

HARVARD

The Memorial Church



Pilgrimage to Walden Pond

“Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito’s wing that falls on the rails.” (Thoreau, Walden, chapter 2)

Preparing for the pilgrimage in the days before...

Setting an intention

“My purpose in going to Walden Pond was...to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles...” (Thoreau, Walden, chapter 1)

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” (Thoreau, Walden, chapter 2)

Spend some time setting an intention for the pilgrimage. Some questions that might help: Is there a change large or small, you would like to make in your life? Is there a particular question you would like to reflect on during the pilgrimage? What direction do you hope this pilgrimage will help you turn toward?

Write your intention, and any reflections on it, in a notebook, and bring it with you on the pilgrimage.

Renunciation

“Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb nail.” (Thoreau, Walden, chapter 2)

We are “rich in proportion to the number of things which [we] can afford to let alone.” (Thoreau, Walden, chapter 2)

When Imam Khalil Abdur-Rashid spoke to the Faith & Life Forum about the practice of pilgrimage in Islam this semester, he told us that Muslims on pilgrimage in Mecca dress in very simple clothes, do not wear jewelry, and do not apply any sort of scent to their bodies. Without the outward distinctions made by clothing and adornments, pilgrims follow in Hagar’s footsteps

as equals. Instead of applying cologne, pilgrims attempt to cultivate a scent of compassion and peace, an atmosphere of devotion.

Is there some small thing you might leave behind that would support and reflect your intention for the pilgrimage? What kind of atmosphere do you want to create around you?

On the day of the pilgrimage...

Sunrise

"Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me." (Thoreau, Walden, chapter 2)

We will arrive at the pond in time to watch the sunrise together.

Returning to our senses (45 minutes)

"I am alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit. The thought of some work will run in my head and I am not where my body is—I am out of my senses. In my walks I would fain return to my senses." (Thoreau, "Walking")

We'll spend 45 minutes walking in silence, alone or with others, as you wish. Try, as Thoreau says, to be where your body is—to return to your senses. Notice your breath, your heartbeat, the ground beneath your feet. Tune in to the world around you with all of your senses. Be attentive to what sparkles at you out of the day, and collect your sparklets in your notebook.

Returning to each other (45 minutes)

"Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?" (Thoreau, Walden, chapter 1)

We'll pair up to walk and talk for another 45 minutes. Share your sparklets from your silent walk with each other, and explore their significance. Ask each other which passage from Thoreau (in the sections above) spoke most to you and why. If you're willing (and it's ok if you're not), share your intentions for the pilgrimage with each other and talk about the kind of support you need to meet those intentions.

Sharing sparklets

Choose one sparklet to share with the group.

Blessing

We'll share this ancient pilgrimage blessing with each other:

May God be for us, and we for one another,
a defense in emergency,
a harbor in shipwreck,
a refuge in the journey,
shade in the heat,
light in the darkness,
a staff on the slippery slope,
joy amidst suffering,
consolation in sadness,
safety in adversity,
caution in prosperity,
so that we may safely arrive
where we are boldly going. Amen.