

Vision



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Truth, Untruth and the Joys of Travel

‘Travel broadens the mind’, they say.

This year, over August and September, I had an opportunity to test the validity of this. The Conclusion? It does and it doesn’t.

Holidays overseas are rich in opportunities to refresh and develop. They also invite notions of something earned; a deserved rest where little rewards become appropriate. The danger is that overburdening the senses with an excess of sights, sounds, and experiences may dull rather than enliven.

“Feeding oneself with beauty only on the physical level is depriving beauty at mental or inner levels; and this must result in disorder or sickness.”¹

This warning from the Wise man encourages one to walk carefully, fully engaged on all levels of being. Words, symbols, myths, family, educational background, social setting and life experiences: all these are planted in the garden of our minds, and all may interrupt the experience of more subtle realms. For myself, it was no mean task to prevent this interruption when the trip contrasts were so extreme. They ranged from the inspiration and deep rest at a Waterperry Sanskrit Week, to pushing through streets in a European drug capital hazy with smoke, past shops selling cannabis ice-cream! Yet in that same city one was overwhelmed by the depth and magnificence of artistic achievement on show in architecture, galleries and museums, all depicting pinnacles of human excellence.

Such experiences reinforced some deeply held convictions and encouraged fresh insights. The intention in this article is to examine some of them and see what lessons can be learned.

The journey began at the annual Waterperry Sanskrit Week. The Waterperry estate, 15 minutes from Oxford, has an atmosphere that reflects its 1000-year history. There is a little church in the grounds, parts of which have been in existence since pre-1066. The main house is 18th century vintage in the front and Jacobean at the back. To meld these parts, the middle was gutted and reconstructed, being faithful to a particular aim. The aim was for the architecture and a series of frescoes to combine to lift the mind and spirit of all who entered. This was to be achieved by measure, harmony and proportion. Thus, the construction and materials chosen had to satisfy this aim according to very precise measurements. A mode based on 24.75 inches was chosen. Everything from skirtings to lengths and heights of walls are multiples or divisions of this. The frescoes created depict the teaching of Advaita Vedanta.



Waterperry House



Ground floor frescoes

There is no doubt that one's physical environment has a profound effect on mental attitude, and here at Waterperry, lightness, intelligence and quality all manifest. Everything about the place shows great care and attention to detail, as did the organisation of the Week itself.

Waterperry has been the site of 'Art in Action', an arts festival hosting artists, craftsmen and performers from across the globe. A mini Greek amphitheatre has been built in the grounds as well so that Waterperry is still the chosen venue for artistic displays, operatic and dramatic performances. The magnificent gardens and horticultural centre are open to the public. This

wonderful venue and the power of the Sanskrit Study produced a clarity and peace of mind that was most wonderful. It was demonstrable that Truth and Beauty wake us up and engage the heart.

Thus enlivened we moved on to Scotland with the intention of examining my family roots.

First stop was Dundee in order to visit the McManus Museum which was holding an exhibition featuring a relation, Thomas Alexander Wise. He is described in Wikipedia as 'a physician, medical author and polymath'² who travelled widely in India and Asia. He learned Sanskrit and became the first European medically qualified scholar to make a detailed study and translation of the ancient Indian medical writings of the Ayurveda. I was amazed that a Scottish relation of the 19th century studied Sanskrit! Not only that, he was one of the early European scholars who helped bring Sanskrit to the West. My connection with this man engendered awe, respect and humility. A familiar line passed through the mind: 'we stand on the shoulders of giants'.



Sombre Glencoe

Being northerly, the light in Scotland is softer yet it has a vividness that brings out a great variety of shades and textures rather than washing them out in harsh intensity as it can do further south. For one prone to photophobia, this was a blessed relief and assisted relaxation. Visits to a family crypt and my grandfather's boyhood home raised much happy emotion though it was difficult to know whether it was caused by the kindness of the living rather than the vibrations of the dead! Nevertheless, a new appreciation of the effect of background and tradition arose. Normally, these are just the things one tends to reject as they are part of the jungle in the mind which covers paths to freedom. However, in this instance, I decided that a more intelligent approach might be to use the good qualities and sense of substance made available. The family motto is 'Ne Oublie'. (Don't forget) I had always wondered exactly what one should not forget, but now, I have an inkling.

There is a piece from the Apocrypha which has always had an impact on me:



Family Crypt

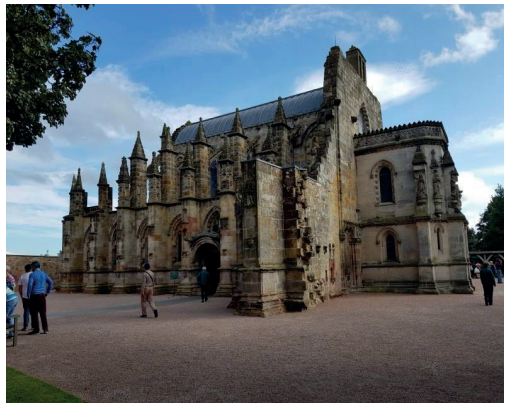
‘There be of them, that have left a name behind them, that their praises might be reported. And some there be, which have no memorial; who are perished, as though they had never been; and are become as though they had never been born; and their children after them. But these were merciful men, whose righteousness hath not been forgotten. With their seed shall continually remain a good inheritance, and their children are within the covenant.’³

And more words from the Wise man to remember.

“Whatever is within is experienced without.”⁴

For me, the lesson gleaned is: It matters what you do and how you do it. Use inspiration and example wherever you find it.

The last day in Scotland produced another significant occasion. We visited Rosslyn Chapel near Edinburgh. It made quite an impact, raised the hairs on the back of the neck and made one tread very lightly. Nor did this have anything to do with Dan Brown and The DaVinci code. It is simply a place with ‘Atmosphere’. The past is certainly ‘present’. The Chapel was crowded but everyone was very, very quiet.



Rosslyn Chapel

After Scotland, we moved on to the European segment. Flying across the channel I was amazed at how many ships were below us. There was scarcely a decent patch of clear water! This was a foretaste of our land-based experiences as we moved through parts of the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark.

Amsterdam certainly sharpened the senses! One had to work to stay alive midst the crowds and the traffic. Not only cars, but death by bicycle or tram was on the cards for the unwary! I had looked forward to seeing the canals but they were brown and full of litter. Fortunately, magnificent galleries such as the Rijksmuseum and the VanGogh museum made it worthwhile. The only problem was finding a space from

which to view the old masters. A more chilling experience was going through the house where Anne Frank and her family hid. This should be a compulsory visit for young people today with little knowledge of the Nazi occupation.

Delft, Rotterdam, Bremen, were the cities we passed through on the way to Denmark. On this section I began to lose much of the earlier Waterperry clarity by trying to take in too much in too little time. Nonetheless, In Denmark there were some special moments; the meeting of the waters at Skagen, the very tip of Denmark, a brief but wonderful stay in a castle, the waterfront in Copenhagen and its Tivoli gardens, and a fascinating interactive museum in a small town called Jelling. The north of Denmark was especially enjoyable. Why? Up there we escaped the crowds.



Canal in Amsterdam

There we had variations on themes of boats, fish, water and always a strange, otherworldly light in the sky. We stood on the most northerly tip of the country with the Skagerrak on one side and the Kattegat on the other and gazed out at lines of ships waiting their turn to make harbour.

Going south to Copenhagen it was very different. We re-joined the crowds. I wondered how long it could all last. Masses of tourists snapping pictures left and right. Many, like me, looking through the lens rather than connecting with the scene. Moving on to Hamburg it was the same. People, noise and constant movement. It seemed a shame that all this noisy activity took place in front of magnificent, centuries-old art and architecture. Solidity amidst fluidity. When it all got too much you could always escape into a church. Cathedrals provide wonderful opportunities for rest and contemplation.

This European experience provoked thoughts about the future and the world we live in today. Issues that came to mind were America's movement away from global responsibilities, Brexit, fragmentation, nationalism, and climate change. Seldom since the end of the Second World War have we been so much in need of a unified approach to global problems and so sorely in need of strong leadership, and yet seldom has it been so lacking. I was reminded of an article I read in 2016.

In May of 2016, an article appeared in an issue of New York Magazine entitled 'America has never been so ripe for Tyranny.'⁵ The article was written by Andrew Sullivan in the months *before* the election of Donald Trump, and details Plato's analysis of political systems in *The Republic*.⁶ Plato shows how one system develops out of another and describes the features of each. From current trends, Sullivan laments that it seems Plato may be right in his assessment that Democracies end when they become too democratic. Plato says that late stage democracy provides the maximum freedoms but is inherently unstable. Law falls into abeyance; principles of order and good taste are trampled underfoot as everyone 'does their own thing'. Giving way to constant requests for more 'freedom and equality' paves the way for individuals to make their own rules. This encourages selfish individualism and fragmentation. Unfortunately, says Plato, this process is likely to end in tyranny. Certainly, in Amsterdam we saw plenty of self-indulgence on show and the smoky haze was such at the hotel we stayed in that my friend claimed to be developing a cannabis cough! At the time it was a joke, but in retrospect it is very sad.

In these circumstances, does the mind expand to encompass the new situations or does it close down? An interesting point. We can see how the rundown of society is accelerated. More and more of the older generation are abdicating responsibility. There is a tendency to let youth and inexperience seize the initiative, an indictment of adult failures most recently exposed by Greta Thunberg's address to the United Nations. Human beings are very good at avoiding predictions of doom and gloom as witness climate change, but crunch time seems to be approaching.

Sombre thoughts for the traveller. So, the question arises, has this overseas trip overburdened and dulled the senses, or has something been enlivened; broadened? I

must turn to Plato again. His *Symposium*⁷ is a record of a conversation about the nature of beauty and love. He says that beauty and love are healing. They bring body and mind into harmony. In the *Symposium*, Diotima, Socrates' teacher, says that Love is the bridge between the mortal and the divine. It is a creative force. It is the essential bridge between the world of becoming and the world of being. You may ask, how does this relate to the question?

The experiences at Waterperry hold the key. The environment, the study, and the organisation have a palpable effect. They enliven. Truth and beauty wake us up and engage the heart. Love manifests and strengthens. The mind is 'broadened.' Conversely, noise, disorder and activity may be exciting on a physical level but the senses quickly experience overload and become dull. In this situation there is little development. The mind is not 'broadened'. Better to choose order and refinement over chaos and coarseness.



Diotima of Mantinea (Jozef Simmler)

Europe has so much to offer but better get up early! Take your time and stop to smell the roses. *This approach* is 'broadening'. Finally, tradition and family background may have its uses. Be inspired by what is good and leave everything else.

I rest my case. Travel has the potential to open vistas or snap shut your shell. But note: You choose!

Tess Stephens

1. 1976 *Conversations with His Holiness Shri Shāntānanda Sarasvatī, Day One*
2. See Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Alexander_Wise
3. *Ecclesiasticus. 44.1*
4. 1976 *Conversations with His Holiness Shri Shāntānanda Sarasvatī, Day Two*
5. Andrew Sullivan. *This article appears in the May 2, 2016 issue of *New York Magazine*.
6. *The Republic. Book VIII*

A week of Service

During the residential week in Auckland in 2018 when Mr Lambie spoke of service, he offered the opportunity to those present to volunteer as a member of the service team for the International leaders' conference to be held at Waterperry, in August and September 2019. This offer sparked an immediate rise of enthusiasm to be part of this event. This may have been partly due to some personal desire to visit and experience the atmosphere of Waterperry and its grounds. I had heard from so many people in the school who had been there for Art in Action days, Sanskrit weeks or in- service teams, that this was an opportunity not to be missed.

The registration as a participant took place, flight bookings were made, and time allocated for a family holiday as part of the month to be spent in the UK.

After finding our way to Waterperry from southern Hampshire, my English sister-in- law Gwyneth, and Teresa dropped me off at the front door of Waterperry's rather grand premises. We were greeted by the local team and I was whisked away to our accommodation in the restored coach house which was a rather nicely finished building with dormitory style main rooms, and good bathrooms, accommodating the 14 gentlemen on the team.

The service team consisted of about 40 students of SOP and I found myself on the room set-up and kitchen teams. Our duties were to arrange the seating and tables in the various rooms and particularly the ballroom and dining room, which were changed every day due to different requirements. This was quite a physical task, but the team of normally four of us soon made short work of it. Other time was spent on the various kitchen duties

that catering for 85 people would take. The Waterperry kitchen was well equipped for the job. These were quite long days as the day started at 5.30 am and finished about 9.30 pm, and included taking turns to serve the leaders at the table for the main evening meal.

The service team had as its meeting room, a large marquee set up on one of the lawns. This was quite a pleasant environment and luckily the weather was quite kind.

Our team leaders were Mr & Mrs Munden, whose easy manner and the fluidity with which they presented the group material were an inspiration. They were lovely meetings with great conversations and participation by all present. Our group material for the week was based upon the fine new book published by the Sydney school, entitled 'The Power of Service'. This book is based upon the lectures given by Mr Leon MaLaren.

The group meetings were held later in the morning after much of the physical work was done. After lunch another meeting for the group saw the various leaders of the Schools around the world present their story -



Alan Hull in front of Waterperry House

about themselves, how they found themselves running a School of Philosophy and interesting stories and information regarding their particular school in their part of the world.

Time off in the afternoon for me meant a time of exploration. Every day another part of the beautiful gardens was discovered. The walled garden was a favourite where very obviously mindful and conscious garden principles are practised. The extensive orchards with classic varieties of fruit trees in abundance were a joy. Quite a bit of time was also spent exploring the roof of this fine house, built in the 1700s.



"All be happy..." obelisk in the grounds of Waterperry House

Much of my time was spent during these afternoons in the garden centre, gift shop, gallery and museum which are open to the public. I especially liked the quality of everything in these areas, a practical display of mindfulness at work.

These explorations were usually brought to a conclusion by a visit to the tearooms prior to a restart of the service team duties. The end of the event was quite a reflective time for me. England is where I was brought up, and having not lived there for 52 years, it seemed a bit like going back to the start of one's journey. A journey which included all the adventures of making a life in Australia and New Zealand, and finding the School in New Zealand.

This coming together of people from all over the world and different backgrounds was experienced as a practical exercise in Advaita which reinforced for me the value of service and the substance of the School's work. I am very grateful for the opportunity to have been part of it.

I would like to end with an extract from *The Power of Service*, p 17, which encapsulates the nature of the week's experience.

How love expresses itself.

'Universal love is full of service; it serves fully and without any stint, there is no holding back, no reservation; it always expresses itself in this fulness of service. The reason for this is simple. This love, this universal love, is in fact a manifestation of your own Self. It is manifest subtly, but it is manifest. And the Self serves everyone from within, it is its very nature; and so this love expresses itself in this great service and care. You always notice this about people who are under its influence, that they do not calculate their personal pleasure or displeasure, desire or aversion; they just serve.'

The first hallmark of universal love is that it unites, and the second hallmark is that it always offers and never takes; it really is the principle of the whole creation. '

Leon Maclaren.

Alan Hull

Note: The illustration on the cover is the reverse side of the obelisk pictured above, in the grounds of Waterperry House – with the words in Sanskrit of the prayer "May all be happy, May all be without disease, May all creatures have well being and none be in misery of any sort."

Follow

Listen, Get up! Follow!
Get up, listen, follow
Follow, follow the road,
Do not look back,
Do not doubt,
Have courage, step out, walk
Walk, walk the path,
Let it draw you to the waterfall
Do not stop, keep going,
Keep going, going; straight in,
Plunge in: Under, under and under again.
Stand still, feel, look, listen again.
All is new, feel, look, listen.
Learn to walk again, see again, listen again, taste again, feel again.
All is me and Me is all.
Love is. Let it be.
Follow, follow, follow the road.



This poem was written after a life-changing intervention.
The author wishes to remain anonymous.



Plato & Plotinus
Summer School
Auckland

Week: 18th—25th January 2020
Weekend: 18th-20th January 2020
288 West Tamaki Rd.

The Laws
&
On The
Intelligible
Beauty

*"The victory over oneself is the
first and best of all victories."*

Enrolments welcome for the week or the weekend.

For further information please contact Russell Allen at russellallen8484@gmail.com



A consideration of Self-control using Plato as a starting point

On several Sunday mornings during this year, Russell Allen and Matthew Roscoe have led a series of discussions based around examining excerpts from the works of Plato and Plotinus. All have been made welcome, and each session has been a “stand-alone” topic encouraging discussion and deeper exploration.

A couple of months ago, the group considered the topic of self-control using a section of the dialogue of Charmides.

The Charmides is one of Plato’s Dialogues, in which Socrates engages a handsome and popular boy in a conversation about the meaning of *sophrosyne*, a Greek word usually translated into English as “temperance”, “self-control” or “restraint”. As is typical with Platonic early dialogues, the two never arrive at a completely satisfactory definition, but the discussion nevertheless raises many important points.

Charmides first suggests that *sophrosyne* is a kind of quietness. Socrates talks him out of this and Charmides proposes that *sophrosyne* is the same as modesty. Socrates says this can’t be right because Homer (whose authority they both accept on this point) says that modesty is not good for all people, but it is agreed that *sophrosyne* is. The third definition attempted by Charmides is that self-control is ‘doing one’s own job’ but Socrates refutes this definition also, whereupon Critias, the boy’s teacher/guardian takes over the debate and after following a line of thought that self-control is doing good things, the implication appears to be that self-control is doing good knowingly or that self-control is the knowledge of (the doing of) good. Later in the dialogue, Socrates confesses that his motive in questioning and refuting the various definitions put forth, is to encourage a closer look at the idea of *sophrosyne*.

It was suggested at this point in the discussion, that each of the group reflect on the passage and share their thoughts by writing for ten minutes (in the style of Plotinus) on self-control.

The question that was posed was:

What does self-control mean, at this point in time?

- Having reflected on the above question the first aspect that came to mind was “acting rightly”. But what does this mean? What does it entail? One aspect which comes to mind is what we have been looking at in Part 1. “What would a wise person do now?” It seems that Self-control is to be the ability to respond rather than react to a situation as a wise person does not seem to react impulsively. I seem to have equalled Self-control as something to do with wise people or those that

have wisdom are self-controlled. So, acting rightly could mean responding appropriately to any given situation but without indulging or being caught unreasonably by any particular emotion.

Another aspect of Self-control is having the ability to resist distractions when participating in any physical, mental or contemplative actions. This means one has to endeavour to remain present.

- Surprisingly, I have to acknowledge that Self-control lacks rigidity, is flexible and is an expression of Essence. Self-control involves a degree of measure where we act from a place of good intention and wisdom. Self-control is pure, comes from a place of stillness, and is expressed when attention is centred and when we act with the good of the universe in mind. Although Self-control can be expressed by the individual or collectively, the impact is universal.
- Temperance if understood to mean giving every action its measure also implies a high degree of Self-control. “Stick to the knitting” also needs this controlling element of measure so the jersey doesn’t fit an elephant rather than the baby it is intended for. Action requires constant awareness of original intent of task and purpose – whatever the action.
- Self-control is to be able to walk the path in such a way that what is taking place around and in front of you is untainted by distraction or control.
- Allow the Soul to “Be” and shine through and the individual soul to follow its direction. Be open-minded. With an open- mind let the light of the Great Soul permeate all actions where the individual soul can act with wisdom. Life will be measured, lawful, full of love and beauty. All souls will have the space to be themselves acting freely with the Greater Good as the reference point.
- If we allow that we act, then we should consider our motivation in each act; where does it come from and why? We have already established that we act in order to realise the object of our contemplation. But what is the source of this contemplation? It cannot be any of the things that are, for they are as a result of contemplation and are not in any way superior to it. So, our soul’s contemplation must be of that which is higher to it; that which is the source of all things and which we hold to be inherently good. It follows, therefore, that to the extent that our contemplation is pure, it will be measured; being in excess nor deficit as the Good can only be itself and permits no greater or lesser.

To the extent that our actions follow our contemplation, and they must do having no other reference or authority, then they will be measured having neither excess nor deficit, being thus self-controlled and a reflection of the Good.

Image source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_School_of_Athens#/media/File:%22The_School_of_Athens%22_by_Raffaello_Sanzio_da_Urbino.jpg

From the Editor:

Thanks to all those who have contributed to this issue of Vision.

It should be noted that the views expressed in this document are not necessarily those of the School of Philosophy Auckland.

The Third Century

The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things. The Men ! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem ! Immortal Cherubims ! And young men glittering and sparkling Angels, and maids strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty ! Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. I knew not that they were born or should die ; But all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places. Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day, and something infinite behind everything appeared : which talked with my expectation and moved my desire. The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven. The street were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the World was mine ; and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it. I knew no churlish properties, nor bounds, nor divisions : but all properties and divisions were mine : all treasures and the possessors of them. So that with much ado I was corrupted, and made to learn the dirty devices of this world. Which now I unlearn, and become, as it were, a little child again that I may enter into the Kingdom of God.

Geoff Taylor has brought this work by Thomas Traherne forward for further consideration, as an example of beauty in its use of language, which has been described as: "at once simple and shining, as hard cut and glittering as a gem". The content is very powerful and easy to understand, something to be slowly savoured and tasted. It speaks of how we rise from children to adulthood often losing the ability of present moment awareness that naturally sprang up in our childhood. As Geoff comments "To me it's the greatest piece of prose and oh what an effect it has when one digests it".

Thomas Traherne, from *Centuries of Meditation*

<http://thepoemoftheweek.blogspot.com/2008/04/poem-of-week-472008-third-century.html>

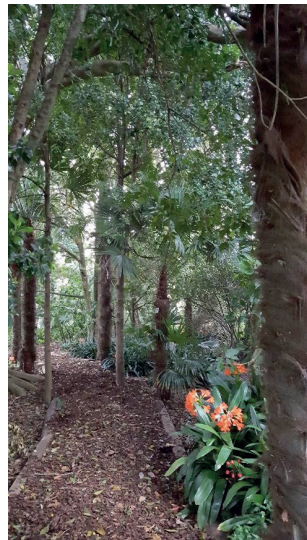
A Metaphysical poet, Traherne was most primarily a pastor and member of several holy orders in England in the mid to late 17th Century.

“Trees are poems that the earth writes upon the sky”¹

Visitors to the School’s property at 268 West Tamaki Rd, cannot fail to be impressed by the beauty and majesty of the many mature trees on the property. It is rare to find trees of this age and diversity outside of council owned parks and reserves and some years ago Auckland City Council arborists described the property as “extraordinary” in terms of its trees. The majority of the trees are believed to have been planted in the late 1930s, and include both exotic and native species, including some rare specimens. A large Cape Chesnut tree (*Calodendron Capense*), half-way down on the right as you come through the gates off West Tamaki Road, is reputed to be the only one outside of South Africa.

The dedication and knowledge of plants and trees over many years shared by Tom Johnson, one of the School’s longest serving members, has been of immeasurable value. In a 2003 edition of this magazine Tom provided information on the location and background of some of these trees. Some excerpts are shared here.

Around to the left of the house on the right-hand side of the driveway is a large Norfolk Island Pine. Immediately opposite, planted below the wall which leads the eye up to its towering trunk is a beautiful Queensland Kauri, related to the NZ Kauri and just as imposing but much quicker growing. It is uncommon here. Moving down the driveway past another Norfolk Pine is one of the most majestic examples of Australian She Oak in Auckland. In acknowledging its presence, one is brought to a deep rest. To the right of this is a very large Plane tree which comes from the Western Himalayan region and also has a commanding presence. Across the lawn on the eastern side of the house is a large Moreton Bay Fig with its huge spread and imposing buttress root structure.



In recent years the bushwalk pathway between the main house and the Annex has been cleared and now provides a restful shady haven for quiet walkers and birds alike. The sight and sound of the tuis and other birds attracted into the trees are always a joy for the senses.

More than 25 trees on the property are now identified with signage attached. Is a tree more beautiful if a name can be attached to the form? Perhaps, perhaps not, but each of these trees is uniquely beautiful and accessing its characteristics and source is enhanced and made accessible by this identification. How many can you find?

Our thanks must go to the gardeners who had the foresight over 80 years ago to plant such a rich heritage, and thanks also to those who have maintained and preserved it over the intervening years. Our responsibility now is to continue to care for these glorious manifestations of the Creation.

¹ Kahlil Gibran “Sand and Foam”

Camino Frances 10/9/19 - 14/10/19

The French Camino, one of the several 'Pilgrim Paths' to Santiago de Compostella has in recent years regained its place as the most walked Christian pilgrim route in the world. It commences in Saint Jean Pied de Port in the foothills of the French Pyrenees and is waymarked as 800 km to the destination in Galicia. Otherwise known as the 'Way of Saint James', the pilgrimage ends at Sant Iago (Cathedral) where James relics are buried.



Bill Hanson - Day 2 at Roncesvalles

The popularity of the path dates to the 12th Century when access to Jerusalem was lost after the loss of the Crusades and the "Way" was much promoted and mystified by the Gnostic Knights Templar. The order of the Knights Templar subsequently demised after rattling the cage of Rome one too many times. Literal translation of things Biblical was never for them! The scallop shell became the sign of the path.

THE MOTIVE

This walk needs at least 35 days and was always a stretch of available annual leave so the idea had been on the radar for when there was more free time.

It really did come down to being open to finding out what transforms a physical walk into a pilgrimage.

The work and associated disciplines carried out in the School seemed apparent as an ideal fit as a training ground, after all, it can't be that different to a few back to back residentials.

So time to put it all to the test!

THE OUTER PATH

Lets consider this the realm of 'Name and Form'

A wonderful attribute of the path is how well set up and established it is for hosting the 'peregrino' (pilgrim). The yellow arrow and scallop shell become reassuring signs of being on track.

Accommodation is by way of the pilgrim hostels or albergue, bunk rooms with simple facilities. The ablutions are mainly gender specific but not always. They are often run by international volunteers, previous walkers giving a little back.

So you really need to get over your (little) self early, as a desire for private space probably means it may be best to stay somewhere else.

Food is available all the way and in the evening by way of the shared 'pilgrim menu', a substantial three course, limited choice, meal with as much wine as you can drink (9-10 Eu). Vegans may struggle in this meat dominant culture.

Physical fitness needs to be reasonable to walk the average 25 kilometres a day and specifically care of the feet was a necessity. This was the number one lesson for me, the early excessive rajas meant mis-measure



and blistering. The lesson was simply that of finding you are not bullet proof, hence the much needed humility. Thankfully this was early on in the walk. The kindness of the fellow pilgrims at this point was a reminder of the essential loving good nature and really did help soften any reserve.



Early morning atmosphere

‘Less is More’ applies to how much to carry, 8-9 kg and anymore is too much unless you wish to consign the being to that of the human packhorse! I found 5 hours walking was a good measure, so with a 6.30- 7 am start, the walking was complete by 1pm, book in to an Albergue, settle and the rest of the day was at your discretion. The first beer was usually a priority!

The rich heritage of Northern Spain whets any appetite for history, architecture, language, culture, geography, wine (Rioja), and all in an agreeable climate. I walked in September/October.

Much South American gold certainly found its way into adornment of the many Church altars.

THE INNER PATH

Discovery of what may underpin and give substance to the name and form.

To commence the journey free of too many expectations or preconceived ideas seemed essential. Any baggage of this nature could well weigh more heavily than the physical load. The tool kit was confined to a few sutras, a mantra, a dedication and an aspiration to remember some simple disciplines and to pay attention. This memory was certainly assisted by the immediate good company of the fellow travellers.

Spending a lot of time in your own company was in itself an illumination.

The presence and the extent of the inner commentary seemed almost unrelenting and was the ideal opportunity to be patient and turn the attention to something more useful. This, over some time, became an underpinning strength.

Daily conversations so often led to a better understood shared experience, most pilgrims being in similar situations, and brought even greater clarity. Internal commentary on other walkers was soon seen as the imposter that it certainly is. The very practical discipline of meeting what you have in common rather than that which sets you apart is liberating. The memory for this is strengthened with regular dedications.

Devotion emerges.



Ancient symbols of devotion

The presence of the Iglesias (Churches) and the regular offer of the Pilgrim Mass helped open yet another pathway to this liberation. Rather than be caught with the language difference and ideas about rituals, there was determination to hear the words and let them wash over the

being in their own way. The entry bow when practised consciously becomes a surrender of this little entity and a devotion to the greater.

Similarly, the Holy water serves as a symbolic cleanser and reminder to not hold onto things unhelpful. At Hontanas on the high Meseta (flat plain) the Priest nominated (me) for the second reading which was to be in English (fortunately.) It was Acts 4 32-37.

A moving experience, the essence of which is non-attachment.

Another customary practice is to carry a stone brought from your home, and to leave it at the foot of the Cruz de Ferro or Cross of Iron. This is beyond Foncebadon in the Leon province.

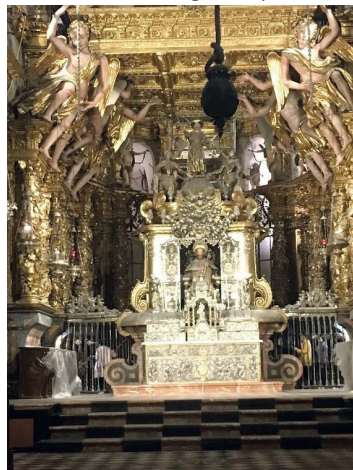
A group of 3 of us, Spain, Holland and NZ, ceremonially left our stones before morning first light.

This small act was a very moving one, and all to do with letting go. A spontaneous tear was shed.

There are a lot of stones in that pile from the many thousands who have preceded, an ever present reminder of the nature of the Beloved when the overlay is offloaded.

The inner journey went a long way in revealing true being, illumination and the revealing of the beloved.

Satchitananda in a word!



Santiago cathedral - Relics of St James

CONCLUDING



Santiago

On the 14th October after 34 days walking, we emerged, accompanied by driving rain, into the Cathedral Square in Santiago. By this stage we were a little Co-fraternity originating in Poland, Holland, UK, Canada, USA, Brazil also NZ.

It seemed for all that the shared embrace was the natural way to go and was truly heartfelt. This group had many shared discussions and had emerged as a greater body.

The central question emerged of where to from here?

To return to our daily lives and practice 'mini Caminos' based on the experience and the lessons learned emerged as a useful way to share with all.

Bill Hanson