



EXPLORATION

Journey

Readings



1. *The Ultimate Journey*

by Christina Feldman

A few years ago, an elderly monk arrived in India after fleeing from prison in Tibet. Meeting with the Dalai Lama, he recounted the years he had been imprisoned, the hardship and beatings he had endured, the hunger and loneliness he had lived with, and the torture he had faced.

At one point the Dalai Lama asked him, “Was there ever a time you felt your life was truly in danger?”

The old monk answered, “In truth, the only time I truly felt at risk was when I felt in danger of losing compassion for my jailers.”

...We may never find ourselves in situations of such peril that our lives are endangered; yet anguish and pain are undeniable aspects of our lives. None of us can build walls around our hearts that are invulnerable to being breached by life. Facing the sorrow we meet in this life, we have a choice: Our hearts can close, our minds recoil, our bodies contract, and we can experience the heart that lives in a state of painful refusal. We can also dive deeply within ourselves to nurture the courage, balance, patience, and wisdom that enable us to care.

...The ultimate journey of a human being is to discover how much our hearts can encompass. ...If we choose to develop the capacity to heal, which is the challenge of every human life, we will find our hearts can encompass a great deal, and we can learn to heal—rather than increase—

the schisms that divide us from one another.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2358>

2. *Touching the Earth*

by Tracy Cochran

In the great myth of the Buddha’s journey, there came a point when he is completely overwhelmed. As he sits meditating under the Bodhi tree, the devil Mara sends temptations to distract him from the wish of his deepest essence. Mara flashes images of the Buddha as a great leader, as a huge success in business with mountains of money, surrounded by beautiful women. He shows the Buddha that can make India great again if he would just give up his quest to awaken.... The Buddha will not move.

When temptation doesn’t work, Mara tries fear, conjuring visions of terrible armies.... These armies are external and also internal, legions of anxieties and fears. But the Buddha does not flinch. Slowly, he reached down and touched the earth. The classical explanation is that he is asking the Earth itself to bear witness to his many life times of effort. Not his blinding brilliance or his unique talent, mind you, but his effort, his perseverance, his willingness to show up no matter what. His willingness to fail and fail again. “Ever tried. Ever failed,” writes Beckett. “No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” The Buddha understood what the Christian author G.K. Chesterton meant when he wrote, “Everything worth doing is worth doing badly.”

At moments when the ground gives way beneath our feet, it’s good to remember the power of touching the earth, descending from our racing thoughts and fears to an awareness of the present moment. When words fail, we can sometimes discover a new voice and a new kind of determination. We can rise up rooted, like trees.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2210>

3. *The Only True Voyage*

by James P. Carse

A garden is a place where growth is found. It has its own source of change. One does not bring change to a garden, but comes to a garden prepared for change, and therefore prepared to change. It is possible to deal with growth only out of growth. True parents do not see to it that their children grow in a particular way, according to a preferred pattern or scripted stages, but they see to it that they grow with their children. The character of one’s parenting, if it is genuinely dramatic, must be constantly altered from within as the children change from within. So, too, with teaching, or working with, or loving each other.

It is in the garden that we discover what travel truly is. We do not journey to a garden but by way of it.

Genuine travel has no destination. Travelers do not go somewhere, but constantly discover that they are somewhere else.

...To travel is to grow.

“The only true voyage would be not to travel through a hundred different lands with the same pair of eyes, but to see the same land through a hundred different pairs of eyes.” (Proust) [...]

So, too, with those who look everywhere for difference, who see the earth as source, who celebrate the genius in others, who are not prepared against but for surprise. “I have traveled far in Concord.” (Thoreau)

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=639>

4. *The Pilgrimage of “Who Am I?”*

by Paulo Coelho

I ...believe that we have this possibility of doing a pilgrimage every single day — because a pilgrimage implies — in meeting different people, in talking to strangers, in paying attention to the omens — basically being open to life. We



leave our home to go to work, to go to school, and we have every single day this possibility, this chance of discovering something new. So, the pilgrimage is not for the privileged one who can go to Spain and to France and walk ...500 miles but to people who are open to life. A pilgrimage, at the end of the day, is basically—get rid of things that you are used [to] and try something new.

Every morning, I find myself a different person. I'm always a mystery to myself. If I knew in the first hours of the morning what I'm going to do, what is going to happen, what attitude or decision should I take—I think my life would be deadly boring because, well, what makes life interesting is the unknown. It is the risks that we take every single moment of our day, of a single day.

So, to be totally honest, I don't know who I am. And I don't think people ever will know who they are. We have to be humble enough to learn to live with this mysterious question, "Who am I?" I am someone who is in this pilgrimage from the moment that I was born to the day that will come that I'm going to die. This is something that I can't avoid. So, what I have to do is to honor this pilgrimage through life.

Source: <https://onbeing.org/programs/the-pilgrimage-of-who-am-i-paulo-coelho/>

5. *The Pilgrimage to Wisdom* by Blake W. Burleson

The pilgrimage is not concluded upon the arrival at home but continues for weeks, months, even years through reflection. This ...stage ...of reintegration into everyday familiarity and routine is of vital importance in sacred travel. When I return from a trip abroad, I am always a different person. I have a different eye with which to see my world, and I am sometimes astonished by what I was seemingly blind to before the journey began. A trip to the grocery store or the

gas station provides evidence of my affluence in a world where many go without food and shelter; a walk through my neighborhood reminds me of how insular and isolated neighbors can be from one another; everyday conversations may seem to lack depth and sincerity. Upon my return home, my perceptions are always more acute — the mindless chatter of the talk radio host is more irritating, the music from a concert in the park more sublime, a simple joke from a family member funnier. My life seems less governed by the clock when I return home — I have more time available for family and friends, more time to sleep, more time to play. Frustrations I had over this or that project at work now seem trivial; disputes with colleagues seem inconsequential and petty. ...While travel of any kind may engender this kind of awareness for the returning traveler, a pilgrim's intentional reflection on the journey holds potential that the wisdom obtained from the journey may become a permanent feature of the pilgrim's life.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/27757>

6. *Love Your Path* by Paulo Coelho

The path begins at a crossroads. There you can stop and think what direction you want to take. ...Ask yourself the classic Carlos Castaneda question: Which of these paths has a heart? (...)

The path doesn't last forever. It's a blessing to travel the path for some time, but one day it will come to an end.... (...)

Honor your path. It was your choice, your decision, and just as you respect the ground you step on, that ground will respect your feet. ...

Be well-equipped. ... Know what tool to use at each moment. And take care of your tools, because they're your best allies.

The path goes forward and backward. ... A well-tended path enables you to go back without any great problem. Take care of the path before you take care of what's around you. Attention and concentration are fundamental. ...Use your energy to tend and conserve the ground that accepts your steps.

Be patient. Sometimes the same tasks have to be repeated, like tearing up weeds or closing holes that appear after unex-

pected rain. ...

Paths cross. ...Listen to advice, but make your own decisions. You're responsible for the path entrusted to you.

Nature follows its own rules. ...Make the most of each of the... seasons, and don't complain about their characteristics.

Make your path a mirror of yourself. By no means let yourself be influenced by the way others care for their paths. You have your own soul to listen to.... (...)

Love your path. Without this, nothing makes any sense.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=570>

7. *The Land Within* by Leonard J. Biallas

We have to explore how we can turn our next time away from home into a holiday and not just simply a vacation, that is, to "make the day holy," and not just "empty" ourselves.

...Developing this pilgrim spirit, we can see profoundly, hear attentively, and feel intimately the rich experiences with the sacred in our hearts and souls.

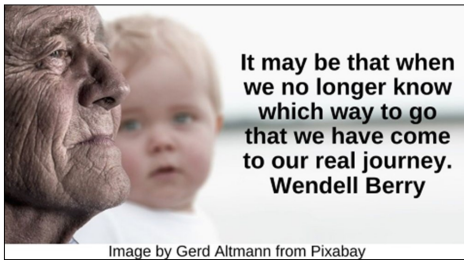
...The very essence of travel is to be away from home and on the road, in strange places and among unfamiliar people. We may travel far away to Asia or Africa, surrounded by unfamiliar languages, customs, food, and sights. Then again, we may travel only to a nearby town and still feel ourselves in territory that is not home.

Travel is about attitude and aspiration as much as about geography. What is at stake is not discovering distant countries and exotic habits, but making the move out of ordinary space and time.

...A wise Zen monk told a pilgrim: "You will travel long and you will travel hard. But do not travel far." Twenty years later, the monk asked the pilgrim if he had found Shambala, that is, enlightenment. "You were right," said the pilgrim, "It took me a lifetime to understand why I did not have to travel far. The land of enlightenment is not north or south but within us all the while."

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28459>

The Fisher King by Robin Williams



**It may be that when
we no longer know
which way to go
that we have come
to our real journey.
Wendell Berry**

Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

Wisdom Story

Did you ever hear the story of the Fisher King? It begins with the king as a boy, having to spend the night alone in the forest to prove his courage so he can become king. Now while he's spending the night alone, he's visited by a sacred vision. Out of the fire appears the Holy Grail, symbol of God's divine grace. And a voice said to the boy, "You shall be keeper of the grail so that it may heal the hearts of men." But the boy was blinded by greater visions of a life filled with power and glory and beauty. And in this state of radical amazement, he felt for a brief moment not like a boy, but invincible, like God, so he reached in the fire to take the grail, and the grail vanished, leaving him with his hand in the fire to be terribly wounded. Now as this boy grew older, his wound grew deeper. Until one day, life for him lost its reason. He had no faith in any man, not even himself. He couldn't love or feel loved. He was sick with experience. He began to die.

One day, a Fool wandered into the castle and found the king alone. Now being a Fool, he was simple-minded, he didn't see a king. He only saw a man alone and in pain. And he asked the king: "What ails you, friend?" The king replied: "I'm thirsty. I need some water to cool my throat." So, the Fool took a cup from beside his bed, filled it with water, and handed it to the king. As the king began to drink, he realized his wound was healed. He looked at his hands, and *there* was the Holy Grail—that which he sought all of his life! He turned to the Fool and said with amazement: "How could *you* find that which my brightest and bravest could not?" And the Fool replied: "I don't know. I only knew that you were thirsty."

Source: <https://www.filmsite.org/bestspeeches46.html>

Snippets

I love going out of my way, beyond what I know, and finding my way back a few extra miles, by another trail, with a compass that argues with the map, ... nights alone in motels in remote western towns where I know no one and no one I know knows where I am, nights with strange paintings and floral spreads and cable television that furnish a reprieve from my own biography, when ... I have lost myself though I know where I am. Moments when I say to myself as feet or car clear a crest or round a bend, I have never seen this place before. Times when some architectural detail on vista that has escaped me these many years says to me that I never did know where I was, even when I was home. *Rebecca Solnit*

We were never perfect.

Yet, the journey we make together is perfect on this earth who was once a star and made the same mistakes as humans.

We might make them again, she said.

Crucial to finding the way is this: there is no beginning or end.

You must make your own map.

Joy Harjo

Embarking on the spiritual journey is like getting into a very small boat and setting out on the ocean to search for unknown lands. With wholehearted practice comes inspiration, but sooner or later we will also encounter fear. For all we know, when we get to the horizon, we are going to drop off the edge of the world. Like all explorers, we are drawn to discover what's waiting out there without knowing yet if we have the courage to face it. *Pema Chödrön*

I used to think people on spiritual paths were world-withdrawers, lurking about in melancholy woodland places. They were the incense burners, the chanters, the shavers of heads, the meditators. But what if the spiritual path leads one not away from but right back into the world, with a renewed sense of vigor for amending it? Amending the world, fixing it up, saving it from itself: these are

the ideas that were at home in my mother's house. It never occurred to me (it would have been a forbidden, heretical idea) that spiritual people might be comrades in this endeavor.

Kim Chernin

Most of us arrive at a sense of self and vocation only after a long journey through alien lands. But this journey bears no resemblance to the trouble-free "travel packages" sold by the tourism industry. It is more akin to the ancient tradition of pilgrimage — "a transformative journey to a sacred center" full of hardships, darkness, and peril."

In the tradition of pilgrimage, those hardships are seen not as accidental but as integral to the journey itself. Treacherous terrain, bad weather, taking a fall, getting lost — challenges of that sort, largely beyond our control, can strip the ego of the illusion that it is in charge and make space for the true self to emerge. If that happens, the pilgrim has a better chance to find the sacred center he or she seeks. Disabused of our illusions by much travel and travail, we awaken one day to find that the sacred center is here and now — in every moment of the journey, everywhere in the world around us, and deep within our own hearts. *Parker Palmer*

Much of the journey is about the ways we work with our attention, because attention gives us more life. It expands the register, bringing us to notice more of the vividness and consolation of our ... lives, so that we can exist in our true range, and not go around missing things, as if we knew countries only from their airports and hotels. Attention is the most basic form of love: through it we bless and are blessed.

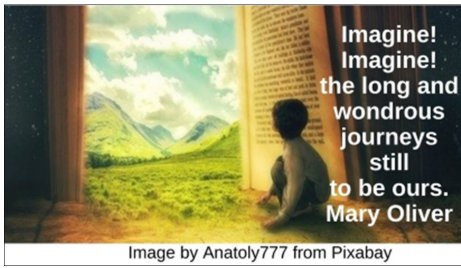
John Tarrant

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. ...

... Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.



...This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

...We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite. *Joy Harjo*

Imagine your first memorable journey. What images rise up in your soul? What feelings are evoked by your travel memories? Do they have any connection to your life today? Have you ever made a vow to go someplace that is sacred to you, your family, your group? Have you ever *imagined* yourself in a place that stirred your soul like the song of doves at dawn? If not you, then who? If not now, when? If not here, where? Uncover what you long for and you will discover who you are. *Phil Cousineau*

Matsuo Basho, the late 17th century Japanese poet, master of *haibun*, speaks of a strong desire to wander, as if it's the essence of who he is. In the opening lines of his travel sketch, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, he says: "the gods seemed to have possessed my soul and turned it inside out, and roadside images seemed to invite me from every corner, so that it was impossible for me to stay idle at home." Throughout all his travel sketches he seems always to be setting out on a journey, leaving home, leaving friends. We might call him, in those haunting words of the Sufi poet, Rumi, "a lover of leaving." At the conclusion of *The Narrow Road*, he speaks of a wonderful reunion with friends. "Everybody was overjoyed to see me as if I had returned unexpectedly from the dead." But his homecoming is short-lived. Though filled with the fatigue of jour-

neying, he sets out again, and offers this final poem: As firmly cemented clamshells / Fall apart in autumn, / So I must take to the road again, / Farewell my friends. *Rev. Josh Pavlek*

Questions

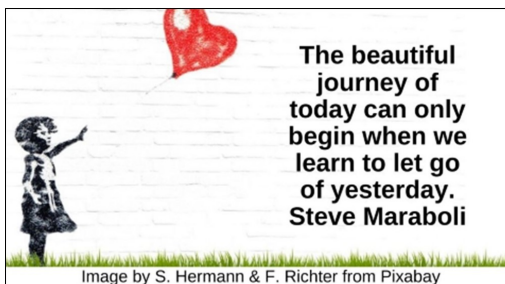
1. In reading #1, Christina Feldman writes, "...The ultimate journey of a human being is to discover how much our hearts can encompass." Do you agree? Why or why not? How has your life journey affected how much your heart can encompass?
2. In reading #2, Tracy Cochran writes about the Buddha's journey. In the end, the Buddha is successful, as she writes, "Not [because of] his blinding brilliance or his unique talent, mind you, but his effort, his perseverance, his willingness to show up no matter what. His willingness to fail and fail again." What role has failure played in your journey? In your success? Why?
3. In reading #3, James Carse writes about travel through the metaphor of a garden and the growth that occurs there. As he writes, "To travel is to grow." Do you agree? Why or why not? And is the reverse true, "To grow is to travel?" Why or why not?
4. In reading #4, Paulo Coelho writes, "Every morning, I find myself a different person. I'm always a mystery to myself." Because of this, every day is a pilgrimage to try to answer the question, "Who am I?" Is this a question that has a single, fixed answer or does the answer change over time? Why?
5. In reading #5, Blake Burleson writes about how his perception is changed by each journey he takes. At home, he sees things that he missed before because he sees with new eyes. How have you been changed by some of your journeys? Burleson also writes about the importance of reflecting on the journey to discern what wisdom it holds for you. What have you learned from your journeys? What wisdom would you share with others?
6. In reading #6, Paolo Coelho encour-

ages us to love our path, as well as asking "the classic Carlos Castaneda question: Which of these paths has a heart?" What is your path? What is its heart? How does your path reflect who you are?

7. In reading #7, Leonard Biallas writes, "Travel is about attitude and aspiration as much as about geography ...[about] "making the move out of ordinary space and time." What is your experience when you travel? Are there different kinds of travel with different results for you? When and how is travel transformational?
8. The Wisdom Story told by Robin Williams comes from the movie, *The Fisher King*. In it, the King's journey was interrupted for most of his life, despite what he actually needed was close at hand. Are there examples of people who sought treasure far away when it was always close at hand? What does our culture consider to be holy grails? Why? Is there something that represents the holy grail to you? Why? Where have you found your treasures?

The following questions are related to the Snippets.

9. Rebecca Solnit writes about going beyond what she knows as she travels. She concludes, "...I never did know where I was, even when I was home." How do you understand this? Are there some ways, at deep levels, that we are always strangers? As Norman Maclean wrote in the book, *A River Runs Through It*, "It is those we live with and love and should know who elude us." Do you agree? Why or why not?
10. Of the journey, Joy Harjo writes that there is no beginning or end. We are always in the middle of the journey: born into it because our parents, grandparents, and more distant ancestors came before and our descendants will continue after us. Harjo then says that we must make our own map. What have you learned about mapmaking? Have you made maps before, or after the journey, based on your experience? What have others taught you about



map making? Have their maps been helpful to you? Why or why not? Have you shared your maps (i.e., experience/wisdom) from your journeys with others? What was that like?

11. Pema Chödrön writes about the fear that many face on their journey and the courage needed to face it. What role has fear played in your life journey? Has it stopped you? How? Did you overcome it? How? What has fear taught you? What helped you face fear?
12. Kim Chernin thought that those on spiritual paths were always world-withdrawers, yet Unitarian Universalism bids us to go into the world to make things better. How has your congregation supported your life journey both inwardly, and in terms of your involvement to make a better world?
13. Parker Palmer asserts that we arrive at a sense of self after a long journey characterized by hardships. How has your sense of self emerged? What experiences were formative for you? Where is the sacred center in your life?
14. John Tarrant stresses the importance of attention in our life journey. What have you learned about paying attention on your journey? What are the rewards of attention? The challenges?
15. Joy Harjo writes about the kitchen table as both the beginning and the end of our life journey. What did the kitchen table mean to you growing up? If not a kitchen table, what has served as a base camp for your journeys, that place that you can always return to? What connections tie you to such places? What meaning do you place upon such touchstones?
16. Phil Cousineau asks a number of

questions about journeying and traveling and then concludes, "Uncover what you long for and you will discover who you are." Do you agree? Why or why not? Share one thing that you uncovered in your life journey? What did it mean to you? What did you learn about yourself? Finally, what was your first memorable journey? What images of it are important to you? Why?

17. Josh Pawlek writes about Matsuo Basho's desire to wander, calling him a lover of leaving. Have you known anyone who really loved to travel (including yourself)? What was the cause of their wander lust? Given their love of travel, what kept them grounded? Some travel on the surface, and others deeply. What's the difference? Which way of traveling do you prefer? Why?

