

Journey: On Setting Out and Coming Home

by Mel Bailey, March 3, 2019

In writing this I received inspiration from a sermon of the same title, written by Rev. Josh Pawelek from the Unitarian Universalist Society East in Manchester, CT
The following is an excerpt from that sermon.

“Our lives are spiritual journeys, and spirituality is fundamentally about connection. We may not always realize when we are embarking on a spiritual journey. More often than not our journeys begin with a twinge, a gnawing at the back of our minds or the edge of our hearts. We may feel a longing to set out in search of a connection we have yet to experience. We may feel called to come home when we need to strengthen our connection to that from which we came. As you contemplate your own spiritual journey, are you setting out or coming home?” As I contemplated this question, I began to reflect upon my own journey, both spiritual and physical, and wondered if these elements are exclusive or if they could be aspects of the same journey.

In our story for all ages, the Little Girl set out on a journey to find something that was not readily available to her in her place of origin. The journey was long and arduous as she climbed the Mountains of Imagining, crossed the River of Wondering Why, and made her way through the Forest of Finding out. But once she found what she had been searching for, her journey was not over, rather she had to take her newfound treasure back home. “But it had been a very long journey, and those who take great journeys of the heart are changed. The people did not recognize her.”

This reminded me a great deal of my own journey. I grew up in Mt Pleasant, attending Sacred Heart Academy and Catholic Parish. In late high school I began to have dreams (literally not figuratively) about Africa. Seeing myself surrounded by children, thatched roof huts in the distance. This led me to find a University that had a study abroad opportunity in Africa which focused on “Decolonizing the Mind”. I also studied African Traditional Religions and attended a Seminary classes on “Angelology and Demonology.” This experience expanded my world-view immensely and exposed me to ways of living that I had only imagined. Returning to the U.S. I felt like “the people did not recognize me” and I now saw my own society in a very different light. Like the little girl, I brought back pieces of the truth that the people found hard to comprehend. And I found it a challenge to re-acclurate or adjust to the ways of life in this primarily capitalist and consumerist culture. I found this to be true each time thereafter that I traveled abroad or even explored corners of our own country that were new to me. Again, the following are the words of Rev. Pawelek

“We set out when we feel stuck where we are, when we need something new, some connection we’ve never had, some knowledge we cannot acquire by staying home. We set out when we feel constrained and need freedom, when we find it hard to breathe and we need the fresh air of the open road. The work of setting out includes experimenting, exploring, creating, searching. Setting out requires courage, curiosity, strength, nerve, an adventurous spirit, a willingness to take risks, even arrogance at times.

We come home when we’re longing for foundations, for roots, for love, intimacy, care and nurture. We come home when we’re yearning for community, for familiar faces and places, familiar food, smell, touch, land, seasons. The work of coming home includes listening, sharing, sacrificing, forgiving and building community. Coming home requires its own kinds of courage and strength; its own kinds of persistence and endurance. It requires vulnerability, humility, and a willingness to set one’s own needs aside at times to meet the needs of others.”

Whether we are talking about a physical or spiritual journey, the process of setting out and coming home are both vital. As we gather experiences and exposure we need to bring those truths back to

our center and integrate them into the fullness of our being. This concept of our lives as a journey was also my inspiration for naming my daughter Abiona whose name means “born on a journey”.

I'd like to close with this Recitation of THE JOURNEY by David Whyte - <https://youtu.be/6PK3GhnHOJc>

One of the difficulties of leaving a relationship is not so much, at the end, leaving the person themselves — because, by that time, you're ready to go; what's difficult is leaving the dreams that you shared together. And you know that somehow — no matter who you meet in your life in the future, and no matter what species of happiness you would share with them — you will never, ever share those particular dreams again, with that particular tonality and coloration. And so there's a lovely and powerful form of grief there that is the ultimate of giving away but making space for another form of reimagination.

Above the mountains
the geese turn into
the light again

Painting their
black silhouettes
on an open sky.

Sometimes everything
has to be
inscribed across
the heavens

so you can find
the one line
already written
inside you.

Sometimes it takes
a great sky
to find that

first, bright
and indescribable
wedge of freedom
in your own heart.

Sometimes with
the bones of the black
sticks left when the fire
has gone out

someone has written
something new
in the ashes of your life.

You are not leaving.
Even as the light fades quickly now,
you are arriving.

Reading

For our reading I'd like to offer the following poem "The Journey" by Mary Oliver. I was delighted to find a live reading as Mary is now no longer with us in body and did not do many publicly recorded readings.

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice—
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.

You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.

But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world
determined to do
the only thing you could do—
determined to save
the only life you could save.