

# THE JOURNEY BEGINS

*A Brief History of People and Places*

*Some form of common worship and a common place of worship, appear to be a human necessity.*

— MAHATMA GANDHI, Lawyer, Activist & Pacifist, from his writings, 1925

We worship first at the altar of the womb, emerging into the world through the portal of the feminine and evolving through the nurturing of our Great Mother, the Earth. The first humans created sacred spaces within the smoke-stained cathedrals of the caverns and caves in which they found shelter and in the verdant groves of fruit trees and in the vast expanse of desert sands.

They discovered the divine within nature, in the movement of both the stars above and of their own bodies below, arms raised in praise, feet tracing the patterns of ancient dances. The first temples were constructed of carved primordial stones, the first sacraments gifted within the circle of bodies gathering around a fire. The elements themselves were our gods and goddesses—the fertile earth, the tempestuous skies, the flow of river and ocean and the flames which warmed our skin.

Throughout human history, sacred sites have held profound significance and importance

(previous pages) Unknown · *Frieze of Archers*, Susa Iran · 6th Century BCE Made from bricks of siliceous clay, the procession of warrior-archers panel is from the exquisite Palace of Darius the Great from the ancient Iranian Achaemenid Period, spared from Alexander the Great's destruction of Persepolis.

for various cultures around the world. These sites, imbued with spiritual, cultural, and historical resonance, serve as points of connection between humanity and the divine, the natural world and the cosmos. These spaces hold tremendous importance, serving as physical manifestations of spiritual beliefs and cultural values. From ancient temples and burial grounds to the paths crossed by the devout in pilgrimage, sacred sites have played a vital role in shaping the beliefs, practices, and identities of diverse civilizations.

The latter is one of the key reasons why sacred sites remain vitally important, as they serve as enduring repositories of cultural heritage and history. Many sacred places around the globe have been designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites due to their significance in conveying the shared heritage of humanity. These sites are often home to monuments and artifacts that provide valuable insights into the beliefs and rituals of

Myriam Wares · *A Quiet Stroll in Time* · Canada 2021–22 One half of a surrealist diptych by Wares, the self-taught illustrator invites the viewer to contemplate the passage of time within a grand labyrinth.







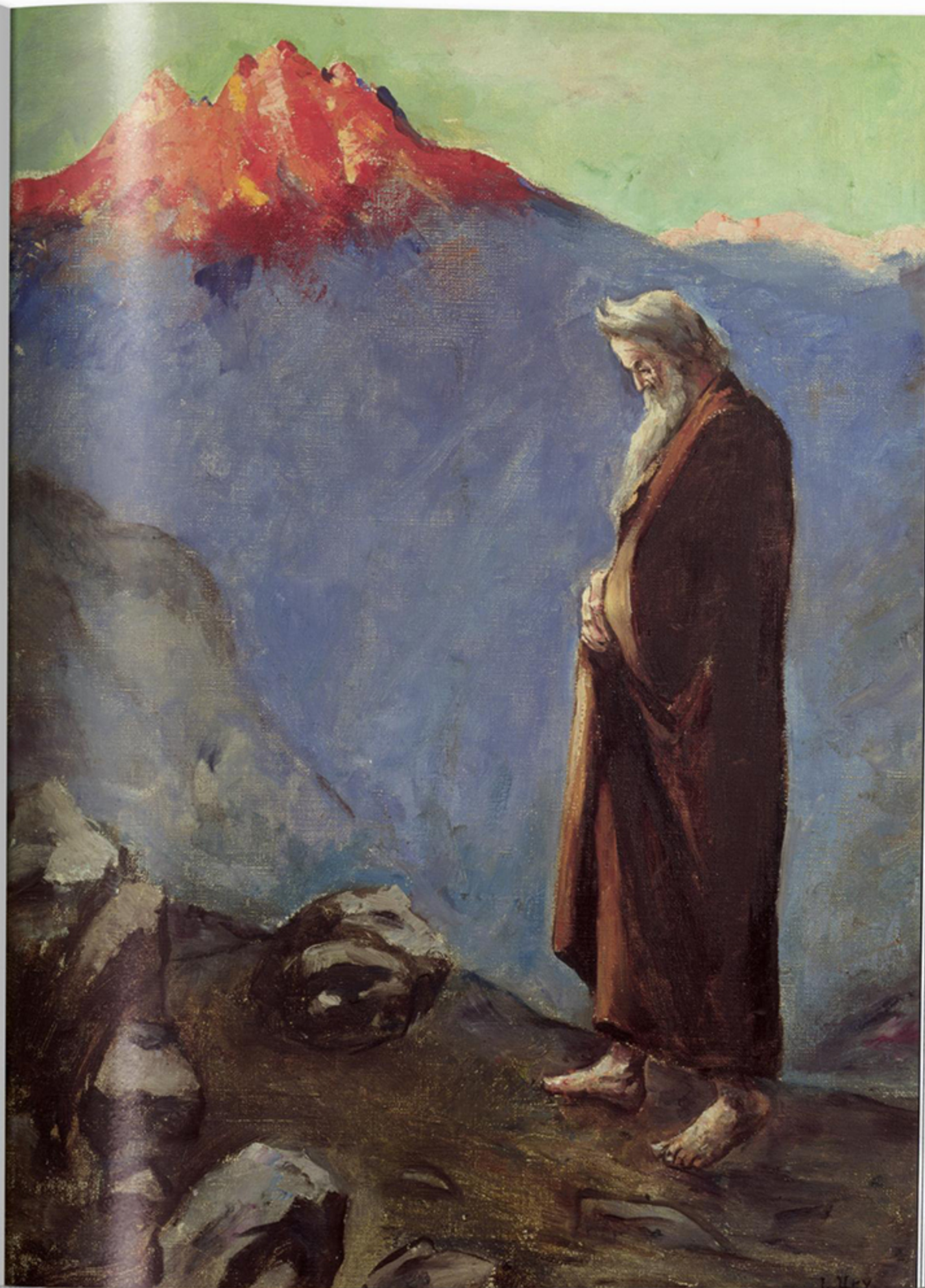
events and its intricate artwork indicates a profound connection between prehistoric people and the cycles of nature. Göbekli Tepe, located in southeastern Turkey, dates to approximately 9600 BCE, predating Stonehenge by several millennia. This site consists of massive stone pillars arranged in circular structures, depicting intricately carved animals and symbols. Its purpose, like Stonehenge, is thought to be religious or ceremonial. The site's age suggests that prehistoric societies were capable of organizing large-scale communal efforts for building such monumental structures, contradicting previous assumptions about our hunter-gatherer ancestors. Also located in England, is the town of Glastonbury, a place known for both its historical and mystical significance. Believed to be the site of the mythical Isle of Avalon, the final resting place of King

Unknown · *Machu Picchu* · Peru · 15th Century  
Majestically overlooking the sacred valley below sits the palatial Incan ruins, a spiritually significant city built with astrological architecture upon an x-shaped fault line, with impeccable and mysterious skill.

Arthur, Glastonbury is also home to the Glastonbury Abbey, an important medieval monastery. The area is thought to have been a center of pagan worship before the arrival of Christianity and remains a popular destination for spiritual seekers.

Ancient Egypt, with its deep connection to the spiritual realm, is home to some of the most important sacred sites in the world. One of the most famous and enduring is the Great Pyramid of Giza, an architectural marvel that has fascinated and perplexed scholars, archaeologists, and visitors for centuries. Built during the Fourth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom, around 2580-2560 BCE, the Great Pyramid is the largest and most well-known of the three pyramids at Giza, serving as the tomb of Pharaoh Khufu. Its colossal size, precise engineering, and astronomical

Lesser Ury · *Moses (approaching Mt. Sinai)* · Germany 1905-07  
Moses ascends Mt. Sinai to commune with God, who came down in a thunderous fire cloud, resulting in the Ten Commandments. Ury interprets Moses' journey to the fiery mountaintop in his unique impressionistic technique.





monuments in the world. The Sphinx is believed to have been built during the reign of Pharaoh Khafre in the 26th century BCE and is thought to have served as a guardian of the pyramids, serving as a symbol of royal power and protection.

The pyramids constructed in the ancient city of Teotihuacan in Mexico are another important sacred space showcasing the spiritual and cultural practices of the Mesoamerican civilizations. Teotihuacan, meaning "the place where the gods were created," in the Nahuatl language, is home to the Pyramid of the Sun, the Pyramid of the Moon, and the Temple of the Feathered Serpent, iconic structures that served as ceremonial and ritual centers for the Aztecs, Maya, and other indigenous peoples. The



Unknown · *The Wailing Wall or Western Wall*  
Jerusalem · ca. 19 BCE Built by King Herod, the only remaining wall from the holy Jewish temple on Mount Moriah, second to the temple built by King Solomon, is said to have been that which housed the Ark of the Covenant.

city's layout, architecture, and art reflect a deep reverence for the cosmos, nature, and the supernatural forces that were believed to govern human life and destiny.

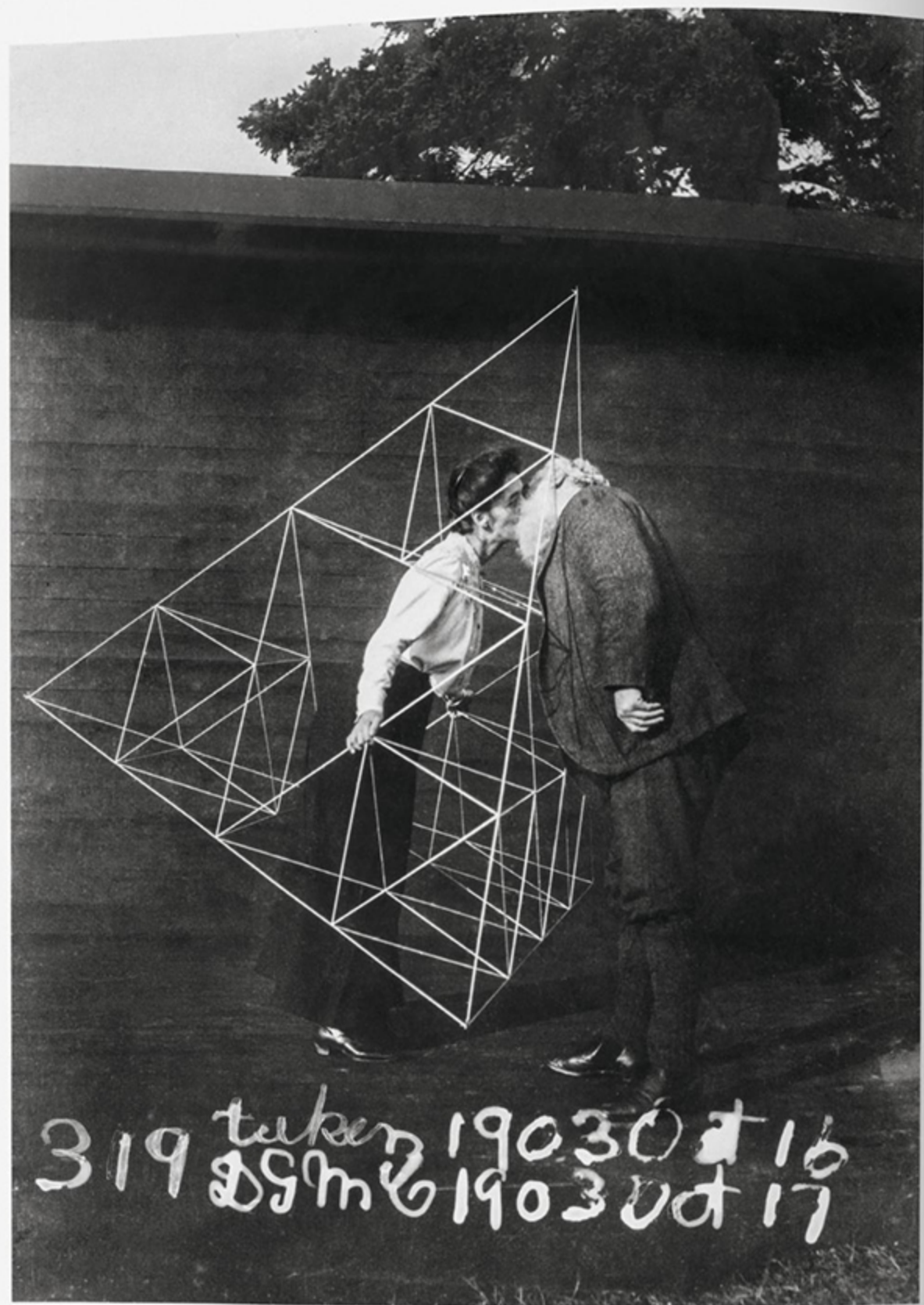
Chichen Itza, located in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, was once a thriving metropolis of the Mayan civilization and features the towering pyramid known as El Castillo, or the Temple of Kukulcan. Rising 79 feet high, the pyramid is a testament to the mathematical and astronomical knowledge of the Mayans. Aligned with the movements of the sun, the site offers a stunning visual display during the spring and fall equinoxes, when the shadow of a serpent seems to slither down the side of the steps. In addition to the Temple of Kukulcan, Chichen Itza is home to several other remarkable structures, such as the Great Ball Court, the Temple of the Warriors, and the Group of a Thousand Columns. One of the most intriguing aspects of Chichen Itza is the Sacred Cenote, a large natural sinkhole that was used by the Mayans for sacrificial offerings. The discovery of human remains and artifacts in the cenote has shed light on the religious practices of the Mayan people and their reverence for water as a sacred element.

To the south, high in the Peruvian Andes, Machu Picchu still stands as a testament to the ingenuity, spirituality, and architectural prowess of the ancient Inca civilization. This iconic archaeological site, perched on a steep ridge overlooking the Urubamba River valley, draws visitors from around the world. Machu Picchu, meaning "Old Mountain" in

Ra Paulette · *Tree of Life Cave* · United States  
2011–19 Artist Ra Paulette hand-carved 14 subterranean caves in the northern New Mexico desert, painstakingly chiseling his works from the organic forms already present in these underground chambers.







319 taken 1903 Oct 16  
DSM 1903 Oct 17

