

## JHC Message, Summer, 2004

By Rabbi Lenore Bohm

[lenore@insightsbg.com](mailto:lenore@insightsbg.com)  
[www.insightsbg.com](http://www.insightsbg.com)

“Journey” is an enormously popular, and, one could argue, highly overused, term. Synonyms include trip, excursion, and voyage, although these seem to describe shorter-term forays relative to the longer-term “journey” that many people see themselves on as life moves them forward in time.

At this season of excessive comings and goings, I’d like to suggest for your consideration a less widely used and understood travel term: **pilgrimage**. We may go on a trip, take an excursion, plan a voyage, or embark on a journey but what makes a going from here to there a “pilgrimage?” More to the point, is it possible to add a *pilgrimage dimension* to the trips we take?

Traditionally and typically, the term “pilgrimage” is used to describe travel to a place hallowed by religious association. When one goes on a pilgrimage, the decision to go is as monumental as the going itself, and the going is as significant as the arriving. In most of our other travel plans, getting there is what one has to go through; it is rarely as important a part of the journey as reaching the destination. But in a pilgrimage, every minute counts, the “getting there” is an important part of the commitment.

Going on a pilgrimage requires *spiritual* planning: Am I ready to take this on? Am I strong enough to encounter and overcome obstacles along the way? Have I prepared myself internally? A pilgrimage is serious business; it is not a joy ride. This does not mean, however, it is without joy. On the contrary, pilgrimages are associated with elation, even ecstasy, with inner awakenings and feelings of fulfillment. Many pilgrimages have a “once in a lifetime” quality to them, a sense of unique and graced privilege and opportunity.

As you plan or embark on your summer vacation, consider if, in any way, it can be treated as a pilgrimage. In other words, ask yourself: is there something inherently meaningful in taking this trip, or how can I add some meaning to it? What about it can be transformative? How can I make the *getting there* a worthwhile prelude to the actual *being there*? And when I am there, can I remain open to new possibilities, new ways of looking, seeing, responding?

My friend and teacher Tilden Edwards wrote: “Each of us can choose to approach vacation time as an open pilgrimage, rather than a closed tourist trap. We can plan out the time roughly: where we’re going, whom we will see, what we will do. But inwardly we know this is just an expedient structure, a kind of

network of activity where our sight will be on the little open spaces between the netting. On pilgrimage...we must trust enough to keep an open door through all we see and do and feel, an open space where we may remain gently expectant, willing to be caught up and pulled into new freshness." (Living Simply Through the Day: Spiritual Survival in a Complex Age)

Dear friends, May God accompany each of us as we go forth and as we return, enhanced and enlivened through Your Presence, from our travels at this season and always.

Tefilat HaDerech – The Traveler's Prayer (from Talmud, Berachot 29b)

May it be your will, Adonai, my God and God of my ancestors, to lead me, to direct my steps, and to support me along the way. Lead me throughout my life, tranquil and serene, until I arrive at where I am going. Deliver me from harm that I might encounter along the way. Bless my path. Let me receive loving acts of kindness from those I meet. Praised are You, Adonai, who responds to prayers and who hearkens to prayer.