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Prepared for the Journey: From Patient to Pilgrim

Until now, I have been trying to make visible certain features of our world as twenty-first-century Americans. I worry that we have become impoverished. We long for happiness, peace, and perfection, but in our willingness to accept diagnoses, pursue self-fulfillment, and maximize self-esteem, we've lost our existential and ethical moorings, our grounding in vast realities larger than ourselves. We've distorted our connection with Others. We've shrunk our capacity for awe appropriate to the majesty of the natural world. We've tended to neglect the realm of the imagination as well as all that is disclosed when words are allowed to open worlds rather than shutting down experience. We've become so literal minded in our efforts to nail down experience that we forget "tenderness," for example, might open up exploration of a relationship shut down by the supposedly obvious dynamics of "codependence." And, yes, we've lost touch with the sacred in whatever ways it can be encountered here and now.

I've been saying that the pilgrim is "a self who is a soul." What does that mean? In order to think about ways of being that might help us rediscover harmony with profoundly nourishing realities—Truth, Beauty, Goodness—let's begin by exploring qualities of soul. I hope we'll see that healing and growth can mean much, much more than simply preserving and enhancing oneself.