

Pilgrimage as a Pedagogic Practice to Advance Tolerance, Compassion, Social Justice, and Individual Emancipation

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Pilgrimage is an ancient spiritual practice used by most peoples around the world to enable individuals and groups to seek meaning, connection, forgiveness, transformation, healing, and even God. Pilgrims leave home behind, travel to unknown places with unknown people using different customs, language, etc. and therefore experience situations that are unfamiliar and often beyond their control. This demands the development of knowledge, attitudes and skills that often result in profound changes in the pilgrim's way to conceive and deal with themselves, the world, and others. In other words, the practice of pilgrimage is educational in the most authentic sense of the word. In this paper, we will consider pilgrimage as a guideline to develop alternative pedagogies to advance difficult to attain learning objectives such as tolerance, compassion, social justice, and individual emancipation. Pursuing educational programs based on pilgrimage finds particular traction in today's age of massive (ethnic, economic, religious, etc.) migrations, escalating (racial, class, gender, etc.) disparities between social margins and centers, and the economic, political, and cultural forces driving globalization and its growing counterpart, nationalism. The fundamentals of pilgrimage will be introduced along with reflections about its potential as a teaching device, revealing that there is more to pilgrimage-based pedagogies than traveling to faraway lands. Having had a committed personal experience of pilgrimage will be presented as a prerequisite for the success of this pedagogical agenda. An hour-long workshop utilizing a pilgrimage-driven pedagogy will be presented as a compressed example of this educational idea.

INTRODUCTION

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness."

—Mark Twain

Contemplative practices seek to instill a non-self centered, equanimous, just, and attentive engagement of reality. Given our usually distracted, self-obsessed, and socio-culturally distorted minds, a contemplative attitude depends on effecting a fundamental change in perspective.

While a variety of methods have been developed through the ages, the most well-known ones resort to internally-induced techniques (e.g., breath, mantra, prayer). However good, these practices depend on first-person or subjective processes and contents and, therefore, prove limiting for addressing communal or interpersonal matters directly. In order to advance the second-person dimension of our humanity, our social, embodied, and behavioral relationships must be engaged. This realization led most contemplative traditions to develop methods based on external and interpersonal interactions. One of them, the practice of *pilgrimage*, is particularly relevant for those in Higher Education interested in the cause of social justice, tolerance, individual emancipation, and compassionate relationships for several reasons.

First, pilgrimage is accessible to lay people and therefore matches the conditions of students, staff and faculty, facilitating its potential adaptation. Second, fundamental to the practice is the (social, cultural, ethnic, economical, language) displacement that the traveler must consciously, patiently, kindly, and non-judgmentally undergo in order to perform their duties. The result is the suspension of many of the pilgrim's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns, de-facto causing a realization of their own intrinsic biases and opening new ways of approaching the world — a positioning that is contemplative. Furthermore, having lost their familiar ways and traversing foreign lands make the pilgrim vulnerable and often dependent on the help and compassion of strangers, experiences that may lead to emotional, social, and ethical insights. Not surprising, successful pilgrimages often occasion profound and lasting alterations in the itinerant's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Third, the practice of pilgrimage finds particular traction in today's age of massive (ethnic, economic, religious, etc.) migrations, escalating (racial, class, gender, etc.) disparities between social margins and centers (to use bell hooks' metaphors), and the economic, political, and cultural forces driving globalization and its growing counterpart, nationalism.

Pilgrimage is not only a socio-culturally progressive and timely curricular addition to Higher Education, but also quite feasible to enact. In fact, most schools of architecture are already using some version of it in their travel abroad programs. But are these foreign studies making the best educational use of the opportunity? Are faculty critically aware and utilizing the

many dimensions of pilgrimage to open up less addressed or new agendas? And more provocatively, is it even necessary to incur in costly, logistically complicated, and time-consuming travel to attain the learning objectives of pilgrimage? Can't some of its goals be more easily and effectively accomplished by a short drive to a different part of town if we prepare ourselves properly? One of the wonders (and challenges) of contemporary civilization is precisely the remarkable diversity in which we live and, too often, are oblivious to (or avoid altogether). Needless to say that visiting a foreign country or a nearby depressed urban area will obviously produce different kinds of experiences and learning outcomes. If properly used, pilgrimage-type of conditions or attitudes may be also accessed through other well-known practices such as (1) Guy Debord's "derive," enabling to address urban social, economic, political, and racial struggles; (2) 'aesthetic distancing,' permitting to challenge instrumental reason (Harries 1997) and delivering glimpses of the just (Scarry 1999); and (3) collaborative, community-based research, planning, design, and action, assisting/empowering ordinary citizens to resolve their challenges (Carr & Kemmis 1989). In other words, there is more to pilgrimage-based pedagogies than traveling to faraway lands.

THE BASICS OF PILGRIMAGE

"... a journey without challenges has no meaning; one without purpose has no soul."

—Phil Cousineau

In order to develop a successful pilgrimage-driven pedagogy, it is important to understand its fundamental characteristics. The word "pilgrimage" comes from the Latin 'peregrinus', meaning 'stranger', 'foreigner'. Being in pilgrimage implies to voluntarily displace oneself from home through movement or travel (although one can think of ways in which such action may be done virtually, if very carefully executed), and become immersed in alien environments. This simple but powerful action precipitate leaving our ordinary frame of mind behind and accessing a consciousness characterized by (1) psychic distancing, (2) perspective shifting, (3) active receptivity, and (4) a contemplative attitude.

The conditions to enact a successful pilgrimage are well known (Cousineau 2012, Kujawa-Holbrook 2013, Reader 2015):

1. There has to be a heartfelt motive propelling the action. Reasons include:
 - seeking meaning (new horizon, change in one's life, being existentially lost),
 - devotion/faith,
 - connecting to the transcendent/extraordinary,
 - healing/peace,

- spiritual renewal,
- penitence/forgiveness,
- vow/promise/accompany someone else,
- exploration/curiosity/escape/restlessness, and
- reaching a particular destination.

Notice that while these reasons are generally spiritual or religious, many of them have direct humanistic, ecological, or ethical parallels and, in today's world, are the ones often fueling secular people's decision to become pilgrims. Without purpose or goal, no true pilgrimage is possible;

2. The experience must involve difficulty and challenges. In other words, some sort of sacrifice must be offered (in cost, effort, time, etc.);
3. The pilgrim must tolerate dwelling in a state of existential, cultural, etc. 'liminality' (betweenness, transition) and recognize the real possibility that nothing may be accomplished or gained out of the experience;
4. The individual must deploy or develop the 'right pilgrimage attitude,' that is, one of letting go of the past and be gratefully receptive to whatever is forthcoming in the journey. This attitude has to do with the double directionality of all pilgrimage: the apparent outwardly driven, focused enterprise has to be matched and made worthwhile by the pilgrim's involved inward work (contemplation);
5. Participation in specific rituals is necessary in order to keep the pilgrim aligned with the journey's purpose or goal;
6. The person should partake in 'communitas', that is in an active social engagement of the places and people met along the way as well as those sharing the path.

Pilgrimage can be better understood and used as an educational vehicle by examining its relation to **home**. In many ways, the reasons propelling most pilgrimages are driven by some type of "homesickness": the person needs and seeks something that is fundamental to their nature that is missing — authenticity, existential meaningful, peace, health, sense of belonging, God, etc. Many pilgrims speak of feeling a 'call' or 'longing' with increasingly overbearing power to the point that, eventually, they must give in and start their journey toward their 'true home.' The importance of home in pilgrimage is made all the more evident when we consider the five stages of pilgrimages (Cousineau 2012 vis-à-vis other scholars, see Table 1 at the end of the paper):

- Stage 1: The Call / Preparation — *Homesickness*
- Stage 2: Departure/Threshold (letting go, breaking away, releasing) — *Leaving Home*
- *Journeying in*

- Stage 3: Transition / in-between (ordeal – initiation) — *Homelessness and Home-seeking*
- Stage 4: Arrival / Finding (receiving) — *Homecoming*
- *Journeying out*
- Stage 5: Return (reintegration, transformation, giving back) — *returning Home and Homemaking*

Although the fifth stage is essential it is often forgotten, wrongly implying that the pilgrim completes their journey upon reaching the attractive stage 4. However, it is in their returning home and transforming their previous conditions by what was learned during the displacement (homemaking) where pilgrimage finds its true *raison d'être*. Here lies the fundamental pedagogic nature of pilgrimage.

It is worth noting that labyrinths have been often used as compressed 'mechanisms' to produce effects similar to those of pilgrimage but involving much shorter periods of time and spatial distances, hence their use since prehistory by so many cultures across the world. Labyrinths are wise educational devices offered to anyone interested in accessing a contemplative state by surrendering to their intricate structure.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

The fundamental characteristics of pilgrimage offer clear pointers for developing pilgrimage-based pedagogies. It would seem that, in the hand of any well-versed instructor, a teaching method and curriculum could be easily concocted. But this would be unwise.

Developing and leading a pilgrimage-driven course are not usual educational tasks. It should be apparent from the discussion thus far that there is a lot more at stake. We are talking of putting the pilgrim-learners in challenging conditions that by necessity (otherwise there wouldn't be a pilgrimage) defy their existing manners to deal with reality. This may cause unexpected (internal and external) reactions that the faculty must be monitoring and prepared for. As important, the teacher should be also very aware of the places and people the pilgrim-learners will be encountering and how such meetings may affect the local people and conditions. There is no space in this paper to dive into these serious educational, psychological, ethical, social, racial, political, etc. considerations but they are far from trivial. For this reason, good intentions, belief, educational theory, or many years of teaching are not sufficient to embark in a pilgrimage-centered teaching effort. The individual(s) leading the effort must have gone through at least one committed pilgrimage themselves. I speak from experience. It is because I have undergone long (eight to twelve-weeks long) spiritual/cultural pilgrimages in my life [1] that I have been able to successfully lead this type of learning experience for graduate students, scholars, and professionals, including one that followed the renowned Camino de Santiago in Spain (Saint James' way) — see Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1: University of Utah graduate students walking the Camino de Santiago in Galicia (Spain). This experience was part of an architecture design studio focused on pilgrimage that I led in Fall 2004.



Figure 2: Group photo of the graduate studio at Cabo Finisterre (from Latin, the end of earth), the termination of the Camino de Santiago according to pre-Christian traditions. The Christian end is the Santiago de Compostela Cathedral, 55 miles East (Fall 2004).

I have witnessed first-hand the positive educational effects of pilgrimage in my students, colleagues, and myself. Although very compelling evaluations or comments from students or pilgrimage participants could be offered to support the case for this teaching method, I would like to point at one piece of empirical evidence coming from the results of a large survey I conducted a decade ago (Bermudez 2011). This poll shows that being away from home after undergoing a challenging journey in search of something meaningful not only (often) provides access to extraordinary experiences but also (sometimes) literally transform peoples' understandings and lives.

THE WORKSHOP.

Presenters in the Fall 2019 ACSA Conference (“less talking | more action”) were expected to lead a hands-on demonstration of their ideas in a workshop-type session. In my case, this meant to concentrate a pilgrimage experience within strict time limitations (about 1 hour) that were revealed a month before the conference. As a result, my original plan to visit a nearby ethnic neighborhood (to invite considerations/experiences of tolerance, empathy, race, openness, and social justice) had to be abandoned — driving time to/from would have consumed 2/3 of the allotted time. Instead, and with the generous and insightful help of conference co-chair Amy Larimer, I selected a place on the campus of Stanford University that, while different in nature from my original idea, could still provide participants with a taste of a pilgrimage-driven pedagogy.

The site for the pilgrimage workshop was the **Papua New Guinea Sculpture Garden**. This beautiful and culturally significant landscape had been designed 25 years ago to resemble the Sepik environment and the central plaza of Sepik Villages (in Papua New Guinea) by two academics (one from the U.S. and the other from Papua New Guinea). The intention of the sculpture garden was to offer *“a reinterpretation of New Guinea aesthetic perspectives within the ... context of a Western public art space.”* [2] Ten master carvers from Papua New Guinea were brought and asked to work within that idea. The result shows old and traditional mythical stories from Melanesia meeting western civilization and the contemporary world.

The workshop asked participants to *become pilgrims in an aesthetic and cultural pilgrimage to non-western objects/spaces and sensibilities by strolling, stopping, sitting, touching, seeing, etc.* Given the location of the selected site as well as the strong contemplative nature that this particular type of pilgrimage demanded, I made use of the Sunday morning meditation session that had been scheduled in the conference program to prepare my workshop participants. The Stanford University meditation hall (the Windhover) was very close to the Papua New Guinea Sculpture Garden so this decision was easy to implement.

The workshop started right after the meditation had finished. It involved a fifteen-minutes introduction to the topic of pilgrimage including directions of how to enter in a pilgrimage/contemplative frame of mind. The participants were asked to:

- Hold two main attitudes: letting go of what has passed and gratefulness for whatever the situation brings in;
- Be silent, not talkative, respectful, curious without projecting meaning, and actively receptive;
- Slow-down, walk at 1/3 their normal speed and turn-on all their senses;
- Explore the garden. When something attracted their attention or emotions, participants were asked to stop and remain in that location for as long as wanted. If so

inclined, they could use a small notebook (I had given them) to write their impressions or draw their experience;

- Focus outwardly while paying attention to their inner responses. More specifically, the ‘pilgrims’ were asked to (1) Notice any internal resistance to engage the pilgrimage (inward attention) and environmental resistance toward what they desire to do (outward attention); and (2) Notice what attracts/repels, calms/agitates them;
- Turn off and not use their smartphone, camera, or any other technology;
- Be non-judgmental, non-analytical, open;
- Execute some simple ‘ritual’ when entering the pilgrimage (e.g., count till 10 and take 3 deep breaths, pick up a stone and hold it in their hand as they voice an intention, etc.) and another before completing the experience (e.g., return the stone, voice their thanks, etc.).

Upon finishing the workshop introduction, the ‘pilgrims’ were sent off for a thirty-minutes voyage (this demanded a very short two/three-minutes walk to the sculpture garden). Once the pilgrimage was completed, participants shared their insights in a fifteen-minutes group session.



Figure 3: A workshop participant appreciating one of the sculptures of the Papa New Guinea Sculpture Garden (Fall 2019).

	GENERAL			RITE OF PASSAGE (Hero's Journey)			LABYRINTHS			
scholar (reference)	Phil Cousineau	Home	interpretation (Bermudez)	Arnold van Gennep (Y, p.58-59)	Joseph Campbell (Y, p.60)	William Melczer (X, p.82)	Lauren Artres (Y, p.131)	Helen Raphael Sands (Y, p.130)	Di Williams (Y, p.129)	
STAGES OF PILGRIMAGE	The Call	Homesick	Longing				via positiva	remembering		
	Departure	leaving Home	Threshold	Separation	Separation	Separation	via negativa	releasing	threshold	
	In the Way	Home seeking Homeless	In-between	Transition/ordeal	invitation/initiation	Arrival			journey in	
	Arrival	Homecoming	Finding				via creativa	receiving	resting place	
	the Boon	returning Home, Homemaking	Treasure	Incorporation	Return	Return	via transformativa	resolving	journey out	

Table 1; Comparative listing of the different stages of pilgrimage according to a variety of scholars addressing related rituals and devices (X-references are from Cousineau 2012, and Y-references are from Kujawa-Holbrook 2013).

CONCLUSION

Pursuing pedagogies based on pilgrimage translates into developing and deploying contemplative practices of voluntary (social, cultural, economic, religious, national, racial, gender, and political) displacement in which students, faculty and/or researchers migrate from their comfortable location to a challenging place that defies easy apprehension and/or demands their significant engagement of others with different backgrounds. In order to succeed in such pilgrimage (i.e., fulfill a purpose, arrive to a destination), patience, receptivity, humility, tolerance, flexibility, empathy, and dialogic engagement, must be learned and practiced. These skills and way of being are the most valuable takeaways of the experience.

Although the workshop offered a very compressed experience, it is fair to say that the participants

- Were fully engaged and enjoyed the experience;
- Experienced a perspective shift and entered a contemplative state;
- Appreciated and learned about something that they didn't know beforehand, namely, some of Papua New Guinea's artistic tradition and culture. This learning was illuminated by a non-judgmental attitude and therefore different from the usual analytical way the participants (architecture faculty) encounter the world;
- Were surprised at how quickly they turn into 'pilgrims,' and how much could be done in such a short exercise;
- Connected the unfolding moment to their life experiences;
- Gained valuable insights and shared them during the group session at the end.

The most meaningful dimension of any pilgrimage is the permission that the individual gives themselves to become a pilgrim, which is no other than emancipating themselves from the bondage of familiarity, the ordinary, the expected. In this sense, hitting the road is a critical act towards one's situation. Going in pilgrimage voices a discontent with an internal and/or external status-quo along a willingness to seek real answers even at a high cost. Such decision demands lots of courage but, when

done and followed through with discipline, commitment, and passion, invariably delivers authentic, fundamental, deep learning —the one that truly and ultimately matters!

ENDNOTES

1. Overall information about my pilgrimages (to Mediterranean Europe, Asia, and the Middle East) including itinerary, reflections, contemplative methodology and work produced is available (albeit in Spanish) in this website: <http://faculty.arch.utah.edu/usus/> (accessed Nov 2, 2019). Bermudez (2012) presents a short introduction on the use of sketching as meditation tool during pilgrimage.
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papua_New_Guinea_Sculpture_Garden (accessed Nov 2, 2019)

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