mystique of the area.

The mountain which towered above us for those days was unrivaled in magnitude. It seemed indifferent and unmoving. Our daily actions paled in insignificance when compared to its presence. I am thankful for the opportunity to know the mountain first hand, to observe the mountain's many moods and watch ever-changing colors. It helped to place in a new perspective the small concerns of a common life.

At the climbing camp on the far edge of the glacier, life was different. There were enormous piles of material things designed to sustain a comfortable existence. A giant tent was set up overflowing with wine. The aroma of artichoke soup and freshly baked bread reached our nose as we approached. We were invited to stay for dinner which was served by the "kitchen crew". It must have taken two porters to carry the table over the one hundred miles from the trailhead. Except for heavy breathing in thin air, the dining experience was similar.
to that at home. The "Rolling Stones" blared out
over the stereo speakers drowning out the sound of rolling
stones avalanching down the mountain. What a contrast
to the solitude and serenity back at our camp located
beneath a boulder.

"Welcome to Fantasy Ridge" the sign above the tent
door read. How appropriately named, I thought. The
image of the mountain is man-made. The view through
the camera lens is a picture postcard, a sellable com-
modity. The location is a dot on the map. The "tourist
package" is an insulated suit.

I also remember reading their advertisements.
"Step into adventure." "We will create the experience
of a lifetime." "See the most unspoiled country in the
Himalayas." All it takes is money. Such a commer-
cialization of the mountain experience violates the moun-
tain as well as the native people's beliefs and customs.
It destroys the very "unspoiled country" the fantasy
promotes.

Both the Fantasy Ridge tour as well as our small
group probably felt awed and overwhelmed, to varying
degrees, by the natural forces we witnessed. However,
the "fantasy" creates the illusion that the experience
of awe, fascination, and mystery can be obtained with a
minimal amount of effort, fear, or danger. The Fantasy
Ridge tour goes to great effort to prevent any un­
desirable experiences and ends up insulating themselves
from fully experiencing all that the mountain can offer.

There were hundreds of people who made the journey
to K2 that summer. We were by no means alone. I believe
that people are fascinated by scenes of unbridled power
and magnificence that are somehow opaque and inaccessible
to us. This is the key to K2's popularity. In the
presence of its awesome magnitude, we recognize a dis­
parity between our senses and that magnitude. There is
something there beyond the power of human comprehension,
beyond human control. It is the source of fascination,
mystery, wonder, and fear.

Within a religious context, the fascination, awe,
and mystery a mountain inspires has for a long time
awakened an overwhelming sense of the sacred. In previous
chapters, I have mentioned the Kangchenjunga divinities
of the Sikkimese natives and the yama no kami of Japan.
These mountain spirits reveal a vision of a world be­
yond human comprehension. Remember also Moses' encounter
with the mysterious burning bush and the awe of holy
ground. These are sacred experiences because they are
encounters with something apart from the world we know
or can know.

Mountain literature is filled with words like awesome,
mysterious, fascinating, majestic, and sublime. These
words are in keeping with the Latin word _sacer_ meaning "to set apart" as explained in the Introduction. They imply the existence of something out of the ordinary. Now we will explore the significance of these words as they relate to sacred mountains.

Rudolf Otto, the German scholar of religion, uses the expression the "wholly other" to describe the realm beyond the sphere of the usual and intelligible. "Wholly other" contains three elements. These are _mysterium tremendum et fascinans_. Each of these elements alone is insufficient to explain the ensnaring attraction of the mountain. Together these three elements help express the special character of K2 - the feeling of the uncanny, awe, exaltation, and the sense of impotence.

_Mysterium_

When describing the mountain environment, there is no shortage of authorities ready to find reasonable explanations for all phenomena and to provide solutions for all the mysteries this environment may hold. Scientists have ready answers to why the air is thin, why there is alpenglow, and why glaciers move. In spite of this, the unknown and mysterious still persists and demonstrates that everything in the world cannot be explained or controlled.

Rudolf Otto defines _mysterium_ as "that which is hid-
den and esoteric, that which is beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar." The mysterious is inaccessible, beyond the comprehension of human beings who are limited in time and space. It is the part of nature that is incommensurable, nameless, and formless.

Mountains are mysterious in the sense of subtlety and depth, not in the sense of imperceptibility. It is something that can be felt though not given a clear conceptual expression. After all, mystery "arouses an irrepressible interest in the mind", and causes us to "recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb." Mystery is fascinating because it sets the mountain in contrast to everything that is familiar and ordinary. It discloses something outside of ourselves.

Himalayan mountaineering is a direct exploration of mystery. It took several generations of climbers to discover some of the secrets of K2 and experience its various moods. Slowly, a fuzzy picture began to emerge. A possible route to the top was discovered. This slow, painful build-up of information and experience required many years of effort. However, K2 will always remain as a "wholly other". It will continue to elude comprehension.

**Tremendum**

The word which most closely approximates *tremendum*
in English is "awesome". The word "awesome" enjoys current popularity. But, it is more than idiomatic. The root word "awe" comes from the Old Norse word agi meaning fear, and is cognate with the Greek word achos meaning pain and grief.Awesome has a double meaning. Fear mingles with admiration and reverence to produce a sense of something majestic and sublime.

According to Otto, the fear provoked in the presence of something awesome is distinct from the emotional response of being afraid or ordinary fear. Awe includes the feeling of "something uncanny, eerie, or weird." This kind of fear comes when in the presence of overwhelming power or "absolute unapproachability". This is the type of fear Moses felt on Mount Sinai. In a more demonic sense, this emotion stimulated early Europeans to consider the Alps a fearful place – the haunt of dragons, ogres, and evil spirits. The awe of mountains may compell us onwards over the next ridge while at the same time repel us by its strangeness.

The feeling of awe emphatically guards against any anthropocentric tendency to scale down the sacred to the measure of human reason. Fear in the face of "absolute unapproachability" is humbling. We are overwhelmed by the eerie silence, the trembling glacier, or the horrifying vastness of ice and snow while in the mountain.
The awe of such phenomena forces us to reflect back on our "creature feeling" which Rudolf Otto defines as the "feeling of personal nothingness and submergence" and "the impotence against overpowering might." Such a feeling of religious humility comes when we are conscious of a being that is vast when compared with us. Awe compels us to contrast ourselves with the apparent almightiness of the mountain.

**Fascination**

Rudolf Otto's third element of the "wholly other" is fascination. Many of the unknown aspects of a mountain appear to us as puzzling, surprising, or astounding. These excite the mind and demand further attention. The mountain has a potent charm.

"The mystery is for him not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him; and beside that in it, which bewilders and confounds, he feels a something that captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication; it is the Dionysiac element in the numen."

Here, Rudolf Otto is describing a numinous experience, perhaps a confrontation with God. But mountaineers have described a similar fascination with mountains. (Take for example Willi Unsoeld's experience on the West Ridge of Everest.) The experience can be found in the
wildness of snow and ice as well as within a cathedral. Fascination with mountains has led people to do many noble, divinely foolish, and very wise things. Fascination has led many well-known adventurers to not only reach their own limits but willingly step over the edge. Take for example the famous vanishing act involving George Mallory and Andrew Irvine who disappeared near the summit of Mount Everest in 1924. Some people believe they died in a fall. Others, more optimistic perhaps, believe they reached the summit and then kept on climbing. They pursued the infinite possibilities to far. Perhaps their quest for imminent revelation, led to disaster. They call to us from beyond the edge of our safe and warm little world.

**Sublime**

Sublime is another term used to express the emotional mix of delight and terror resulting from an experience of majesty, vastness, and grandeur. The word "sublime" is derived from the Latin word sublimis meaning high, lofty, and exalted. The etymological roots are the prefix sub (under or beneath) and limis (boundary or limit). Literally, these words combine to mean "coming up to below the lintel." Originally, sublime implied a disparity between the subject being uplifted and the threshold itself.
Traditionally, the sublime stems from a confrontation with an object in nature that is so vast and majestic as to appear infinite. Immanuel Kant compares the sublime with the movement of a vibration, i.e., "to a quickly alternating attraction toward, and repulsion from, the same object." This compelling movement can come "only by the inadequacy of the greatest effort of our imagination to estimate the magnitude of an object."\(^{139}\)

Likewise, Marjorie Nicolson calls the sublime "the aesthetic of the infinite". She claims that the vastness of a mountain first introduced the concepts of eternity and infinity to human beings.\(^{140}\) The imagination finds its capacity filled with the project of trying to comprehend the immensity and magnificence of a mountain. It's like staring into infinity. Like a confrontation with the "wholly other", the sublime can inspire both exaltation and fascination as well as terror and fear.

Unlike the aesthetics of beauty, the sublime does not initially bring a sensation of pleasure or satisfaction. Rather, there is a sensation of anxiety and discontent. The security of a familiar world is suddenly disrupted by the disparity between the self and the infinite. There is the discontent with personal limitations and the anxiety of boundless spaces.
The sublime speaks to our phenomenal existence. It confronts us directly when we discover forces independent of human creation. We recognize our very impotence as finite, physical beings. The sublime often is sensed as an objective presence, a perception which has no physical existence as such, but has a tremendous impact on our lives similar to religious rapture. The following describes an experience of the infinite.

"I remember the night, and almost the very spot on the hilltop, where my soul opened out, as if it were, into the infinite, and there was a rushing together of the two worlds, the inner and the outer. It was deep calling unto deep - the deep that my own struggle had opened up within being answered by the unfathomable deep without, reaching beyond the stars." 

This stirring encounter with the infinite is an experience of the continuity of life. A relation is recognized between the familiar and the unknown, the seen and the unseen, and also between the fragment of anything and its entirety. Here continuity means participation. Henry Bugbee argues that the acknowledgment of the mutuality of things is properly sublime.

"In the phenomenon of the sublime we are decisively caught up in destinate existence with one another and with things - as belonging together, existing in a mutuality that is final and ultimate. It is in and out of that mutuality appreciated as final and ultimate that
we can affirm things and other persons in their independence, and also at the same time — reflexively — ourselves." 142

Participation in the diversity of mountain heights brings together the mountain and the climber. The sublime unites the two together like a rope joining climbers. The rope attaches the climbers to the mountain, with the aid of pitons and chocks, in such a way that the climbers recognize the mutual existence of both themselves and the mountain. Like the sublime, the rope epitomizes our lonely imprisonment together. "There is a significant grasp, not of entities thought of as 'in-themselves', but of things and ourselves as co-ingredient in a dynamic order of concrescence, in the flow of a common existence," states Dugbee. 143

Conclusion
Let us return to K2 basecamp for just a minute. The view of K2 out the tent door is that of a sacred mountain. However, its function as a sacred mountain is directly proportional to the degree of participation. The experience of the "wholly other" is no armchair encounter. It requires toil, sweat, and an openness to adventure. Videos and other means of recording the event for those back home are poor substitutes for active participation. K2, as a symbol of the "wholly other", is a comprehensive experience of awe which is

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Concerning the Fantasy Ridge tour, the question may be "Which is substance, which is shadow?" The members are imprisoned by material things and services which hamper their efforts to experience the "wholly other" quality of K2. They are like the men in Plato's cave. They are trans fixed by the shadows while being sealed off from the sunlight itself. The true adventure starts only by breaking free of the chains which bind them to a fantasy. The mountain is best viewed apart from even the smallest sign of human interference.

Needless to say, some sunlight does leak into the Fantasy Ridge tourists' K2 experience. Some tourists do return fascinated and awed by their trip. But their favorite picture of K2 is at best an underexposed photo. All the hues and tones are subdued by the technological world they forgot to leave behind. Very little of the sacredness of the mountain is seen.

"Whatever that reality is, however we may conceive of it - as a deity, the ground of being, emptiness, the unconscious, the self - it takes us out of our ordinary level so that we can grow beyond the persons we think we are. Like the view from the summit of the mountain, it opens us to a fresh new vision of ourselves and the world around us. In transforming our conceptions of ourselves, it transforms our lives, giving us a new sense of meaning and direction," states Bernbaum.
Chapter V

Sacred as a Land Use Category

Gary Snyder, in his article "Good, Wild, Sacred" suggested that in light of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1973, "(s)acred virtually becomes a new land use category." However, the language of such a statement betrays our best intentions. Critical examination of Snyder's statement indicates why sacred does not yet exist in land management schemes.

Sacred as a land use category combines two contradictory land orientations. The sacred orientation involves purification, fasting, and prayer in an attitude of reverence and respect. The land is the vehicle that unifies the spiritual, cultural, and environmental elements. Such interplay with the land is not viewed as a self-conscious, "re-creative tonic of wildness... to be bottled and labeled as a recreational resource." Sacred land is revered because it has an inherent worth of its own apart from man. It has a theological significance. This inherent worth has many faces. To some people, it appears as a spirit, kami, or god. To others it appears in the form of the "wholly other". In all cases, sacred is beyond the control, order, management, or domination by people.

Contrary to the meaning of the word "sacred", the
word "use" means that something has instrumental value. Something is useful if it has a practical function or a utilitarian purpose to us. Land, therefore, can be seen as having economic value, recreational value, aesthetic value, or religious value - value for us, that is. Such is the usual way the word "use" is conceived.

The word "category" exemplifies our atomistic tendencies to divide the whole into increasingly smaller units. Categories can be dealt with as separate entities, clear and distinct from each other. Each can be assigned a number and outlined with sharp boundaries. They can be managed and controlled.

Such an anthropocentrically instrumental valuation is the basis of land use management today. For example, the Forest Service has a "multiple use land management plan". These multiple uses are divided, defined, classified, and monitored in a visible, logical, and quantitative fashion. They often compete with each other so are often adjudicated according to the numbers of their respective advocates. The land "is made captive to the dogma of multiple use," says Henry Bugbee. "(T)hose who cling so fiercely to keeping the land in the ambience of man's work in the world will awaken one day to their own irretrievable loss: the source of their very passion."
Therefore, we are left with a land policy that is morally bankrupt. It is empty because there is no meaning beyond its instrumental value to man. The land is reduced to a complex arrangement of molecules made complex by chance. These molecules of land are seen as so much recalcitrant stuff to be molded to our liking. This allows some people to rake profit at the expense of others - other human beings and non-human beings.

In the United States, land contentions usually collide in a court of law. Even conflicts involving sacred mountains have ended up there. To further expose the irony in the statement, "Sacred virtually becomes a land use category," we will look at two cases in particular involving Indian religious freedom, sacred mountains, land use, and federal policy. These are the San Francisco Peaks, sacred to the Navaho and Hopi Indians, and the Badger-Two Medicine area, sacred to the Blackfeet Indians. These case studies are particularly illuminating because they illustrate U.S. federal land policy involving sacred mountains and religious freedom in general.

"Light Shines from It"

Dook oslid, meaning "Light Shines from It", is the Navaho name for one of the four sacred mountains which define the Navaho country. It is the mountain to
the West that First Man and First Woman attached to the earth with a sunbeam. (I described the significance of this event in chapter I.)

For most Americans, the mountain is known as Mount Humphreys, the highest peak in Arizona, located north of Flagstaff. Mount Humphreys is one of several peaks making up the San Francisco Peaks. This area is well known for its recreational opportunities and is the home of Snow Bowl, one of Arizona's best ski areas.

For the Hopi Indians, the mountains are the home of kachinas. Kachinas are not deities but are more like intermediaries or messengers whose chief purpose is to bring rain, thereby ensuring the continuation of life. For half of the year, the kachinas frequent villages and have a wide range of contacts with children. During the Powamu ceremony, when initiation rites are given to children, the kachinas are of special importance. The children don kachina masks thus becoming kachinas themselves. The mask makes the kachina's essence present in material form. According to Sam Gill, the importance of this ceremony is that "it serves to bring the children to the threshold of religious awareness and as a consequence initiates their religious lives."  

The San Francisco Peaks are of utmost importance to both the Navaho and Hopi Indians. Both tribes view the peaks as sacred because of their essential role in
traditional religion. The San Francisco Peaks area in indispensable to a number of Indian healers and religious leaders as a place where they pray, conduct ceremonies, and gather sacred objects which they need to fill religious roles central to their traditional religion.

The San Francisco Peaks remained pristine until 1937. At that time, the Forest Service built a lodge and a road to serve the interests of local skiers. However, skiing remained localized until the mid 1960's when skiers from larger cities developed an interest in the sport. Recreational and economical development began to raise its ugly head.

In 1969, in response to the overwhelming numbers of recreationalists that besieged the San Francisco Peaks, Summit Properties announced its intention to develop a ski village on Hart Prairie below Snow Bowl. This company intended to build condominiums, apartments, and homes on a 325 acre plot. Of course, Hopi and Navaho spokesmen were adamantly opposed to the development of Hart Prairie. Other opponents included environmentalists who were concerned about the quality and quantity of water for the city of Flagstaff. Summit Properties' desires were crushed in 1973 when the Forest Service purchased Hart Prairie in a land swap, thus opening the area for public use.
This was not the end of private interests in expanding and developing the government owned ski area. In 1977, the Forest Service transferred the permit to operate Snow Bowl from Summit Properties, Inc. to Northland Recreation Co. Soon afterwards, Northland submitted a plan for future development. In 1979, the Forest Service decided to permit development of the ski area. The selected alternative permitted a new lodge, restroom facilities, construction of three new lifts, the paving of the Snow Bowl road, and parking lot expansion. Development was permitted in spite of the Indians' plea that it "would be a profane act, and an affront to the deities, and that, in consequence, the peaks would lose their healing power and otherwise cease to benefit the tribes." In 1978, passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) added support to the Indians' position. The resolution states:

"...it shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian...including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites." AIRFA is of special significance to the Indian tribes.
in their right to prevent development on their sacred mountain. Together with the free exercise of religion clause in the first amendment, the Indians could claim that development would violate their rights to practice their religion. The sacred mountain is like a shrine to them as it plays a major part in ceremonials and ritual practices. After all, "you wouldn't ski through the Vatican. You wouldn't throw snowballs in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City," Bill Beaver of the Sacred Mountain Trading Post charges.

Navajo and Hopi tribal members challenged the Forest Service's management plan. AIHRA and the first amendment's free exercise of religion clause was the basis for the challenge. In order to restrict the government's development of public lands on the basis of AIHRA and free exercise of religion grounds, the plaintiffs had to prove that the San Francisco Peaks are indispensable and central to their religious practice and beliefs. In compliance with the court's wishes, they asserted that the sacred mountains were the basis of their cosmology and have been the center of religious practices for hundreds of years.

In spite of this evidence, the 1933 suit contesting Forest Service plans to develop the ski area ended in favor of Snow Bowl development. The circuit judge held that:
1. The plaintiffs did not show an impermissible burden on religion. Impact on religious ceremo­
nial practices were minimal because only 777 acres of the 75,000 acre San Francisco Peaks area were developed.

2. The Forest Service did comply with AIRFA require­ments to consult with Indian religious leaders, but was not required to accept those values to the ex­clusion of their own.

3. Development of the ski area would not cause the tribes to be denied access to any sacred sites. Therefore, there were no provisions in AIRFA to halt ex­pansion of Snow Bowl. Recreational and economic reasons superceded the beliefs of the Navaho and Hopi people.

Likewise, subsequent law suits, contesting the govern­ment's ability to develop public lands on the basis of AIRFA and the first amendment, have consistently been settled in favor of government interests. All except for one that is. In Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association v. Peterson, a district court issued an in­junction preventing the construction of a road and any timber harvesting in a unit of the Six Rivers National Forest in California because it would burden an Indian tribe's free exercise of religion. The district court's order was the first decision restricting development of
This decision was upheld by a ninth circuit court in 1986, but was reversed by the Supreme Court on April 19, 1988.

The precedent setting Supreme Court ruling makes a mockery of AIRFA and the first amendment. Justice O'Connor stated that the "(l)ocation of the line between unconstitutional prohibitions on free exercise of religion and legitimate conduct by government of its own affairs cannot depend on measuring effects of governmental action on religious objector's spiritual development." Therefore, the government's interests as landowner often take precedence over any claims that such interests infringe on religious practice.

The Supreme Court's decision also shows that AIRFA did not create any enforceable measures that would protect Indian religious rights. AIRFA only acknowledges past deficiencies in relation to Indian religious practices. AIRFA states that these "religious infringements result from a lack of knowledge or the insensitive and inflexible enforcement of Federal policies..." It contains no provisions that would force the government to correct this problem. One judge writes:

"The court holds that a federal land-use decision that promises to destroy an entire religion does not burden the free exercise clause. Having thus stripped
respondents and all other Native Americans of any constitutional protection against perhaps the most serious threat to their age-old religious practice."

I am sure that Indians would welcome efforts on the part of congress to make AIRPA's language less refutable.

"Backbone-of-the-World"

"Backbone-of-the-World" is what the Blackfeet Indians of Northwestern Montana call the Rocky Mountains. The mountains of the Badger-Two Medicine area south of Glacier National Park are both central and essential to the Blackfeet religion. The entire area is sacred. Doris Wells, a Blackfeet traditionalist, states the importance of the mountains.

"The mountains are more in touch with the spiritual world for us and being in the mountains brings us much closer to the spirits. To us Blackfeet, the mountains themselves are the body of our religion. Our spiritual help comes from the mountains and if the mountains or the quiet they provide were gone it would be hard to fast - and not fasting would kill our religion. A very big part of our religion is fasting and spiritual vision quests. They must be done in the mountains."

The mountainous region of the Badger-Two Medicine area is a place the Blackfeet go to receive knowledge, dreams, or visions. While there, an animal or supernatural being whose compassion has been excited by
the person's fasting, would provide that person with a gift of power. These other-than-human beings may appear as a buffalo, wolf, or bear; or may be in thunder, wind, or storms. Any sacrilege could drive them away.

"When I go to pray and fast," states George Kipp, a Blackfeet traditionalist, "I do not go to a particular place, but rather to where the spirits direct me. Different areas are important to different people, depending on where the spirits direct each individual. I might be directed to different places within the Badger-Two Medicine at different times. The entire journey is spiritual. Every plant and animal that I come in contact with has significance. This is true even for the smallest of details. The way a stick is left in the ground, or a twig overturned, can be important. That is why it is necessary for the place where I visit to be pristine."

The Blackfeet religion is dependent on the pristine qualities of this sacred area. As George Bird Grinnell explains:

"It was deemed essential that the place to which a man resorted for this purpose should be unfrequented, where few or no persons had walked; and it must also be a place that tried the nerve, where there is some danger. Such situations were mountain peaks; or narrow ledges on cut cliffs, where a careless movement might cause a man to fall to his death on the rocks below."

The spiritual significance of the Badger-Two Medicine area can be traced back to the earliest of all Blackfeet myths. For the Blackfeet, the area has been the
source of spiritual inspiration since before Europeans ever set foot in America. According to Jay Vest, "the most significant confirmation of the sacrality of the Badger-Two Medicine area emerges from the Poia myth." A couple versions of this myth describe the role of mountains in Scarface's (Poia's) quest for the Sun who removed his scar.

Scarface was very sad. "Pity me. I am very poor," he told the old woman. "I am going away on a long journey to the Sun. Only the Sun can remove my scar," Scarface said. The old woman kindly made him several pair of moccasins for his journey. All alone, Scarface left the Sweet Grass Hills for his quest for the Sun. For days he travelled towards the mountains.

Then he met a Helper. A Helper pointed him towards the West. "Go West to the highest mountain of them all," the Helper told Scarface.

One mountain he encountered was Misteake Morning Star. Misteake Morning Star asked, "Where are you going?"

"I have come to find the Sun," Scarface replied. "Please help me. My food is nearly gone."

"The Sun's lodge is farther West," said the Helper. "Follow that trail and you will see it."

The highest peak he encountered was Morning Star Mountain. Scarface slept there to seek out the spirit of that mountain, who knew where the Sun lived.

There he was greeted by a young boy. "I am Morning Star. The Sun is my father. Come, I will take you to him."
When the Sun returned home that evening he said, "I will remove your scar if you promise me one thing. You shall build me a Medicine Lodge shaped like the world. There, sick people can go to become cured."

Scarface stayed at the Sun's lodge. The Sun told him everything about making the Medicine Lodge and when he had finished with the instructions, he rubbed a medicine on Scarface's scar and it disappeared.

Scarface returned home wearing beautiful clothes. He was a handsome man. "The trail was very long, and I nearly died, but those Helpers led me to the Sun's lodge," Scarface told his friends.

The first Medicine Lodge was built. The people were glad. They lived to a very old age and never grew sick.

On June 4, 1986, the pristine quality of the Badger-Two Medicine area was threatened. The Regional Forester for the Northern Region of the United States Forest Service issued a land management plan for the Lewis and Clark National Forest that included development and construction within the sacred wilderness. The management prescription permitted oil and gas exploration, road construction, seismic testing, and helicopter traffic. The Forest Service land management plan was appealed by Robert Yetter, Keith Schultz, Steven Kloetzel, George Kipp, Woodrow Kipp, and Galen Bull Shoe, Sr. The appellants charge that the management plan is "flawed and unacceptable by standards set forth in the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) and the National Environ-
mental Policy Act (NEPA)." The appellants contend that the Forest Service failed to consult with Blackfeet religious leaders and failed to assess environmental consequences on wildlife, wilderness, and water.

The development as envisioned under the plan would infringe on the Blackfeet tribe's free exercise of religion, thereby affecting their lifestyle and culture. "The development of this area would have the same impact as if all the Bibles in the world were destroyed," George Kipp claims. "By destroying the pristine nature of the Badger-Two Medicine, then you destroy my ability to practice my religion."169

Conclusion

These two cases are characterized by a federal land policy that has consistently misunderstood or ignored Indian religious beliefs. Although AIRPA acknowledges that religion is a crucial facet of Indian culture and their relationship to the land, it has provided little more than lip service to correct the problem.

This is because the judicial system itself speaks from a position of alienation. Rather than seeing the world in terms of natural mutualisms held together by mysterious forces, it sees externally related interests at stake that can be weighed independently of one another. The judicial system is devoted to administration by
control and coercion, but at the same time it is obsessively fearful of even the slightest opposition. In its fear, it runs over the deeply sensed sacramental presence in nature leaving in its wake religious persecution and environmental destruction. The word "sacred" has no meaning for a federal agency that assumes a proprietary right over the land.

Occasionally, sacred mountains have been liberated from human domination. Some countries have demonstrated that it is possible to respect religious tradition, respect the inherent worth of mountain, and forgo economic profit. Even in those countries with a variety of religious traditions, sacred mountains have enjoyed official sanction. Here are some examples:

1. Kangchenjunga. The government of Sikkim respected the religious traditions of the indigenous Bhutia people by requiring the 1955 mountaineering party not to tread on the summit, thus protecting the five treasures the Bhutia people believe exist there.  

2. Machhapuchare. This formidable peak in Nepal is revered by the Gurung people as a holy mountain. The 1957 expedition was forbidden to step on the summit by the government, thus preserving it in mystrium tremendum.

3. Manda Devi. The Manda Devi sanctuary, home of the
renowned Goddess Nanda of Hindu mythology, was closed by the government of India in 1978. In 1982, the area became an Indian National Park and has been closed to mountaineers and trekkers ever since. It is preserved as the source of the holy Ganges River as well as the home to rare species of flora and fauna.\textsuperscript{172}

Following the initiative of various countries in Asia, the United States needs to incorporate sacred mountains in its land use policy. Such a policy would provide us with the opportunity to redefine and reinterpret the land, with which we live, as sacred. Sacred mountains provide us with the opportunity to peel away veneers of ego, pride, and petty self-interests and replace them with practical moral consideration and compassion for other human and non-human beings.

Like the pilgrims who circumambulate Mount Kailas, we too must return from the mountains to our homes. The memories and souvenirs we bring back will remain in our hearts forever to be shared with others. In this way, we can help to link the people of the community with the mountains. Endowed with the special knowledge of sacred mountains, we as pilgrims act as intermediaries helping to link seemingly opposite domains—heaven and earth, human beings and non-human beings. We can restore bal-
ance and harmony, and enrich the lives of other people
with inexhaustible wonder.

If mountains are to be our teachers, their non-
human dimension must not be tampered with but must be
revered and respected. However, if we allow the sacred-
ness of mountains to be destroyed or profaned, they will
teach us nothing.
Before George Mallory vanished into the clouds of Mount Everest in 1924, he gave many lectures about his mountaineering experiences. Invariably, someone would ask him, "Why do you climb?" Terribly tired of being asked that question, he gave the now famous reply, "Because it is there," as a joke hoping to change the topic. His joke has since become the koan of mountain climbing.


5 Ibid, pp. 11, 12, 23.


7 Ibid, p. 22.

8 Ibid, p. 12.


12 Genius is a translation of the Nahua term "naual". In Quiche usage, naual refers to the spiritual essence or character of a person, animal, plant, stone, or place. Ibid, p. 337.


16 Ibid, p. 81; see also Trebby Johnson, "The Four Sacred Mountains of the Navajos," Parabola 13 (Winter 1988), pp. 41-42.

17 Beck and Walters, supra at 15, pp. 81-82.

18 Ibid, p. 82; and Johnson, supra at 16, pp. 41-42.

19 Johnson, supra at 16, pp. 40-41.

20 Beck and Walters, supra at 15, p. 77.

21 W.Y. Evans-Wentz, supra at 2, p. 71.


23 Evans-Wentz, supra at 2, p. 56.


26 Ibid, pp. 76, 85.

27 Ibid, p. 81.

28 Ibid, p. 77.


30 Olschak, supra at 25, p. 77.

31 Ibid, pp. 77, 82.


34 Ibid, p. 39.

35 Ibid, p. 47. A yurt is a felt covered hut of the natives of the steppes of Asia.

37 Hori, supra at 36, p. 145.

38 Snelling, supra at 36, p. 25. A mandala is often painted on cloth or paper which shows deities in their spiritual or cosmic connections as a condensed representation of the universe. A mandala serves as a center which preserves one from dispersion or distraction.

39 Snelling, supra at 36, p. 217.


41 Ibid, p. 29.

42 Eliade, supra at 33, p. 42.

43 Cohn, supra at 40, p. 65.

44 Job 15:7

45 Psalms 90:2

46 Psalms 121:1

47 LaChapelle, supra at 13, pp. 17-18; also Evans-Wentz, supra at 2, p. 40.

48 Psalms 76:2

49 Cohn, supra at 40, p. 38.

50 Psalms 48:2

51 Cohn, supra at 40, p. 39.


53 Psalms 99:5

54 Isaiah 66:1

55 Cohn, supra at 40, p. 40.
Biblical scholars and subsequent tradition affirm that Mount Horeb is geographically indistinguishable from Mount Sinai. This is supported in Deut. 4:10-15 where Moses recaps the history of his earlier episode as if he encountered Horeb rather than Sinai. Cohn, supra at 40, p. 44, and T. Bryant, ed., The New Compact Bible Dictionary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), p. 232.

Exodus 3:2-3
Exodus 17:6
Exodus 19:17-20
Exodus 24:15-18
Cohn supra at 40, pp. 55-56.

Ibid, p. 110.

Snelling, supra at 36, p. 206.
Snyder, supra at 65, p. 201.

Earhart, supra at 63, p. 111.


73 Earhart, supra at 63, p. 111.


75 Snyder, supra at 65, p. 201.

76 Earhart, supra at 63, p. 116.

77 Moslems believe that Adam, the first man created by God, stood on the peak creating the three-foot-long depression shaped like a human footprint.


79 Hori, supra at 36, p. 145.

80 Eliade, supra at 78, p. 100.


83 Eliade, ed., supra at 68, p. 131.


86 Ibid, p. 171.


89 Amos 9:13
90 Job 9:6
91 Bernbaum, supra at 29, p. 17.
92 Tedlock, supra at 10, p. 365.
93 Eliade, ed. supra at 68, p. 133.
94 Evans-Webb, supra at 2, p. 53.
96 Eliade, supra at 33, p. 20.
99 OED
100 Bugbee, "Wilderness in America," supra at 97, p. IX2.
102 During the Chinese "cultural revolution" following the invasion of Tibet, access to Mount Kailas for the purpose of parikrama was greatly restricted. The route from India was closed in 1962. Religious buildings and temples were destroyed by Chinese militia. Since 1981, conditions have improved and the pilgrimage has resumed. Raghubir Singh, "Pilgrims Return to Kailas, Tibet's Sacred Mountain," Smithsonian 13 (May 1982), p. 94.
105 Snelling, supra at 36, p. 196.
107 Snelling, supra at 36, p. 220.
It would be naive to suppose that all who trek over the Himalayas somehow experience a spiritual conversion. Snelling admits the failure rate is quite high.


Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," in Western Man and Environmental Ethics, Ian Barbour, ed., (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 24-25. This is not to imply the absence of other theological perspectives that existed during the first seventeen centuries of Christianity that support a caring or nurturing relationship with God's creation, or which recognize both the transcendence and immanence of God.

Nicolson, supra at 111, p. 50.


Nicolson, supra at 111, p. 1.

Ibid. p. 263.

Ibid. p. 143.


99.

122 Bates, supra at 119, p. 84.

123 Berry, supra at 114, p. 134.


127 Rebuffat, supra at 125, p. 130.

128 Mr. Bourdillon in Irving, supra at 124, p. 121.


130 Fantasy Ridge is an adventure travel company based in Telluride, Colorado specializing in international mountain guiding.


133 Ibid, pp. 28, 29.

134 Klein, supra at 3.


137 Ibid, p. 31.

138 Klein, supra at 3.


140 Nicolson, supra at 111, p. 339.


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Jay Vest points out that the word "management" implies "hand-action". He states that "manage" comes from the Old French Menagerie that referred to the control of domesticated animals and was derived from the Latin manus meaning "hand". Jay Vest, "Wilderness and Environmental Ethics: A Philosophy of Wilderness Praxis," Ph.D. diss., (University of Montana, 1987), p. 176.


The first amendment "prohibits governmental actions that burden individual's free exercise of religion unless those actions are necessary to fulfill governmental interests of highest order that cannot be met in a less restrictive manner." Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association v. Peterson, 795 P2d 688 (9th Cir., 1986), p. 688.

Ibid, p. 1339.


Ibid, Affidavit of George Kipp, p. 3.

George Bird Grinnell as quoted by Jay Vest, supra at 147, p. 99.

Ibid, p. 103.

George Bird Grinnell, Blackfoot Lodge Tales, (Williamstown, MA: Corner House Publishers, 1972), pp. 93-103; and Vest, supra at 147, pp. 96, 103.


Ibid, p. 2.

Ibid, Affidavit of George Kipp, p. 4.


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Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association v. Peterson. 795 F2d 688 (9th Cir., 1986).

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