

The woman called Peace Pilgrim was born on a small farm in the early part of the century, she grew from modest roots and ...gradually acquired money and things. When she realized this self-centered life had become meaningless, and worldly goods burdens to her rather blessings, she walked all alone one night through the woods until she felt "a complete willingness , without any reservations, to give my life to God and to service."

She gradually and methodically adopted a life of voluntary simplicity. She began what was to be a fifteen-year period of preparation, not knowing just what it was she was preparing for. Her pilgrimage for peace began on the morning of January 1, 1953. ...Her vow "I shall remain a wanderer until mankind has learned the way of peace, walking until I am given shelter and fasting until I am given food. ...She walked more than 25,000 miles. ...She walked alone and penniless..She walked as a prayer...

(Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Own Words)

PEACE PILGRIM

This is the year
she started walking,
that is,
when she was my age.

I think of her
as the date
approaches,
of how I wanted
to walk that year,
not knowing
she already had.
Did she feel,
as I did,
the need for
flexible shoes
upon the Earth,
the longing for
steady, soothing
motion,
an existential nausea
over the automobile.

The difference is,
of course,
she did it,
while I only felt the urge.
I was younger then
with life left to waste.

Now I am her age
and getting serious
at last.
No, I was always that.
I am ready act
on the seriousness,

I am preparing
to walk.

It was a house of clarity - I knew that. There were things I couldn't tell whether it was time to get rid of or not but I knew I would know after I moved in. The first thing I became clear about was that I didn't want to be home at all.

I sorted my closet not by skirts and blouses, but by take with me and I don't care about at all. This is something I do regularly, of course, weed things out. It a primary occupation of mine. I have spent the last two decades continuously purifying my life so that I only have around me what I feel some resonance with, some indescribable, undeniable response that draws me.

At least resonance was the way I thought of it for years. But driving home that day on Del Dios Highway, I realized I only wanted to have things around me that I loved. Love - it's just as simple as that. So love, not resonance, became the operative word.

All the things I love
are the color of honey,
my apple cider vinegar
the earrings I always wear,
the silk clothes,
which are my particular
version of saffron robes.

Honey, is God's favorite food,
I, of course, prefer mangoes.
But left on a desert isle,
it is honey I would take.

Silk is God's favorite cloth,
she likes it best
when it is honey-colored.
I wear it so I can travel
light.

As soon as we hit Virgo I start throwing things away. It took me a long time to recognize the pattern - as it did most of my patterns, despite the fact that the observation of patterns is another of my significant occupations. But finally I knew it was a Virgo thing I did - and I came to call it my Virgo purge.

The thing about letting go of things is that you have to do it when you are called even when you don't understand why. It does not matter if the rational, practical part of you says, "You might need a blue blazer some day."

PEACE PILGRIM:

"In my life , what I want and what I need are exactly the same.. Anything in excess of needs is burdensome to me.

...I talked to one person who thought I was being deprived of some of the pleasures of life. But none of the things I do not use or do not do were taken away from me. I just did not include them when I was choosing a harmonious life.

(Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Own Words)

She told me about the nun, on a pilgrimage with only three saris, who told her how wonderful it was to only have three articles of clothing. I knew immediately that was right for me.

I have found a gold silk sari so beautiful that if I had it I would only need one. Actually, I have all too few occasions for a sari. But the three sari rule can be applied to almost everything. I have kept three rayon skirts, three denim skirts, three black skirts, even though I don't officially wear black.

The what I want to have with me side of the closet is mostly silk. Two of one kind of silk skirt and two another, so there is room to grow. I dream of winnowing down to only silk, but maybe my life will never be like that.

*Silk is god's favorite cloth.
I wear it so that I can travel light.*

PEACE PILGRIM:

"My clothes are most comfortable as well as most practical. I wear navy blue slacks and a long sleeved shirt topped with my lettered tunic. Along the edge of my tunic, both front and rear, are partitioned compartments which are hemmed up to serve as pockets. These hold all my possessions which consist of a comb, a folding toothbrush, a ballpoint pen, a map, some copies of my message and my mail.

So you can see why I answer my mail faster than most - it keeps my pockets from bulging.

As I put on my simple clothing one day after a swim in a clear mountain lake I thought of those who have closets full of clothes to take care of, and who carry heavy luggage with them when they travel. I wondered how people would want to so burden themselves, and I felt wonderfully free. This is me and all my possessions. Think of how free I am! If I want to travel, I just stand up and walk away."

(Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Own Words)

URAD DHAL

I feel overwhelmed
by too many grains,
the things I'm sure
I'll remember
the names of,
but months later
hold up to the light
wandering:
Is this buckwheat?

Now and then I try to
expand, reading
some cookbook,
trying to follow some
Way.
I considered macrobiotics
because I loved Mrs. Kushi's
spiritual approach to food.
Something I threw
against the wall
that didn't stick,
but left strange bottles
on the kitchen shelf,
oils and vinegars
I never used.

Yesterday I brought my
food jars out of the
Lazy Susan,
a dark corner I knew
would not work for me,
which made consciousness
too hard to hold on to.

I need a life
more kinesthetic
than that.

No wonder I
didn't eat all
summer,
I didn't know
what food I had.

Now that I do
I realize what
must get tossed,
and commit myself
anew,
to my long-grain brown,
my beloved basmati,
and - it goes
with out saying -
oats.

In legumes, as well,
I need simplicity.
What was I thinking
when I bought
toor dhal -
or this dreadful
yellow split mung
which smells so
I cannot cook it.
Urad urad urad
do.
I just can't
get used to you.

Brown lentils leave
me wanting something
pretty to see,
but red lentils -
red lentils
always please me.
Mung beans,
black beans,
now and then
pintos properly
cooked,
black eye peas

on New Year's,
at least.

When it comes
to fruits and vegetables
I want no limitation,
except what
I'm not in the mood
to eat.
But I only want
a few of them in the
fridge at once.

Meditation, writing, walk.
Abhyanga then bath.
House and garden,
errands in the world.
And in the afternoon
I write.
Virgo. I remake
myself as I do
each year,
I am doing it
with fewer grains,
not so many
legumes.

I am quite certain in a former life I was some sort of fabric gypsy, traveling about with tapestries and cloth. A vendor, not a weaver. This is the life where I knew my sister. Cloth has always been our most positive bond, though in this life it was more her calling than mine. She used to make beautiful batiks - she was always ahead in fashion. To the best of my knowledge she was the one to start the fad of wearing tennies.

We used to scour the remnants in the Newberry's basement and she could figure out how to copy anything we saw in stores. One time she got the bright idea to make an outfit from burlap because it was so cheap. But when she wore it on a date the guy didn't want to sit beside her. She was the first, of course, to make burlap curtains. It really is a pity there's no reward for this kind of inventiveness. or my sister and I would not have been such gypsies in this life time as well.

PEACE PILGRIM:

The only footwear I need is an inexpensive pair of blue sneakers. They have soft fabric tops and soft rubber-like soles, I get them one size too large so I can wiggle my toes. I feel as free as though I were barefoot! And I can usually get 1,500 miles to a pair. I wear a pair of navy blue socks. There's a reason why I chose navy blue for my wearing apparel - it's a very practical color, doesn't show dirt, and the color blue does represent peace and spirituality.
(Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Own Words)

I might have known I'd be seeing her soon by the fabric experiences I kept having. The flood of the senses that bolts and bolts of fabric can bring, descending the basement stairs of a fabric store where the fans whirred.

After I came home from her house I went out shopping to buy her more bed linens. Finally, I got the box mailed with the orange-flavored hemp lip balm, the comfrey ointment she liked for her back, a souvenir cup from the Village Corner where we used to go in Carmel, and baggies of my idea of instant soup: lentils and spices with instructions of what to add.

After I mailed the box I kept wanting to call to see if it had arrived, so we could open it together the way we usually do at Christmas. I realized after the fact that what I wanted - what I always am looking for is the occasion for enthusiasm. But other people never seem to share my enthusiasm for enthusiasm, at least very few. It has always been the thing that people most want to squash in me. The only thing people hate and fear more than magic is enthusiasm - magic's first and favorite child.

The first definition of enthusiasm is one we never pay any attention to: belief in the special revelations of the divine. Urad urad urad do. That is what I loved in you.

She said one of the bags of lentils came open so the lentils were spilled all through the sheets. I could picture the little orange circles against the aqua cloth.

I liked the image.

Of course, there is always the great debate about how dhal is spelled. D H A L or D A L or D A L L, but you know which I prefer.

this is my life
this is my living
this is my life
this is my living
this is my life
this is my living

So the walking autumn
I knew it was not just love,
but enthusiasm I had to have,
that I had to feel enthusiastic
about my grains, the way my heart soars
when I smell the scent of basmati cooking,
that I had to be enthusiastic about my legumes
the way I love the color of red lentils,
which are actually orange,
that I had to be enthusiastic about
the cloth brushing against my skin
the colors I see around me,
on my kitchen counter
in the amber filled jars.

And I knew, at last, that I needed to get rid of the blue plates, that I could better do my work without the burden of blue plates.