Abstract

The practice of pilgrimage can serve as a medium of transformative teaching/learning towards a deeper spiritual understanding of a person’s identity and vocation within the world. Pilgrimage can be revelatory and transformative to both students and educators encountering the social and cultural challenges of this post-industrial era. As a religiously educative endeavor, it invites participants into the dialogue between the interior, contemplative life and the outer, active life. This fosters and develops connecting threads of awareness, strengthening an understanding of issues of social justice, and providing hope towards healing and integration. By mining the rich religious tradition of the pilgrimage journey, past experiences can be reappropriated, offering a reshaping of the understanding of a desire to draw closer and deeper into relationship with others, the environment, and the Divine.

Introduction

Pilgrimage, a journey to sacred places, is an ancient practice within a variety of religious traditions. It is a living and lived experience of relationship, connection, intent, and meaning. The sacred act of pilgrimage is one that is ritualistically meaningful and is a form of self-conscious awareness of the individual towards a quest for the Divine.

As an innovative and creative process for the teaching and learning of religious education, pilgrimage focuses on the lived experience of the human person and can be reimagined as an opportunity to educate seekers within the realm of the religious by bringing into focus one’s relationships with other and the environment, moving beyond the self. Through this inward reflection, the pilgrim is drawn outwardly along the journey as she or he seeks to retreat, reflect, and respond to a desire for understanding, healing, and deeper and richer meaning.

This paper proposes a brief analysis of the practice of and reflection upon a historic meaning of pilgrimage as a religious ritual and a journey of hope. Beginning with this conventional consideration, and drawing from my academic experience with students on pilgrimage, I advocate for a postmodern practice of pilgrimage that invites educators and students to reflect on, and engage with, pilgrimage as an opportunity to bring deeper awareness to issues of social justice with the potential for healing and hope.

The traditional understanding of pilgrimage as journeys that strengthen religious faith and belief, pilgrimages can be reshaped with a focus on issues of social injustice and healing, offering a profound framework for integrating personal, and societal values of a particular religious tradition as educationally and religiously transformative. From this perspective pilgrimage serves to potentially strengthen the individual’s spiritual life,
while also providing an awareness of responsibility and commitment towards others within the context of community. A centering of pilgrimage education that offers the possibility of healing or recognition of issues of social justice, such as immigration, climate, fair wages, gun violence, or PTSD allow the educator an imaginative and creative opportunity to engage with her students beyond the traditional classroom and plant seeds of hope that go deeper than a naïve understanding of this desire. Rather, as Paulo Freire would offer, “hope needs practice in order to become historical concreteness.”¹ This type of educational and religious methodology, while deepening awareness and sensitivity to particular issues offers a setting through which student and teacher walk and learn about and from one another and the particular political, social, and/or ecological climate in which they find themselves immersed.

**Historical Pilgrimage**

The word ‘pilgrimage’ is rooted in the Latin *peregrinus* or ‘foreign’, and *per ager* ‘going through the fields.’ This denotes the image of journey, leaving home, and being a stranger as one travels.

The historical and customary reasons for embarking on pilgrimage were to atone for one’s sins, petition God or the saints for miracles, healing, forgiveness, offer thanksgiving for answered prayers, or to gain spiritual grace or merit whether in this life or the next. Pilgrims were also stirred to walk or travel to sacred sites that were designated as such because of the connection to particular saints, miraculous or holy events and figures. These journeys allowed the devotees to place themselves in the presence of the relics or where the figures may have lived, so as to receive blessings and grace.

Through atonement, pilgrims were focused on the goal of casting off that which had burdened them, or brought shame to their families and communities with the hopes of a restored heart and a renewal of grace. By participating in the unknown physical challenges and religious rituals of emptying themselves emotionally, suffering, and becoming vulnerable “strangers,” pilgrims sought to be healed, renewed, and restored with God and the Church. The inner desires, disquiet, and/or personal burdens of pilgrims were made outwardly visible to all as they walked to sacred destinations such as Rome, Jerusalem, or Santiago de Compostela.

In expanding the traditional understanding and purpose of pilgrimage, there are journeys that invite seekers into deeper awareness of the self, others and the Divine through participatory movements that involve study, consideration, and responsiveness to social, political, justice, and humanitarian issues that are of concern in our world. By sharing in these pilgrimages, we not only broaden our personal horizons through the observation, consideration, and knowledge of other communities and cultures, but we also open ourselves up to refashioning our perceptions about other people, the natural world, and our selves. These particular pilgrimages can transform our existence and cultivate a broader consciousness that recognizes the sacramentality of the ordinariness of

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life, reminding us that God’s loving presence is ubiquitous. On pilgrimage we have the opportunity to work towards solidarity, healing, and harmony with others when we devote ourselves to working towards mutual understanding, reparation, and peace. This engagement compels a reframing of our understanding of pilgrimage, making it a profoundly richer experience. As with traditional pilgrimage, this involves risk taking, boundary crossings, and following the road. By participating in pilgrimages of social justice, we open ourselves to other cultures, communities, with the aim of understanding the cause of the injustice, suffering, and pain while working towards a greater respect for human rights and reconciliation.

Pilgrimage that are journeyed with compassionate and humble intent hold the potential for social and personal transformation. By visiting places where violence, natural disaster, or human displacement have occurred, we can work towards understanding, improving, and encouraging, healing and repair. In this way, the vocation of being a pilgrim in this world is one that is a certain and sustainable experience of the meaning of sacramental life. The investment of one’s personal time and energy offers opportunity for engagement and fellowship that transforms all involved. When we make pilgrimage with the resolve of meeting and supporting others, we move, listen, and make ourselves vulnerable without exploitation or aggression. The desire is not to jeopardize or dominate, but rather to respect and revere. We journey to further our awareness as well as restore balance in our communities and environments, while at the same time deepening our inner lives of spirituality. Pilgrimages made with the intent to repair and reconcile open our hearts and minds to realities that become more than a passing photo in the newspaper or video clip of a tragedy features on the evening news. By making pilgrimage to communities where adversity and heartbreak has transpired we gain the insight, courage, and tenacity to deepen harmonious and sustaining bonds with the environment, others, and the Divine.

**Educational Symbols and Practices**

The pilgrimage journey commences long before the physical arrival in Santiago de Compostela, Mecca, Jerusalem, or Fatima. It occurs before one steps onto the road, or boards a plane or train. A pilgrimage begins internally, as inner movement, a stirring from within the soul. This could manifest as a desire for healing and or prayer, or as a response to personal trauma. Even when embarking on a pilgrimage alone, one is guided and supported by a community of family, friends and colleagues. Preparation may include physical training, familiarizing oneself with a new language, maps of the terrain, as well as embracing the badges or outward indicators of being a pilgrim. It also often involves the participant (s) making themselves vulnerable to the unknown that lies ahead. With this comes fear, trepidation, and excitement, all of which serves to remind pilgrims that the journey is never one that is made entirely alone or in isolation. These elements of the pilgrimage experience connect the pilgrim, as Nancy Louise Frey states “to the past, to the road, and to a community of pilgrims.”

One of the outward signs that connect pilgrims who walk to Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain, and along many other pilgrimage routes, are the

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scallop shell (worn around the neck, pinned to a hat or dangling from a backpack), the walking stick, and the backpack. These symbols of pilgrimage not only reflect one’s status as a pilgrim but also are instrumental in teaching people, as Brett Webb-Mitchell points out, “to be pilgrims.”

The journey of a pilgrim is one that is made in relationship to those who have journeyed the route through history, but also those who we have left at home and those who will follow in our footsteps in the future. It also includes those individuals who have no voice, or whose voices have been oppressed or snuffed. The wearing of a scallop shell on pilgrimage is the assuming of a responsibility to act with kindness, sympathy, understanding, and mercy. It is an expression of courage, uncertainty, and a desire for healing, not only for the self, but for others, and the earth. This meaning of the scallop shell can serve as a powerful symbol for those who undergo pilgrimage in search of reconciliation or hope. Individuals who have experienced traumatic loss from the death of a loved one, a veteran of war, a survivor of domestic violence or conflict can experience the healing presence of God through being with others as well as allowing others into one’s life without judgment or expectation. Pilgrimage offers the embrace of unconditional love, forgiveness, and reconciliation for the person which can then be extended outwardly to others along and after the journey. This embrace also recognizes that to be in relationship with others, the environment, creation, and the Divine is to love fully, totally and entirely without condition or limits.

The pilgrim’s road is as much a symbolic and metaphorical journey as it is an experiential one. In essence, the pilgrim walks or rides out of a deep desire for wholeness. It is an experience that one learns from, is taught, and in turn, through which one teaches. Essential to pilgrimage is the openness to learning through experience. What better way to learn what we are capable of accomplishing than setting out to walk eight hundred kilometers across France and Spain? How else to embrace and impart mercy than to receive it with humility when young men insist on carrying the pack of their middle aged professor struggling with an injury along the last twelve kilometers into Santiago? On the Camino, charity and hospitality are reflected in the tender care that dissolve the barriers of culture and language as people attend to blisters and offer massages for sore muscles with no shared language save love, compassion, and concern for fellow travelers along the way. We educate and transform through the lives we lead. Pilgrimage provides the context for the practice of this form of religious education with the understanding and desire that it will be carried back home and blossom, infusing and igniting a desire for balance, love, and peace that resides within all who yearn for deeper and more significant relationship with the earth, other humans, the non-human animal, and God.

Healing Journeys

While motivations for making a pilgrimage, as discussed, have been vast, from the desire to strengthen one’s faith or gain deeper wisdom, pilgrimages of healing, have resonated across the centuries and religious traditions and have powerful implications in the curriculum and pedagogy of pilgrimage studies.

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Pilgrimages of healing, journeys that seek spiritual or physical renewal or wellness are part of most of the world’s religious traditions. In some of the world’s religious traditions there are pilgrimage destinations which are visited for reasons of spiritual restoration or strength. There are countless ancient shrines with healing properties across the globe that serve to provide comfort, awareness, and solace to believers of all religions. The energy and drawing power of these sites have eased burdens, soothed pain, and settled the wounds (both physical and spiritual), of suffering sojourners. Within this particular pilgrimage quest lies the potential for these journeys of healing to offer broader elements or forms of transformation. Pilgrimage has the potential to bestow meaningful and life changing opportunities for forgiveness and healing for individuals, families, communities, as well as race and class relations, political discord, civic disturbances, and environmental damage. This is accomplished by providing rituals, symbols, practices, and techniques that might join people who are in conflict, suffering from misunderstanding or differences that move towards repair, reconciliation, mercy, tolerance, and goodwill.

The world and its inhabitants are beings of beauty, wonder, and delight, yet around us we experience rising fractures and schisms, as well as widening chasms. Veterans return from battle, wounded physically and spiritually. Children grow in settlement camps with fear and hatred. Migrants flee poverty or armed conflict in despair only to be met with barricades and contempt. Pilgrimage may provide and come to be an essential ingredient to reimagining religious practices that serve to bridge differences and offer peace to those who many have ignored, overlooked or been indifferent to the suffering and pain. The ancient rituals and traditions of many of the worlds’ pilgrimages have the elasticity and suppleness to be reshaped and reformed so as to embrace the spectrum and scale of the customs and ideologies of those in need of attention, care and healing.

**Pedagogy and Practice**

I have led student pilgrimages along the Camino de Santiago across northwestern Spain. After a semester of academic, spiritual and practical preparation, none of which ever fully prepares anyone for pilgrimage (including myself), our group meets in León, Spain in eager anticipation of the seventeen-day walk to Santiago. Walking in small groups, giving site presentations, meeting other pilgrims along the route, sampling and sharing communal meals and the local cuisine, or tending to one another’s blisters or muscle pain, students quickly form deeper friendships with one another and with other pilgrims they meet. The long hours of walking invite conversations about life, as well as introspective meditation and an appreciation for the tranquility and simplicity of a pilgrim’s life. Almost immediately, the protective layers that students and faculty arm themselves with in order to guard their vulnerability, disintegrate, yielding to ease and familiarity which develops and grows stronger with each day of the journey. Without a great deal of deliberate or pointed discussion or lessons, the spirituality of the Camino, and what it means to be a pilgrim, manifests itself within the group. Students find that they begin to tap into the wisdom of the religious foundation of the pilgrimage, even with its flaws and shortcomings.
Our daily walks provide the members of our community a chance to live in the present, as opposed to the moment. Walking the Camino, going on pilgrimage, is experiencing the past as a living, vital essence of being and shaping, contributing to, and forever altering the future. This attitude and understanding creates a deeper awareness of the body, a quieter and more intent observation of the natural surroundings, an openness to pilgrims of different countries and cultures. The Camino course exposes students to the cuisine and customs of Spain, teaching them language and survival skills. It informs a deeper appreciation of what the students are physically and mentally capable of accomplishing, as well as the diversity and riches of the landscapes and peoples of the world.

No matter how well we are prepared as pilgrims, there are always unforeseen encounters or situations that occur on pilgrimage, that in truth, are most often the most revealing and transformative. Whether it is a continuing conversation with other pilgrims from town to town or serendipitous encounters along the road, the educational opportunities that take place leave lasting impressions that connect the pilgrim to the sacramentality of the present. Faith and the tradition of religious beliefs become relevant and offer a lasting impression of the connectivity between history and the 21st century. Students gain valuable lessons about themselves, others, and their terrain as they problem solve through dilemmas such as language barriers, directions, physical ailments and other quandaries and challenges. They also experience the very important lesson of pilgrimage: giving to others what is needed rather than deciding what they think is wanted or should be had. This lesson can take the form of something as simple as a bandage or the offer of a coveted bottom bunk, to the more or the more intricate request of conversation with a stranger, an offer of the use of a cellphone or bottle of water. It may also be the recognition that on a particular day assistance will be needed to ease the day’s journey. This offers consideration of what it means to walk a pilgrimage as an individual yet as part of a broader community. Along the Camino de Santiago there is a saying that is oft repeated by pilgrims along the Way: “The Camino will provide.” Yet it is important to have the grace to recognize what is being provided may not necessarily be what a pilgrim believes he or she desires. The wisdom is discovering and accepting the difference.

What the Camino provides and the lessons that are learned are really the compelling and quiet lessons of life. Kindness, patience, charity, understanding, justice, and love are cultivated, sometimes unexpectedly while making pilgrimage. The teaching and learning became more than an academic endeavor, bringing to light the many ways we are shaped and challenged as pilgrim people on our life journeys.

**Transformation**

The pilgrimage to Santiago can be a sobering and tempering journey for those who are seeking answers, especially in attempting to read and interpret the signs of one’s body’s reaction to the days walk as a message from God. In their enthusiasm for a spiritual encounter, I have had to sometimes caution students that sometimes a blister is just a blister, an empty water bottle is just that, or an arrow pointing in the wrong direction is just an error or someone up to mischief. Everything that happens on the Camino is not always a direct or apparent sign from God. Yet, it is an opportunity to
expand one’s understanding who or what God is in our lives. Utilizing some techniques of Ignatian spirituality, students are invited to examine the quiet, almost inconsequential or subtle occurrences, observations, or encounters that they experienced throughout the day. “Where do you need or hope to find God today?” “Where did you find God today?” are questions that we consider as we begin and end our day. Students begin to discern that God is vividly apparent in the details of landscape, the minutia of our concerns/attention, and in the quiet recesses of our hearts. The conversations yield a rich harvest, as the students learn that the Divine can be ambiguous, elusive, subtle, and incomprehensible as well as humorous, inspiring, and filled with joy, in the world of growing and transforming people into lifelong pilgrims. These pilgrimages encourage the cultivation of both the inner and outer person, drawing students and faculty alike into a deeper realization that learning and living as beings in the universe is the essence, crux and core articulation of human development, goodness, and movement in relationship and towards the Divine.

Pilgrimages of Hope and Healing

Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs facilitate pilgrimages to Assisi, Italy that minister to pilgrims who wish to learn more about the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare as they spend time in prayer and reflection at the sanctuaries significant to the lives of these saints. One of the pilgrimages that the organization offers is for veterans of the military. Francis of Assisi was a wounded military veteran and experienced reentry into his city and society after combat and as a prisoner of war in Perugia. While not diagnosed, it is probable that he suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) upon his return home to Assisi. Francis was never able to experience life as he had prior to his military service. Francis, his family, and his relationships suffered tremendously as a result. Greg Masiello, is a Franciscan pilgrimage leader, and psychologist who works with soldiers and veterans returning from combat. He observes that PTSD is a disorder that is fracturing and is a disconnect. Those suffering from PTSD find themselves disconnected from self, others and God.4 Masiello notes that making this pilgrimage to Assisi is not a cure all, the effects often stay with the person for years or a lifetime. Yet it provides an opportunity to explore the guilt and pain and offers a safe haven to reflect on one’s relationship with God and others in the places where Francis walked and healed. Masiello sees that the experience of this pilgrimage can serve as a buffer towards the pain veterans carry. The pilgrimages for military veterans provide pilgrims with relief, an easing of some of the burdens of the experiences they had while serving in places like Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan. Many veterans are unable to discuss what they saw and what they did with those they love, instead keeping thoughts and emotions suppressed. The opportunity to relive and learn about Francis’ life, as well as that of Clare’s, to pray in the sanctuary of San Damiano, the chapel where God spoke to Francis (asking him to rebuild the church) and where Clare offered healing (to those who came broken and in pain) provides veterans with a tremendous sense of forgiveness and peace that they had never experienced. These pilgrimages ease the burden of guilt and the guilt of leaving comrades behind, being forced to make decisions that bear endless shame and reoccurring pain. Many combat veterans carry these stigmas with no hope for repairing the wounds. These

pilgrimages, made while walking in the footsteps of Francis and learning how his life and charism were formed, in no small measure because of his military service, provide mercy and release to veterans.

In October of 2015, the Episcopal Church sponsored a pilgrimage to Ferguson Missouri to visit the place where Michael Brown, an eighteen year old, unarmed African American teenager was shot to death on August 9, 2014 by a white police officer after a confrontation and physical struggle.\(^5\) In the wake of this fatal tragedy members of Michael Brown’s family and community of Ferguson, Missouri took to the streets demonstrating against the injustice. Protests, rioting and confrontations with the police followed not only in Ferguson but also in many other cities across the United States. On the anniversary of Mr. Brown’s death, there were renewed protests in Ferguson and a civil state of emergency was declared. The killing of Michael Brown at the hands of law enforcement was one of many deaths of unarmed African American men and young boys in recent history.

The pilgrims to Ferguson were young adults between the ages of nineteen and thirty-four, of African American, Hispanic, white, Native American, and mixed race backgrounds, who came together to study racial justice and pray for reconciliation and healing. The pilgrimage included conversations and presentations with local clergy, community leaders, and worship. This journey offered these young people a chance to learn what happened that fatal night and return to their families, schools, jobs, houses of worship, and communities with lessons for understanding, tolerance, and healing. Through visiting the place and speaking with witnesses and community members of Ferguson, the pilgrims were afforded the opportunity to reflect on the tragedy and ensuing violence and discord and consider how to incorporate their experience into best practices of promoting conversations of mercy and forgiveness in order to repair fractures within their own communities. Pilgrimages of justice such as the one to Ferguson, Missouri and others are initiatives that engage with national and global issues in an effort to bring about reconciliation and peace to communities in conflict.

In September 2015, one hundred women walked one hundred miles from Pennsylvania to Washington, D.C. in order to greet Pope Francis during his visit to the United States and draw attention to issues of justice for immigrants, women, families, and communities\(^6\) in solidarity with Pope Francis’ message of dignity for immigrants and refugees. The women made the journey to show solidarity with the Holy Father’s message of global charity and cooperation migrants, in response to Pope Francis’ message that our nations and churches should not have borders and should welcome the stranger.

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http://americasvoice.org/blog/womens-pilgrimage-for-migrant-justice-100-immigrant-women-to-walk-100-miles-to-dc-for-popes-historic-us-visit/, “100 Women Begin 100 Mile Pilgrimage September 15,”  
recognizing that no one is useless, out of place, or disposable. The pilgrims walked for justice for those they love, some of the women were themselves undocumented immigrants who had not seen their children or their families in over ten years. Other women work on behalf of domestic workers and survivors of domestic violence. Each woman had her story and a personal reason for walking. The pilgrimage was not a form of protest, but a walk of compassion and awareness, a practice of peace, putting faith into action, reminding those along the way to have open arms, open hearts and open minds towards all people. As the pilgrims drew close to Washington, D.C., one of the women remarked: “We will all leave the pilgrimage transformed. A lot of us are healing through this walk. It’s been very cathartic and uplifting.”

In addition to these pilgrimages that focus on healing personal and communal tragedy, conflict, and issues of human dignity and justice, the pilgrimage experience includes walks across Europe that draw attention to climate justice highlighting and educating the world as to the urgency for attention to our environment and the devastating effects that will result for the environment, ecosystem and the human community if we continue to neglect our responsibility as stewards of our common home and protect it from greater devastation.

There are pilgrimages that take place which are far from the historical and oft romantic idea of pilgrimage, that of the journeys of refugees…pilgrims or “strangers” walk in fear and away with little hope or assurances for their futures. In giving serious consideration to pilgrimage as an educationally transformative experience, it is important to recognize and examine the situations of those who are pilgrims not by choice, or are not in search of spiritual lessons, but rather walk or flee out of necessity for survival. What are the implications for these pilgrimages and how might the journeys of political and social refugees and migrants serve to transform our global communities?

As religiously revelatory and educationally transformative journeys, pilgrimages can serve to draw attention to political, social, economic and environmental issues that affect local, national and global communities and diverse religious traditions. Pilgrimages can offer reconciliation, healing and hope to those who are broken and in need of mercy. In all forms, they serve to strengthen and affirm our religious beliefs and remind us of the depth and richness of our relationships and capacity for charity and love.

Often, during the last days or two hundred kilometers while walking the Camino de Santiago, I have overheard or engaged in conversations with my students or other pilgrims along the way about “what next?” Questions about how do we bring the positive experiences, emotions, and values that we have learned on the Camino back home? Many pilgrims fear that the simplified lifestyle that they have adopted, the deeper insights and awareness that they have developed with regard to the environment, the gestures of hospitality and kindness both offered and received will be abandoned and forgotten once they depart from Santiago for the many places called home. There is fear that the return home will bring a return of the patterns of behavior and attitudes that were in place before walking the Camino. The lessons learned from the Camino, the lessons learned from any pilgrimage journey, are lessons that can be embraced, embodied, and expressed upon returning home.

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7 Ibid., Accessed, February 15, 2016.
8 The following web resource provides insight into pilgrimage work in the area of climate change: http://peoplespilgrimage.org/
The lessons learned on pilgrimage are lessons that shape our spirits and our lives. On pilgrimage, through perseverance, gestures of kindness, understanding and justice, we are reminded that we do not journey alone as we make the pilgrimage of our lives. Our travels serve as metaphors for our lives, recognizing that when we set out we walk in faith into the unknowing, risking that our essence and our characters will be permanently altered and not without discomfort, disruption and dis-ease. Yet, the risk also brings with it the potential for joy, compassion, understanding, and love in depths that were unpredictable and unimaginable before we set foot our doors. As pilgrims, we immerse ourselves in the experience of walking and discovery, attuned and open to the confusion and turmoil of creation, seeking peace within ourselves and peace within our world.

Through pilgrimage we are compelled to respond in manners that are not necessarily comfortable or how we desire, but rather, in ways that are right, just, and loving. The pilgrimage experience, both particularly and broadly seizes our understanding and recognition of our personal physical and spiritual suffering as well as the suffering of those who despair and are lost. Making pilgrimage to distant shrines or relics of saints exposes our vulnerability and challenges our faith, faith in our religious beliefs as well as our bodies and minds. This stripping away of our comforts invites reflection and meditation on the values we hold, the choices we make, and the impact that these values and choices have on our young people, our environment and societies at large. The pilgrim’s journey of discovery and awareness is an opportunity for examination and a realignment of how we can envision and live each day of life. A pilgrim’s journey does not end at the tomb of St. James in Santiago de Compostela or after dipping into the healing waters in the grotto in Lourdes. It is an invitation to renew one’s commitment to living in understanding, tolerance, and peace as a loving community reflecting God’s unconditional love. It is an invitation to open oneself up to the very real possibility of altering one’s perspective on what it means to be engage with others unconditionally and lovingly. It is a bidding to step out and take a sacred adventure that will forever redesign one’s life, as illustrated by a conversation of the wizard Gandalf the Grey and the Hobbit, Mr. Bilbo Baggins in the film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien’s classic tale, The Hobbit:

Gandalf: “I am looking for someone to share in an adventure that I am arranging, and it’s very difficult to find anyone.” Bilbo: “I should think so, in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can’t think what anybody sees in them,” Gandalf: You’ll have a tale or two to tell when you come back…Bilbo: You can promise that I’ll come back?” Gandalf: No. And if you do, you will not be the same.9

Pilgrimages that attend to social issues and healing are journeys that have potential to offer educators and students freedom to examine, test, learn, and flourish in the hope of a renewed world, altering the manner in which they engage with the world. These are essentials for growing in loving, religious, relationships. Pilgrimage, provides seekers the occasion to experience opportunities of grace that deepen, accentuate, reveal,

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and offer hope in the lessons of life. Participating in a pilgrimage draws participants into a deeper understanding of or empathy for issues of social justice. The unexpected movement of the Spirit draws participants into experiences that provide insight into areas of concerns, or the self in unforeseen or fortuitous ways. Pilgrimages offer hope and healing in the traditional understanding, but may also cultivate a recognition of the power of love, patience, forgiveness, understanding, faith, and joy within the individual.

**Conclusion**

The spirituality of pilgrimage has developed, continued, and been sustained throughout history and across the world. The journeys, rituals, symbols, and sacred places of ancestors have left indelible marks on the landscape of the earth, and on the psyches of communities. Pilgrimages offer seekers inspiration and hope along the road and the possibility to return with experiences that can be reshaped and refitted into everyday lives. As educational and spiritually transformative experiences, they remain with the person long after the journey is a distant memory. It is the responsibility of all who have made pilgrimage to create communities of hope and healing that are embedded in the values and practices of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is both an outward and inner practice that forms the person in relation to wholeness. This practice is made manifest in a variety of forms that assist the pilgrim in their personal development and relationships. This growth and movement of life is one that is religiously and educationally revelatory, transforming the pilgrim into an understanding that life is not just about getting from beginning to end. Pilgrimage offers each of us the chance to walk on the road towards the Divine and discover that the Divine is present within the depths of the journey.
Bibliography


