

**Christian Pilgrimage, Faith Development and Identity Formation:
*Presenting an Integrative Assessment Approach***

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In January 2008, the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts sponsored a pilgrimage to Israel and Palestine for 25 college students. The students were from seven different area universities, and from a very diverse range of backgrounds. Just over half of the students were Episcopalian, but all of them were in one way or another involved in the Episcopal Chaplaincies at their respective universities. For twelve days, these students, along with three chaplains, two guides, and a bishop traveled throughout Israel and the West Bank. They visited the traditional Christian holy sites, celebrated a baptism and a confirmation on the Sea of Galilee, and had a two-day retreat with the Bishop in Nazareth. In addition to visiting holy sites, the group also listened to presentations by many political activism groups (including, but not limited to, the Christian Peacemaker Teams, Sabeel, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, and Breaking the Silence). The group also spent four days staying with Palestinian Christian families, attending cultural events, planting olive trees, and learning about the situation of Christians in the Holy Land.

Each of the 25 students on this pilgrimage had a very different experience. Despite seeing the same sights and hearing the same speakers, each person seemed to be touched on a different level or by a different activity. To listen to their stories, one would think that they all went on a separate journey. And perhaps that is partially true—each student was in a different place spiritually and developmentally, and thus received and processed new information in a unique way. For some, this was their first trip outside of the United States, and for others it was their

second trip to the Holy Land. Some students came because they were interested in the socio-political situation, and others were drawn to the pilgrimage as a chance to return to the roots of their Christian faith.

Below are stories of just three of the students who made this pilgrimage. Each one speaks to very different aspects of life. “Mary,” “Elsa,” and “Charlene” (the names have been changed, but the stories are unchanged, and written by each of them shortly after returning) attend three different universities in the Boston area. At the time of the pilgrimage, Mary was a third year student (at a five year institution) studying History, Journalism and Education; Elsa was a sophomore studying Art History and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies; and Charlene was a junior studying International Relations and Political Science.

I have chosen to analyze their experiences from very different developmental theories, rather than using the same theory throughout. Primarily this is because their experiences are so different and so complex that using just one theory would over-simplify what is truly a multi-faceted reality: some points of identity are just more salient for one student over another. Mary’s faith and identity was central for her, Elsa’s faith and intellectual development was primary, and Charlene’s journey was about family and self-awareness.

“Mary”

Ashes, Loved

*I have carried my grandmother around
Not just in my heart
But in my hand
Her ashes sifting through my fingers
As I scatter them around the world.*

*I was surprised at how many chunks of bone were left behind.
Bones I once embraced with her warm skin*

*And warm heart pulsing between us.
But now only my heart pulses for both of us,
As I cast a prayer up to her soul in heaven,
And what is left of her body falls to the Earth.*

*I took my grandmother to Boston with me,
In my heart and in a plastic baggie.
I introduced my roommates to her
But the sight of ash and bone where a sandwich should be alarmed them
So I hid her in my sock drawer.
But even after death her dreams were coming true—
She had always wanted to go to college.*

*She dreamed of travel and seeing the world,
So whenever I would go anywhere,
I would bring something back for her from each of my travels.
Now everywhere I go I leave a piece of her behind
Slowly burying her around the world she longed to see.*

*I took my grandma to the Holy Land,
A fraction of her body hidden in a blue velvet sachet,
Maybe what was left of an arm or thigh or hand,
But I imagine it is a foot
Walking along with me in the places Jesus once stepped.*

*I took my grandma to Qumran,
Where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in caves,
Buried for thousands of years.
I sprinkled her ashes upon the sand and watched them disappear.*

*I left a piece of her behind
At the site of a demolished Palestinian home
Her ashes scattered among the tile, toys and pita bread
Left behind by the people who once called that mound of shambled bricks a home.*

*My grandma now sleeps in the Shepherd's Field,
May she watch over the town of Beit Sahour
Like the shepherds kept watch over their flock
On that fateful winter's eve...*

*I planted her with olive trees—
A symbol of home and peace and life,
Her ashes a stark contrast
To the red earth patted with care around the sapling.
I will foster peace in her memory.*

*The wind carried her from the rooftop
Of the Nazarene Convent in Nazareth
From there I could see a mosque, steeple, and temple in the distance
As the Muslim call to prayer floats through the air.*

*I buried my grandma at sea
Among the fishers and the fish
Where Jesus called disciples to be fishers of men.
On this water seas calmed, feet walked,
And now her ashes float.*

*Her ashes came to rest
Where He was crucified, died and buried,
And rose again from the dead.
May her soul rise to heaven and be in company with Him
As her ashes rest within an ancient Syrian tomb
Where one lone candle glows.*

*Trips past I have brought my adventures home
Recounted through observation and written word
Page after page of journal written
So that my dreaming grandmother might be able to imagine
The world, which I was able to see.*

*But now she needs no second-hand interpretation
No scrawling script or souvenir
Now—
Where I am, she is here.
She can see the world along with me
Wherever I bring her memory.*

One of the primary challenges in the transition from adolescence to young adulthood is the ability to learn to manage one's emotions. Managing emotions might at first glance appear to be a simple enough task, but "the problem with some emotions is that they seem to crop up unexpectedly and confound all of our hard work and planning" (Chickering 84). In other words, no amount of physical or cognitive work will shield someone from experiencing emotion. The college years are a time of "leaving home" and of becoming independent. "Leaving home" experiences do not always occur when one physically leaves the place in which they grew up.

Instead, they might occur when life as one has always known it to be ceases to exist. For Mary, this happened when her grandmother passed away just months before the January pilgrimage. Mary's pilgrimage experience was one of profound self-discovery and emerging autonomy. Her journey, as shared through her poem, was primarily one of personal, emotional growth, of working through her grief, and of finding God in the midst of that work.

What, then, is home, if this concept of "leaving home" is so critical to understanding Mary's experience of pilgrimage? Home, as Sharon Daloz Parks describes it, is

...to be able to make meaning of one's own life and of one's surroundings in a manner that holds, regardless of what may happen at the level of immediate events...[home] is to have a place in the scheme of life—a place where we are comfortable; know that we belong; can be who we are; and can honor, protect and create what we truly love (Parks 34).

Home, then, is not a physical place. It is a place of emotional security and personal freedom. It is about constructing a way of knowing the world and one's place in the world. Mary's "home" disappeared when her grandmother died—the primary support systems and stability she had known through her first three years of college were no longer there. Her faith was the one thing in her life that remained constant, a source of strength and comfort. The invitation to return to the birthplace of Christianity—"Jesus' home!" as she so often called it—was one she couldn't turn down. For Mary, this was a shared dream of hers and her grandmother's. "She dreamed of travel and seeing the world,/ So whenever I would go anywhere,/ I would bring something back for her from each of my travels" (Mary).

Traveling to the Holy Land was a chance for Mary to make meaning of the situation she found herself in, and of aspects of her faith. If one thing is abundantly clear in Mary's poem it is her understanding of the incredibly intimate connection between heaven and earth, between this life and the life everlasting. While many people might have put the ashes of a deceased loved one

in a sealed urn, Mary chose a simple plastic baggie: something transitional, something impermanent. By this choice alone it is clear that she wasn't planning to hold on to her grandmother's ashes forever.

Connecting her grief and loss with both the historical story and the faith story of Christianity became a way for Mary to work through her emotions. Look at the places where she chose to leave behind pieces of her grandmother—the site of the discovery of sacred texts, a place of destruction and injustice, the place the angels announced the birth of Jesus, in the roots of trees that will grow for centuries to come, into the air filled with prayers from many nations, into the sea which witnessed many miracles, and finally into the place of death, into the tomb with Jesus. From ancient scripture to miracles to the tomb: a tracing of the life and death of Christ, a tracing of her understanding of her faith.

In many ways, Mary found the opportunity in this pilgrimage to connect her grief with the grief of the Christian tradition, and subsequently to find hope and healing in the hope of resurrection, shared with Christians from all generations. What she could not do alone, she found the strength to do in community, and in the footsteps of Jesus. “Faith,” as Parks describes it, “is not simply a set of beliefs that religious people have; it is something that all human beings do” (Parks 18). In Mary's case, faith is something that she had to “do” in order to enter more deeply into relationship with God and to begin creating a new way of making meaning in the world.

As much as physically “doing” faith—engaging in actions that construct meaning and give purpose to life—was important to Mary's pilgrimage experience, so too, was managing her emotions. One of the key aspects to Chickering's understanding of managing emotions is that students must develop an increasing awareness of emotions in their lives. “Awareness grows when students allow the feelings to percolate, accepting their existence rather than denying them

or distracting attention from them” (Chickering 101). According to Chickering, awareness also involves becoming aware about conflicting messages inside one’s head, and learning how to respond to those messages (102). The messages Mary relates at the very beginning of her poem couldn’t be more conflicting—her own sense of her grandmother’s continuing presence in the ashes and her roommate’s response of being upset by the ash-filled baggie; of first feeling proud of her grandmother’s ashes, and then feeling ashamed. The physical presence of her grandmother’s ashes—in a plastic baggie in her sock drawer and in a blue velvet sachet—might well have aided Mary in allowing her emotions around her grandmother’s death to come to light, and her own challenge with re-creating a place to call home to begin to emerge.

One of the most telling aspects of Mary’s poem is how she refers to her grandmother at the beginning, and then again at the end. There is clearly a shift in how Mary is relating to her grandmother’s influence in her life, and how Mary is dealing with her emotions and grief. In the third stanza, Mary clearly says, “I took my grandmother to Boston with me” (Mary). In the final stanza, Mary again refers to bringing her grandmother with her. But this time, instead of bringing her physical presence, Mary instead says, “She can see the world along with me/ Wherever I bring her memory” (Mary). The shift from the physical presence of her grandmother to her memory is a significant one. It demonstrates a change in consciousness, and a new way of relating to her grandmother and to her place in the world. The power of Mary’s memories have, in some ways, superseded the need for her plastic baggie. This is a shift from concrete to abstract relationship—in reality what the grief process is about: learning to relate to the one we loved in a new way. At the end of her Holy Land experience, Mary herself is the place where her grandmother still lives on.

Travel itself can be a transformative experience, causing someone to rethink his or her place in the world. “International travel can evoke deepened recognition of connection and interdependence” (Parks 185). In Mary’s case, it seems as though the pilgrimage experience did exactly that. By giving her the opportunity to return to the roots of her faith tradition, and to bring with her quite probably some of the most powerful and challenging emotions she’s ever had to deal with, Mary was able to grasp both faith and life on a deeper level. She was able to grasp their interconnectedness. By joining her grandmother’s post-mortem travels with the footsteps of Jesus, and by joining her grief with the grief of two millennia of Christians, Mary discovered a powerful way of managing her emotions and moving forward.

“Elsa”

When it comes to my religion, I am like the majority of students on the Boston College campus: I am a Christian. I like to tell people, however, that it seems my life, in and out of the classroom, is a constant interfaith experience. I was raised as an Episcopalian, my significant other is Jewish, and last year I chose to pursue a minor in the excellent Middle Eastern and Islamic studies program offered here at BC. All the religions of Abraham converge.

My religion was not a large part of my life before I came to BC. I went through the motions and never took an interest in learning about the history and activities of my church or discovering the true significance of the liturgy. With respect to these things I still have quite a long way to go. Yet the first step that I took in college, perhaps the most important step, was to truly begin exploring my faith and my church and embracing it as my very own. College is both a stressful and exciting time when one grows at an exponential rate, and I believe that beginning the struggle to come to terms with my own religion will give me the courage to try to make sense of the rest of this world, which is a daunting task indeed.

The most formative factor of this personal journey is my involvement with the new and growing Episcopal Eagles on campus. Every week we come together as a community to share food and to share our lives. Last winter, several people from our group represented Episcopal Campus Ministry on a trip to Israel and Palestine, where I witnessed first hand the incredibly complex situation there.

After returning from Israel and Palestine, I wanted to help somehow. I realized that one of the deadliest culprits in our world is ignorance. People fear and hate what they do not understand. And I realized that breaking down stereotypes and prejudices not only needs to happen in Israel and Palestine, but it needs to begin first in our own lives.

Last year I, along with a fabulous group of enthusiastic, intelligent women, formed the Daughters of Abraham, an interfaith book group for faculty, students, and staff that explores the three Abrahamic faiths: Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Once a month we come together to discuss a selection from a work that explores one of the three faiths or one that incorporates them all. This is not the first or only Daughters of Abraham: we are among five groups. The first group began in Cambridge, Mass., in direct response to the need for solidarity after the events of Sept. 11.

Interfaith dialogue is difficult. I will be the first one to say this. In our culture we have been trained to believe that it is impolite to discuss religion, and it is very hard to foster a mutual level of trust in a relationship, to be able to have a productive and positive conversation and exchange of ideas. That is why a small group like the Daughters is so effective, because over time we ladies are able to talk and get to know each other and have a safe environment to share our beliefs and lives. And, as we all learned in middle school, if something is difficult, it is that much more worth doing. It is only by finding the wealth of similarities in supposedly different cultures around the world, as well as acknowledging and respecting the differences that give us our identities and make us who we are, that we will be able to move forward: on this campus, in this city, in this country, and around the world.

Critical thought is one of the key aspects of the undergraduate academic experience.

Elsa's experience of her pilgrimage to Israel-Palestine deeply affected the way she looked at the world around her, and the way she sought to understand her place in that world. Piaget's theory of cognitive development explains the transition in thought processes quite well:

The concrete operational child is *carried* by the flow of his or her life and reflects on events and relationships from *within* that flow. In contrast, the adolescent begins to be able to reflect on the life course from "above" or "beside" it. Formal operations bring the ability to construct a personal past and to anticipate a personal future, based on expected or projected developmental transformations of the self (Fowler 71).

Rather than experiences or events dictating the course of one's thought and action, a person who has grasped formal operational thought is able to step outside of a situation and reflect upon it with some distance. In other words, this person is able to think about thinking.

When Elsa witnessed fear and hatred on all sides of the conflict in Israel and Palestine, she was able to think critically about where those emotions and actions came from. “I realized that one of the deadliest culprits in our world is ignorance. People fear and hate what they do not understand” (Elsa). Elsa’s reaction to her pilgrimage experience was primarily a cognitive one. Faced with a problem, she chose to do her part to solve it through academic inquiry and critical thought—something quite familiar to most undergraduate students. Elsa devoted the rest of her undergraduate experience to studying Art History and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, and looking for a way to bring deeper understanding of the Islamic world to Westerners.

What is most interesting is how Elsa’s pilgrimage experience allowed her to begin to take ownership of her faith—not only in God and the Church, but in humanity as well. Religion, for Elsa, was never an incredibly salient point of her identity growing up. She chose during her college experience to “truly begin exploring my faith and my church and embracing it as my very own” (Elsa). While exploring her faith, she also explored the faiths of others as well, most especially Judaism and Islam. It was only when she stepped outside of her own tradition that she was able to step more deeply into her own faith.

Most young adults come to college in what Fowler would call a state of “Synthetic-Conventional” faith. Fowler explains that, “for stage 3...authority is located externally to the self...despite their genuine feelings of having made choices and commitments, a truer reading is that their values and self-images, mediated by the significant others in their lives, have largely chosen them” (154). Elsa demonstrates an initial situated-ness in this stage when she comments, “I was raised as an Episcopalian...I went through the motions” (Elsa). Her faith was primarily hers because it was handed down to her by her family. She accepted it unquestioningly, and became comfortable within its structures. She was an Episcopalian because her family was Episcopalian,

and she believed what Episcopalians believed because she was taught to think that way. This stage tends to be fairly literalistic—a symbol is inseparable from that which it symbolizes. Persons residing in stage three are able to “articulate [values and normative images], defend them and feel deep emotional investments in them, but typically have not made the value system, *as a system*, the object of reflection” (Fowler 162). In other words, the person is not able to critically engage their meaning-making system. Elsa was attached to the rituals and traditions of The Episcopal Church, even without knowing exactly what they meant or why she was engaging in them. She had not yet begun to think about the church as a system that one could stand “beside” or “above” to analyze and reflect upon.

Many adults never move on from stage three. Stage four, or Individuative-Reflective faith requires critical engagement of one’s meaning-making system. It requires that the person ask difficult questions and analyze their beliefs. There generally must be an inciting event for a person to move to the next stage. When something challenges our worldview—what Fowler calls the “assumptive” worldview of stage three—it becomes imperative for the person to find a way to reconcile that challenge. Working to reconcile that challenge becomes the catalyst for moving a person from stage three to stage four. For Elsa, the thing that challenged her worldview was what she witnessed on pilgrimage. Being faced with a reality completely different from the one she had been exposed to her whole life, and being asked to understand the under-represented side of an incredibly complex conflict was enough to begin the process of further faith development within Elsa.

A critical component of being able to reach stage four is the “freedom (and burden) to explore who he [or she] could be away from home” (Fowler 178). One must extract themselves from the very communities that formed and informed them. The essence of stage four is this idea

of the locus of authority shifting; the primary authority in Individuative-Reflective faith resides within the self. Elsa, in many ways, did not choose to extract herself from the community that formed and informed her—rather she entered more deeply into her Episcopalian roots by becoming more involved with the Boston College chaplaincy. But simultaneously, Elsa was also working to broaden her perspective of faith by forming Daughters of Abraham, an interfaith women’s group. While becoming more involved in her Episcopal faith, she was also exploring other ways of being a woman of faith in the world. In her development of this group, we can clearly see how the shift in the locus of authority was playing out for Elsa. Instead of relying on a centralized external authority to dictate belief systems and ways of thinking, Elsa began to understand the authority of each individual voice, and the power of her own self-authority. By forming the Daughters of Abraham, she was forming a place where Christian, Muslim, and Jewish women could gather to learn from and teach each other about faith and life. She created a place to ask deep questions and to think critically about her own tradition in light of other faith traditions: an ideal environment to foster faith development.

Pilgrimage, for Elsa, was about a lot more than just seeing and understanding, it was about responding. In her response we can see the emergence of what is quite likely to be a life-long passion for interfaith dialogue. Witnessing the effects of hatred and fear, and then returning home, determined to work in her own way to eradicate that hatred and fear both pulled Elsa out of her own faith tradition and brought her more deeply into dialogue with it. “I believe that beginning the struggle to come to terms with my own religion will give me the courage to try to make sense of the rest of this world, which is a daunting task indeed” (Elsa).

“Charlene”

When I traveled to Israel and Palestine in December, something about the things I saw seemed familiar to me. My dad was drafted to the Vietnam War when he was 18-years old and served in the middle years of the conflict, the most violent times. When he returned, like other veterans, he was often criticized rather than acknowledged for his sacrificial service. This obligation fulfilled at such a young age has left my father with a silent suffering for so long; his service, painful experiences and the emotional struggles that followed remain taboo in my family.

Driving home from school at the end of my fall semester, I broke my family’s code of silence and quietly asked my dad, “how much did Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder affect you when I was younger?” I had recently been diagnosed with Secondary Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, a form of anxiety associated with those raised or directly affected by someone with PTSD. In a difficult conversation my dad explained that during my early childhood he gone through some of the hardest times of his emotional struggle.

I have been called “the canary in the coal mine” as I have an acute sense of other peoples’ emotions even when they are masked. On Christmas I could tell my dad was depressed, although no one else in the family could really see it. I asked if he was okay and he said he felt a little down and thanked me for noticing.

Two days later my parents brought me to the airport to leave for the pilgrimage. I met the rest of the group I would be traveling with there: the three college chaplains, Bishop Thomas Shaw, and our trip leaders the Tobins, a retired priest and his wife, a former teacher. We flew to Amman, Jordan and spent a day touring the city. The next day we traveled in our coach bus to the Allenby Bridge to cross into Israel.

We had been prepared for the strict security for crossing the Israeli border. We were instructed to answer directly, remain calm and avoid mentioning that we were going to Palestine. Still very jet-lagged and with our cumbersome luggage we dragged ourselves into the long line at the border-crossing to present our passports. It was dimly lit and swarming with flies. It was obvious when we walked into the security building who the Israeli soldiers were securing their border from. In the waiting area for those being held from entering Israel were dark-skinned men and veiled-women with children holding green passports. When I finally reached the security counter I handed my passport to the young Israeli female soldier. Standing elevated on a platform she looked down at me and asked me to pronounce my name, “Charlene L----.” She asked if I had even been to Lebanon or Syria. I answered no. She asked if I had any other passports. I said no. She began to speak in Hebrew to the other young female soldier sitting beside her. They were both looking at my passport. She asked if I was married and then asked for my parents’ names, my grandparents’ names and my great-grandparent’s names. I said I did not know my great-grandparent’s first names. She stared at me coldly and asked where I got my last name. I told her that my great-grandparents had immigrated to the United States from Lebanon. She asked again if I had ever been to Lebanon. She asked where I was born and who I was traveling with and if anyone in my family was with me.

As she questioned me she kept an authoritative, cold demeanor even though I sensed she was younger than me. As I often do in uncomfortable interactions, I tried smiling at her, but she was unwavering.

She picked up a telephone and began speaking Hebrew again. She handed me a slip of paper and asked me to write my home address and phone number, e-mail address and parent's phone number and address. After I wrote it all down she took my passport for what she called "processing" and asked me to sit in the waiting area.

Maurine Tobin, one of our trip coordinators sat with me. We talked a little bit about the days to come on the trip and my reasons for coming. As a student majoring in international relations, I wanted to learn more about the Arab-Israeli conflict; I hope to one day have a career in international peace-keeping and social services.

I sat in the waiting area and, as the only green-eyed blond-haired girl, I drew a bit of attention. A Muslim woman holding a baby told me she had been there for eight hours and that the bridge would be closing in another hour. We spoke with another young Muslim man from California who wanted to see the holy sights and had been waiting since the early morning; he had left his wife and child in Amman and planned to only go for a day. For him a chance to visit the land he considers holy was worth waiting all day and risking never gaining admittance. The only other non-Arab person I met was a valiant young woman from Spain who worked for an NGO and had been in and out of Syria and Lebanon working for an organization for women's rights.

But the thing that struck me the most in my experience in the waiting room was not the other people being detained; it was the young Israeli soldiers. They looked about 18 years old. They acted so impersonal when they stood behind the counter. Then I watched the girl who had questioned me step down from her platform behind the counter. She pulled a pink cell phone out of her pocket, and her hardened expression turned to the soft innocent face of a teenage girl. Talking on her phone and laughing she bounced back and forth over a beam behind the counter guiding the line of the border-crossers towards the metal detectors. Her mannerisms reminded me of myself. I imagined she was planning for what she would be doing in a little while the same way I impatiently count down the final moments of a day at work, especially on a warm sunny day. I saw myself in her.

Then she returned to the counter. So much power was given to this normal girl when she stood behind that counter, wearing that uniform. Maurine's husband, Bob Tobin a retired priest donning his collar, approached the girl. He explained the situation. She snapped back "Her passport is being processed." He asked how much longer and if there was any way she could speed it up or see how much longer it may take. She said no. He said "This is ruining our day's schedule." She rolled her eyes and raised her voice, "Ruining your day? That's not my problem. I am doing my job." I could not believe she spoke back to an older man, let alone a priest. But she was just doing her job, and not necessarily a job she chose. I saw my dad in her.

Finally after 2 hours, a soldier at another desk called my name. As I gathered all of my luggage she sarcastically remarked, "Okay now you take your time." She handed me my passport and told me I could cross. A taxi took Maurine and I to the down the desert road to the coach bus. I

looked back at the dank building at Allenby Bridge and thought of all of the Arab families still waiting. Then I looked ahead of me and all I saw was open sky and desert hills and sand. This was the first time in my life I had seen so much openness. I felt closer to God than I ever had. And I wondered, how could a world so beautiful in its nature be so polluted by the ugliness of fear and hate?

When I was reunited with the group I was surprised how concerned and agitated everyone had gotten. Everyone asked about the soldiers and seemed slightly angry at their hostility and extremely surprised at my calmness. I was not angry with them at all. I felt sorry for them. No one should have their innocence taken so young.

At the end of the pilgrimage I had a similar experience when we met with members of Breaking the Silence, a group of former Israeli soldiers speaking out about the horrors of their compulsory service at age 18. Their stories included sending Palestinian children to pick up suspicious packages to find out if they were bombs. While clearly these men were morally opposed to what they did in hindsight, they admitted to a sense of duty and a detached fulfillment of orders that came with these tasks. They were trained to do this. Another pilgrim reflected that he had interned at a veteran's clinic and how constructive it was that these men in their twenties were breaking the silence now. He explained how he had worked with many men in their 60's and 70's who had struggled in silence with their painful duties when they were so young. I prayed that my dad would find some peace and reconciliation.

When I arrived at Logan airport after the trip my mom greeted me. On the way home I asked why dad had not come to the airport. She told me that while I was away my dad had had a bad panic attack and was sent to a veterans' hospital for a couple of weeks. I was amazed at how quickly and directly God had answered my prayers.

I believe everything that happened to me this winter and to my father had happened for a reason. God had a mission for me on this pilgrimage. I returned more inspired and dedicated to work for peace and justice and pursue a career in this field. I have witnessed how cruelty hurts beautiful and innocent people, and how innocence, morality and humanity can be jaded and helplessly lost under influence of war and authority. I have observed and felt how these experiences impact someone for the rest of his life and how this impact even contributes in shaping the next generation. As the generation following the Vietnam War era, I chose to make this insight and impact shape my life in a positive way with compassion and activism in peace-keeping. Although I have an Arab last name, I can sympathize with Israeli soldiers taught to be intolerant towards Arabs.

Charlene had a closer encounter with the politics of occupation than any of the other pilgrims on our most recent journey. Singled out because of her last name, Charlene found herself detained and discriminated against because of something out of her control. For many

college students, this would have been simply too much to handle on the first full day of the trip. For Charlene, however, this experience shed light into family history. It was not an experience of relating with the oppressed, which much of our pilgrimage was based around; instead, her experience was one of relating to the oppressor. There are many approaches I could take to analyzing her experience, as there are quite a few issues that came up for Charlene in this journey. For simplicity's sake, I chose only one issue, and the one that appeared to be most salient (and unique) to her: the ability to understand the Israeli soldiers and see beyond the uniform. Few, if any, of the other students on the pilgrimage were able to connect with the soldier's experience in the way she was. Kohlberg would explain this in terms of her "perspective taking ability." Charlene's journey, as shaped by this particular experience, was one primarily of moral reasoning, and self-understanding.

Kohlberg's stage theory of moral development has three primary phases, pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional thought. Late adolescence and early young adulthood is a time of transition between conventional and post-conventional thought processes. Perspective-taking ability is central to moral development.

Moral judgments require the mental ability to assess and evaluate multiple points of view. Since interpersonal conflicts are comprised of clashes between different points of view and different interests, one's adaptation to these encounters must to some extent rely on perspective taking ability...the ability to take the point of view of another person, to see things from others' points of view, and to understand the interests, intentions and claims others bring to a particular situation (Green & Piel 329).

Charlene's experience of being detained by the Israeli soldiers is one that clearly demonstrates her level of perspective-taking ability and moral development. Her particular family situation and her desire to understand her father's experience as a young soldier is undoubtedly an influence on the way she encountered this situation. Being detained by soldiers could absolutely

be seen as an interpersonal conflict and a clash of points of view. Charlene believed she had the right to enter Israel; the Israeli soldiers were not as agreeable to that belief.

Conventional Morality, as Kohlberg describes it, understands justice as being “determined by society’s needs, as cast in the expectations and laws of cultural groups” (Green & Piel, 334). Many undergraduates have a conventional sense of morality. Right and wrong is determined by an external source of authority, and one must abide by those rules, do as they are told, and fulfill what is expected of them. The ultimate goal is to benefit social order. Charlene’s understanding of the actions of the Israeli soldiers demonstrates a clear “law-and-order orientation,” or what Kohlberg calls “Morality of Social Systems and Conscience”—stage four (Green & Piel 335). Charlene saw herself in the female soldier she encountered—a young girl looking forward to finishing a day of work. Even though this soldier’s actions were discriminating against Charlene, Charlene still perceived those actions as just on some level. “But she was just doing her job, and not necessarily a job she chose” (Charlene). Charlene couldn’t blame the girl, it was a rule that those with Lebanese heritage be subjected to this kind of scrutiny, and this girl was just obeying the rules, doing as she was told, following orders. As Kohlberg describes, “doing what is moral means doing one’s duty, respecting social authorities, and acting to maintain the established social order” (Green & Piel 335). Fulfilling one’s contractual duty is a calling above all else in conventional morality. It is a hierarchical mode of thought and action.

By understanding the Israeli soldier’s actions in this context, Charlene was also seeking to understand her father’s actions as a young soldier in Vietnam. In her reflections on the action of the female soldier, one can almost hear her lament over her father’s reality as well: “no one should have their innocence taken so young” (Charlene). This notion of a “sense of duty and a

detached fulfillment of orders” is one that seems to have touched Charlene very deeply. In the experiences of the Israeli soldiers she encountered, again and again she found the experience of her father—an experience he never voiced to her, but one she had certainly imagined.

Pilgrimage, for Charlene, seemed not so much to be about developing a deeper relationship with God or a deeper understanding of faith. Rather, what Charlene experienced was a very political and moral dimension of humanity. While college is ideally a time to promote cognitive, moral, and faith development, sometimes that development can occur in ways other than “moving through the stages.” Charlene finally began to understand what it was like for her father to be a young soldier; she saw what occupation looked like and how soldiers were expected to act. She saw that simply putting on a uniform and picking up a gun can change a person. “I have witnessed how cruelty hurts beautiful and innocent people, and how innocence, morality and humanity can be jaded and helplessly lost under influence of war and authority” (Charlene). Charlene quite likely left the United States and returned to the United States with the same understanding of justice and morality. This does not mean that there was no development. Rather, it means that she deepened her understanding of self and of her family in the only context she had: a law-and-order understanding of justice.

Pilgrimage and the College Student: Conclusions

Quite clearly, each of these students experienced their journey to the Holy Land in a very different way. As so many developmental models indicate, college students are in a time of great change and transformation, not only academically, but emotionally, spiritually, and morally as well. These four years are truly a time of maturation and development of an adult identity. They

are when the “postadolescent-not-yet-full-adult still needs to accomplish...finding a home where the integrity, promise and power of the emerging self can dwell together with the perceived realities of the social world” (Parks 65). This pilgrimage program offered the opportunity for students to return to the birthplace of their faith while at the same time engaging in real and complex social justice issues.

David White seeks to explain the call to be faithful Christians as an evolving process. “Christian discipleship can be understood as giving as much of ourselves as we understand to as much of God as we understand each day, and it is important to continually expand our understanding and responses throughout our lives” (White 196). He is speaking about a mode of discernment and a way of encouraging students to engage with the world, what he labels a “discernment of action.” This can only occur in some form of community and in the context of a wider understanding of one’s place in the world and how one’s actions might affect that world. The presence of global mission outreach and annual pilgrimage opportunities really connect students with the world, allowing them to experience something in an active way while being supported by a community that will help them process and understand it on the heart, mind, and soul levels as well. When one’s whole self is engaged in the act of discipleship—mind, heart, soul, and body—Christian faith can be brought alive for young adults. Young adults need to be engaged as whole, integrated people in their own specific context, and in ways that help to foster an understanding of global citizenship and social responsibility.

Pilgrimage offers the unique opportunity to step outside of one’s social reality and into a new and unfamiliar situation. It also creates a situation where spirituality, intellectual inquiry, emotional reactions and physical action all come together. Faith becomes less of an after-thought and more of a place of empowerment and confidence. A good pilgrimage experience must

absolutely offer the possibility to engage all parts of a person's being. Each of these four dynamics (heart, mind, body, and soul) has the potential to speak to students in different ways while informing and forming their identities. Depending on where students are spiritually and psychologically, they will hear what they need to hear and be reached on the level or levels where they are most in need in order to experience God and understand this new reality they have been presented with. The opportunity is there to be transformed, if a student, like Mary or Elsa, is open to that transformation. For those who are not ready to move to the next place developmentally or spiritually, like Charlene, the pilgrimage experience still provides the chance to seek a deeper understanding of self, other, and God.

Many students go on these pilgrimage trips looking for something. Whether it is that deeper understanding of God, or the desire to serve, or simply the interest in travel, something draws students into these journeys. It is not as important to ask why students come as it is to ask what students can take from this kind of experience. This type of immersion trip—one coupling socio-political issues and spiritual pilgrimage—lays the foundation for the development of informed action and informed global citizenship, while hopefully inspiring students to get involved and work to change the injustices they have identified in the world.

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