

These ideas are taken from Phil Cousineau's book "The Art of Pilgrimage" (1998): Conari Press. I can recommend it as a wonderfully focusing pre-pilgrimage read.

Cousineau identifies the following pilgrimage stages: The Longing; The Call; Departure; The Pilgrim's Way; The Labyrinth; Arrival; Bringing back the Boon. These notes focus on Departure and the Pilgrim's Way.

Imagination is a pilgrim's constant companion at every stage of the pilgrimage. Richard Tarnas wrote: "I believe our task is to develop a moral and aesthetic imagination deep enough and wide enough to encompass the contradictions of our time and history, the tremendous loss and tragedy as well as greatness and nobility, an imagination capable of recognizing that where there is light there is shadow, that out of hubris and fall can come moral regeneration, out of suffering and death, resurrection and rebirth."

Imagining allows us to prepare fully for the journey – preparing to *leave* as well as preparing to *go*. Leaving will be harder for some than for others. We leave family and friends and all the responsibilities and joys associated with them, important milestones, opportunities, homes, ministries, work (paid and unpaid)...

From author Alexander Eliot – a 'Russian way': be ready to leave your home half an hour before the appointed time. Sit on your luggage! This will give you space to remember anything important you may have forgotten to pack in your bag or in your heart, and space/time/quiet/stillness for the transition between *here* and *there*...

Photographer Trish O’Rielly speaks of the need to ‘download’ before we leave – shedding things that may burden us on our travels and stand in the way of gaining the spiritual insights and growth we hope for. As we take off our everyday ways of seeing, we can take on new ways of looking/hearing/understanding/discerning, and experience what she calls ‘freedom of thought’.

Cousineau suggests that wherever we go, a related biography and a book of poetry are perfect companions. Given that books are heavy, electronic readers come into their own at this point. However another suggestion is that you create your own sacred text before leaving – handwritten or photocopied excerpts from writers or saints or travellers who have walked the way you are following. Most of you will have your Bibles with you, but you may have special verses/stories/psalms/prayers that you would like to highlight by including them in your book. Your own sacred text may also be your journal/sketch book, a place to write in at the beginning or end of each day, and to capture the thoughts and images that have come to you along the way.

Before you leave home, consider what you might take with you that can be an offering of gratitude to those you meet along the way. Cousineau writes: “The shift from tourist emphasis on ‘taking photographs’, ‘taking souvenirs home’, taking a break’, to ‘leaving’ something behind is the pilgrim move.” (p85).

Practise this habit before you leave, and when you arrive at your beginning destination, listen, listen, listen to everything around you... consciously

reduce the soundtrack of everyday life. Imagine what you are listening for? What are the questions that are trying to get out?

5 excellent practices of pilgrimage – inspired by a fifth-century conversation between Confucius and Zi Zhang:

- Practise the arts of attention and listening;
- Practise renewing yourself every day;
- Practise meandering towards the centre of every place;
- Practise the ritual of reading sacred texts;
- Practise gratitude and praise-singing.