

LIFE-FORCE ENERGY: The Sacred Root Of Place, Architecture, And Community

Tom Bender

tbender@nehalem.tel.net

tombender.org

Life-force energy (*qi, chi, prana, baraka, etc.*), is a foreign concept to many in our culture, though core to the healing and martial arts, philosophy, architecture, and access to the sacred, of more than 65 cultures worldwide.¹ Such "foreignness" of other cultures is often a valuable reflection of blindness in our own, and therefore worth exploring. A good example is our scientists refusing to acknowledge the logical implications of quantum connectedness. If every element of our universe is quantum connected to all others, there is total informational interconnection, and therefore an "integral consciousness" existing in every grain of sand. Though acknowledged by most other cultures, this is a profoundly different universe than our culture thought we inhabited!

The architectural history of those cultures, plus current design projects, demonstrate the central role which life-force energy plays in the nurturing power of place, architecture, and community. Its acknowledgement and use offers a significant contribution to our capabilities as architects.

Life-force energy is the innate core dimension energizing otherwise ordinary things, nature, and the everyday, evoking special meaning for individuals, societies, and cultures. We are finally beginning to develop tools and processes to explore, verify, and work with this energy.

¹ In the limited space here, I can only give a glimpse of the topic, but with hotlinks to more detailed information on various aspects. The 65 cultures worldwide whose core is life-force energy are listed [on my website](#), and in my BUILDING WITH THE BREATH OF LIFE, and SILENCE, SONG, AND SHADOWS.

[BUILDING WITH THE BREATH OF LIFE](#), 2000, is a left-brain introduction to historical and current use of life-force energy in design of sacred places, with over 300 images, two hundred plus references and a similar number of citations from published work by others in various related fields. It also provides exercises for those wanting to experience this field and develop their own skills in it. [Draft chapters without images](#) are available on my website.

[SILENCE, SONG, AND SHADOWS](#), 2000, is a right-brain introduction to the same topic, focusing on emotional and color image introduction to the core concepts and elements.

The [ENERGETICS INDEX](#) and [ARCHITECTURE AND THE SACRED INDEX](#) on my website hyperlink to numerous sources of my own work specific to this topic - books, dvds, articles, chapters, presentations, monographs, calendars, built projects, etc. - and their support references.

["Sacred Art, Sacred Space"](#), 2006, demonstrates the different roles of art and architecture in a world where all is held sacred, and where the primacy of energetic realms is understood.

My ["Living Architecture"](#) chapter from Kellert, Heerwagen and Mador's BIOPHILLIC DESIGN, 2008, provides several dozen reference sources relative to architecture, life-force energy, and the sacred.

["Places Touching Spirit"](#), 2006, shows how our places can bring us into deeper connection with the rest of creation.

Our acknowledgement of life-force energy is deeply connected with a major shift in understanding of the physics of our universe. The Hubble telescope, and now other equipment, is transforming our culture's concepts of astro-physics, showing that our universe is formed from *electromagnetic plasmas*, not inert matter.² Those plasmas appear to originate in a "mirror realm" to our 3-D world, which is the realm of life-force energy, and where actions actually occur that we attribute to our 3-D world. Parallel with this new perspective, information is coming together about the physics of qi energy and its implications for culture and architecture.³

Exploring the architectural history of other cultures is showing us the nature and power of life-force energy-sourced design and experience of place. The tools employed in those cultures, and the roles that their built environment plays are first steps in developing our own. Those working today with these tools are developing new techniques for working with life-force energy to imbue our architecture and surroundings with the healing and nurturing power inherent in this energy.

Many different cultures express the core role of life-force energy in our surroundings, everyday life, and energizing the places we create and inhabit:

THE POWER OF NATURAL PLACES:

Suzanne Wenger speaks of the life-force energy power of undamaged natural places in Nigeria and elsewhere:



Sacred Groves in Yoruba Tradition

Natural sacred places, in all religious contexts, have always existed for the accumulation of metaphysical life-force energy. Unmolested nature generates energy intensities of various orders. Such energy nodes are in command of, and are commanded by, inner realities of all kinds. These include human, floral, animal, mineral, and ethereal realities; primordial ordinances, symbolic orders, and truthforms.

This residing energy in a Sacred Grove empowers ritual, whose role is to open up spiritual two-way-traffic from and towards the source of life.

Yoruba religious awareness is directed towards all kinds of meta-psychic and meta-intellectual proto-types and the gods, *Orisa*, which individuate from the boundaries between the physical and the metaphysical dimensions of life.

In such religious context, addresses to godheads are not prayers but means to energize one's mystic participation within the inner organism of sacredness. They manipulate primary exchanges between a devotee and their god. Sailing on these symbol-vessels, we are god, and god is each and all of us.

This phenomenon is made feasible by integral ecstasy and self-controlled trance. These unite both into oneness - "*Od'Orisa*" (he has become Orisa). And this is - thanks to the profound vitality of Yoruba Wisdom - true not only of humans, but also of all created life-forms; because all exists in all.

edited from Susanne Wenger, THE SACRED GROVES OF OSHOGBO. 1990

² For a summary, see "[Plasma Universe](#)" on my website, or visit [Thunderbolts.info](#).

³ See "[Physics of Qi](#)" on my website, or for more detail, view my [PHYSICS OF QI](#) DVD.

EVERYDAY SACRED SITES IN PUEBLO VILLAGES:

Joseph Rael speaks of everyday living with life-force energy in Native American Pueblos:



Preparations for a dance at Acoma Pueblo.

Attention to energy fields in the earth has been part of the energetics of community in almost every culture. Energetic awareness was commonly used in China, Japan, and elsewhere in choosing sites for establishing new cities. Anomalies in earth energy do occur, or can be called into existence, on the scale of a community. It is an aspect to consider in founding a new city, or expanding or relocating an existing one.

African, Aboriginal, and Native American traditions suggest a richer, finer-grained, and more complex connection with the energy of place in their communities. Joseph Rael, a Southern Ute and Picuris Pueblo Indian, talks of this connection:

As children we were taught that we existed as pressure point activators for the sacred sites within the village. Every twenty feet or so were consecrated points on the ground which carried special blessings. These shrines were buried in the ground and were only visible to the inner eye. As we walked through the village, we pushed them into aliveness with our bodies' pressure on them. . . . The holy shrines were placed there because the vibrational essence of those holy sites would enhance the psyche of community and of each individual within the community.

. . . The energy was always shifting, was always different. The resonating vibrations in the sacred sites were always changing so that the people in the village were always alive with energy. These sacred spaces, generating life sustaining powers, maintained our integrity as a group, orienting each individual toward the community's highest ideals.¹

¹ Rael, Joseph, BEING AND VIBRATION, Council Oak Books, 1993.

EARTH ENERGIES:

One of many aspects of life-force energies in the places we inhabit is "earth energy" - distinct concentrations of qi-energy in various natural places, often caused by discontinuities in the earth's crust. Machu Picchu, for example, is located on a huge batholith of crystalline granite, with a geologic fault-line on each side of it. Compression of the granite along those faults generates piezo-electric currents, which accumulate in the granite shards that underlie the site, giving the site unique power to connect with the spirit realms. Other well-known sites such as Serpent Mound, the *cenotes* in the Yucatan (below), or the Kiyomizu Shrine in Japan are such naturally energy-distinctive places. Such energy can also be brought into a place by a variety of means, accumulate in a place through its use or design, or be altered through shamanic action.

THE CENOTES OF YUCATAN:

Some energized gateways are geologically-caused. In the Yucatan, many Mayan cities contain sacred places called *cenotes*. There are more than 3000 of these sinkholes in the limestone rock, often accessing the only dependable water supply. What is unique to many of these cenotes, and the cause of their "sacredness" is that they appear to be alive. Winds pour in and out of them in six-hour-long inbreaths and outbreaths, like the breathing of some giant being. The water levels rise and fall in tune with the inbreaths. The air has strange smells. Some cenotes moan and make strange sounds. The impact of such behaviors provides the emotional energy to activate intention manifesting things in our world.

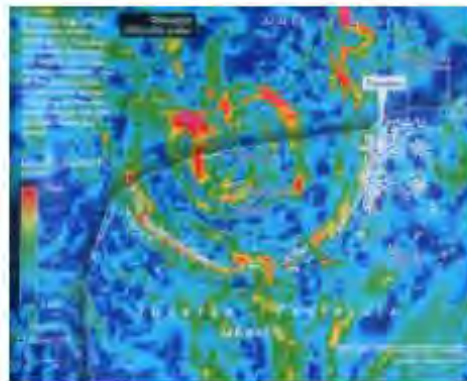
The cause of these strange effects is definitely otherworldly. They arise from an ancient meteoric impact that shattered the limestone crust in the area, establishing and linking into a network of underground waterways.



Understanding the cause of these phenomena in no way decreases the emotional impact of their experience, nor their ability to impact the activation of qi energy-related events.

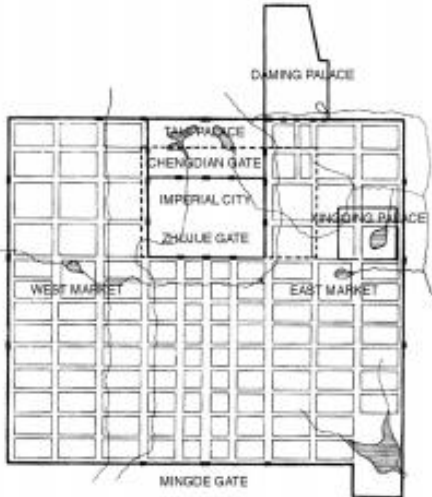


Much of this network was connected with the ocean, the tidal rise and fall of the waters compressed the air in the underground caverns, forcing it in and out of the openings.



CHINESE CITY DESIGN:

68 BUILDING WITH THE BREATH OF LIFE



Above: Chang'an of the Tang Dynasty – axial and rectangular layout typical of Chinese administrative cities. Symmetrical layout of markets, axial location of the Imperial quarter on the north, facing south, grid street layout; walled, enclosed blocks.

FENG-SHUI OF CHINESE CITIES: MIRRORS OF THE COSMOS

Feng-shui outlined a process for locating and laying out Chinese cities. The view of the cosmos on which city location was based spoke symbolically of four Gods: one dwelling in a stream to the east, one in a plain to the south, one in a highway to the west, and the fourth in a mountain to the north. A site with these surroundings was felt to be suitable.

A rectangular plan was made in the symbol of the cosmos, reflecting the rhythms of the sun, the stars, and the seasons that most strongly affected the land. The east-west axis is the path of the sun and the stars. The north-south axis is the direction of the still point in the heavens and the yearly path of the sun and the moon through the seasons.

The Emperor was placed in the north of this rectangle, as he always faced the holy south—in alignment to receive the growth-granting forces of the earth and sun. In the northeast, temples were built to a guardian deity, as that direction was felt to be unlucky; devils dwell in the mountains (as well as enemy troops). Buddhist temples were often placed in the west, as it was felt that Buddhism had a tendency to proceed eastward, and their influence would positively affect the city. The entire geometry and detailed layout of the city symbolically reflected and reinforced their understanding of the cosmos.

Thus sites were selected with mountains to protect the city from winter winds, and monasteries were founded in the mountains so that the city could be warned of attack. Southern orientation brought sunlight, warmth, cheer, and sanitation. Fresh water and air were provided for by proximity of the mountains and rivers, and the commerce and food supply of the city assured by the proximity of a river to the east and fields to the south. At the same time, every activity involved in making the city, living in it, and participating in its life reminded a person of the forces that acted upon their world. They became aligned with those forces, and gained nourishment from them.

Below: The Western Gate of Beijing in the 19th century – an impressive greeting for visitors.



This Chinese tradition of clearly placing themselves and their places of living within a pattern of the forces of the universe played out in a similar configuration of the Ming Tang, or "Bright Hall." In this ritual temple, the Emperor followed a progression of ceremony within the circle of the seasons, with the configuration of the temple complex tied to the same heavenly directions. Similar patterns determined the design of tombs, possibly including that of Qin Shihuang.

JAPANESE "KAMI", OR EARTH SPIRITS:

Another interesting example involves a dowsing study we did in 1998 confirming existence of the *Kami*, earth-energy "spirits" in Japan, their annual "retreat" at the Izumo Shinto Shrine, and the ability of dowsing to track such events from around the world:

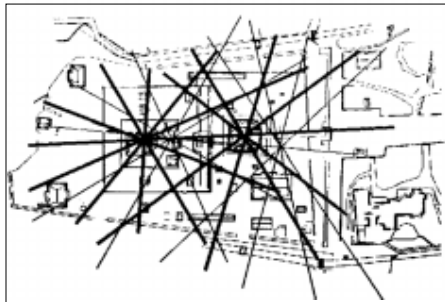
Right: *Honden*, or main shrine building at Izumo Taisha, in ancient Shinto style.

VISITS OF THE KAMI TO THE IZUMO SHRINE, JAPAN

Located near a small bay on the west side of Honshu Island across from Hiroshima is the Izumo Shrine, the most ancient Shinto shrine in Japan. This shrine has been venerated continually for well over a thousand years. Every year in late fall the *kami*, or earth spirits, of Japan leave their normal homes throughout the country and gather for a week at the shrine. During this period, the Shrine is also visited by thousands of pilgrims who have come to celebrate the arrival of the *kami*. This visit of the spirits even has a special name in the Japanese language – the period of the visit is known as *kami-arizuke* (period with the gods) at Izumo, and *kannazuki* (period without gods) in all other parts of Japan.

At the time of their 1998 visit, we performed an experiment in remote dowsing to see if the visit caused any change in the chi energy of the Shrine's site. Dowzers Sig Lonegrin in Europe; Joey Korn and James Sullivan in North America; and Hitomi Horiuchi in eastern Japan dowsed a map of the shrine precincts before, during, and after the visit of the *kami*.

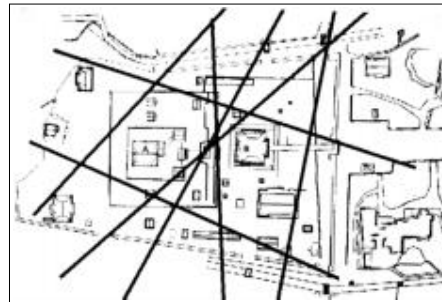
Below: Diagrams by dowser Joey Korn showing multiple crossings of energy lines on main shrine buildings while *kami* were in residence.



All found a major change in the energy of the site during the visit, and a return to the earlier energy state after the departure of the spirits. One dowser registered confusion because his reading first showed an energy node at one shrine building, and rechecking later, found it at a different building. A call to the Shrine produced a schedule of events during the week, which indicated that a welcoming ceremony had been held at the first building at the time of the first reading; and later the spirits moved to the second building for another ceremony!

In spite of the Westernization of Japan, the Japanese still acknowledge the existence of the *kami* and continue their annual visits to the Shrine to honor them, as they have for probably more than a thousand years. The presence of the spirits is still perceptible to visitors, and people gather from around the world to celebrate and honor them.

Light lines are "echos" of opposite energy resulting from the abrupt shift in energy. Right: Energy lines on site before and after *kami* visit.



TOOLS FOR WORKING WITH LIFE-FORCE ENERGY IN DESIGN:

The tools used by "architects" in various cultures to work with life-force energy in design are amazingly varied and powerful:

- The use of geometry in the faceted vaulting of Islamic mosques, in Hindu temples, or tantric sculpture in the Ellora Cave Temples in India⁴.
- Location of "birthing stones" in Hawaii to give power to women giving birth.
- Determining the location of Japanese temples by dowsing, to find powerful existing earth-energy locations.
- Empowering of images and structures by "Opening of the Eyes" process in Egyptian, Buddhist, Native American locations.
- The use of non-rectangular detailing in the architecture of the Rudolf Steiner tradition.
- The role of ritual in design, construction, use, and decommissioning of energized places.
- Moving life-force energy throughout the Khmer lands in Cambodia through water temples and irrigation canals.
- Design and empowering of Chinese cities and tombs.
- Use of feng-shui, vaastu, and other related processes in designing homes, temples, communities in different cultures.
- Rebuilding of Mayan temples as the astrology and rulers changed.
- Incorporation of materials from previous temples in construction of new temples in Egypt.
- Design of temples in Egypt to incorporate and link to the energy of other deities and previous temples.
- Creating energized "Gardens of the Spirit".
- Design and energizing tombs, temples and statues to connect the living with deceased pharaohs, rulers, or spiritual leaders.
- Use of energized walls or boundaries to protect and empower spiritual precincts.

The presentation at Ghost Ranch will focus on imagery of the above historical architectural elements and on current projects working with life-force energy.

CONCLUSION:

Our architecture and culture have been missing a vital dimension that energizes place, lives and culture. Our practice of architecture is being deeply transformed and empowered as our culture, life experiences, and professional work embrace and work with life-force energy.

⁴ See my [THE CAVE TEMPLES OF INDIA](#) DVD, 2004.