

Thresholds: Doorways to Transformation

Pilgrimage always involves a threshold experience. In this stage, one steps decisively through a doorway—leaving one way of being behind and taking an irrevocable step forward toward the unknown.

Cousineau in *The Art of Pilgrimage* writes,

"Threshold comes from threshing, what was done to separate the seed from the chaff right on the entrance to the farm houses....The threshold divides the inside from the outside, the sacred from the profane, the past from the future."

The resistance and fear we feel at the beginning of a significant journey is in part the (usually unconscious) knowledge that we are leaving the self we currently are behind.

If the journey is successful and the inner change we seek is attained, the old life we are leaving will never be able to be returned to in quite the same way.

Travel as a Creative Act

"Pilgrims are poets who create by taking journeys." - Richard Niebuhr

What if each journey is a poem?

What happens when a person views traveling as a creative act? Approached in this way travel can be more than simply moving from point to point, more than siteseeing, more than a series of events to photograph or experiences to consume.

To step into a journey of this sort is to step into the flow of a great river of energy. It is to begin to walk a narrow path into the heart of the infinite world. Each journey we embark on is unrepeatable, totally unique, never to be lived again in quite the same way.

This is because the timing of your journey, the people you will encounter, and the ones you leave behind are all entirely unique. So too are the inner realities you bring along at this particular time in your life.

Each small decision you make will echo through the rest of your journey. Strange as it may be, whichever particular day you begin your trip will affect who meet along the way. Or a seemingly random decision to stop for coffee connects you to a new friend who will deeply impact your journey.

These decisions and thousands like them mean our journeys do not passively happen to us, we construct them as a artist lays down paint layer by layer, or a poet builds a poem verse by verse.

Whatever fears, hopes, longings, shortcomings and strengths you possess at this particular point in time

are now along for the ride. These too shape the journey. Should you again someday repeat the journey by visiting the exact same places--and by some metaphysical trick manage to encounter the exact same people--your journey will be entirely different as your inner landscape will have inevitably changed.

In this sense every journey is a once in a lifetime journey and every moment in our lives a pilgrim's walk further into the life we are co-creating with the Divine.

What the Pilgrim Seeks

What makes Pilgrimage different than mere travel is the inner movement that propels one into the journey followed by the transformation that one undergoes as the trip unfolds. This transformation often culminates (though by no means ends) with the arrival at a sought after destination—usually after enduring hardships, trials, or testing of some sort—whether physical, psychological, or spiritual.

The Pilgrim is at heart a searcher.

This is not wandering, though wandering may be involved. This is not escapism, though there may indeed be things to escape from. This is not avoiding the real world—it is precisely the opposite. The Pilgrim seeks the Real and is not satisfied until they find it. Their real selves, the things that really matter in life, their real desires, the Real God.

Because of this Pilgrimage is a harrowing experience. Something must die. False ways of relating & perceiving are stripped away. Often our illusions of control are challenged—clung to—and then overturned. Things that seemed so important when first leaving are exposed as less-than-Real during the process of going and becoming.

What the Pilgrim seeks is an experience of Reality—and since the-most-Real-thing in all the cosmos is God and God's Kingdom—the Pilgrim is seeking this whether they are immediately aware of it or not.

The Curse and Blessing of Walking for Days

I've found that one the great blessings of walking is that you have a lot of time to think. I've also found that one the great curses of walking is that I have a lot of time to think.

Sometimes too much.

With no distractions, it's like every worry and fear I carry inside gets dialed up a few notches.

But part of why I walk for hours and hours each day is for this precise reason. I don't want to run from what is within me. I would rather confront this great tossing sea inside than be moved by forces outside my awareness.

Thankfully the walking and the space to think and pray and wrestle have been clarifying.

It has felt as if a flame has been put to my soul—burning off the excess, the false, the unimportant—like wax running off a lit candle.