

THE ODYSSEY

Syllabus

*“Transformation occurs as a result of intent.
Rituals serve to focus the intent.
The more focused the ritual, the more powerful the potential transformation.”
- Caryn Anderson*

The Odyssey is an epic poem attributed to Homer, which describes the ten years' wandering and adventures of Odysseus (Latin: Ulysses) in returning home to Ithaca after the siege of Troy. This Odyssey is also a long wandering or series of travels, and also a return home, after a siege.

- **Part spiritual retreat, part urban walking tour**, the Odyssey is a complex ritual I've developed based on a creative integration of ancient mystical and mythological traditions.
- **Part scavenger hunt, part holy pilgrimage**, the Odyssey course is an adventure-based program designed to generate personal transformation using mental, emotional, spiritual and physical methods.
- **Part dress-up, part mindfulness**, the Odyssey journey is a playful exploration and mining of our deepest values and qualities.

If the ideas of Psychological Sudoku, Mystical Scrabble, a Linguistic Labyrinth or Mathematical Meditation seem more curious than crazy, and you are looking for some new creative problem-solving methods in your personal or professional life, this may be the adventure for you. Based on Creative Planning and Pragmatic Serendipity, the Odyssey experience can be described as a Methodological Pilgrimage or a kind of Spiritual Outward Bound. You need to be willing to do a little math, a little reading, a little mind-opening, and a substantial amount of walking through the city and suburbs of Boston.

Over the course of ten weeks, we will explore a new way of thinking about the world and our lives. We will plan a spiritual journey based on ancient mathematic and mystical methods, and we will make that journey physically, through the city and suburbs of Boston. We will record our observations and insights, share them with each other, and make recommendations for future travelers. Ultimately, as with any arduous journey, we will have many opportunities to grow: through suffering and through triumph; by our own hand, with assistance from the hands of others, and through unseen hands. Upon our return, we will have new methods for creative problem solving and probably a new vision for our respective futures and the inspiration to pursue it.

Week 1: Introduction, Tree of Life and Growth Cycles

We will review the outline of the class, explore the nature of transformation, examine the concept of pilgrimage and discuss the history and fundamental components of the Odyssey practice.

Intersession Work: Calculate Growth Cycles and Make/Acquire Tree Map

Week 2: Sephirot and Channels (Elemental Conditions and Paths of Change)

We will review our intersession work calculating our growth cycles and making our own maps. We will then examine in detail all of the elemental conditions (10 sephirot) and paths of change (22 channels) that will constitute the bulk of our Odyssey practice.

Intersession Work: Make/Acquire Cards

Week 3: Requests for Guidance

We will review our intersession work preparing our cards to represent the elemental conditions and paths of change. We will then explore the nature of requests for guidance, especially in terms of being clear about our requests and evaluating our willingness to receive alternative answers. We will then examine three systematic frameworks for requesting guidance and discuss how to interpret results.

Intersession Work: Request Guidance and Interpret Responses

Week 4: Routes of Travel

We will review our intersession work requesting guidance on specific issues or our lives in general and interpreting the responses. We will then review how to plot those responses on our maps and plan the Odyssey route we will take on our physical journey.

Intersession Work: Map Journey on Tree

Week 5: The Journey

We will review our intersession work mapping the route of our journey. We will then review the details of how to adequately prepare for engaging in the physical journey, including clothing, tools, materials, sustenance. We will also clarify the specific activities to occur during each phase of the journey.

Intersession Journey: Travel Malkuth to Kether
Intersession Work: Brief dispatch about your journey

Week 6: The Journey

There will be no meeting this week, to enable more time for physical travel and reflection.

Week 7: Journey Dispatches

We will share our writings about our journeys thus far and discuss what we have learned and any questions that have emerged.

Intersession Journey: Travel Kether to Malkuth
Intersession Work: Brief dispatch about your journey

Week 8: The Journey

There will be no meeting this week, to enable more time for physical travel and reflection.

Week 9: Journey Dispatches

We will share our writings about our journeys thus far and discuss what we have learned and any questions that have emerged. We will discuss individual and collective preparations for the Philosophers Banquet at the final session.

Intersession Work: Identify Gifts, Compose Wisdom for Travelers and Suggested Readings

Week 10: Philosophers Banquet

In this last session we will have a banquet where we will feast and also share our distilled wisdom – the gifts we have brought back from our journey. Friends and family are welcome to attend the Philosophers Banquet, but they must bring their own candlestick, chalice, knife, and plate and must also bring one bottle of beverage, one dish of food, and one quotation/proverb that reflects their perception of great wisdom.

REQUIRED READING

- **Harold and the Purple Crayon** by *Crockett Johnson*

SUGGESTED READING

- **The Art of Pilgrimage** by *Phil Cousineau* – Great guidance on how to approach any journey, even to the market.
- **Reflections on the Art of Living** by *Joseph Campbell* – Collections of wisdom, mostly from lectures, by the foremost scholar of mythology. (The video series of Bill Moyers’s conversations with Joseph Campbell, entitled *The Power of Myth*, is also very good.)
- **The Odyssey** by *Homer* – I like Allen Mandelbaum translation, but I recommend going to the bookstore, lining up at least three translations and reading three or four random stanzas in each of the books in order to select the translation that speaks to you most.
- **Narcissus and Goldmund** by *Hermann Hesse* – Unparalleled exploration of the many ways to wisdom, peace, fulfillment and the divine. A masterpiece and yet a surprisingly neglected novel; I prefer to think of it as my secret.
- **Illusions** by *Richard Bach* – Excellent reminders of the truths and fictions we create for ourselves.
- **Golf in the Kingdom** by *Michael Murphy* – A magnificent illustration of the value of metaphor and the practical techniques of exercising it from the founder of the Esalen Institute, one of the great American centers dedicated to exploring human potential and “new age” philosophies and practices.
- **Conversations with God** by *Neale Donald Walshe* – One of the most unique explanations of god and the purpose of life I have read.
- **Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance** by *Robert Pirsig* – A compelling investigation into the nature of quality as a fundamental force of human existence; fantastically supplemented by its sequel, *Lila*.
- **Dictionary of Symbolism** by *Hans Biedermann* – One of my earliest books on symbols and still one of my most accessible.
- **Sefer Yetzirah** by *Aryeh Kaplan* – A thorough and very detailed explanation of the mathematic and linguistic methodology of ancient judaic mysticism.
- **Feng Shui** by *Eva Wong* – An excellent introduction to the philosophy of feng shui with easy to follow instructions for analyzing and planning an environment. The practice of feng shui is closely aligned with the elements and mathematical methods of mysticism and I have found it an excellent complement to the Odyssey practice, especially when observing environments and physical features during any journey.

I look forward to participants building the list of suggested readings with their own recommendations and brief annotations on the website.