



Chapter Eight Excerpt

Egyptian Sonic Temples

*Give me my mouth;
I want to talk.
Give me iron words forged in fire
That I may speak the language of the Earth
Normandi Ellis¹*

In the beginning the “...singing sun created the world with its cry of light.”²

Everything was formed: sky, earth, river, delta, hawk, heron, red sandstone, black granite, the land of Egypt. The River Nile, like a lotus born from mud, gave life through its rich silt, making a narrow green band along its banks. Here, the civilization we know as Egypt was cradled, and for at least 3,000 years, the pharaohs, living gods on earth, ruled and built pyramids, temples, and the enigmatic Sphinx which gazes into eternity. Some believe this civilization to be much older, perhaps over 10,000 years.³ Author and Egyptologist John Anthony West has championed this cause. Geologic research has shown that the weathering pattern of the Sphinx is due to water while all the other nearby shrines were weathered by wind erosion. Over ten thousand years ago the Giza Plateau was under water which West, and many geologists, believe caused the erosion pattern.

I interviewed West many years earlier while researching sound and Egypt. Now I would be able to find out for myself. Subsequently, he welcomed my offer to lead toning in the temples and pyramids when I went on his tour in 2006.

The flight from New York City was long and tiring. A sandstorm in Cairo rerouted our plane to Sharm El-Sheikh by the Red Sea. We were transported to a hotel and after three hours sleep we were back on route to our destination. We arrived in Egypt at 3 AM and were taken by bus to the famous Mena House Hotel. Our Egyptian guide greeted us with the words “Welcome Home.”

Welcome home to Egypt...to the black land by the Nile. Welcome home to doves and feathery wands of palms... to spiraling flutes of minarets and Arabic letters carved on the night breeze. Welcome home to Egypt...to crates of oranges stacked in sidewalk markets ...to fires lit on pavement ...to a Nile filled with stars. Welcome home to magic rugs hung on ropes, threaded dreams carpeting the sidewalk. Welcome home to eucalyptus and acacia... to palaces of perfume and a blue scroll of sky. Welcome home to honking horns and evening prayer, to mud bricks and mosaics, to water buffalo grazing near palm fronds waving hello. Welcome home, Immortal Soul.

My travel-weary body finally collapsed on the bed at the Mena House. I felt like I was floating on the boat through time which took me back to golden temples and finally into the welcomed oblivion of sleep.

In less than five hours the phone rang for our wake-up call. My room mate Jenn scrambled out of bed, ran to our balcony and excitedly told me to come outside. There they were. The pyramids, almost close enough to touch. Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore. Or Taos. This was Cairo. Right on the Giza Plateau. My first day in Egypt. What must they have been like when they were covered in their polished white limestone casings? The Greek writer Herodotus says that they “...glittered in the pure desert air like

gigantic prisms.”⁴ The pyramids did not glitter but they did pulse. I could hear them singing a finely-tuned song, as if they were broadcast stations to the stars, transformers of light. What are they? Why are they here? Will we ever know? Author Robert Bauval believes that the three pyramids represent the stars of Orion’s belt on Earth. Of the three, Khufu is the grandest, the most complex, earning the name the Great Pyramid of Giza. Over the centuries, the pyramid has been thought it to be an astronomical observatory, an almanac, or a telescope. The Great Pyramid was believed to be a center of initiation by Gnostics, Rosicrucians, Theosophists and Masons. Author Chris Dunn, who was on the tour, disagrees with the initiation theory and thinks the Great Pyramid was a power plant where its “...crystal edifice created a harmonic resonance with the Earth and converted Earth’s vibrational energies to microwave radiation.”⁵ He believes every part of the pyramid’s precise design was there to enhance its acoustics. I would have to wait for my own experience. Our private meditation and toning would be on the last day of the trip. But on this first day I would be able to sing inside the Red Pyramid at Dahshur, less than an hour from Cairo near Saqqara.

Red Pyramid

From the windows of our tour bus we passed pomegranate trees, rows of cabbages, carts of carrots, stacks of hay, an old woman pulling a bony cow through a lane. Other buses were already parked in the parking lot with names like Zam Zam Tours, Paradise Tours, Isis Tours. Cream-colored desert dogs greeted us, guardians of these first pyramids, one with a heart on his forehead. Gulls and mud swallows flew overhead. We went first to the Step Pyramid of Zosher, and its complex, which included an elaborate fluted colonnade

leading into a great court. Chris walked with me and wondered if the seventeen stalks of papyrus bound together in the columns related to the seventeen notes of the Arabic scale.

Finally we arrived at the Red Pyramid. Named for the casing of pink granite which covers the stones, this pyramid is not usually on the tourist route. We had it completely to ourselves. After climbing the steep stairs outside, we then descended down a ramp into the pyramid. We had to duck and walk backwards; holding onto handrails as we went down through the long narrow passageway. The air was stale and I wore my scarf over my nose. A couple, who had been on the tour before, wore dust masks. The passage opened up into two adjoining chambers, each with a corbelled roof that looked like the inside a church steeple, or the inside of the nose. The A-frame shape did not have clean lines but was built in stair steps, each course of bricks inset closer together. I lead a toning. We didn't have much time, and I didn't have any time to prepare the group with my usual speech about toning, finding your voice and how most of us feel shy and awkward about singing or making sound, especially in a holy place where we are taught to be silent. I made a glissando with my voice and a high note brought out the most resonance. Though the reading I had done suggested that the acoustics of this pyramid were most suited to the lower registers of the male voice, the stair stepping of the vault suggested a higher note to me. A man on the tour said that when I sang the room was instantly lit up with harmonics. The inner part of the chamber generated overtones from the starting tone, or fundamental pitch, of my voice. The second harmonic of an octave was almost as loud as the room, something he had never experienced before. I found out later that this man, Adam Reed, was an acoustics expert.

Strangers just yesterday, still jet-lagged, travelers from all over the world became fellow pilgrims finding their own notes and we soon became a group voice. As for me, I had the impression that the granite walls were moving and breathing with us as we sang. Each voice became a colored thread woven into a harmonic tapestry.

Our tour traveled on. Due to a combination of jet lag, sensory overload, dreams, visions and temple dust I seemed in an altered state. Nothing had prepared me for Egypt, for sunrise at the Sphinx, for 1,000 swallows singing the sun up, for white herons gathered like magnolia blossoms in bushes alongside canals, for the flame trees on Elephantine Island, for Donald Duck speaking Arabic on television, and the ready laugh of Egyptian people. Each temple, each moment, was a note in song that has been sung for thousands of years.

The Temple of Man

On the east bank of the Nile, the region of the rising sun, past an avenue of sphinxes, past twin throned colossi, sits the Temple of Luxor, skewed on its axis. According to the Symbolist Egyptologist, R.A.Schawaller de Lubicz, the temple is a microcosm of the human body. It reveals an outline of a skeleton whose every part is located within the temple's plan: clavicle walls, colonnade legs, breathing lungs and the beating heart of the hypostyle hall.

Luxor has been called "...the cathedral of the Great Teaching."⁶ Like a cathedral it has the equivalent of a nave and choir which is placed in the covered area where the High Altar sits. Just as Christian hymns were sung by cathedral choirs near the altar where communion was performed, in Egypt the High Priest chanted in the temple's 'choir' while he circled the sacred barque, symbol of the crescent moon. This sanctuary is located at the

place of the nasal cavity. At the vocal chords the King's divine birth is portrayed, here he was baptized, his name inscribed on stone walls joining the names of other kings.

We went there at night. The Temple, illuminated by floodlights, had a golden appearance. With the moon almost full I walked through the Avenue of Sphinx's to the obelisk. The shadows cast into the carved hieroglyphs brought them forward as offerings: owl, feather, ibis. West began his commentary as we walked through the threshold. I listened first with my senses, to the bats and rock doves roosting at the top of the columns a counterpoint to the dissonant call to prayer from the nearby minarets. Then I was drawn to his words, "Luxor is an exercise in harmony and proportion. We are stirred by these places in the same way we are stirred by music. The proportions of Egyptian sacred architecture produce the effect of resonance. We are in the middle of a stone symphony. There were always two obelisks at the entrance of the temple cut out of a single piece of granite for the purpose of tuning the temple."

As I listened to West and his explanations of the temple's reliefs I also began to listen to myself. *Go deeper, further in, into the Holy of Holies.* What a privilege it was to be here. In ancient Egypt only the Pharaoh or High Priest would be allowed entry into the Holy of Holies. Ritually purified, he broke the seal guarding the door and entered the inner sanctum containing the deity. Unveiling the image, he prostrated himself and circled the shrine with incense and incantations. The statue was then bathed, anointed with oil, and dressed in fine garments. Jewelry and other insignias belonging to the deity would be placed upon it and an elaborate banquet was brought forth. Then the priest, walking backwards, would clear his footprints from the floor, and close the shrine door which was

then resealed. Through this offering “...the underlying fabric of the universe was renewed.”⁷

At Luxor and other temples, statues of the resident deity were imbued with the qualities of living gods, representatives of the Duat, the Netherworld, from whence the gods came. When a temple was dedicated a ritual called “The Opening of the Mouth” was performed on every statue, every relief, and every inscription throughout, breathing life into the stones. The temple itself was called a house of utterance and considered a living being. The gods were thought to breathe through stone noses, listen through stone ears and eat through stone lips.

Now I was here at the Holy of Holies, neither priest nor priestess, just an American woman from the 21st century. When the group eventually arrived in the inner sanctum, I led them through a toning experience. I knew from reading West’s book *Serpent in the Sky* that the Holy of Holies at Luxor corresponds to the nasal cavity. Its Egyptian name *shtyt* means ‘sacred’ and ‘hidden.’ The letters ‘N’ and ‘M’ vibrate the nose which is “connected to the sympathetic and vagus nerves.”⁸ When the nasal cavity is stimulated by sound altered states of consciousness are possible.

I slid my voice in a glissando to find the most resonant note of my range and together we toned this note with the nasal sounds of ‘Mmm,’ ‘Om,’ ‘Nggg,’ and ‘Nee.’ The sound reverberated through both my nose and the chamber. I experienced the sounds returning to me like golden rings that entered through my breath and circled inside me, overtones of light filling every crevice of my body. When we finished, we walked back through the temple in silence.

¹ Normandi Ellis, *Awakening Osiris: The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, Phanes Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1988, p. 108.

² Joachim Ernst-Berendt, *Nada Brahma-The World is Sound: Music and the Landscape of Consciousness*, Destiny Books, Rochester, Vermont, 1987, p. 174.

³ 3,000 years is the conservative date used by most Egyptologists and historians. John Anthony West and many others believe that the civilization of Egypt is much older.

⁴ John Anthony West, *The Traveler's Key to Ancient Egypt*, Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, Madras, India, 1985, p. 85.

⁵ Christopher Dunn, *The Giza Power Plant: Technologies of Ancient Egypt*, Bear and Company, Santa Fe, New Mexico, back cover.

⁶ R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz, *The Temple in Man: Sacred Architecture and the Perfect Man*, Inner Traditions International, Rochester, Vermont, 1977, p. 35.

⁷ Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*, Thames and Hudson, New York, 2000, p. 89.

⁸ John Anthony West, *The Serpent in the Sky: Wisdom of Ancient Egypt*, Julian Press, New York, 1987, p. 124.