Pilgrimage



Pilgrimages have played an integral role in religious activity since time immemorial.The largest–and longest-practiced–is the Hindu “Kumbh Mela” in India.{1}(Zoroastrianism–the world’s most long-lived monotheistic religion–boasts the second oldest extant pilgrimage tradition.)Every religion has rites of passage and sacraments…replete with hallowed ground and sacrosanct tenets.The regimen of sanctified rituals often includes a visit to some sort of auspicious place–a “temenos” to which supernatural traits are ascribed.Whether Assyrians seeking Marduk in Babylon or Egyptians seeking Amun-Ra at Karnak or Vikings seeking Odin at Uppsala, the phenomenon seems to have been universal.Jains–who’s tradition goes back almost three millennia–go on a “tirtha”.Jews go on a “regal” (a “walking”; i.e. a trek to the Kotel) during “Sukkot” [celebration of tabernacles].Muslims go on the “Hajj” (to the Meccan cube).A single sacred place is not necessary (practitioners of Mithra-ism honored Mithra[s] at myriad sites); but a “temenos” is typically singular in its auspiciousness.For here, we are not talking about just any sacred space; we are talking about ONE SPECIFIC PLACE.

A “temenos” is deemed the most important place in the world.It is often posited as an interface between the corporeal world and the ethereal world “beyond”.Typically, this is seen as a location with supernatural features; so there is an incentive to pay visits to it.After all, such a cosmogonic nexus is a place that may imbue one with preternatural powers.

A venue for worship can be anywhere in practice, but the destination for the most important pilgrimage in any given Faith is, as it were, set in stone.It is meaningful for the creed in a way that no other place could possibly be; for it is often the location on which the religion’s lore hinges.(Again: Mithra-ism may have been one of the exceptions to this rule.)For many, the “temenos” is considered the place where one can best commune with the divine (however conceived), or somehow communicate with (be heard by; hear from) entities that cannot be accessed by ordinary means–be they higher powers or deceased ancestors.In New-Age-speak, it is a place of energy vortices or “harmonic convergences” (as if the Earth itself had chakra points on its surface).The fixation on such a place might be referred to as “Omphalos Syndrome”, named after sacred stones (usually black meteorites) that were seen as symbols of the gods. {2}

The idea, then, is that there is a specific place (somewhere on the surface of the planet) with unique cosmic significance; and that by visiting it, people might enjoy some sort of spiritual perk–a perk that they can get nowhere else.Participating in a pilgrimage is a way to identify with one’s cultural heritage (and, ostensibly, to get in touch with the designated deity).The import of such a sacrament was illustrated in 1678 by John Bunyan in his classic, “The Pilgrim’s Progress From This World To That Which Is To Come”–a physical journey that was correlated with a spiritual journey.

A pilgrimage typically involves the notion of an “axis mundi”: the (supposed) center of the world; as the “navel” of the cosmos is often seen as a conduit to the spirit-world or the afterlife.Thus the designated location is believed to be a point of convergence between the material world and a magical realm (read: a connection to the divine).In Jain, Hindu, and Buddhist cosmology, the axis mundi is Mount [su]Meru [Chinese: Xumishan].

Take, for example, the Yazidis (a.k.a. “Dasni”), a small group of monotheists located in northern Mesopotamia.The most important ritual for the Yazidis is their perennial visit to the tomb of Adi ibn Musafir al-Umawi of Beqaa at Lalish, in Nineveh. {7}To almost anyone else, this tomb has all the religious significance of aisle 3 at the local grocery store.But for the Yazidis, this may be the most important location on

Earth.Hence, each year, it is the destination for their pilgrimage–which dates back to 1162 A.D. (though the religion itself is based on traditions that are several millennia old).

The point of making the PHYSICAL journey to the designated destination is a SPIRITUAL journey–namely: achieving communion with the divine via geographical proximity to the “temenos”.In Judaism, this is referred to as “shekhinah”.In Christianity, it is thought of as being “in Christ”.In Islam, it is referred to as “wasilah” (communion with the divine) or “qurbah” (closeness to divinity).In Ancient Greek (esp. neo-Platonic) thought, communion with the divine was referred to as “henosis”.In some of the world’s religions, such communion is–ostensibly–achieved by visiting hallowed ground (and/or participating in certain rituals).

The notion of achieving one-ness with the divine goes back to the Vedic notion of “advaita”, whereby one’s “atman” becomes one with “Brahman”.The key difference between the Abrahamic “wasilah” and the Eastern “advaita” is that the the former is about submission while the latter is about liberation.(When the godhead is an authority figure, this is a matter of appeasing him–by surrendering.When the divine is conceptualized as something that is transcendent, this is a matter of “moksha” (what the Japanese dub “satori”)–by becoming one with.The former is about currying favor; the latter is about enlightenment.)

The designated “axis mundi” often has an (alleged) historical significance–be it a mountain or a cave or just the site of a propitious event.It is consecrated accordingly.Typically, the location is the site of a commemorative structure–be it a shrine (obelisk, tell, sacellum, henge, or heathen hof), a tomb (pyramid, heroon, tumulus, cairn, or mausoleum), or some kind of temple (ziggurat, pagoda, hieron, sept, synagogue, basilica, or mosque).The early Hebrews used tents (tabernacles), just like their Canaanite forebears.The early Arabs used cubes (ka’abu).But pilgrimage is a social-construct; and mustn’t be confused with visiting a particular place that has personal sentimental value (which could literally be ANYWHERE).The fact of the matter is: Taking a leisurely stroll through a tranquil setting–a forest or a canyon or a beach–can offer far more spirituality than any “temenos” ever established.

To reiterate: Supplicants consider the hallowed place to be the center of the world both literally and metaphorically–as the Ancient Greeks did with Mount Parnassus (even as the gods were said to have lived on Mount Olympus). {3}Thus the destination can be seen as the world's center in either the geographical or the spiritual sense.For heuristic purposes, the two are often correlated. {5}

Pilgrimage dates back to pre-history–long before any discernible religion came into existence.Her are TWENTY sites from archaic times:

1. The shrine at Qermez Dere in upper Mesopotamia [Nineveh] (c. 10th thru 8th millennium B.C.) {8}
2. Gobekli Tepe in southern Anatolia [Nineveh] (10th thru 8th millennium B.C.) {9}
3. The heroon at Sagalassos in western Anatolia (c. 8,000 B.C.) {10}
4. The shrine to the mother-goddess at Catalhoyuk in central Anatolia (c. 8th millennium B.C.) {11}
5. The ziggurat at Tepe Sialk in Isfahan (6th millennium B.C.)
6. The megaliths in western France–most notably: the grand tomb of Barnenez, the Er-Grah at Locmariaquer, the tumulus of Bougon, the tumulus of St. Michel, and the tomb at Gavrinis (5th millennium B.C.)
7. The proto-Sumerian citadel at Urbilum [Erbil] from the "Ubaid" period (5th millennium B.C.) {12}
8. The temple at Tepe Gawra, near Nineveh (5th millennium B.C.)
9. The Goseck Circle in Germany (c. 4,900 B.C) {13}
10. The megalith at Carnac in Brittany (c. 4,500 B.C.)
11. The Monte d'Accoddi temple in Sardinia (c. 4,000 B.C.)
12. The megalith of Monte d'Accoddi in Sardinia (early 4th millennium B.C.)
13. Many of the oldest tombs ("cairns") are in what is now Scotland and northern Ireland–notably, those at Listoghil, Midhowe, Unstan, Isbister, and Newgrange (4th millennium B.C.) {14}
14. The G'gantija (on Gozo); the [i]Mnajdra and Tarxien temples; and the Xaghra stone circle in Malta (4th millennium B.C.)
15. The necropolis of Pranu Muttedu in Sardinia (late 4th millennium B.C.)
16. The Hougue Bie on Jersey in the British Channel (c. 3,500 B.C.)
17. The temple at Uruk (c. 3,200 B.C.)
18. Stone Henge in England (c. 3,000 B.C.) {15}
19. The temple of Ninhursag at Tel al-Ubaid (3rd mellennium B.C.)
20. The temple of Sin at Tutub [now dubbed "Khafajah"] (3rd millennium B.C.)

And it is possible that the now-submerged megalith at Yonaguni (in Japan's Ryukyu islands) came from a Bronze Age civilization.

To put this in chronological perspective, the oldest fully-intact Egyptian structure is the pyramid of Djoser from the 27th century B.C.(This was at the same time the Sumerians were flourishing in Mesopotamia and the Elamites were flourishing in southern Persia.)That was followed by the pyramids of Sneferu, and then of Khufu in the 26th century B.C.The Sphinx seems to have been erected by Khufu's son, Khafra.This was around the time that the Minoans were beginning to flourish.Even these great structures were built almost a millennium before Abraham would have lived.(Note: the pyramids were not shrines; they were tombs.)

Considering the archeological record, those smitten with the Abrahamic tradition may wish to ask themselves a few questions.First and foremost: While Khufu had the great pyramid at Giza built, why did the Abrahamic deity not see fit to give the Egyptians any memo about the proper theology?After all, it was almost a thousand years later that he finally opted to mention something to a Canaanite shepherd from Chaldea.

The temple at Gobekli Tepe was erected EIGHT millennia prior to the time that Abraham would have lived–putting the present day TWICE AS CLOSE to Abraham's purported lifetime as that civilization would have been. (!)The Meccan cube, meanwhile, dates from c. 500 A.D.Funny how the Abrahamic deity chose to keep quiet for all that time.

So what was the Abrahamic deity doing when the archaic Anatolians were building Gobekli Tepe?And what caused him to wait OVER TEN THOUSAND YEARS before finally releasing the "Recitations" (inscribed on an eternal tabled) to mankind?And why to Bedouin merchants in the Hijaz?Such a timeframe leads to a narrative quandary.

If the Abrahamic deity really existed, he sat idly by for MILLENNIA as major parts of the world propagated (what would be, according to Abrahamic lore) COMPLETELY ERRANT accounts of the universe.And when he finally decided to deliver his crucial memorandum to mankind (a revelation to end all revelations), he opted to only do it in the western Arabian desert…to an illiterate Bedouin who's vocation was raiding merchant caravans.

As for the history of pilgrimages, it is difficult to say what the earliest examples might have been.The earliest known FORMAL pilgrimage is probably that of the Mitanni people in the 2nd millennium B.C., which was made to the temple of “Nergal” in the Hurrian city of Urkesh (now called “Tel Mozan”).The deity (“Nergal”) was appropriated from the Sumerians (via the Akkadians), who’s primary temple was at Gudua (a.k.a. “Cuthah” / “Kutha”), a location now referred to as “Tel Ibrahim”.

The earliest practitioners of Mazdaism (an ancient Iranian religion) seem to have visited the fire temples at Gonur Tepe in the land of Mouru (near what would later become Merv) during the 2nd millennium B.C.This led to the sacred sites visited by the earliest Zoroastrians (preceding, and then during the Achaemenid Empire).

We might also note the nuraghe at Su Nuraxi (c. 1500 B.C.) and the nuraghe at Losa (14th century B.C.) in Sardinia.

Surely, countless other pilgrimages occurred in ancient civilizations.We can infer pilgrimage traditions from ancient holy sites.Here are examples from sixty other past cultures:

1. **Sumerians** (who alternately worshipped Innana, Enlil, An-u, and Utu) likely considered Dilmun (eastern Arabia, posited as the homeland of Ninlil) a holy land.The cult of the sun-god “Utu” was worshipped at Larsa[m].Nin-a[b]zu, benevolent god of the underworld, was worshipped at the E-Kur-ma at Eshnunna.The cult of Marduk visited the E-Sag-ila and/or the E-Temen-An-Ki at Babylon.Some visited the E-zagin, sanctuary of Nanib-gal (alt. “Nisaba”; goddess of writing, learning, and harvest) at Umma.Some also visited the Royal Cemetery at Ur.Starting with King Ur-Nammu (in the 21st century B.C.), pilgrimages were likely taken to the Great Ziggurat at Ur (the largest ziggurat every constructed) to pay tribute to the moon-god, Nanna, patron deity of the capital city.
2. **Akkadians and early Hurrians** (who worshipped Enki / Ea) likely visited the great temple, E-Abzu [alt. “Apsu”] at Eridu.Akkadians may have also visited the “E-anna” (temple of Ishtar, their version of Inanna) at Uruk; the E-ninnu (temple of Ningirsu, their version of Ninurta) at Lagash; and the temple of Ereshkigal at Gudua [alt. Kutha]. Those who worshipped the sun-god, “Utu” voyaged to Larsa.
3. Later, the **Kassites** visited a temple of Ishtar / Inanna at Uruk. {16}
4. **Egyptians** (who worshipped Amun-Ra) likely visited the great temples at Karnak [Thebes].They also visited the great temple to Osiris at Abydos and the

great temple to Horus at Nbwt (a.k.a. “Nakhen”; later dubbed “Ombos”) and at Behdet (a.k.a. “Edfu”).Participants in the cult of Atum visited the Re-Atum obelisk at Annu (later dubbed “Heliopolis”).The goddess of Justice / Truth (Maat) was worshipped at “Set Maat” [Place of Justice / Truth; also associated with Meret-seger / Hathor].Participants in the cult of Hathor visited the “Iunet” at Ta-ynt-netert (alt. “Tantere”; a.k.a. “Nekhen-tori”; later dubbed “Tentyra” / “Dendera”).The cults of Serapis and Isis visited the “Per-Habitet” at Menouthis; where, later, the Iseum became a pilgrimage site for the Roman cult of Isis.Some worshipped Amun at his sanctuary at the Siwa Oasis. Meanwhile, the Nubians visited Nepata, which they considered home of the Egyptian god, Amun.

5. **Nubians** (who worshipped the sun-god, Mandulis) visited the temple at Kalabsha.Nubians who partook in the Isis cult visited the temple at Philae.
6. **Elamites** (who worshipped the mother-goddess, Kir[ir]isha / Pinikir) likely visited the Apadana at Susa…as well as the Dur-Untash ziggurat (a.k.a. “Chogha Zanbil”), dedicated to “Inshushinak” (protector of Susa) in Khuzestan.
7. **Early Assyrians** (who, like the Kassites, worshipped Ishtar) likely visited the “E-Gasan-kalamma” at Urbilum / Arbela [present-day Erbil].Later, Assyrians (who worshipped Marduk) likely visited the great temple of E-temen-anki at Babylon; as well as the nearby “E-Sagil[a]” (dedicated to the godhead, Marduk[-Bel]). {17}The Babylonians (who worshipped Nabu, son of Marduk) visited the great ziggurat at Barsip [a.k.a. “Borsippa”; sometimes associated with Nimrod] starting in the 21st century B.C.The cult of Nirgal was centered at Kutha [alt. “Cuthah”].
8. Even later, **northern Neo-Assyrians / Babylonians** (who worshipped the godhead, Ashur) likely visited the temple at Assur (his namesake).Meanwhile, southern Neo-Assyrians (who worshiped the Sumerian deity, Enlil) visited the “E-kur” [House of the gods] at Nippur. {18}In Canaan, those who worshipped An-a-melekh and Adra-melekh visited Sippar[a]vaim (that is: the two Sippars, located on opposing banks of the Euphrates River, corresponding to the ancient Mesopotamian city of Akkad).
9. **Urartians** (who worshipped [k]Haldi) likely visited the shrine at Ardini.They may have also visited the temple of Musasir at Ararat.
10. **Canaanites** seem to have worshipped “Ish-Baal”, per the “Khirbet” inscription in the Judean hills overlooking the Elah Valley (from the early 10th century B.C.)Amorites (who worshipped the fertility / fish god, Dagan[u]) likely visited the temples at Terqa (in Canaan) and Tuttul (in Syria).In Canaan, the Philistines followed suit (see below).The Ugaritic deity, Kinaru[m] was worshipped at

Tyre.Proto-Hebrews (Canaanites who may have been an offshoot of Amorites; possibly the Shasu) visited a shrine at Shilo[a]h, in Ephraim. {19}

11. **Hittites** (who worshipped the sun-goddess, Wurusemu, a.k.a. “Utu Arinna”; alt. the mother-goddess “[k]Hepat”) visited the Yazili-kaya at Hattusa.They also likely visited the temple at Arinna.Those who worshipped the storm-god, [Baal] Hadad (who was based on the Hurrian “Teshub” and/or on the Sumerian “Ishkur”; later known as “Baal-Zephon”) likely visited the temple at Halab [Aleppo].Those in Syria seem to have visited the temple to Ishtar [Astarte] at Ain Dara.The Hittite capital, Kussara (alt. Hattusa) in central Anatolia was also a significant place of worship.
12. **Hurrians** of the Cappadocian kingdom of Kizzuwatna (who worshipped Teshub) likely visited the temple at Kummanni [“Kummiya” in Hittite; “Kumme” in Assyrian].
13. **Phoenicians** likely visited the great temple of Eshmun at Sidon, the temple of Melqart at Tyre, and the temple of Ba’alat Gebel at Byblos.
14. **Moabites** (who worshipped the godhead, Chemosh / Kamish) likely visited a shrine at Divon [alt. Dibon] and/or a place referred to as “Karchah”.
15. **Ammonites** (who worshipped the godhead, Moloch / Malkam) likely visited the shrine at Tophet in the Valley of Ge-Hinnom (esp. to make sacrifices).
16. **Philistines** (who worshipped Dagon; alt. “Marnas”) likely visited the shrine at Ashdod.They seem to have also visited sites at Tell Qasile and Ashkelon.
17. **Edomites** (who worshipped the godhead, Qos / Koze) likely visited the shrine at Hisma–where a mountain in Jordan still bears his name (“Jabal al-Qaus”).
18. **Sabaeans** (who worshipped, among others, L-M-Q-H) likely visited the temples of Barran and Awwam, near the ancient Yemeni city of Ma’rib. Later, in Abyssinia, their progeny, developed their own traditions in Aksum.
19. **Achaemenid Persians** (who, being Zoroastrian, worshipped the godhead, Ahura Mazda) likely visited the Apadana at Persepolis.
20. **Sassanian Persians** (some of whom worshipped the goddess, Anahita) visited the “Dezh Dokhtar” in Pars.
21. **Aramaeans** (who worshipped Baal / Bel) likely visited the great temples at Palmyra, Syria.
22. **Minoans** (who worshipped a mother-goddess, later rendered “Ariadne”) likely visited the “Juktas” sanctuary at Knossos and the temple at Hagia Triada, on Crete. And the “Palace of Nestor” (located on a hilltop near Pylos) was an auspicious place for the Mycenaeans c. 1300 B.C.
23. Some **Ancient Greeks** likely visited the Pythia of Phocis (a.k.a. the “Oracle at Delphi”) on Mount Parnassus.Some Archaic Greeks visited the Sanctuary of

Artemis Orthia at Sparta.The Mycenaeans of Achaea visited her shrine at Patras (on the Meilichus river) in Arcadia.Later Greeks visited her temple, the Artemision, at Ephesus.The Malians of Thessaly visited the temple of Demeter at Anthele.The “temenos” for Athena Alea was located at Tegea. {20}

24. A Greek hero-cult based on **Macedonian** nobleman, Hephaestion, paid homage at the massive tumulus on Kasta Hill at Amphipolis (a.k.a. “Kasta Tomb”).Those belonging to the cult of Asclepius visited the “asclepeion” at Epidaurus in the Peloponnese.
25. **Athenians** had more than one temenos, depending on the cult.Those who worshipped their hero / founder, Cecrops, visited the Kekropion.Those who worshipped their god / founder, Erechtheus, visited the Erechtheum.And those who worshipped the seer, Skiros, visited the temple at Skiron.
26. **Umbrians / Early Sabines** seem to have visited the “Semo Sancus Dius Fidius” (temple of a deified Sancus); as well as the “Collis Quirinalis” (temple of Quirinus) on Quirinal Hill in Latium (eventual site of Rome).
27. The Rasenna [a.k.a. “**Etruscans**”; alt. “Etrurians”] (who worshipped Voltumna / Veltha) visited the sacred grove, “Fanum Voltumnae” near Volsinii.Other Etruscans (who worshipped the sky-god, Tin[ia]) may have visited the hallowed grounds of Val Camonica (north of Etruria) in what is now Lombardy.Those who worshipped Minerva visited the Portonaccio at Veii (starting in the 2nd century B.C.)
28. Some **Romans** may have visited a sacred location at Lixus (in Morocco), believed to have been a gateway to the Garden of Hesperides.During the reign of Emperor Elagabalus, many visited the Elagabalium on Palatine Hill to pay tribute to “Sol Invictus” and/or the source of the emperor’s eponym, the Syrian god, “El-Gabal”. {21}
29. **Roman Sabines** visited the “sacellum” to Strenia, located on Capitoline Hill. {22}
30. **Nabataeans** (who worshipped Hubal) visited the temples at Ramqu (a.k.a. “Petra”); as well as the “ka’abu” shrine to Dushara at Petra. {55}
31. Later Sabaeans in southern Arabia (**Himyarites**), who worshipped the sun-goddess, Shams, likely visited her temple at Zafar [alt. “Dhafar”]. Others visited the Yemeni Kaaba at Ma’rib. {23}
32. **Scythians / Sarmatians** seem to have considered the Pazyryk Valley in the Altai Mountains to be a holy site.
33. **Lydians** visited the temple of Cybele at Magnesia ad Sipylum (at the foot of Mount Sipylus), in western Anatolia.

34. **Phrygians** considered Mount Agdistis [a.k.a. “Agdos”] to be a temenos for the “Great Mother, Cybele” [alt. “Matar Kubileya”].They also seem to have visited the temple of Atargatis [alt. “Ataratheh”] at Hierapolis.
35. **Armenians** visited the temple of the godhead, Aramazd at Ani-Kamakh.
36. Those who partook in the **Mithraic Mysteries** visited the great mithraeum at Ostia Antica–among other, less prominent temples to Mithra[s]. {24}Those who partook in the Mysteries of Isis visited the “Iseum Campense” at the Campus Martius in Rome.
37. **Ptolemaic Egyptians** (who worshipped Serapis) visited the Serapeum at Alexandria and at Canopus.(Serapis was based on the Egyptian bull-deity, Apis.)
38. The **pan-Hellenic mystery cult** that worshipped Demeter visited the “Telesterion” at Eleusis in Attica.The Eleusinian mystery cult was also oriented around Demeter’s daughter, Persephone (goddess of the underworld); and originated in Pylos under the Mycenaeans.Another major mystery cult (apparently from Sparta) considered the temple complex at Samothrace to be their temenos.And those who worshipped Despoina visited the temple at Lycosura in Arcadia.The cult of Isis was especially active during the Ptolemaic period–as attested by the Iseion in Lower [northern] Egypt (at what is now Behbeit el-Hagar) and the temple at Philae in Upper [southern] Egypt. {25}
39. **Dacians** (who worshipped the godhead, Darzalas) likely visited the temples at Odessos and at Histria / Istros. {26}They also considered Mount Kogaionon to be a holy place. {27}
40. **Thracians** visited the temple of the sky-god, “Saba-zios” (alt. “Karabazmos”) at Perperikon in the Rhodope Mountains. {28}
41. **The Kushans** traveled to Bukhara to worship the goddess, Anahita.
42. **Tengri-ists** (who worshipped the sky-god, Tengri) may have visited the sacred mountain, Khan Tengri, in the Tian Shan mountains of China.
43. **Later Mongols** (pursuant to the Golden Horde) seemed to have visited the Ovoo [shrine] of Heaven, at the peak of the sacred mountain, Burkhan Khaldun (home of the celestial “Blue Wolf”).This likely also involved Tengri (god of the blue skies).
44. **Mauryan Hindus** likely visited the Dhamek[a] Stupa at Sarnath (near Varanasi, where Shiva is said to have lived).Gupta Hindus (who primarily worshipped Vishnu) would have visited the (Chandela) Dashavatara temple at Deogarh in Jeja-ka-bhukti [alt. “Bundela-khand”].Hindus belonging to the cult of the sun-god, Surya / Aditya, visited the “Mulasthana” at Multan in Punjab.Dravidian Hindus likely visited the Anantha-puram Lake Temple at

Kasargod in Kerala, where Vishnu (as “Anantha-padmanabha”) was said to have lived. {29}Sindhi Hindus worshipped Varuna (as “Jhulelal”) at Sri Varun Dev Mandir.During the 5th thru 10th centuries, the cave complexes at Ellora were a significant center of worship. (Especially noteworthy is the Kailasha temple.)In Java, (Sanjaya) Shaivite Hindus visited the gigantic Prambanan temple (originally known as the “Shiva-grha”; later rendered “Rara Jonggrang”).Further examples of (more current) Hindu pilgrimages are enumerated forthwith.

45. **The archaic Chinese** (who worshipped the godhead, “[Shang-]Di”) seem to have visited temples at Zheng-zhou. {30}
46. **Manichaeans** (“Manichee”; “Zandiks”) likely visited the Cao’an temple in Jinjiang, China.
47. **Ancient Japanese** apparently considered Masuda-no-Iwafune at Asuka to be holy ground (starting c. 600).
48. **Ancient Javanese** (Mahayana) Buddhists visited the gigantic (Shailendra) Borobudur temple at Magelang (starting in the 9th century); the largest single-structure Buddhist temple ever built.
49. **Ancient Sundanese** people visited the megalith at Gunung Padang [Mountain of Enlightenment], purportedly dedicated to the legendary “prabu” [king], Siliwangi…though the site dates to Classical Antiquity.
50. **Ancient Norse** (esp. the Vikings) visited the heathen-hof [hill-temple] of Uppsala (in present-day Sweden).
51. **Ancient Germanic** (Cimbrian) cults (who worshipped Mercurius) visited a sacred site at Heiligenberg (in the Rhineland).
52. **Ancient Prussians** visited the pagan temple at Romuva / Romowe / Rickoyoto in Sambia / Livonia.
53. **Ancient Celts** of Ireland seem to have visited the great cairn at Newgrange (Boyne Valley), associated with their godhead, Dagda (dating back to 3200 B.C.)Meanwhile, Brittonic peoples (who worshipped Nodens; from whom the Irish “Nuada” was derived) visited the temple at Lydney.During medieval times, the Cnoc na Teamhrach [Hill of Tara] was seen as sacred ground, as the site of the throne of the fabled “High Kings” (per the “Lebor Gabala Erenn”).
54. **The Norte-Chico** considered Caral (in Supe Valley, Peru) to be a sacred location, with structures dating back to pre-history.
55. Other **archaic Meso-Americans** apparently visited the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan (in present-day Mexico), considered the birthplace of the gods.

56. **The Olmec** seem to have visited the holy site at La Venta (in Tabasco, Mexico), including the great pyramid erected c. 400 B.C.; as well as a temple that dates back to 1,000 B.C.
57. **The Nazca** likely visited the adobe pyramids at Cahuachi (in present-day Peru) starting at the beginning of the 1st century A.D.The pilgrimage lasted until about 500 A.D.(Older sites exist at Sacsayhuaman and Quenko in the Andes mountains of Peru.)
58. **Incas** likely visited the Puma-Punku temple at Tiwanaku (“Doorway of the Cougar”; located in the Andes of present-day Bolivia) starting in the 6th century A.D., which they considered the exact location from which the world was created. {31}
59. **Mayans** seem to have visited Actun Tunichil Muknal [a.k.a. the “Cave of Crystal Sepulchre”] in present-day Belize, which may have been considered the gateway to “Xibalba” (the underworld).Mayans also had major temples at Kalakmul, Tikal, Palenque, and Calak-mul.The gargantuan temple complex on the Aguada Fenix plateau in Tabasco, Mexico was built c. 1000 B.C.It was over 50% larger than the Great Pyramid at Giza, Egypt (though shorter).Other massive complexes were located at Xunantunich and Caracol in Belize.
60. **Aztecs** (who worshipped Quetzalcoatl, Nahuatl, and Tlaloc) likely visited the great temple to the divine triad at Tenochtitlan.Their meso-American predecessors would have visited the great Temple of the Feathered Serpent at Teotihuacan.(Also notable at Teotihuacan are the Pyramid of the Sun and Pyramid of the Moon.)Most notable, though, is the massive “Tlachihualtepetl” (a.k.a. the Great Pyramid of Cholula), which is the largest pyramid–nay the largest temple of any kind–ever constructed.

Note that I am not merely listing local shrines / temples or hallowed ground; I am listing UNIQUE places where people of a certain Faith traveled from distant locals to visit–doing so as a sacred rite.Whether supplicants were OBLIGATED to visit these holy sites is another matter.Surely, pilgrimage was discretionary–or even limited to a priestly class–in many cases.

It should be pointed out here that none of these holy sites are any more or any less legitimate than any other.They are all different manifestations of the same underlying phenomenon.To bring the point home: None of pilgrimages done in the above cultures were any more or any less outlandish than, say, Judaism’s “Sukkot” or Islam’s “Hajj”.Regardless of the mysterion, the same psychological mechanisms

are at work. {32}Hence the aforesaid “Omphalos Syndrome”.From case to case, we find that the only thing that really changed was the branding (to wit: the conception of the deity and the location of the tribute).

Such perennial rituals are largely a matter of mistaking pageantry for spiritual prowess–as if pomp were a barometer for profundity.The idea is to visit a designated place because it holds special powers.Sometimes, the belief is that one should go to the special PLACE at a special TIME–as with a designated month on the lunar calendars of Hinduism / Jainism, Buddhism, and Islam.

The Islamic pilgrimage is dubbed “Hajj” when done at the appointed time of year; and dubbed the “Umrah” when done at a time of one’s own choosing.Long before the Mohammedans started their version of the pilgrimage to the Meccan cube, pagan Bedouins had been doing it for generations.And Hijizis had been visiting the Yemeni “kaaba” in Ma’rib (the first Arabian “kaaba”) even before that; and the Nabataean “kaaba” in Petra even before THAT.

In pre-Islamic Arabia, massive pilgrimages were made to the shrine of Dhu’l-Khalasah at Tabalah (in southern Hijaz) by the Banu al-Azd, Banu Daws, Khath’am, and Bajilah.Himyarites regularly made pilgrimages to the temple of Ri’am at Ma’rib.Arabians who worshipped the goddess, Allat visited Ta’if. And by the time Mohammed of Mecca undertook his fabled ministry, the Banu As[s]ad was already Abrahamic.Not only that; it already had its own pilgrimage tradition to the Meccan cube.

Other than the Hindu “Kumbh Mela” and the Islamic “Hajj”, we’ve mentioned the Yazidis’ yearly pilgrimage to Lalish, in Nineveh.Here are 28 more examples of CURRENT pilgrimages:

1. **Hindus** voyage to Kashi [a.k.a. “Varanasi”] and Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, India. {33}
2. **Jains** voyage to several places–among them: Pundarikgiri (now dubbed “Shatrunjaya” hill) at Palitana; the temple in the Parasnath hills at Shikharji / Jharkhand; as well as the Vastupala and Neminath temples in the Raivata / Ujjayanta [now “Girnar”] mountains (both in Gujarat, India). {34}
3. **Burmese animists** voyage to Mount Popa to pay tribute to the “nats” [demiurges].
4. **Theravada Buddhists** voyage to any of four places: Maya Devi temple at Lumbini in Nepal (birthplace of Buddha); Kushinagar (a.k.a. “Kusinara”; final

resting place of Buddha) in Uttar Pradesh, India; the “Bodh Gaya” of the Maha-Bodhi [Great Awakening] Temple in Bihar, India (location of Buddha’s enlightenment); and [r]Ishipatana (a.k.a. “Sarnath”; the venue known as “Deer Park”, iconic venue for Buddha’s teaching) also in Uttar Pradesh, India. And during Classical Antiquity, the Mauryans constructed the “Juna-gadh” network of caves (spec. the Khapara Kodia and Bava Pyara caves).

5. **Siamese Buddhists** voyage to Wat Phra That Doi Suthep in Chiang-Mai, Thailand…which dates back to the Lan-Na / Lavo era (followed by the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya eras).
6. **Burmese Buddhists** voyage to Shwe-dagon Pagoda in Yangon during the lunar month of Tabaung…which dates back to the Old Mon era.There are various minor sects.For example, the (Maha Nikaya) Dhammakaya cult (a recent phenomenon) visits the Cetiya temple at Pathum-thani in Thailand.
7. **Mahayana Buddhists** (esp. practitioners of Shaolin-quan) voyage to the Shaolin Temple at Zheng-zhou in Henan, China; as well as to Mount Jizu in Yunnan, China.The first Chinese Buddhist temple was the Eastern Han “Pi-ma-sai” [White Horse Temple; alt. “Pai ma” monastery] at Luo-yang in Henan.
8. **Tibetan Buddhists** and followers of Bon voyage to “Gangs Rin-po-che” (“Ti-tse” in Zhang-Zhung; equated with the fabled Mount Kailash[a]) in Tibet.They consider this to be the gateway to the mythic “Tagzig Olmo Lung Ring”. Thus they also consider Mount Meru (Mount Kailas[h]a) to be a temenos.
9. **Japanese Buddhists** of the Tendai tradition voyage to the Kumano temples in the Kii mountains; while those of the “Pure Land” tradition (a.k.a. “Jodo-[shin]shu”) voyage to the Chion-in temple at Kyoto.
10. **Taoists** voyage to Mount Sanquinshan, to the Kunlun mountains (associated with the mythic Mount Kunlun), and to Mount Hua; all in China. {35}
11. **Confucians** voyage to the temple of Qufu in China.
12. Practitioners of **Shinto** voyage to “Takachiho-gawara” at Ashihara-no-Nakatsukuni. {36}
13. **Zoroastrians** (a.k.a. “Magi”) voyage to the fire temples in Persia–the first of which was purportedly in either Pars or Khwarezm. {37}
14. **Jews** voyage to the Kotel (the purported “western wall” of Solomon’s temple; a.k.a. the “Wailing Wall”) in Jerusalem. {38}Breslover Hasidim attend the “Rosh Hashana kibbutz” at Breslove; and visit the tomb of Rabbi Nachman at Uman in Podolia (Ukraine).
15. **Mandaeans** voyage to Al-Uzair in eastern Mesopotamia (at the edge of Persia).
16. **Samaritans** voyage to “Aahr-Gaarizem” (Mount Gerizim) in Canaan.

17. **Christians** voyage to (what they call) “the holy land” in Canaan, which contains various sites of contrived historical significance–most of which are more tourist-traps than authentic archeological sites. {39}
18. **Sikhs** voyage to the Harmandir Sahib [Golden Temple] in Amritsar, Punjab. {40}
19. **Druze** go on the “ziyarat” to the Nabi Shuayb [tomb of Jethro] at Kfar Zeitim [Village of Olives] in Hittin, Galilee.
20. **Baha’i** voyage to the Mansion of Bahji, near Acre (a.k.a. “Akka”) in Canaan.They also visit the Hanging Gardens of Haifa (including the shrine of the Bab) as well as the Lotus Temple in Delhi, India.
21. **Freemasons** voyage to Zedekiah’s Cave (a.k.a. “Solomon’s Cave”) in Jerusalem.They also posit a place where Enoch buried the secrets of the universe–a take-off on the Eleusinian Mysteries.
22. **Neo-Druids** voyage to “Stone Henge” in Wiltshire, England.
23. **Romani** voyage to “Saintes Maries de la Mer” in southern France.
24. **Cheyenne** (Native Americans) voyage to “Noahavose” in South Dakota.
25. **Shoshone and Crow** (Native Americans) voyage to the “Medicine Wheel” at Bighorn in Wyoming.
26. **Klamath** (Native Americans) consider Mount Shasta to be the axis mundi (inhabited by their godhead, Skell).
27. **Aboriginals** of Australia consider Uluru (a.k.a. “Ayers Rock) in Anangu to be a temenos.
28. **Filipinos** traditionally had sacred places called “Banal na Pook” / “Iambana” / “Dambana” / “Simbahan” to pay tribute to “anito” (ancestral spirits).

These pilgrimage traditions all seem rather different.Overtly, they are quite distinct.However, the participants are–ultimately–all after the same thing: a connection.A connection with EACH OTHER; as well as a connection with (however they see) the divine.More to the point, by trying to get in touch with divinity OUT THERE, they are also trying to get in touch with something within themselves.

We might also note that over the ages, “pilgrimage” has meant different things to different people.Frankish Crusaders even fashioned themselves as “peregine(s)”: making a (violent) pilgrimage to the Holy Land to reclaim it from the heretical Saracens.

The location of the “most special place” for a cult needn’t necessarily be “sacred” in the traditional sense.For example, Scientologists go to the Flag Building (a.k.a. the “Super Power Building”) in Clearwater, Florida…without considering Clearwater, Florida PER SE to have any cosmic significance. {41}Other examples:

- **Nazis** (spec. the “Ahnenerbe” cult) fashioned Wewelsburg (in Westphalia) as a holy place–based on the legend of the great Last Battle at the Birch Tree.
- Up until its recent sale, **Jehovah’s Witnesses** would voyage to the “Watch Tower” in Brooklyn, New York.
- **Mormons** make pilgrimages to Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah.This is simply due to the fact that THAT where their forebears happened to end up (after their emigration from Nauvoo, Illinois in 1846). {42}
- **Tongil-gyo** (members of the Church of Unification; a.k.a. “Moonies”) voyage to the “Heaven and Earth” Center at Cheongpyeong in Korea: home-base for the Church of Unification.
- **Peace Mission** “angels” (followers of Reverend Major Jealous Divine) visited the “Shrine to Life” at “Woodmont” in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania.

It is unclear whether such designated venues are auspicious because they are deemed INHERENTLY sacred or simply because they happen to have become the primary place of tribute (and so could just as well have been located elsewhere).Sometimes, the location is simply the place that has been anointed for memorialization.Regardless, it is all the result of historical accident.

We might note that alternate pilgrimages within a Faith are possible, but they are considered ancillary.A pilgrimage can theoretically be from anywhere to anywhere, so long as it is done to commemorate a propitious event; or to pay homage to an important figure within the Faith.Christians the world over have countless pilgrimage traditions–often involving local saints or Marian shrines. {43}In the case of the “Domain” at Lourdes, it is water with magical healing powers that draws pilgrims.Irish Catholics have their own pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick.French and Spanish Catholics established a pilgrimage, along the “Camino de Santiago” [Way of Saint James].That includes the shrine of Saint Martin of Tours, the destination of which is the “Santiago of Compostela” in Galicia (wherein lies the tomb of St. James).For the Lag B’omer commemoration, Jews visit Meron in Galilee, where the grave of the ancient Jewish mystic, Shimon Bar Yochai is located.Moroccan Jews have their own pilgrimage tradition: the “Hiloula”. Etc.

There are even ancillary pilgrimages within Islam, sometimes referred to as “ziyarat”–notably to the tomb of Moulay Idriss in Morocco, the tomb of Rumi at Konya (in Turkey), the great mosque at Kairouan in Tunis, as well as the Al-Aqsa Mosque (and the Qubbat al-Sakhrah) on the Temple Mount [“Haram al-Sharif”] in Jerusalem.For Shiites, there is the Shah Abdol Azim shrine in Rey, the tomb of Ali ibn Abi Talib (the first imam, per Shiism) in Najaf, and the site of Husayn ibn Ali’s last stand at Karbala (the visitation to which is known as the Arba’in pilgrimage).

And for Maghrebi Muslims, there is the Tunisian town of Kairouan. As legend has it, during his conquests c. 670, Umayyad general Uqbah ibn Nafi stumbled across a golden goblet buried in the desert sands of Tunis–an item that was purported to have originally been from Mecca.When it was dug out of the sand, a spring appeared who’s waters were believed to come from the same divine source as those of the sacred Zam-zam well.This tall-tale led to Kairouan becoming a place of pilgrimage–fashioned by many as the “Mecca of the Maghreb”.

Some locations are considered sacred by numerous religions. Mount Kailash[a] / Meru in Tibet (Buddhist and Bon) and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (all Abrahamic religions) have already been mentioned. The Chalukya temples at Arya-pura (a.k.a. “Aihole”) and at Rakta-pura (the “Patta-dakal[u]”) in Karnataka are recognized by Buddhists, Hindus, AND Jains. Sri Pada, located on a mountaintop in Sri Lanka, is considered a sacred sight by Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, AND Muslims.

Sacred places are as myriad as religious traditions–even when it comes to political cults.Paying homage to a deified historical figure in a specific place is standard protocol whenever cult activity is afoot.This is demonstrated by:

- **North Koreans** visiting Kumsusan (“Palace of the Sun”) to pay tribute to Kim Il-Sung
- **Chinese** visiting the mausoleum at Tiananmen Square in Beijing (former site of the “Gate of China” at the Imperial City) to pay tribute to Mao Tse-Tung
- **Vietnamese** visiting the mausoleum at Hanoi to pay tribute to Ho Chi Minh
- **Taiwanese** visiting the mausoleum at Taipei to pay tribute to Chiang Kai-shek.

Each of these is an example–to one degree or another–of hero-worship.

A pilgrimage needn’t even involve full-blown cult activity.Elvis fanatics visit Graceland in Tennessee.Michael Jackson fans visit Neverland Ranch in California.American “hippies” visit Woodstock in upstate New York.New Age mystics visit Sedona Valley in Arizona, Mount Yamnuska in Alberta, or the “Holy Thorn” in Glastonbury, England.

Whether harnessing imagined “energies” or paying tribute to a glorified figure, the idea of a “temenos” invokes the same kind of logic: a SPECIAL PLACE where paranormal things happen (according to one cosmogony or another).That the deities mentioned here are no more real than H.P. Lovecraft’s “Cthulhu” (and the magical realms no more real than C.S. Lewis’s “Narnia”) is beside the point; the act is entirely about BELIEF.

And what of the rituals involved?There are many scenarios in which people pay homage to heroic figures or to ancestors by visiting a sacred place.When cult activity is involved, the pilgrimage often involves some kind of choreographed procession–sometimes little more than a cloying pantomime of pseudo-spirituality.The procession often involves sacred rites (which must be performed in order for the deed to “work” properly).Typically, pilgrims are enjoined to engage in a pageant of schwarmerei–as each participant is expected to feign excessive sentimentality so as to demonstrate fealty.Gushing affectation is taken as evidence of devotion.The pageantry is seen as a sign of piety. {54}

We know that most of the elements of the Islamic pilgrimage were adopted from antecedent pagan rituals at the site in Mecca:

- Ablutions (“wudu” / “ghusl”)
- Synchronized prostration (“sajda”)
- Circumambulation of the cube (“tawaf”) {45}
- Animal sacrifice
- Running between the Safa and Marwah hills (“sa’ay” / “sa’yee”) {45}
- Throwing stones at satan (represented by a stone structure) in order to expiate sins and repel temptation (“rami al-jamarat”) {45}
- Drinking from the Zam-zam well to effect spiritual purification {46}
- Kissing a venerated black stone (“hajar al-aswad”) for good fortune {2} {21}

And so it goes: The rituals now found in the Islamic tradition are simply recycled pagan sacraments.Indeed, the Kaaba in Mecca was the centerpiece of Hijazi rituals that long predate Mohammed's ministry.We also know that there were earlier pilgrimages to the Yemeni cube (i.e. the original Arabian Kaaba) by southern Hijazis long before Mohammed's lifetime.

Of course, throughout the Ummah, it is seen as uncouth to recognize that the overwrought proceedings of the "Hajj" all ape the pagan rituals of pre-Islamic pagans.Yet it should not be untoward to point out the obvious: The drone-like circumambulation of the Kaaba (a pagan ritual), as well as the hammed-up routine of synchronized bowing (also a pagan ritual), render the affair more louche than dignified.

Needless to say, REAL "wasilah" / "qurbah" (communion with the divine) has nothing whatsoever to do with one's physical proximity to a black cube in the Hijaz (an object with pagan origins)…or with physical proximity to anything else, for that matter.There is no axis mundi except for the one(s) we create in our own minds. {47}

There are many eminently worthwhile pilgrimages that ANY person is better advised making than one to, say, the Kotel or the Meccan Kaaba.If one is truly looking to expand one's horizons (or to personally connect with the divine), the world offers a panoply of amazing destinations.From the largest temple complex ever built (Angkor Wat in Cambodia; c. 1100) to the most intriguing (the Kailashanatha temple at Elapura [Ellora]). {48}From the most cryptic (the catacombs of Kom el-Shoqafa in Alexandria, Egypt; 2nd century) to the most foreboding and ominous (the Mayan Temple of Kukulcan in Chichen Itza, Yukatan; 9th century). {49}From the most geo-politically significant (Hagia Sophia in Istanbul; c. 537) to one of the highest (the Tawang Monastery [a.k.a. "Galden Namgey Lhatse"] in Arunachal Pradesh; 17th century). {50}

When a freethinker climbs a mountain to behold the majesty of an alpine vista, or goes into the wilderness to be closer to nature, or views with wonder the starry night sky from a quiet place of temporary solitude, it is no less of–and, likely, much more of–a spiritual experience than the ersatz spirituality of the programmed supplicants who shuckle before the Wailing Wall as if having an epileptic seizure or mindlessly circumambulate the Kaaba like a herd of sheep.(This is a reminder that if one person does it, it's called "crazy"; but if a large group of people do it together, it's called "religion".) {51}

More than a smidgeon of hubris is required to insist the entire cosmos is made for homo sapiens (let alone that the overlord of the entire cosmos is primarily concerned with a black cube in the middle of the Arabian desert).As discussed already, much of the maudlin display encountered at Mecca's "Haram" ["sacred"] mosque during the Hajj is based on pre-Islamic Hijazi rituals. {53}This is an incommodious fact that most Islamic worshippers would prefer remain unspoken.It is rather befuddling that so many Muslims can do something so choreographed, and yet be left with the impression that they are partaking in any kind of authentic spiritual experience.When beholding the proceedings in the Masjid al-Haram, one can't help but wince.While there is nothing remotely spiritual about this orgy of histrionics, participants fashion it as the pinnacle of human experience. {54}

Pilgrimages typically engender a kind of spiritual anosognosia–in which supplicants are wont to think that their pantomime of spirituality is an overt expression of genuine spirituality.In this sense, pilgrimage–as with most other religious activity–serves as an effective spiritual prosthetic for those who are spiritually handicapped.Sacraments serve as a quick fix for spiritual deficiency.Indeed, sacred rituals enable delinquency to be celebrated as prodigy.It should go without saying that affectation is not a barometer for transcendence.

The House of Saud has effectively rendered Mecca an ultra-tacky theological theme park–replete with skyscrapers, gift-shops, and a carnival of extravagant accoutrements.Hence the ostentatious spectacle that is the Hajj takes place in a mise en scène–at a venue especially designed for maximized schmaltz.It is difficult to say whether the architects were going for razzmatazz or for bombast; they certainly missed the mark when it comes to solemnity.(Perhaps they did not know the difference.)Even the gaudy settings of Las Vegas exhibit less camp.

Also note the array of luxury accommodations for the ultra-affluent–high up in the obtrusive Abraj al-Bayt.Such a flagrant display of gluttony is no more solemn than the stampedes during "sa'ay" / "sa'yee".This over-the-top decadence, on display for the world to see, belies the statement of humility and equity represented by the mandatory "ihram": the purified state that is ostensibly effected by everyone donning the same robes.In reality, the House of Saud is about as humble as it is secular.

The state of "ihram" in which Hajjis (purportedly) reside is nothing more than a put-on.Behold mawkish sentimentality masquerading as solemnity.The faux humility of this (putatively) unprepossessing comportment is belied by the massive towers of

luxury accommodations surrounding the Masjid al-Haraam–which are, of course, limited to the super-wealthy (who, it turns out, do little more than bask in obnoxious degrees of opulence whilst the rabble subsist in grueling conditions).It is no irony that it is in this feigned state of exultation that thousands of Hajjis regularly trample each other to death during the “sa’ay” / “sa’yee”.

Hallowed ground for Muslims has effectively been rendered a tourist trap; wherein the only tourists allowed are the ones who will be guaranteed to play along with the charade.This jamboree of melo-dramatized supplication (“ibadah”) seeks to compensate for the Hajji’s spiritual vacuity by peddling an endless supply of kitsch.

In terms of Islamic holy places, Istanbul’s Blue Mosque, Cairo’s grand Citadel, and Medina’s “Masjid an-Nabawi” [“Mosque of the Prophet”] all trump in aesthetic grandeur what is now the hokey, commercialized destination that is Mecca’s Masjid al-Haraam…which, god willing, will someday–along with the Vatican and the Wailing Wall–be nothing more than a museum, open to all, like any other great museum (in the same vain as, say, the Palace of Versailles near Paris or Pushkin Palace near St. Petersburg).

Speaking of museums, religionists–Muslims and non-Muslims alike–might consider making their next pilgrimage to the Louvre in Paris or to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg.There is no need to circumambulate an ancient Qurayshi shrine whilst incessantly uttering, “Labbayka-Ilahumma” (“God, I obey you”) in a ham-fisted attempt to commune with the divine.Engaging in “dhikr” is to spirituality what shouting “Go USA!” is to American patriotism.Suffice to say: Histrionics is not indicative of transcendence.

The notion that proximity to a particular object will somehow bestow spiritual prowess upon the supplicant is as daft as is it archaic.As it turns out, the center of the universe is wherever one fashions it to be.Exploring the world, one discovers that a plethora of spiritual experiences await–WITHOUT engaging in idolatry (especially flagrant idolatry of the sort that surrounds the Meccan cube).As spiritual freethinkers regularly demonstrate, there needn’t be anything dogmatic or confectionary about going on a pilgrimage.And as doctrinal religionists remind us, to the degree that such an undertaking is choreographed, it is inauthentic.

Helpful hint: If one is inclined to say, “Look how pious I am”, one can be quite certain that whatever one is doing, it is not spiritual.Advertising one’s piety has nothing to do with spirituality. And one only cheapens what is supposed to be a spiritual journey by making it a matter of pomp and pageantry. (Reciting a script that one has been assigned only makes it more jejune.)

There is no “spiritual center” of the world.To suppose that there is such a place is to derogate the very notion of transcendence.There are many places one can go to find divinity…if one cares to look.After all, the divine is–by definition–omnipresent.And there is nothing more worth venerating than other humans, for their humanity; no commute required.

* * *

{1The first formally documented “Kumbh Mela” was, coincidentally, in the early 7th century, within a decade or so of the (purported) first Hajj; though the tradition surely dates back to the writing of the Puranas, Mahabharata, and Ramayana.One of its destinations is the ancient Avanti city of Ujjain.Other rites of passage occur at Maharashtra, Haridwar, and the “Prayag Triveni Sangam” river confluence.}

{2The Greek term for a sacred stone is “omphalos”.In Semitic tradition, such a stone was located at the “Beit El” [“House of God”]; hence the Romanized term “Baetylus” for sacred stones that are used for shrines.Other examples of such stones include the Cybelene shrine in Rome (the “Mater Idaea Deum”); the Pythia of Apollo at Phocis (venue for the fabled “Oracle of Delphi”); the shrine to “Zeus Meilichius” in Athens (the “Meilichios”); the shrine to “El-Gabal” / “Sol Invictus” in Rome (the “Elagabalium”); the shrines to “Apollo Agyieus” at Acharnae and at Mycenae; the shrine to “Zeus Casius” at Seleucia Pieria [Antioch]; and the shrine to “Zeus Teleios” at Tegea [Arcadia].See also footnote 21 below.}

{3According to modern convention, then, the center of the world (0 degree longitude, 0 degrees latitude) is in the Gulf of Guinea–as inauspicious a place as anywhere on the planet.This would make Ghana the nation closest to the middle of the world (which is actually a weather buoy floating in the ocean 700 km. off its coast).Technically, the only places that qualify as the “center of the world” (on surface of the planet Earth) are the two poles.Unsurprisingly, due to the inhospitable climes, nobody has ever been very concerned with Arctic real estate.It might also be

noted that, due to the nature of geodesics, when on the opposing (lateral) hemisphere, the shortest direction toward Mecca is northward-pointing in the far-north–a quirk of spherical geometry.Also see footnote 4 below.}

{4 It has been natural for countries to fashion themselves as the center of the world.The name for China is “Zhong-guo” [Middle Kingdom].The Native American “Zuni” called their homeland “Halona Idiwan’a” [Place in the Middle].}

{5In the Hebrew Bible, Ezekiel refers to Jerusalem as the center of the world–in BOTH the physical and theological sense.In terms of cosmogony, it makes sense that the powers-that-be would make the geographical center the spiritual center (and vice versa).Thus a location is designated as auspicious in both senses either because it was believed to be the geographical center (and therefore deemed the spiritual center) or it was deemed the spiritual center (and therefore believed to be the geographical center).See footnote 6 below for further comment.}

{6It might be noted that it is not a big step from christening one’s own GROUND as cosmically central to one’s own PEOPLE as cosmically central; or vice versa.Thus ethno-centricity is often coeval with territory-centricity.After all, an anointed tribe typically requires a consecrated land to which the anointed group is uniquely entitled.Ergo obsessions with “blood and sand”.Revisionist Zionists consider the rest of the planet peripheral to what they dub “Judea and Samaria” (with the epicenter at Jerusalem) just as they consider the rest of mankind peripheral to the Jewish people.Hence their seething contempt for goyim who reside anywhere in the territory deemed “eretz Israel”.And so we can go from a cockamamy idea of territory-centrism that–in and of itself–is relatively benign…to a cockamamy idea of ethnocentricity TIED to it, which ends up yielding something that is extremely malign.By contrast, that the Yazidis consider Lalish (in Nineveh, Mesopotamia) to be the most sacred ground in the world is utterly anodyne, as they do not ALSO believe that they are more important than everyone else in the world.This stark juxtaposition stems from the basic fact that some dogmas are innocuous and some are invidious–even as they may be equally spurious.Because Yazidis don’t consider their own lives to be worth more than anybody else’s, they are not inclined to persecute / kill non-Yazidis who happen to live in Lalish (in the name of asserting “Ezidkhan”).There are intermediary cases–as with Mormons, who accord themselves more privilege than non-Mormons in Salt Lake City, Utah.}

{7He was considered the avatar of their archangel / demiurge, Tawuse Melek (a.k.a. “Malik Taus”)–conceived as an emanation of the godhead.Interestingly, as with Mecca, Lalish has a Zamzam well and a Mount Arafat–both of which are integral parts of the Yazidi pilgrimage.}

{8In his 2010 book, “Why The West Rules–For Now”, Ian Morris put it well: “What could possibly be more natural than asking gods, spirits, and ancestors for aid?What could make more sense than identifying special people and creating special places to facilitate communication?The shrine at Qermez Dere looks like an amplifier, turning up the volume on requests for help.”}

{9This moniker is Turkish for pot-belly hill.Most of this giant network of structures is still underground (within the hill).It boasts the earliest forms of writing ever discovered (at least 11.6 millennia old), and was likely a TEMPLE of some sort.}

{10A “heroon” was a shrine around which cult activity occurred.Such activity typically had to do with hero-worship; and pertained to the invocation of paranormal powers.}

{11She was likely the precursor to the Phrygian “Cybele”.}

{12Reference the Ebla tablets c. 2,500 B.C.}

{13The so-called “Nebra Sky Disk” was excavated nearby, an astrological artifact that is at least 3,600 years old.}

{14Later were the Grey Cairns of Camster, the Taversoe Tuick, the Holm of Papa, the Barpa Langass, the cairn at Cuween Hill, and the cairn at Quoyness (all c. 3,000 B.C.)The “Dun Aengus” is a sacred site of unknown age.The tombs at Carrowmore and Carrowkeel are the largest.Also, in Batavia (present-day Drenthe, in Netherlands) are several “dolmen” that date back to 3,500 B.C.Though sacred sites, these seem to have been more tombs than shrines.(That is: they were for burial rather than for pilgrimage.)They date to roughly the same time as the earliest activities at Stone Henge.}

{15Stone Henge served as a destination for proto-Celtic peoples.The annual pilgrimage seems to have had something to do with a commemoration / veneration of–and the communion with the spirits of–ancestors.It was apparently performed during the vernal equinox.}

{16The Sumerians, Akkadians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Hurrians typically referred to their temples as “E-[x]”.The archeological term for these structures is “ziggurat”.}

{17“Bel” Marduk was also conceived as King Belos / Belus, who built a great tower, and was later worshipped at his tomb.“Babili” (“Babylon”) was known as Bab-El (“Gateway to God”).This served as the basis for legends of a Tower of Babel.}

{18Enlil was also adopted by the Akkadians, Hittites, and various Canaanites.}

{19That was until the monarchic period, when they moved their temenos from “Shilo[a]h” (in Ephraim) to the Amorite city of [u]Rusalim[a] (which eventually came to be named “Yerushalem”), where they dubbed their godhead “Yah[weh]” after the patron-deity of the Shasu.(It is therefore speculated that the Shasu may have been the progenitors of the earliest Hebrews; with their godhead serving as the precursor to the Abrahamic deity.In keeping with the Shasu from which they derived their theology, the Hebrew “Yahweh” cult was originally more monolatry than monotheism.)It also so happens that “Shalem” was the name of a Ugaritic deity (one of the sons of the godhead, “El”)…AND the name of the place from whence the first Abrahamic priest, “Melchizedek” hailed.(This is no coincidence.)“Shilo[a]h” is often conflated with the mythic “Siloam”, which is thought by Abrahamic historiographers to have been an area on the eastern outskirts of Jerusalem (in what is now “Silwan”), replete with the fabled “Pool of Siloam” (as well as the “Tower of Siloam” mentioned in the Gospel of Luke).In addition to “Shilo[a]h”, early Hebrews worshipped at Shechem (the god: El B-R-T, which was likely a variant of Baal Berith), Bethel [based on the moniker, “House of El”], Gilgal, Mizpah, Ramah, and Dan [alt. “Shfela”].Later, they would worship in the city of David (a.k.a. “Jerusalem”).}

{20The Greeks had innumerable sacred sites.The cult of Helios visited the temple at Baal-bek in Syria / Phoenicia.The cult of Isis visited the Iseion at Eretria (on Euboea).The cult of Hera visited the Heraion at Samos; yet also visited the Tavole Palatine at Metapontum.There was even a Heraion on the hallowed island of Delos.On Delos could also be found the Stoibadeion (for those who worshipped Dionysus) and the “Terrace of the Lions” (for the Naxos, who worshipped Apollo).The cult of Pan visited the cave and spring at Paneion [Panium] next to Mount Hermon in the Levant.Cults of Apollo and Artemis visited the “Laphrion” at Calydon[ia] in Aetolia.}

{21The temple to the Syrian god, “El-Gabal” on Palatine Hill was erected on the site of the old temple to Jupiter.Interestingly, this temple contained a sacred black stone–a meteorite–that was treated as a symbol (“omphalos”) of the revered god.Sound familiar?As it happens, the other major venue for the worship of Jupiter was in the city that would become the capital of the Umayyad Dynasty: Damascus.It is not hard to connect the dots when inferring from whence the black stone of the Kaaba may have come.Interestingly, there is an old Turkic legend of a magical black stone that came from the sky, made of iron.Sure enough, the Arab worship of a special stone (“betyl” / “ansah”) seems to be a vestige of stone-worship that occurred in Emessa.}

{22Also note: The “Valle dei Templi” at Agrigento in Sicily was one of the most auspicious places during the early Roman Republic (5th century B.C.)The Temple of Asclepius was a destination for pilgrims seeking cures for ailments.Also in the valley were the Temples of Concordia, Juno, Heracles, Olympian Zeus, and Vulcan.}

{23This culture (ref. the Kingdom of Saba, based in Ma’rib) had many phases and many parts.There was the city-state of Haram in Ancient Antiquity…which was followed by the Minaeans (ref. the Kingdom of Ma’in).Eventually, the region included the Hadhrami (ref. the region of Hadhramaut), the Katabanians (ref. the Kingdom of Qataban), the Himyarites (ref. the Jewish Kingdom of Himyar, based in Zafar), and other peoples.}

{24A popular mystery-cult devoted to Attis also had its primary temple at Ostia Antica.}

{25Note that the Isis, Cybelene, Mithraic, and Eleusinian mystery-cults were only some of the many such cults in the Greco-Roman world.There were also Orphic, Dionysian, and countless others.Noteworthy were the cults of Attis (in Ostia Antica), of Proserpina (based on Persephone; throughout Magna Graecia), of Thesmophoria (a women-only cult based on Demeter; primarily in Eleusis), of the Kabeiroi [alt. “Hephaestus”] at Lemnos, and of Athena Alea at Tegea (in Arcadia).In the 2nd century A.D., some deified the Bithynian youth, Antinous–a cult instigated by Emperor Hadrian.They worshipped in the Antinous Mondragone at Tusculum (as well as in the Antinoeion at Villa Adriana, Tibur). The Dionysian cult of Semele paid tribute at the Cadmeia in Thebes.}

{26Later, Phrygians / Thracians (who worshipped Saba-zios) may have also visited temples at Odessos.}

{27Kogaionon may correspond to the location of the Sarmizegetusa temple at Dealul Gradistei.}

{28Saba-zios was a “heros” (deified horseman).The Thracians also had a hero-cult surrounding their patriarch, Zalmoxis, whose holy place was “Kogaionon” (the holy mountain of the Geto-Dacians).Moreover, there was an important temple for the chthonic god, Darzalas, at Odessos; and a sanctuary for the lunar goddess, Bendis, in Piraeus (Attica).Any one of these could have been pilgrimage destinations.}

{29Some important Hindu temples were modeled after this ancient temple–most notably, the Dravidian “Padmanabha-Swamy” (Vishnu) temple in Kerala, India: the wealthiest temple in world history.It has several mysterious vaults that have never been opened–adding to its mystique.Another important temple in ancient Shaivism was the “Badresh-vara” in My-Son (the Cham-Pa Kingdom), dating from the 4th century A.D.Other important temples in Vaishnavism are at Badrinath and the Sri Ranga-natha-swamy Temple (a.k.a. “Thiruva-Rangam”) at Sri Rangam. And in Indonesia, Vaishavis still visit the Uluwatu temple in Bali.}

{30In archaic China, the location of hallowed ground seemed to change from epoch to epoch.It began in Taosi during then pre-literate era, but was then established in Shan-dong at some point in the 7th millennium B.C.The location was then moved to Erlitou under the Xia at the beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C., then moved to Yan-shi under the Shang in the 17th century B.C., then moved to Zheng-zhou under the Zhou in the 11th century B.C.Since the early 15th century A.D., there is an annual ritual performed at the Temple of Heaven in the Imperial City.}

{31Located at an elevation of 3.9 km, the structures were made from incredibly sophisticated engineering.The “Gate of the Sun” megalith dates back to the 5th century A.D.That site was first used by the Tiwanaku people as their “axis mundi” dating back to c. 300 B.C.Meanwhile, the temple at Kala-sasaya dates back to c. 200 B.C.Other significant holy sites for the Incas [“Tawantinsuyu”] were the Sun Temple at Ollantaytambo, the monolith at Sayhuite, and the Muyuq Marka citadel at Saksay-waman in Cusco, Puru.The area is now inhabited by the Aymara people, who claim to be direct descendants of the Tiwanaku.}

{32In the Christian tradition, a mysterion (sacred rite) was called a “sacramentalia”.Pilgrimage, then, is a mysterion that involves visiting a consecrated place that is deemed sui generis.That is to say: the destination is not just ANY hallowed ground, it is THE hallowed ground.As a designated “temenos”, the location is believed to have cosmic significance that no other place has.}

{33There are numerous places to which mainstream Hindus go on pilgrimages.The major pilgrimages are to the four destinations of “Char-Dham”: Purushottama Puri (a.k.a. “Shrikhetra”) in Odisha, Rameshwaram on Pamban Island, the Dwarka-dhish (a.k.a. “Jagat Mandir”) at Dvaraka (alt. “Dwarka”; home of Krishna) in Gujarat, and Badri-nath in Uttarakhand.Each denomination has its own special destination.Some Hindus do a pilgrimage to Uttaranchal as part of their “Char Dham”.Varkaris visit the temple of Vithoba at Pandharpur.Veddas visit the temple at Kataragama in Sri Lanka (dedicated to Murukan / Kartikeya).Shaktas visit any of the “Shakti Peetas”.Vaishnavis visit any of the 108 “Divya desams”–most notably the “Mata” Vaishno Devi mandir [temple] in the Trikuta Mountains of Kashmir (where the legendary city of Lanka was supposedly located). Those who revere Krishna above all else visit his temple at Mathura, considered to be his birthplace.Practitioners of both Shaktism and Shaivism visit the “Hinglaj Mata Mandir” cave-temple at Hinglaj in Balochistan.Vaishnavis visit Badri-nath [alt. “Badri-ka”].During the festival at Puri, Vaishnavis of the Tamil tradition visit the Adi Jagannatha temple in Tamil Nadu.The “Aghora” sect visits the Baba Keenaram Sthal in Varanasi.Nepalese Hindus visit the Pashu-pati-nath Temple.In bygone eras, there were other pilgrimages.For example, those who worshipped the sun god, Surya, visited the great temple at Konark (in Kalinga) between the 13th and 17th centuries…before it was destroyed by the Muslim (Mughal) Emperor, Jahangir.Tamils of the Chola period visited the gigantic “Brihadees-wara[r]” temple at Thanjavur, dedicated to Shiva.And those of the Vijayanagara Empire of Karnataka visited the great Veera-bhadra temple to Shiva. Finally: Note the “surya” / “martand” [sun] temples at Anantnag (Kashmir) and Nana Gop (Gujarat).}

{34Another “tirtha” (pilgrimage destination) is to the five Dilvara temples on Mount Abu in Rajasthan.For the Digambara sect, the “Saavira Kambada” temple (alt. “Tribhuvana Tilaka Cudamani”; a.k.a. the “Chandra-natha” temple) in Moodabidri, Karnataka; the Jal Mandir [Water Temple; a.k.a. “Apapuri”] at Pawapuri / Bihar; and the “Chandra Gupha” [“Moon Cave”] on Mount Girnar in Gujarat are also primary

destinations.The Shantinath temple at Deogarh / Lalitpur, the Mohan Kheda, the Narayana temple at Pattadakal / Karnataka, and the Gommatesvara Bahubali statue at Sravana-Belagola are other sacred places in Jainism.}

{35Taoists also consider the Golden Hall (“Jindian”/ “Jinding”) in the Wudang Mountains to be a sacred place.Meanwhile, RELIGIOUS Taoists make pilgrimages to Mount Heming and/or to Mount Qingcheng. (See footnote 44 below.)}

{36This is said to be the location where the sun-goddess, Amaterasu sent her grandson, Ninigi-no-Mikoto down to Earth.Other sacred places in the “kami-no-michi” tradition include Ise Jingu, Izumo Taisha, Fushimi Inari Taisha, Atsuta Jingu (at Nagoya), and the shrine at Itsukushima.Another sanctified location is Yomotsu Hirasaka (marked by the Iya Shrine) at Matsue–considered to be the (mythical) entrance to the underworld (“Yomi no Kune”).}

{37Historically, Zoroastrians have also considered Mount Khajeh and Lake Hamun in Sakastan to be sacred.According to Zoroastrian legend, Lake Hamun is the keeper of Zoroaster’s seed. In Zoroastrian eschatology, when the final renovation of the world is near, “houri” will enter the lake and then give birth to the “saoshyant”, savior of mankind.Other major temples [“Atash-gah”; alt. “Atash-Behram”] seem to have been located in Media.The worship of Ahura-Mazda often involved reverence of three Great Fires (representing agriculture, battle, and holiness): Adur Burzen-Mihr [alt. Burzin-Mitro] (fire of the farmers), Adur Gushnasp (fire of the warriors), and Adur Farnbag (fire of the priests).This divine triad inspired themed pilgrimages that are performed to the present day–notably at Bad-kube [a.k.a. “Baku”].}

{38This is also taken to be the site of Abraham’s almost-sacrifice of his son, Isaac–dubbed “Mount Moriah”.Though personal (informal) pilgrimages to Jerusalem were intermittently performed by Jews since the days of the Hasmonean Kingdom (late 2nd / early 1st century B.C.), this particular location entered the liturgy much later.The myth is that this structure is the western wall of what remains of Solomon’s temple; or perhaps the second temple (which took its place at the culmination of the Exilic Period in the late 6th century, until its destruction under general Titus, during the reign of Tiberius c. 70 A.D.)This is false.In fact, the “Kotel” is what remains of a rampart that had been erected by the Romans under Herod–not as a temple, but as a protective city wall.It was not rendered a place of prayer for Jews until almost 1700.It became a slightly more common site to pray in the advent of (secular) Zionism in the 1890’s.It was not until fifty years after THAT (in the 1940’s) that the wall became an iconic structure; and thus a significant (sacred) location for Jewish

supplication.Revisionist Zionists soon started telling tales about it having been part of Solomon's temple (the first temple).As usual, self-ingratiating farce is passed off as history.}

{39Many of the myriad Christian denominations has its own sacred place(s).A few of the major SECTARIAN pilgrimages: **Roman Catholics** visit Saint Peter's Basilica (at Vatican City) in Rome.**Lutherans** visit the church at Wittenberg in Saxony.**Eastern Orthodox** Christians visit Mount Athos in Greece.**Coptic** Christians visit Saint Mark's Cathedral at the "Baucalis" in Alexandria, Egypt.**Syriac Orthodox** Christians visit Dairo d-Kurkmo [alt. Dayro d-Mor Hananyo; Dayr al-Zafaran; a.k.a. the "Saffron Monastery") on Mount Izla in Nisibis (later dubbed the "Monastery of Saint Ananias").Members of the (neo-Coptic) **Orthodox Tewahedo** Church visit the temple of Mary of Zion at Aksum in Ethiopia.Zulus of the (**Zionist / Nazarite**) Shembe Church consider "Eku-Phakameni" in Inanda, South Africa to be a sacred place; and go on a yearly pilgrimage to Mount Nhlangakazi (a.k.a. "Khenana Mountain").}

{40…wherein the Akal Takht ["Throne of the Timeless One"] is located.Sikhs also make pilgrimages to the Hazur Sahib (a.k.a. the "Abchal Nagar") in Nanded, Maharashtra (India), wherein the Sach-Khand ["Realm of Truth"] is located.Additionally, there is a pilgrimage from Anandpur Sahib to Talwandi Sabo–along what is called the "Guru Gobind Sing Marg".}

{41The visit is haughtily referred to as the "Super Power Rundown".No kidding.But don't laugh.While this seems rather infantilizing, we might bear in mind that most religions are not so forthcoming about the puerility of their sacred rites–which are generally every bit as adolescent as Scientologists' exalted "Super Power Rundown".Though Orlando is not hallowed ground, Scientologists consider ANY of their buildings to be a holy place: a sanctorum that is off-limits to outsiders.Secrecy is their most potent weapon; so the cult is predicated on upholding a facade.Transparency would entail the entire dogmatic edifice to disintegrate.}

{42They sometimes refer to this emigration as the "exodus".The theme is commonplace in religious lore; analogous to the Mohammedan "hijra"…and, before that, the Judaic fable of the Hebrews (a.k.a. "Israelites") leaving (purported) enslavement in Egypt.Mormon legend actually designates Independence, Missouri their "temenos", as they consider it the site of Ezekiel's "New Jerusalem" / "Zion":

capital of the coming Messianic Kingdom.Jackson County (Missouri) has no more and no less cosmic significance than any of the other sacred places mentioned in this essay.The branding changes, but the underlying phenomenon is the same.}

{43The Marionite phenomenon [alt. Marian devotion] was thrown into over-drive with the French cleric, Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort c. 1700.The most notable Marion shrines are at Guadalupe and at Ocotlan / Tlaxcala in Mexico; Suyapa in Honduras; the Church of Mary of Zion in Aksum, Ethiopia; the shrine at Knock in Ireland; the Sacred Mountain of Crea in Piedmont, Italy; various shrines to the Virgin of Montserrat in Catalonia; the effigy at Siluva in Lithuania; and the Basilica of Candelaria in the Canary Islands.Today, the most popular Marion cult is that surrounding “Our Lady of Fatima” in Portugal.In many instances, these pilgrimages take precedence over the Vatican.Mariology has spawned numerous artifacts (e.g. Russian Orthodoxy’s “Our Lady of Kazan”) and sacred places (e.g. the shrine of Hodegetria in Smolensk, Russia).Even Japanese Catholics (at Akita) and Chinese Catholics (at Sheshan and Donglu) have caught the Marian bug.Roman Catholic Orders include the (Florentine) Servites and (Catalonian) Mercedarians.}

{44RELIGIOUS Taoists are ersatz “Taoists”.The movement departed from the original teachings of Lao Tsu (which was a philosophy based on the “Tao Te-Ching”; not a religion).This started via the deification of Lao Tsu as “Taishang Laojun”, which led to a Sichuan sect (“Way of the Celestial Masters”; alt. “Way of the Five Pecks of Rice”).Practitioners of RELIGIOUS Taoism subscribe to “Tao Chiao”–a creed inaugurated by Zhang Daoling of Feng-xian / Jiang-su.These votaries established their own sacred text: the “Xiang’er”.Suffice to say: The religion that operates under the aegis, “Taoism” has almost nothing to do with the original philosophy (also referred to as “Taoism”).Such supplicants can primarily be found in Guang-dong, Hong Kong, and Taiwan–bowing to various idols, incense in hand, without the faintest clue what the “Tao Te Ching” might have said.In Taiwanese Taoism (spec. Mazuism), there is a major pilgrimage dedicated to the goddess Ma-tsu (alt. “Mazu”) to the Chao-Tian Temple at Beigang.Mazuists also visit the Tien-hou Temple at Lugang.}

{45The “tawaf” was a pagan ritual long predating the Mohammedan version.The procession is more dramaturgy than “wasilah”.In fact, EVERYTHING about the Hajj is primarily theatrics, from the kissing of the black stone to the running between two hills along a newly-minted promenade where trampling deaths are routine.(One will find more spiritual awareness at the Calgary Stampede.See also footnote 55 below.)The three stone structures (“jamarat”) representing Satan were traditionally

stone pillars.But the House of Saud opted to replace them with stone WALLS so as to maximize surface area and to prevent fatalities.(Until 2004, Hajjis were killing each other by throwing the stones from opposite sides.)Generally speaking, each “jamarah” represents temptation from Iblis.Specifically, the tripartite symbolism accounts for the RETICENCE of Abraham–at three different junctures–to murder his own son.These were conscience-checks: first from himself, then from his wife (Hagar instead of Sarah), then from his son (Ishmael instead of Isaac).In other words: the ritual equates one’s sense of humanity with Satan. If one wishes to see an amazing temple built during Mohammed’s lifetime, one might visit the Pallava “Kailasa-nathar” megalith at Kanchipuram.If one wishes to see an amazing temple that was constructed during the Rashidun period (directly following Mohammed’s death), one might visit the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal (in India), commissioned by Queen Loka Maha-devi.}

{46Belief in magical springs / wells is not uncommon in ancient lore.Most notable are Norse legends of Hver-gelmir, Urdar-brunnr, and Mimis-brunnr–all associated with the world tree, Yggdrasil.Springs / wells have often played a role as sacred sites in Abrahamic lore–as with “E[i]n Rogel” and the Serpent well of Nehemiah.Also note the “Gihon spring” (a.k.a. “fountain of the virgin”).}

{47One can be secular and commune with the divine.The Italian Renaissance thinker, Francesco Petrarca of Tuscany (a.k.a. “Petrarch”) made this crucial point.}

{48Angkor Wat is actually the largest temple COMPLEX.The largest temple (as a single structure) is the Mahayana Buddhist temple at Borobudur in Java; erected in the 9th century.The second largest temple is Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet.At 3.7 km., it is also the world’s highest.Another fascinating temple is the Chand Baori in Rajasthan, India; erected in the 8th century.}

{49These are subjective qualities.By “cryptic”, I mean inexplicable and/or bewitching.By “ominous”, I mean imposing and/or foreboding.Of course, any temple is as enchanting as one allows it to be.The mystical is a exogenous attribute, imputed to things by our attitudes toward them.Enchantment does not inhere in anything; it is a description of how things are perceived.}

{50Hagia Sophia was the most geo-politically significant prior to World War II.In the post-War era (i.e. since the creation of the modern State of Israel in 1948), the most geo-politically significant sacred site is the Dome of the Rock (“Qubbat al-Sakhrah”) on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.In terms of altitude, Potala Palace [Tibetan

Buddhist] (3.7 km) is the highest temple in the world; as well as the second largest.Willka-wayi[n] in Peru [Wari] (3.4 km) is the second highest.And “Galden Namgey Lhatse” [a.k.a. “Tawang Monastery”; Tibetan Buddhist] (3.0 km) is the third highest; as well as the world’s largest monastery.These are followed by Machu Picchu in Cusco, Peru [Inca] (2.43 km)…which may or may not have been used as a temple.}

{51Helpful hint: If one is conducting oneself as though one is a programmed robot, following others’ choreography while reciting an assigned script, one is almost certainly NOT engaged in something that has anything remotely to do with spirituality.Authentic spirituality–untethered from the archaic rituals (and contrived affectation) indicative of any artificial “qurbah”–flourishes anywhere one can experience the sublime.Nobody can tell you where that is supposed to be.The purported “wasilah” of ritualized pilgrimage is as hackneyed as it is bogus; just as is the case with ritualized prayer.In a sense, all of life is a pilgrimage–one, it should be noted, without any particular origin or destination.And one that does not require IDOLATRY at the destination (see footnote 52 below).Indeed, we are all always pilgrims in our own way–fellow travelers with no ordained path.It might be asked: Is the pilgrimage in Chaucer’s “Canterbury Tales” (from London to Canterbury in England) any more cosmically-significant than, say, the pilgrimage African Catholics take to the tombs of the martyrs in Namugongo, Uganda?The question answers itself.}

{52In Arabic, the term for the worship of the Abrahamic deity is “ibada[h]”; the term for the worship of anything other than the Abrahamic deity is “shirk”.The former is simply translated as “worship” while the latter is simply translated as “idolatry”; but they are LOGICALLY the same thing.(It is the object of idolatry that changes, not the nature of the activity.)What else is an idol than the object of worship–whether or not it is seen as a proxy; whether or not rendered a material object?Logistically-speaking, worship and idolatry are synonymous.In Islam, the Meccan cube is a proxy for the godhead.It is, in other words, the very definition of an idol; as MOST idols are seen as proxies rather than the godhead itself.Bring this fact to the attention of an Islamic apologist, though, and he may give birth to a litter of kittens.The typical Islamic apologist will dissemble on this point–pleading that the “kaaba” only serves as a marker, so as to remind everyone of the qibla.Fair enough.To test this contention, suggest that the OBJECT ITSELF (the Meccan cube) be demolished and

replaced with a simple wooden stake (which would serve the same purpose).That most Islamic apologists would be thrown into paroxysms by merely hearing such a proposal tells us all we need to know.}

{53The translation here can be rather confusing.In an odd twist of irony, “haram” is both the (rough) transliteration of the Arabic term for “sacred” AND of the Arabic term for “forbidden”.The nominal pronunciation for each is slightly different; yet the semantic idiosyncrasy exists because–in pedestrian speech–they are often pronounced approximately the same (depending on intonation and accentuation).Ideally, the transliteration for “taboo” is “haram”; whereas the transliteration for “sanctified” is “haraam”.Thus: “ha-RAM” (sinful) vs. “HA-ram” (holy).And so the etymology of “harem” (a coterie of concubines, and the venue at which they are kept) makes perfect sense; as it–paradoxically–designates a sacred place for lascivious behavior.The sanctification of copulation is especially shrewd when it is reflected in semantics.}

{54People go to a holy place to FEEL, not to think.The logic is the same whether in a tiny chapel or a grand cathedral.The “catch” is that supplicants are behooved to pass off their emotive ejaculations as some kind of spiritual effusion.They thereby misconstrue affectation as contemplation.Whether in the form of solemnity or histrionics, the idea is to be reverent.In reality, the pre-frontal cortex idles during propitiation…even as one’s brain is flooded with dopamine (when ecstatic) or serotonin (when austere).During worship, the sensation of euphoria that ensues from the dopamine rush (or the serenity induced by the release of serotonin) is taken as corroboration that one is communing with the divine; and that the place is really as magical as one believes it to be.In other words: the subject state is taken as confirmation that one’s religious beliefs have credence.This is shown to be delusive by solely by the fact that practitioners of EVERY religion experience this impression.Some New Age practitioners experience just as much a feeling of rapture (a.k.a. “transcendence”) when they visit Sedona Valley as some Muslims do when they visit the Kaaba.Thus a surrogate for spirituality is confused for genuine spirituality.This is a reminder that worship is invariably an exercise in projection, not in reflection.}

{55 Also notable are the (Syriac) Palmyrene inscriptions at Hatra, dedicated to the god Baal-Shamin.The temple seems to have been built to pay tribute to a god named “Gad Ramgu”.(“Gad” was an Aramaean deity of good fortune.“Ramgu” seems to have been the moniker for a tribe and/or the revered protector figure for

which that tribe was named.)In Palmyrene theology, Baal-Shamin was one of the primary deities (along with the female deity, Allat and the sun-god, Shamash).Hatra was also known as “Hatra of Shamash”.}