

The Art of Pilgrimage

*We journey across the days
as over a stone the waves. —Paul Valery*

All our journeys are rhapsodies on the theme of discovery. We travel as seekers after answers we cannot find at home, and soon find that a change of climate is easier than a change of heart. The bittersweet truth about travel is embedded in the word, which derives from the older word *travail*, itself rooted in the Latin *tripalium*, a medieval torture rack. As many a far-ranging roamer has suspected, there are moments in travel that are like being "on the rack." For the wandering Bedouins, "travel is *travail*." The ancient Greeks taught that obstacles were the tests of the gods, and the medieval Japanese believed that the sorrows of travel were challenges to overcome and transform into poetry and song. Whether we are on vacation, a business trip, or a far-flung adventure tour, we can look at the trying times along the road as either torment or chances to "stretch" ourselves.

But what do we do if we feel a need for something more out of our travels than the perennial challenges and pleasures of travel? What happens if the search for the new is no longer enough? What if our heart aches for a kind of journey that defies explanation?

Centuries of travel lore suggest that when we no longer know where to turn, our real journey has just begun. At that crossroads moment, a voice calls to our pilgrim soul. The time has come to set out for the sacred ground—the mountain, the temple, the ancestral home—that will stir our heart and restore our sense of wonder. It is down the path to the *deeply real* where time stops and we are seized by the mysteries. This is the journey we cannot *not* take.

On that long and winding road, it is easy to lose the way.

Listen. The old hermit along the side of the road whispers,

Stranger, pass by that which you do not love.

From *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Sacred Travel*, by Phil Cousineau. Conari Press, 1998. [1800-685-9595].