

This summer, our daughter-in-law went for a long walk. A very long walk. Five hundred miles to be precise. Although not a Christian, she spent a month walking across Spain on a Christian pilgrimage route, the Camino—the Way-- from the French border to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. This year a quarter of a million seekers and questers from around the globe-- people of multiple religious backgrounds and none at all--- walked a road that belonged for 1500 years to Christian devouts. Why?

If you are a walker, you probably know some of the reasons. When you are dealing with gigantic spiritual questions like “how do I hold all this pain?” or “what should my next step in life be?” it is good to be able to wake up each morning with a plan: keep putting one foot in front of the other til nightfall, enact physically your intention to move forward. When your body is engaged in its work, your mind can sometimes settle down in stillness .

But when I asked my daughter-in-law what the best part of the trip was, she said without hesitation: The other people. Everyone had a story! What are the stories you are carrying? Where do you find the strength to revisit them? Like Anne Lamott, I sometimes think of my mind as a bad neighborhood, I try not to go into alone. I guess I am not the only one! That is why I find the idea of pilgrimage so compelling. On the Camino, they come as strangers, but they walk together, sorting through their pasts, to walk toward a better future.

People are not the only ones with stories . The Camino *itself* carries memories—the hopes and sorrows and prayers of the millions of pilgrims who have walked that way over the centuries. It is a reservoir of accumulated spiritual energy.

And if a dusty road can hold memories, so too can dusty words in a prayerbook. Which brings us to the task at hand. Like the stones on the Camino, the words in this book come from another time and place. Just as some parts of the Camino are beautiful and some stretches challenging or simply boring, so too is the Amidah (and, indeed, the twenty-fours ahead of us) a mixture of inspiration and slog. Like hiking with a pack, all the standing with this heavy volume can be hard on the back.

I invite you in consider the gift in this long journey of words.

Lucky for us—we have each other in this room. And all those others with us, many long dead. Our companions tonight are the myriad men and women who have come to Yom Kippur, with their own joys and regrets, their own faith in God and pure intentions! How many souls over centuries fell opened their hearts and layed bare their lives to the Mystery with the words in this book!

When we pray, they walk with us., We begin the Amidah by invoking the fathers and mothers “The god of Abraham, the God of Sarah.” No matter if your own parents used very different language! Tonight Abraham and Sarah belong to all of us and this road of words is our pilgrimage.

We journey together with our stories, not entirely sure of where the road will end, but knowing we are not alone.

