

Am I Completing a Long Walk? Maybe It's a Pilgrimage?



'With a deepening of focus, keen preparation, attention to the path below our feet, and respect before the destination in hand, it is possible to transform the most ordinary trip into a sacred journey.' Phil Cousineau

Image: Via de la Plata Camino

The Camino is an opportunity to work on the inner journey. (Not limited to the Camino.) Many believe the Camino has special powers. ~ It maybe that we are hyper alert and notice things that pass us by in the ordinary world. The Celts would say the Camino is an example of a "thin place," It is said there are telluric presences, ley lines, and spiritual energy most noticeably at historic religious sites. People experience synchronicities, coincidences etc.

I find it useful to think in terms of a framework. Then I can ensure each section of my pilgrimage; separation, transformation, reintegration, receives the attention it requires. In this way I can make the most of journeying through the "special world."

While on Camino we have the opportunity to cross the threshold and enter a liminal space for around 5 weeks. This involves leaving the ordinary world and entering the special world. It also includes the return to ordinary life.

Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage has four stages

- Hearing the call and responding
- Preparation
- Journey
- Bringing back the boon

The traditional pilgrimage according to Phil Cousineau has four distinct stages, namely: hearing the call and responding, preparation, the journey – where tests are endured and obstacles are overcome, bringing back the boon, maybe an insight or gifts where these are utilised for the benefit of society.

Pilgrimage Types ~ Different types ~ Marion: Fatima, Lourdes where **ritual** is important, journey to a **shrine**, (medieval), today with the emphasis on the importance of the “**journey**” to the individual, not so much the arrival.

Nourishing the Inner Journey

- Form intention/s ~ (be careful what you wish for!), Have some big questions, avoid expectations.
- Pre-departure preparations ~ to ensure separation ~ Normal from the Special world: cancel newspaper, divert the mail, etc.
- Leave behind as much of the normal world as circumstances allow: no playlists, discuss with relatives and friends your special journey and your wish for ~ non direct contact if possible, (better email, text message), Look at own use of mobile ~ silence notifications, no “face time,” phone calls etc. compensate with blog/daily emails. Maybe text? Contact with fellow pilgrims?
- Be open on the trail, available to others, non-judgmental, seize opportunities
- Watch out for, and engage with, mentors “Camino Angels.”
- Engage the senses ~ presence meditation? Walking and being present.
- Time for walking alone in silence, achieving a state of stillness, listening to the inner voice, letting go; of fear, misconceptions etc.
- Be prepared to persist with interior work, working to downsize the ego to realise the authentic self ~ could take you to uncomfortable places. Letting go...
- Enjoy nature, become as one with it, in tune with nature’s rhythms. Avoiding transport if possible helps here.
- Place of ritual ~ light a candle, stand and reflect before wayside crosses, listen out for church bells, develop your own ritual to bring you to the here and now.
- Enjoy yourself, socialise with fellow pilgrims
- See “stuff ups” as an opportunity for growth.

References

‘**The Art of Pilgrimage, The Seeker’s Guide to Making Travel Sacred,**’ Phil Cousineau, 203.5 COU, Christchurch City Libraries, (1 copy). A comprehensive guide to pilgrimage.



‘**The Soul of a Pilgrim: Eight Practices for the Journey Within,**’ Christine Valters Paintner, 263 PAI, Christchurch City Libraries, (2 copies).

This book has a religious/spiritual basis. It focuses on the inner journey utilising pilgrimage stages. It is highly recommended.

See also Newsletter, April 2024

Image: Cross on Aragonés Camino

‘The difference between pilgrim and tourist is the intention of attention, the quality of the curiosity. The practice you pursue will determine the quality of the pilgrimage.’ Phil Cousineau.