

## A Mystical Journey to the Sacred Sites

Global Summit created by Amarpal Kaur Sohi

*“Treasure and Transformation in the Ritual of Pilgrimage.”* July 2023.

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### **1. How I discovered Pilgrimage**

My concerns over the environmental crises and endless wars on the planet, and the seemingly overwhelming and endless problem that all was – led me to think, how could one contribute in a small but practical and meaningful way (beyond recycling) – Then I had a dream: ‘One (of several) snakes approaches me and wraps itself tightly around my (right?) hand and arm. I’m terrified and try to pry it off. As I attempt to pry it off, it tightens its grip even more. My efforts are useless. The snake is speaking to me telepathically. It is saying, “I am much more powerful than you. You need to submit to this fact. Your ego-self must submit to the power of the snake because the snake is the energy of Life itself, and that is more powerful than you. It is useless to fight this reality – trying to fend off the snake is an expression of your fear. Put your lesser self in service to what is more powerful, that is, in service to Life Itself – This is the true Reality.”

I don’t fully understand but try to follow the wisdom of the snake. Inwardly I try to relax and accept its knowledge. As I try to do this, the space between the snake on my arm and its eye looking at me, begins to open a mysterious portal as if another dimensional reality is coming into view to my visionary eye. Now I glimpse into the energy of space itself, in other words, an underlying reality not accessible to an ordinary state of consciousness (perhaps what physicists call the quantum plenum or zero-point field). I marvel at what the snake is showing me, the essence of the mystery of life itself. I am humbled and in awe of the vision.’

The effect of the dream was to make me realise that one way to submit to Life, was to leave my head/intellect behind and start walking. Writing the dream down and doing all the dream work as usual was inadequate. Snakes, among many other things, signal the spiritual wisdom of the body, to the power of the instincts, to the kundalini energy; snakes, and serpent wisdom, are connected to the goddess, and personified by the Black Madonnas; they point to the dark mysteries of life, to oracular knowing – way beyond the ego – and lead to the Wisdom of Sophia. So, as we were living just at the foot of Mt Ste Victoire in Provence on an extended leave from our teaching jobs, I started walking on this mountain pretty much every day for 2 months.

This experience awakened me to the spirit of nature as a very real presence. This happened particularly at the end. I found I was sad to leave and realized I had become attached to the mountain, somehow I’d connected with its spirit/her spirit;

it felt like she was a sentient being, with awareness, not just a rock. As I expressed my gratitude and sorrow, speaking to her spirit – and I remember it was a very still hot September day – and feeling love for her really, suddenly a great wind came up and wrapped itself around us, and I knew I had been heard and responded to. That was serpent knowing!

So, my many hikes also led to walking the **Le Puy Pilgrimage Route**, one of the main origins of the Compostela de Santiago in France – for me, a solo walking journey in service to the Earth. This path begins in Le Puy-en-Velay, a vibrant town in the Haute Loire department. The town is famous for the Basilica that houses 2 Black Madonnas and a revered black stone – a Druid altar – that reputedly fell from the sky, a meteor, associated also with the ancient goddess. So, you see how pilgrimage is always connected to sacred sites. I'll mention this pilgrimage again later.

So, this was a conscious decision to do a Pilgrimage.

But really, it began in a less conscious way. When I was 18 (1969) and had finished grammar school in London, and my parents asked me what I wanted to do to mark the end of school, I said, without thinking, go to Israel/historically, Palestine. And they said, ok. So, I went to work on a kibbutz in northern Galilee. We picked apples from 4-10 in the morning before the heat of the day, but in the afternoon a friend that I had met there, and I, went hitch-hiking around Israel to visit the sacred sites associated with the Christian story (orthodox one). Two events I have never forgotten: the evening light over the Sea of Galilee (Lake of Tiberias), and a visit to the Dead Sea. At the Sea of Galilee, I experienced the world as a kind of thin veil through which an invisible light came from another world 'behind' it. It stopped me in my tracks and seemed completely real and completely magical; it made me very still, as if I was absorbed into its Presence. At the Dead Sea, while I was swimming, or rather, floating on my back in its salty waters, I looked up at the mountains with their caves, and knew, without a doubt, that I had once lived there – I just *knew* it. This was my first experience of a conscious past life memory. As it turns out, that *knowing* of that life has had an ongoing reality and presence in my life, right up to the present moment. But back then, these 2 experiences were powerful enough to change my university degree from law to theology – I wanted to learn about these mysteries. (Of course, university courses were not the place to learn about the mysteries!)

## **2. Can you give some more examples of Pilgrimage in your life?**

**The Le Puy route:** – I've recounted how I made the decision to walk the ancient Le Puy path. **One example** from that life-changing journey is the following: the rock and the bees.

It was the autumn equinox that day, and I was musing on the movement from summer to winter's dreaming, letting go, symbolic death and renewal. When my attention became arrested by a rather large stone on the path. So, I approached 'him' as a Stone Being or spirit. He looked a bit like an Egyptian cone-headed figure, and also rather like an Aztec! Quite a powerful rock, I thought! He seemed to me like a guardian on that part of the path, so I rested against him for a while, asking for his guidance on my way on this special day. After a few minutes, I felt the rock Being communicating with me. He advised me to focus on the things that last – like himself that had been there for thousands of years – enduring values that we desperately need on our planet like generosity, compassion, instinct, love, wisdom, devotion to the whole of life, adding that these qualities also exist in the cosmos beyond our planet. He conveyed that we humans needed to see life here now through the eyes of eternity and aeons of time, not just this day, month, lifetime, generation, several generations, but 'forever,' like a stone that exists for millennia. Moreover, the passing on of this knowledge of enduring values to others is our job as we humans age. I mused that this is why the alchemists loved their Stone! The philosopher's stone is a paradoxical symbol for that which endures and can be embodied and cultivated in ourselves as something of lasting value as we mature and age.

The Stone Being also had purple flowers and a bees' nest at his base, with bees buzzing in and out of a small opening. He reminded me that the bees are representations of the *Melissae* ("bees") of the Goddess, "priestesses" of the Great Goddess as Earth, and "initiates" of Demeter, Goddess of Descent and Regeneration, for bees are required for the balance of nature, for the major part of food production, and can teach us about being in service to the whole of being, to the cyclical processes of life, and to a consideration of our communities, and not just ourselves as individuals. As I later found out, the Bee Goddess and her "bee maidens" were also linked to the Pythia at Delphi, Apollo's oracular priestess, also called the Delphic Bee. So bee priestesses were gifted with prophecy and practiced the art of divination. Their honey was used in embalming rituals and was transformed into the intoxicating mead elixir drunk as part of ecstatic rites celebrating the rising of the great star Sirius in July, the star associated with the daughter of the Goddess and the renewal of the year. Moreover, the humming of the bees was considered the voice of the goddess and even the sound of creation itself.

Furthermore, the bees led me to the *Path of Pollen*, an ancient European indigenous shamanic path, and to the branch of this path called *The Way of the Melissae*, an ancient feminine oracular tradition (going back to the Venus of Laussel covered in ocre at the entrance to the cave with bees;) a tradition that

engages the alchemical art of transformation. In the *Path of Pollen*, divination is taught and practiced as one of the honeyed arts, and a ‘humming’ mantra allows one to enter a slightly altered state of consciousness to access oracular wisdom from an invisible college of Bee Mistresses. And Rudolph Steiner’s essays on the cosmic significance of bees.

Experiences like this that engaged my imagination, and later expanded by reading and, in this case, apprenticing myself over 2 years to the Melissae tradition, all converged to create the felt experience of the anima mundi, the opening of the heart, and the main message: ‘the earth wants to be loved, not fretted over.’

I also became aware of **The 4 Stages of Pilgrimage** after this journey (but I’ll talk about this at the end): They involve the Call, Entry into a Sacred Landscape, Experiences on the Way, and Bringing the boon back home to share with the Community.

**Languedoc 2016 and beyond: – The Grail Chalice Dream** (see my “Mary Magdalene Mysteries and the Path of the Blue Rose”), arriving in the Languedoc, and exploring legendary places associated with MM: the Pic de Bugarach (and the visitation of the eagle and serpent), other MM sacred sites: –eg. Rennes-le-Chateau with its famous MM church, and Rennes-les-Bains where MM performed her water initiations. And then, in a meditation on the Grail dream after the summer, I received the instruction from MM to follow the ‘Path of the Blue Rose’ – This led to exploring in greater depth the Essene/Gnostic MM, and **creating Pilgrimage for others** (which arose out of my dialogues with MM), the first one being on the Magdalene mysteries. I had retired from my teaching job in 2015 (in part due to the Le Puy pilgrimage I mentioned above), and had deliberately left an open space in my life to see what emerged in terms of my future work. **What I loved about these creating these journeys, was that they linked my interests in Jungian and archetypal psychology, our restoration of a relationship with the earth, and visiting sacred sites in the context of their historical, legendary, and mythic background, and how we are dreaming and visioning them today. They brought psyche and nature, above and below, inner and outer together, one way of restoring our unified world, and helping to heal the split between spirit and matter.** (This is why Jung’s work on synchronicity had so deeply impressed me – it’s not only having interesting experiences (which are certainly very important in an often fateful way), but it’s about a whole new worldview, restoring the Oneness of the world while also appreciating its multiplicity).

**Egypt 2021 – a second visit**, after the first in 2010 (which came about from dreams and where we visited the main temple sites along the Nile, and Sakkara, and the Great Pyramid), and where at the Temple of Abydos, I had a profound

experience of the goddess Isis in her small chapel there). I knew that I would return one day. That became a two-month pilgrimage meditation retreat in the autumn of 2021, at the House of Life mystery school near the Temple. This profound immersion into the mysteries of ancient Egypt, led to the revelation of a very difficult past life, a descent into darkness and loss, a clarity with the ‘eyes of death’ as I call it, ruthless honesty about how left over destructive patterns had played out in my current life once again, and an eventual dawning of hope, rebirth, and renewal to a new understanding that opened up our connection with the stars and to looking at: what is our vision, our worldview, and what is it we’re here to offer – Now? So a creative project came out of it – one I’m currently working on.

**Egypt 2023 pilgrimage to sacred temple sites** – MM and the grail chalice – again - confirmation of ‘my myth,’ and where is it taking me now? Tell story of finding the **small silver chalice in the gutter**, outside an oils producer, and how it led to a deeper understanding of how the story of Jesus and MM is also deeply connected with Egypt. One of the keys of the Grail is its Code: a code of service; what are we in service to? The path of the compassionate heart, beyond division, war, and rivalries – as true today, as it was back in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when there was a flourishing of Grail stories speaking to these themes, and courtly love and devotion to ‘my lady’ initiated by Eleanor of Aquitaine, was developed in an attempt to move our understanding of love forward.

### **3. What are some of the treasures of pilgrimages and visiting sacred sites?**

**Pilgrimage, which by definition links us with sacred sites along the way, opens the soul** in extraordinary ways – often travel to places we’re drawn to does that. I’ve mentioned dreams and visions that arise in these journeys, and that can change our lives, as they have mine in many ways.

**Pilgrimages are walking Mystery Schools** – Mystery Schools are found cross-culturally, they are places where the initiate goes to undergo certain rituals, meditations, body work, etc. to stimulate the psyche/body into opening to the spiritual and starry realms, the soul guides and ancestors, directly, so that the ordeal can lead to both a new level of consciousness, and a renewed sense of the soul’s reason for being here – or being here now at this stage – whether you’re 20 or 70. So, by going back to the source – and this is what sacred sites hold in their aura and energy structure, as it were – as they were built as ‘temple’ sites based on sacred geometry principles, to mark places where the subtle energies were thin between the worlds, where the spiritual realms were earthed/grounded, so they are places that activate the source within ourselves, and can move our lives forward in new vision, commitment, and joy! Mystery Schools valued book learning, the tradition if you like, but this by itself is inadequate. The *direct experience*, the *gnosis*, of the divine, and the wisdom of the ground of our being, is what makes the

tradition come alive. That's why dreams are important, because they give us a direct experience which we can reflect on later. They are oracles which speak to the reality of our soul's life, the deeper sources within us. Pilgrimage, whether walking the ancient paths, or visiting a sacred site, can do the same thing.

So, like a mystery school, pilgrimage often starts in a dream, or a longing in the heart, that cannot be explained rationally, but that you feel you simply must respond to even if you don't understand why. This is **the Call**. It's the first of **4 stages of Pilgrimage**. Next, you actually arrive at the place you feel called to, and in your own way, mark the crossing of the threshold and the **entry into Sacred Space**. This becomes a liminal and magical space where synchronicities and other 'impossible things' happen (like the magical world of the Legends of the Grail). Then there are the **rituals, meditations, dreaming, and journaling, etc that you engage in along the way**. The 4<sup>th</sup> stage is the conscious stepping out of ritual space, and **bringing the key lessons that you learned, back to the community**. This 4<sup>th</sup> step cannot be disregarded. You have an obligation, from your willingness to step outside ordinary time for the purposes of transformation, to share some nugget of gold with your fellow beings, to pass on a measure of wisdom from the other world to other people. It could be a talk, a piece of art or music, etc – any symbolic gesture that is from *you*, that marks the essence of your experience. This *grounds* the experience in your life – gives it a concrete reality to yourself and others. You simply never know how that might land in someone else's heart.

**Pilgrimages connect us to past lives that we need to know about and complete in this life.**

**Often you meet soul companions on Pilgrimages, and though they often have challenging moments which mark any path of initiation, these journeys are also really fun too!**

**Pilgrimage changes us in deep and often unforeseen ways – which can lead us down paths in life we never imagined.** That's why responding to that inner Call to 'do' it is so important – even if people around you are shaking their heads and rolling their eyes!! Pilgrimage is one way of caring for the Earth and caring for ourselves. And it's a way of tuning in to the invisible landscape of place and its many mysteries – a domain where we rediscover the imaginal worlds and know again the ancient idea of the 'world soul,' where everything is connected from stone to star in a symphony of love. The Earth wants to be loved – pilgrimage, from ancient times, has always been a soul journey – we connect with the wisdom of the earth and the ancient voices of the ancestors speak to us, as we walk, or as we enter shrines and seek guidance from way beyond our ego selves. As we open to the depths and the guiding spirits, our lives change in greater alignment to what the soul wants **for us**.

**So, these are some of the joys of pilgrimage; hence my title: treasure and transformation!!**

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