

# **The Living Pyramid**

**By: Susan M. Griffith-Jones**





This work is dedicated  
to the ceaseless activities of all the Masters  
in their endless efforts to create peace and  
happiness  
throughout multitudes of Universes.

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*All photographs and diagrams in this book are taken and  
drawn by Susan M. Griffith-Jones*









## **STAGE 1: SPACE...**

### **Timeline of Events to make the film, ‘The Circle of Immortality’**

March 2001:	Night in Oxford, UK
July 2001:	1st trip to Nepal and to Muktinath
April 2005:	2 <sup>nd</sup> trip to Muktinath -1000's of photos
June 2005:	3 <sup>rd</sup> trip to Muktinath – more photos
Oct 2005:	4 <sup>th</sup> trip to Muktinath – shooting for film
Oct 2005:	1 <sup>st</sup> edit of visuals of Muktinath
Nov 2005:	Virtual Mustang', Photographic Exhibition of 2 x Photo Collage Art pieces, Kathmandu
Dec 2005:	Sakya Monlam, Lumbini – shooting for film
Dec 2006:	Sakya Monlam Lumbini – public show of 1 <sup>st</sup> version of The Circle of Immortality
Jan 2007:	Trip to Maratika – shooting for film
Jan 2007:	Paranirvana of Chogyi Trichen Rinpoche
Dec 2007:	2 <sup>nd</sup> version of ‘The Circle of Immortality’
Dec 2008:	3 <sup>rd</sup> version of ‘The Circle of Immortality

## Foreword

This book, 'The Living Pyramid' describes how I made my film, 'The Circle of Immortality'. You would think this should be straightforward, ie. pick a topic, flesh out some ideas, prepare what needs to be done, go to the location to shoot it, edit it and show the film here and there – turnaround time of a few weeks, months, but not more.

Well, the making of this film was nothing like that. In fact, it stretched over a period of 3 plus years, encompassing 3 versions of it, starting in the Autumn of 2005 and culminating in a final one that was produced in December 2008.

Needless to say, making this film was not a simple affair and as mentioned above, was not just a process of 'making a film', but formed an exponential part of my spiritual growth at a time when I was intensely studying the Highest Tantric path of Tibetan Buddhism with my teacher, His Eminence Chogye Trichen Rinpoche in Kathmandu, Nepal.

The making of the movie became my way to actualise deeper concepts of this refined and intricate path of understanding into my everyday life, as well as fighting demons of confusion – how to present what I wanted to present in the film, inertia – in actualising the project to a final stage and manifesting the finances for it, as it turned out to be much costlier than I had ever imagined.

But somehow, with much effort I managed to achieve what I wanted, even though it took me several attempts to get there. And when the final version of it rolled off

the press in late 2008, I knew this was the one I had been looking for.

Ironically, at some point in 2008, I had written a root text for an installation art piece I made in 2005, which is also called, 'Circle of Immortality'<sup>1</sup> by simply describing the artwork angle-by-angle.

As the layout for the final version of the film was based on the concept of this art piece and its shape, I decided to try out this root text as the narration for the third version of the film. Something sub-conscious must have been at work here, for I was astounded when I could simply cut and paste it into the timeline, where it fit perfectly into the already cut and laid out visuals, as if I had written it especially for it.

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I am very grateful to a lot of people for their assistance in the project; Peter Lim from Singapore, who funded the first and second versions of it and accompanied me to both Muktinath and the Sakya Monlam 2005 for the shooting of the visuals there; Sudarshan Karki, with whom I spent many hours in the editing studio and his patience in bearing my unconventional film making techniques, which I'm sure were a 'first' for him; PBC Taiwan for offering their enchanting music to me to use in the film and then publishing and distributing the second version of it in a beautifully bound format to many countries in S.E. Asia; and to many many others

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<sup>1</sup> — See Photo of the 'Circle of Immortality' Art Piece on Page 87

who were just there to listen to my issues and help me find the way to proceed.

I have shown the third and final version of the film at various festivals, in public domain 'private' viewings and elsewhere. And because Chogyé Trichen Rinpoche had told me of what value it is to people just to see such holy places on film, not to mention hearing the sacred mantras that are like keys turning in the locks of one's energy system, with his stamp of approval and comments on its relevance in the world today, I have made it my aim to show this artistic documentary film in as many places and to as many people as possible.<sup>2</sup>

As the film seemingly goes beyond the rational and is therefore not an 'ordinary' documented account of people and places, it's important not to harbour any expectations and just watch it by being with it and neither analyse nor search for anything in particular. In this sense, it's more like a whole meditation in itself, whilst also deeply conveying the culture of the places displayed in the visuals, albeit at a subtler level than one is used to experiencing in a conventional documentary.

So it is with great pleasure that I send forth this work, 'The Living Pyramid', itself a title that should inspire thought on how a film can be correlated to this archetypal shape!

Within these pages, I have shared the notes I made throughout the process of making the film, as I feel that they may be of some use to expose the method (or

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<sup>2</sup> The final version of 'The Circle of Immortality' may be viewed at:  
<http://www.pyramidkey.com/circle-of-immortality/>  
or  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLfXP1cC71U>

rather ‘non-method!') I used, as well as for readers to understand the philosophical concepts going through my mind at the time I was making it. I am not trying to create any type of ‘new’ philosophical standpoint here, just making notes for my own use, as I continue to translate the concepts into images. These are not meant to be taken literally, but as symbolic.

In this way, I’m introducing a different perspective on how we can make motion visual art in a subtle way to both inspire and calm down the nerves of an ever-increasing populace living in this whirlwind world we belong to.

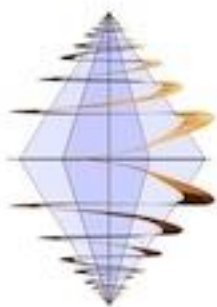
As everything that appears initially emerges from within the element of SPACE, I hereby title this ‘Foreword’ section as such, as this is the ground within which the idea and intention must appear, prefixes to the wind that must blow to start bringing it into appearance.

May this film and these comments herein be seen in the vision that they are intended to be seen in and may they benefit countless beings on their journey to the perfect state of Luminosity.

**Susan M. Griffith-Jones**  
**Kullu-Manali Valley, India**  
**August 2018**







## **STAGE 2: WIND...**

### **...blows me to Nepal**

It would be impossible to say where this story really begins as there are many cut off moments in life, where we see chapters end and new ones begin.

Back in the early 1990s, I had long been wishing to travel to the East – Nepal in particular – as I had already been experiencing an awakening of ‘understanding my existence’ in a variety of ways.

I think this probably happens to everyone at some point in their life, triggered by events that are beyond the norm, usually traumatic experiences, or some kind of suffering that makes one view life in a different way. For me it had happened gradually from my teenage years on and then cumulatively as a series of events piled one on top of the other, where life was literally forcing me out of a situation I had been stubbornly refusing to leave and making me switch tracks.

The events of those days would fill a book in itself, so I’m not going to get into the details of how I reached that point herein, but let’s say that one of the culminating moments of those series of events was when I ended up, unplanned, in the middle of the night, in Southern England’s famous city of Oxford, having an acute and unintentional experience that was definitely spurring me on to the next chapter in my life.

Since much of my creative work to date has been inspired by my various trips to Muktinath, which is located in the southern region of Mustang to the north of the

Annapurna range of mountains in Nepal, I feel to talk about that night in more detail. Although it seems so very far away now, without what happened during the course of it, none of what happened since could or would have happened in the way that it did... I don't think!

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The year is 2001.

In a nutshell, I was in extreme mental pain. After a final moment of realisation that it was never going to work, I had just left my spouse in the historical town of Hastings on the Southern coast of England where we had taken up residence some months prior to this night and driven 3 hours in the night to a family member's home on the edge of Oxford.

Driven, I say, for in the fury of trying to leave, after packing up the car, kids, luggage and all, when I'd put the keys in the ignition, it had refused to start.

I was not going to give in to obstacles standing in the way of this necessary departure from a life that was seemingly leading me nowhere, so I'd called the road side assistance company, an add-on to our car insurance policy and someone had come out within the half hour and wrenched the car up onto the back of a pick-up truck. After enquiring where I would like to be driven 'back to', under my instructions he had taken us to Oxford, two sleepy children aged 3 and 4 by my side in the front of the truck along with the driver.

Later that night as I was lying in bed awaiting sleep, I felt something very strong stirring deep within me – I was on

the edge of a precipice, one foot wrong and I could fall down to the depths, balance myself and I would move onwards and upwards on the path.

It was like a calling, a calling to a place I had never been to that was yet so very close. A chapter in my life was closing, a chapter was opening, "Where must I go?" I called out desperately, staring up at the ceiling, honestly, sincerely and with a passion of intention that cannot be felt unless one is calling from deep inside the abyss of a traumatic experience, "Please tell me where I must go... please tell me what I should do?" And soon after I fell asleep, exhausted from the trials of the night, relieved to be safe for a moment before I would have to make any proper decisions about our future.

The next morning I awoke, still hearing the same word that had been resounding through my mind like a mantra repetition all night, "Annapurna..., Annapurna..., Annapurna..."

Even though access to the Internet was available in those days and I could have easily Google searched it from the computer downstairs in the sitting room, still being an Internet sceptic then, I was not yet fully aware of its capabilities and was still under the impression that all knowledge was to be found in libraries.

So that morning I made the bus ride to the central part of town and trekked through the arcane streets of Oxford to its central library, on a mission to find out where this mysterious 'Annapurna' place may be.

I was relieved and not at all surprised to find out that it was a place in Northern Central Nepal, occupying a large area of mountainous terrain bordering the southern part

of Mustang to the North, the district of Manang to the East, the Kali Gandaki gorge to the West and the Pokhara region to the South. Relieved, because it was a tangible place in my mind and not so surprised, because I had been having a calling to Nepal for many years.

The first time I had ever really come into contact with Nepal had been on a train ride through the Swiss Alps ten years prior to this event in Oxford, when I had met a young English woman who had just returned from Nepal. She had been trekking alone through the mountains and had found an incomparable beauty and serenity there. "Go there," had been her words, "you would love it."

At that time, I had resolved to make a little money working in Italy, then on her advise, travel to Nepal in the Spring of the next year...

...Ten years later, standing in the library in Oxford that day, I felt a small sense of sadness that I had not listened to the calling then, but also a sense of happiness that I had been able to experience life in the way those ten years had displayed it to me. Exhilarating and traumatic as they had been, I had lived every moment of it, yet it had been a case of seesawing from highs to lows, 'flying' with a misguided spontaneity or impulsivity that desperately cried out for grounding for it to actually work in a tangible way.

No matter the outcome, I had not shirked the responsibility of 'living', and here life was showing me that the way I had been processing it was now outdated. I was ready to be honest to my path and live on by moving on and embracing deeper parts of myself that I had been skirting the borders of for a number of years now.

At the time I had met the lady on the train advising me to go to Nepal, I had been far from ready to experience what I was to dive into as a result of 'going to Nepal' later in 2001. In fact, I would have probably shirked off the precious teachings that were now to be poured onto me, as my pride and stubbornness, desire and other negative emotions needed to be thoroughly rounded at the edges by the experiences I went through in those previous ten years, before I would be able to accept that I too actually needed to rise above an ever-revolving quagmire of existence.

However, now completely disillusioned with the world that I had once trusted and thought to be true and untainted, and knowing deep within that this was going to be a life-changing occurrence and that I needed to evolve into maturity, I resolved there and then, "This time, I'm going to Nepal, no matter what."

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Four months later, I was climbing through a monsoon-wrecked Kali Gandaki gorge on the edge of the Annapurna range of mountains in Nepal, on my way to Muktinath with Lama Pema Wangyal Rinpoche - abbot of the monastery complex of Muktinath Chumig Gyatsa, his Newari<sup>3</sup> architect friend, the architect's daughter, Rita and her cousin.

'Lama', as I came to call him, was taking the architect there to make plans for the first phase of reconstruction

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<sup>3</sup> The indigenous tribe of the Kathmandu valley, the people of whom practise a mix of Hinduism and Buddhism

of the temples, as well as to perform the annual Yartung festival pujas in the monastery and I was here on the pretext of doing pre-production research for a film that was to be potentially sponsored by an Italian company in Cinecitta, Rome.

For 3 days, we had been trying to take the flight from Pokhara to Jomsom, the district headquarters of Mustang, but the monsoon weather was so awful that the little planes were continuously grounded. There was a moment of decision making when Lama had proclaimed that we would be returning to Kathmandu. I had asked if there was another way to get to Muktinath and he had answered, "Walking... by road."



At Beni, the start of the Kali Gandaki route to Mutkinath

There are moments in life when one instinctively knows that if one does not get through something, the path stops there and I had strongly replied with a force that left no alternative, "Let's go!"

In that split second the group had looked at me and my resolve was such that no one in the group, I hesitate to say, dared object. Their stares were serious for a moment and then melted into smiles and relief. It was a moment

of bonding as a unit, excited by the prospect of the adventure that lay ahead of us. We were going to need each other's solidarity to get through the journey of 80km by foot in the monsoon weather that lay ahead of us.

And indeed, we faced many obstacles; waterfalls obstructing the little cliff edge pathways, newly formed rivers gushed from the gullies of the mountain side where one foot wrong on the crossing would send you 100m hurtling down to the angry river below, not to mention landslides that occur frequently in the rains and falling rocks from precipices high above, as well as a plethora of earth and stones loosened by the heavy rain, constantly wet socks and boots, leeches...

Lama told me that Muktinath was such a sacred place of pilgrimage that the dakinis<sup>4</sup> of the place were testing our resolve to reach there, whilst I, philosophically mused to myself, "The harder the path, the greater the result." Perhaps both held truth under the circumstances....

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<sup>4</sup> Female energetic beings that can be wise and protective, or devilish and obstacle makers





Left to right,  
Muktinath  
Lama Pema  
Wangyal  
Rinpoche, Rita  
and her  
father, the  
architect.

We stayed in little hut-like rest places along the way, where the delight of the evening was the wood fire in the kitchen that we would all huddle around to dry ourselves. This warm stove doubled up as a cooker for our meal and the smell of the burning wood would permeate the entire room so that when you went outside afterwards, the air would feel so clear and fresh.



Eating  
dinner at a  
road side  
rest house

Our group was incongruous to say the least, but uniformly the lives of each of the five of us that made that journey together was definitely transformed in immeasurable ways by this experience, as the Kali Gandaki gorge displayed to us her wrathful form and we in turn, fought on through to reach our goal. And reach it, we did!

And so my first contact with the valley of Muktinath was attained and the ground set for its role in the ensuing years of my life.



Lama Pema  
Wangyal Rinpoche  
and myself having  
arrived at Jomsom  
where the flight  
would have landed  
if the planes had  
been operating  
from Pokhara.



Lama Pema Wangyal Rinpoche at an ancient stupa of Muktinath, with a recently found eagle feather - considered auspicious



At Muktinath Chumig Gyatsa on the occasion of Mustang Prince Jigme Bista's visit to the complex.



With nuns of Muktinath Chumig Gyatsa in the cave of Guru Padmasambhava.

Ironically, 'Mukti-nath' means 'Place (nath) of Salvation (mukti)' and my 'path' to 'the Place of Salvation' had begun that morning in the library of Oxford where for the first time in my life I had actually braved 'Google Search'. Having typed 'Annapurna, Nepal' into the search box and let a flood of sites come pouring onto the page, I had formatted a standard letter and mailed it out to around two hundred addresses.

Not having any expectation or idea of what sort of response may come back, within the next week I received two prominent and serious replies from that onslaught of mailing. These turned out to be links to the two key places along with their accompanying entourage of people that would be most important to me during the course of my 6-year stay in Nepal.

One place was Muktinath and the other, Solukhumbu/Maratika, places that turned out to be associated with my two 'root gurus'<sup>5</sup>, His Eminence Chogye Trichen Rinpoche - Muktinath, Mustang and Kyabje Trulshik Rinpoche - Solukhumbu and Maratika.

In the first mail that I received from Andre Kalden of the Muktinath Foundation International in Holland, he mentioned that they were always looking for people to assist in ventures related to Muktinath. I called him. He was thinking about making a film about Muktinath and I had connections in Italy to sponsor it.

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<sup>5</sup> A Root Guru is a teacher who you feel most connected to and the one who will lead you to realise the reality nature of your mind.

I travelled over to Holland from the UK to meet Andre and we prepared a synopsis of the film project he wanted to do there and I then went on to Rome to present it to our potential sponsors. By chance, 2002 would be the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the famous Italian explorer, Giuseppe Tucci's expedition to Mustang in the 1950's. We would re-trace his footsteps to Mustang and include Muktinath in the process, in celebration of this golden jubilee of his trip there.