

GUIDE TO BEING A PILGRIM IN SERVICE



Pilgrimage to Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka

Follow your calling

Listen deeply over time to where you feel called and with whom you want to be. Explore deeply why and what it means to be a pilgrim. Trace the roots of this passion. Understand the source of this calling. See if there is a personal wound connected to your compassion and your wish to be of service. Look into and be with ways of healing yourself as part of the journey. See what brings you joy and how this relates to the journey.

Explore the meaning of service

Be clear that there is always an exchange between those you choose to serve and the gifts you're receiving. Think about the differences between "fixing," "helping," and "serving" before you go. Serving emphasizes the reciprocal nature of the pilgrimage. An attitude or expression of helping or fixing gives the idea the other is less than and needs to be helped. Never try to fix another person or situation. Honor the wisdom and gifts you receive from each person you encounter. You are a change agent, exploring how to become part of the natural self-healing of the place and the community you are entering.

Write, draw, express your vision and intention

Have a plan, a dream, a vision, for at least a year. Make a commitment. Think about what you have to give to those you want to meet, and how you will finance this journey. Be willing to go or willing not to go. Look for the signs internally and externally confirming this is the path for you, the right thing for you to do. When you are ready to make the move, go three times around the wheel of your life, asking those who will be touched by your decision to go: your family, children, partners, ancestors, friends, and all parts of yourself, all beings, whoever is essential in your life. Ask them in person, or ask inwardly in a ceremonial way, for their input, reflection, support, or resistance. Make it good with them and all aspects of yourself.



Stone Circle, Evora, Portugal

Be clear about why you want to travel. There is nothing wrong with wanting an adventure, but it helps to know that is part of your purpose. When someone asks why you are traveling, what will you answer? How is the journey part of your intention? Are you drawn to being a "bard", carrying stories not yet told from one place to another? How are you a bridge person and a weaver in a bigger story, a new story, one that helps bring about a holistic, just and regenerative world?

Do your homework

Study what you can before travel. Open yourself to connections and have at least one organization or person to contact in the country you are going to. Educate yourself about cultural customs and know what is accepted and/or offensive in clothing, language or behavior and adjust accordingly, staying true to yourself and why you are there. Consider skillful means of communicating who you are and what you see as meaningful. Know you will need to pick your places and times to

essential; have faith in the language of the heart. Remember that sometimes having a translator is quite a gift. Find a translator you can trust and involve them in your mission. Depending on the culture, it may be important that you two are the same gender. A translator will open new doors for you. And the translation process offers long pauses during which you can take a mindfulness breath and look closely at the listener. Do not look around while someone is translating what you have said or when another is speaking in a language you do not understand – keep your eyes and your smile on their face.



Women's solidarity training, Middle East

Pay your own way

If you don't have your own funds, gather friends around you and ask them for support. Ask them to contribute to your being an ambassador of sorts. Offer them reports, reflections, photos and stories about your learning in return, or ask what they would like in exchange.

Listen. Listen. Listen.

Leave many if not all of your good ideas at the threshold, or add them to a Book of Good Ideas, waiting ideally until you are asked to open it. Notice the difference between what you need to say and what needs to be heard. If your ideas are really needed and relevant they will reappear. Support the comments and ideas of others. Notice what happens when a person or a group feels their story has really been heard. Ask caring questions. Do not be afraid of showing your feelings to most women and in mixed groups, but be aware when and where

men may be uncomfortable with expressions of emotions. Walk gently here. Learn about and become part of the needed change in gender politics. Unless you have been invited, try something the way it has been done, before offering a lot of new ways. One wise wheat farmer asked any visitors, especially agriculture experts, to live there through all four seasons before saying anything about growing larger and healthier crops.

Offer different ways of formal and informal listening: small groups, dialogue, scribing and a variety of council forms

Interviews can provide needed attention and care as well as elicit a lot of learning and connection from each person involved. Remember a Westerner willing to listen is a rare species.



Bearing witness, Isfahan, Iran

Asking questions can be a gift but if done all day may end up a burden. Check and make sure your audience is engaged and that you are in dialogues versus monologues. Ask about things you are genuinely interested in, that you feel will make a positive difference anywhere, such as health, rites of passage, being with children, youth and elders, ecological practices, waste, recycling, relationship to water. Let people know you have come to learn from them, that your culture has its own flaws and that you are interested in the way they do something and want to bring teachings back home. Council at the right time can contribute to building trust, community, connections and more. Creating sound and movement councils can bring lightness and laughter as well as teach a lot about the value of this practice. There are also forms of council that can offer decision-making in new ways, attend to conflicts that arise, and make it possible to discuss difficult topics such as healing old stories of colonialism. Council for dreams and

visioning is also a very good way to share the practice. Listen for the roots of council and the power of listening already within the culture and support these. Explore what practices and stories truly serve you to share and others to hear. See how you can join in efforts already underway as well as offer some new or different approaches that you feel may serve. Remember the importance of growing gardeners as well as gardens, and be willing to take some risks.

Bearing witness

Sometimes, often times, the most important thing one can do is simply show up, be present, stand or sit at the Wall, at the site of the injustice, the wound, the waste, the pain. Equally meaningful in today's world is to bear witness to the beauty, any and all oases of healthy, balanced living with the earth and her peoples, to find and tell the story of the new culture being born of ancient wisdom and modern creativity. To bear witness is more than observing, it is the response of a peace activist and asks all of us to be fully in our hearts and the mind of compassion.

Participate and offer to join

Join in by building things, fixing things, carrying, cleaning, sweeping, washing, working, and assisting in whatever ways you can.



Trash cleanup, Anambas, Indonesia

Help with mailings, translations, writings, and organizing meetings and talks. Be available for family affairs such as childcare, elder care, sewing, mending, and minding of any sort. Celebrating and enjoying what is there is essential. And don't forget to be present and

“indigenitarian”—in other words, eat what the locals offer you. If your gift is costly, give it to the community, not just to one person. Watch for competitive feelings about receiving.

Find a good way to say good-bye and establish ways for follow-up

If you make a commitment to be in touch, keep it. Don't leave behind expectations and dreams you can't fulfill. When/if you correspond, ask questions about what has lately unfolded. Be aware of how your foreign presence may have helped to catalyze certain things, which can fall apart after you depart. Explore ways of continuity and sustainability. And if it is a one-time visit, make it good. Don't leave things unsaid or leave too many feelings unshared, whether difficult or grateful ones. Sometimes where trust has been established there is a call for tough love. And one must be aware of the potential of undermining someone's self worth, which may not be worth your “truth-telling.” Often silent witnessing is the best gift you can give.



J. Halifax & J. Zimmerman leaving 3 Creeks

And truthfully, remember we always leave with uncertainty that we will be able to return. Always strive to leave added beauty behind in whatever form that arises. A small flower or bouquet in their temple or church, a drawing for the oldest girl in the community, a map for the eldest boy or a written copy of the story of your time there for the elders.

~ By ~

Gigi Coyle & Elizabeth Rabia Roberts

Educators, Facilitators, Pilgrims

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The Boulder Institute for Nature and the Human Spirit

The Ojai Foundation

Biosphere Foundation