

Spiritual AF Sundays Podcast

Episode 10

Journey to Santiago de Compostela: A Spiritual Pilgrimage, with our guest, Kathleen Donnelly Israel

Transcript

Jessica K: The quest to deepen one's spiritual practice looks different for different people. Some may turn to a specific religion, while others use meditation or yoga. No matter what path an individual chooses, the goal is often the same: to connect more deeply with one spirituality and to feel a sense of peace and harmony.

Individuals can access their spiritual side in various ways through prayer, journaling, intentional conversations, service, or other practices.

Have you ever considered taking a spiritual pilgrimage? What type of impact would that experience have on your life?

Today we have Kathleen Donnelly, Israel, an experienced traveler who went on this incredible multi-country pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. She's joining us to share her experience and how it shaped her life. Kathleen also shares the wisdom that she shared with her fellow travelers while on her journey.

It's time to get ready, folks. Get your favorite beverage and sit in your favorite chair. It is time for this coming episode of Spiritual AF Sundays, Journey to Santiago de Compostela: A Spiritual Pilgrimage, with our guest, Kathleen Donnelly Israel.

[Opening Credits - Transition to Interview]

Introductions

Jessica K: Welcome back, listeners. This is Jessica the Mystic Geek, and we have Kathleen Donnelly Israel With us today; say hi, Kathleen.

Kathleen: Hi. Hi. I am so happy to be here.

Jessica K: All right, excellent. Well, share a little bit more about yourselves. My listeners are eager to discover who you are and what you do.

Kathleen: Kathleen Donnelly Israel Donnelly was my maiden name. I was born in San Diego, and I grew up here. I got my degree at San Diego State University in Art. I married Ron Israel. We were married for 48 years, and he got Parkinson's disease. He was an athlete, so I thought we'd be riding our bicycles across France or something in our old age.

And when he got Parkinson's, I was like, oh, I guess that's not going to happen.

So I had to find another dream for myself. When I was caring for my husband, I went online a lot, and my friend Judy went on the Camino Santiago. I thought, Ooh, it looked like she was doing something very special for herself.

And so I decided that I would go on the Camino when Ron was done with his disease.

Walking the Camino Santiago

Jessica K: Kathleen, what is the Camino Santiago?

Kathleen: The Camino Santiago is a 500-mile walk across northern Spain. It's a pilgrimage, and back in the time of Jesus, the Apostle James went to the Iberian Peninsula and tried to tell people about Jesus. He went back to Jerusalem, where they martyred him. The story goes that Angels brought him back to Spain.

You know, maybe it was some people with the help of angels. They buried him in Spain.

In the 900s, they were trying to get the Moors out of Spain, and St. James appeared and helped them win the day, and everybody liked Saint James after that.

And they found his grave. And so, people started making pilgrimages to his grave, and that's how the Camino started. They built this giant cathedral around his grave. You know, in the medieval times' people made a pilgrimage. The European people just went out their door and started walking to Santiago.

ago is James, Diego, and ago are both James in Spanish and Saint James, Santiago.

Jessica K: Mm. Okay. That's where that word comes from. A little bit of trivia there.

Kathleen: In the seventies and 1970s, they decided to resurrect the pilgrimage, and they looked for the, you know, the trail, which was mainly Roman roads, and most of them were still available. They had built freeways over some of them anyway, they resurrected the Camino, and sometimes they had to make underpasses under freeways. And, so that's, you know, that's how the history.

Preparations

Jessica K: Wow, that's incredible there and 500 miles. It's hard to even think about getting five miles in a day. What did you do to prepare for the trip?

Kathleen: Well, that's what I used to do. I used to walk five miles, with my friend, at the bay over here in San Diego. We would walk five miles, and I didn't even break a sweat, and so I thought, well, I can walk five miles before lunch and five miles after lunch, and I can do this.

Jessica K: Okay.

Kathleen: yeah,

Jessica K: All right. Other than that, did you do anything else to prepare for this pilgrimage?

Kathleen: Walking by the Bay is not very hilly, and my sister-in-law, Bernadette, told me, "oh, you're gonna have to walk up some mountains." So she found all the mountains in San Diego, and we walked up them. So that was really sweet of her.

I used to volunteer at a horse ranch. I was picking up all the horse pucky, and that gave me a really strong core. Even though my health got way down while it was caring for my husband, I was still quite strong in some ways.

Jessica K: Got it.

Kathleen: Also, I had to find all the clothing. You can go online, and there are YouTubes about how to pack for the Camino and what you need.

There are books, there are all kinds of stuff.

And I went to a workshop at my library about how to pack light for the Camino.

it was funny. Yeah, the room was full, and she asked, "so who here is gonna go on the Camino?" And I was the only one that raised my hand.

I guess all those other people just wanted to know how to pack light. So she was very helpful. She told me where to stay in San Jean. in France. She like handed around clothing, and she had two shirts, and she said, "now feel this shirt and feel how heavy this is. And then now feel this shirt, this is the kind of shirt you need to take on the Camino".

And so you just a regular t-shirt. And then the one for the Camino was just very light. And so I just went online and just searched for lightweight clothing. I wanted to wear long sleeves because I didn't want to wear sunscreen all the time.

I got very special clothes to go with me. It's funny because I always try to get the least expensive ones, so my clothing doesn't match.

[Kathleen chuckles]

You know, a white, purple, and orange shirt goes with my turquoise pants. So, I didn't care. I just wanted some lightweight clothing.

I had to buy four backpacks before I found the right one. REI is great.

You can take things back.

Jessica K: Oh yeah.

Kathleen: And so yeah, the fifth, the, the fourth pack was the one. I've used it twice now. It's a great pack.

Taking the Pilgrimage

Jessica K: Good. So when you were out there, what was the experience like? I'm assuming you were not the only one that was walking the Camino during that time. Did you meet other people while you were doing that?

Kathleen: Yeah, uh, that was like the great thing.

I walk slowly. Everybody was going [zooming noises] past me, and I was just walking as fast as I could. I have a bum foot too, so I had that to worry about. So it was just really beautiful. The first night I stayed in the Beilari in San Jean Pied de Port.

The first thing you do is go over the Pyrenees to Orisson, and then you keep going.

They wouldn't let us go over the Pyrenees because there was snow. They said, "well, most of the arrows are on the ground anyway, so you won't be able to find them, number one, and we don't wanna have to go up and save you."

So it was really against the law to go over the Pyrenees, so we had to walk around the Pyrenees, and you would think that maybe there weren't a lot of hills, but my gosh, there were so many hills going around, they weren't as high as on, but, but I felt like I was walking up and down and up and down. I was like, well, this is the Camino. I came here not necessarily to have a good time but to fulfill a pilgrimage.

Jessica K: Got it. So did you meet any people along the way?

Kathleen: Yeah. when I started, I met a lady on the train. I had to take the train to San Jean Pied de Port, and I met a lady there

we walked together quite a few times. We separated and met on the Camino. So that was lovely. Her name is Diane. She lives in Australia.

Another lady was there in the Beilari also. I walked with her for a while, and we're still friends. The first night after the Beilari, I stayed At Valcarlos, and all the people that night in Valcarlos, we all didn't get to walk over the Pyrenees. We were commiserating with each other about why we were on the Camino.

I met a man who had lost three friends in rapid succession at different deaths, and he just was so sad he couldn't do his life anymore. And somebody suggested he go on the Camino. That might shake him out of his sadness.

So I shared with him that my husband died in August, and my mother died in December. And so he immediately was like, "oh, I'm so sorry. We have something in common" that was lovely. Also, somebody from that first night in Valcarlos made a WhatsApp, and they let me in too. So we can still get ahold of each other on WhatsApp. And like at Christmas, we send a picture of our Christmas tree and like

that. Yeah. Yeah.

Jessica K: Cool. So you made some friends and a mini community there.

Kathleen: I am kind of a timid person, and I was like looking around at people and thinking, well, I heard there was camaraderie on the Camino, but I don't know how to do this. You know?

But then that's the big question. Why are you here?

And so you share with each other why you're there, and then all of a sudden, you know them pretty well, and it's nice.

I met some people in Sahagun. Three people were walking together, and then they had two other friends just staying in this monastery.

And, so, I met them, and we did laundry together. They, had a salad, and I came out into the patio they still needed to finish the salad, so they said, oh, here, have some salad. somebody gave me their plate, and it seemed like they had a clean fork. And so that was just, that's how it happens. And we're just friends now.

Sharing Spiritual Messages

Jessica K: Now, I know that when we talked before this, that part of you walking the Camino was you sharing messages with other people. Can you explain a little bit more about that?

Kathleen: When I was caring for Ron, he was sick for 17 years. He was totally disabled for eight years. I had to be home during that time I did some studying with some enlightened thought leaders.

I had a pretty rough childhood, and I needed some healing.

I've been trying to do healing all my life. I thought, well, I could do some more healing now. Because I studied for so long, it was eight years, and I felt like I knew some stuff afterward. As I had done some really deep healing, I could share some of that stuff with people.

So when I was on the Camino, if they had a problem, I could share some of the things I learned from studying.

Jessica K: Got it.

Kathleen: And I felt God had led me to all those healers.

At the beginning of my study, I would buy somebody's program and do the sleep tapes; do all the work they wanted me to do, and then, after a while, it would seem like not as interesting as it had. Then God would send me another healer, and I would do their work.

Doing the healing over time raised my vibration, which needed a new vibration. I needed more healing.

Each teacher brought my vibration up a little bit more. And that's what I think.

Jessica K: Yeah. And that's an important aspect when it comes to healing is it's a process, and sometimes you think you're done, but then it's like there's another phase and another phase. Whether it's like climbing a mountain or peeling an onion, both metaphors fit for each, or there's always more to do.

Kathleen: Yeah, it was really disconcerting when it stopped being interesting, I'm like, oh, what's wrong with me? I'm not into this, and then God would send me another healer. So that was it.

Returning to the Camino

Jessica K: Yeah. I'm glad you've gone through that experience. You've already walked the Camino once. Are you planning on doing it again?

Kathleen: I actually did walk it in '22 again. I wrote the book about the French Way.

That was in 2019, before covid, and then in 2021, I walked the Portuguese Way. So I started in Lisbon, walked up to Santiago, and went to Finisterre. So it was almost the same amount of miles. Ten miles less; I'm writing that book right now.

The book that I have already published was about the French Way. Not this year, but next year, I'm going to have my 75th birthday on the Camino.

I'm going to walk the Camino del Norte, along the northern coast of Spain, along the, you know, the ocean.

Jessica K: What were the significant differences between your first pilgrimage other than the roadmap? Other than the roadmap?

You went through it once, and now you're going through it again with more experience. You have that. But what, is there anything else significant about the second pilgrimage that, or something that stood out?

Kathleen: Well, the first pilgrimage was so beautiful and progressive. We're getting closer. We're getting closer. When I did the one in Portugal, of course, it was during Covid, and there weren't very many albergues open, actually. You stay in albergues at night, they're really cheap, like 5 to 12 euros a night.

During Covid, a lot was closed, so I had to stay in hotels, which was more expensive. I cannot walk 35 miles daily; I can't do that. Some people do, you know what I mean? But I'm an old lady, I can't do that. Sometimes I would have to walk and then take the bus back to the same albergues and the next night there, then take the bus back to where I left off, and then walk to the next albergues.

So it wasn't that much fun. It wasn't like progressively going closer. Sometimes I had to back up.

Jessica K: Uh, oh my gosh. So for those who need to become more familiar, what is an albergues?

Kathleen: It's a giant room with a bunch of bunk beds. And, they have a restroom.

Some places had a girl's room and a boy's room, and some of them didn't. It was like, you were siblings; that was amazing. If the town had a grocery store in it, then they would have a kitchen.

But if there were no grocery store, they would either have a restaurant they would send you to or provide the food.

Maybe they would charge 12 euros for dinner. So whenever I went to a place that provided food, I always got the food. Sometimes they provided breakfast too, or else you had to go to a bar and get some tortilla or something.

In Spain, they had tortillas, it's not tortillas like we have, but it's like this quiche type of thing with potatoes and eggs, and that was a good breakfast. It was mostly pastries in Portugal, so that wasn't very good for me.

But anyway, I love pastries, so I imbibed them, but, anyway, not good.

Jessica K: Well, I mean, good is relative. Let's just say that there, it was not good physically, but again, if you're walking that much it, it was good for your soul.

Kathleen: Yeah, that's true. It, it was, um, yummy. Mm-hmm.

Advice on Walking the Camino Santiago

Jessica K: So if anyone who's listening, is pondering whether to walk the Camino Santiago, what advice do you have for them?

Kathleen: You know, You don't have to go the whole way. I did not have anything else to do.

I just gave myself three months, and I took off, and I said, I'm coming home when I'm done. If you just have a week, you can just walk a hundred kilometers, and you still get the Compostela certificate.

You start in Sarria, just a little more than a hundred kilometers from Santiago. My friend Judy went from Leon to Santiago. Some people start in San John, walk as far as they can, take the bus to the airport or train, go home, and then come back and start at the same place the next year and do it that way.

You're not stuck. If you don't have time to do it, you don't wait. But it is nice, too, it is nice to do the whole thing altogether.

Jessica K: I'm glad that you've had that experience. Not once, but twice, but then about to be the third time. Sounds pretty exciting.

Kathleen: The first time, I got sick quite a few times on the Camino. By the time I was done,

I had been sick for quite a while, so I couldn't walk. I had wanted to walk to Finisterre, but I just couldn't. I took a bus over to Finisterre and the bus driver, he was our guide, he was lovely. And he told us, okay, now you've all walked the Camino once. You've been bit by the Camino bug. You'll be back. And he was right, you know. I got bit by the Camino bug. Some people just go there, and every time they go, they walk the French Way cuz it's so lovely. I'm going to, I didn't get there yet.

After I walk all the ones I want to walk, if I keep doing it, I would just go back and do the French way again. Cuz it, it's so lovely. It's like walking through the greenery, a fairyland.

I like, um, forests and gardens and things like that. The Portuguese way is more like San Diego; we're the same parallel as Lisbon, and, on the western side of the continent, just the same as San Diego.

We have a pretty dry climate here in San Diego, so I felt like Portugal was really like it is here at my place. But Spain is more,

Northern Spain is more like Northern California. It's just like green and raining, and it's just beautiful.

Final Words of Wisdom

Jessica K: Got it. Thank you so much for sharing all this, Kathleen. Is there anything else that you'd like to share with our listeners before we go?

Kathleen: One of the things that I learned while I was studying was Ho'oponopono. Have you heard about that?

Jessica K: I've seen it, but not really in detail.

Kathleen: I used it extensively to do my healing from my childhood sexual abuse.

It starts out, "I love you," and it's big, I love you, "I love God, God loves me, God loves the other person, the other person loves God". If you can say it, you say, "I love the other person."

But if you can't, you don't have to say it.

And then, " I love you. I'm sorry".

And it's not, "I'm sorry I did anything," but it's, "I'm sorry that this situation exists." So if I have a situation with another person, I'm sorry that the situation exists.

And, " please forgive me." And it's not, "forgive me for what I did," but, "please forgive me for what's going on in me that caused me to attract this."

So I have something going on in me, and whatever they said landed, and I hate them because they hurt me mortally, but I had a pain inside of me that they touched that I already had.

And then, " thank you." And it's, "thank you for showing me this so I could heal," If this hadn't happened and I didn't feel this pain, I wouldn't know where I needed to heal.

I found it, you know, and now I can heal from the pain inside of me that got triggered by that other person.

So, "thank you for showing me this so I could heal." And then, "I love you, I love God, god loves me; loves the other person."

And by then, you can say I love them. But, that's one of the things that I shared. I shared it twice on the Camino. I put it in my book twice, the two different people I shared it with.

The thing about forgiveness is I don't even feel like I need to forgive anybody anymore. I'm taking responsibility for the pain inside me, and I'm no longer a victim. They're just doing what they do. Maybe acting because of their pain. And then I can heal it. It's just like, "thank you for showing me this so I could heal."

The thing about unconditional love, which raises your vibration high, is you can't even do it unless you have adversity.

It's really easy to love the people who love us, but when these people who hurt us so deeply, when we can love them, that's unconditional love. The pain causes the cure.

Jessica K: Got it. Thank you so much for sharing that. And I'm sure some of our listeners are now going to be like doing the frantic Google search for, what is this? So...

Kathleen: Well, it's in my book.

Jessica K: I was going to ask about that. If they wanted to get ahold of you or see your writings, you mentioned the book.

Kathleen: Yeah.

Jessica K: If I remember correctly, it's called Wisdom of the Camino or Wisdom on the Camino.

Kathleen: Wisdom on the Camino: A Spiritual Journey, Sharing Forgiveness and Possibilities to Inspire the Rest of Your Life.

Jessica K: I'll include the link in our show notes.

Kathleen: It's on Amazon, so they can get it on Amazon. You just put Wisdom on the Camino, and it comes up. I have a gift in my book for them, and it's right across from the table of contents is. You can double opt in to see my pictures. So,

Jessica K: Oh.

Kathleen: Everybody told me, "you should put your pictures in your book."

And I'm just like, "yeah. And then it'll be \$50, and nobody will buy it."

So I made a website with galleries and portfolios, so you can just go in and, click on chapter one and see the pictures while you read the book.

Jessica K: Oh, wow. That's a great gift. Awesome. Anywhere else that you're online that our listeners can follow you on?

Kathleen: My website is wisdomonthecamino.com. I'm on Facebook as Kathleen Donnelly Israel, and I have, it's Amazon Wisdom on the Camino. I'm not wi, Amazon Instagram Wisdom on the Camino.

Jessica K: Okay.

Kathleen: Mm-hmm.

Jessica K: It's like all the different websites blur together. Yeah, I know. I get that too. Again, thank you so much, Kathleen, for joining us today and sharing with us your wisdom and your experience on your pilgrimage, and also letting us know that we can find out more about what you've gone through, through the book that you've published and hopefully through the book that you're publishing soon.

Do you have any idea when the second book's gonna come out?

Kathleen: Uh, probably this summer; probably summer.

Jessica K: All right, great. Well, thank you so much.

Kathleen: Thank you to Jessica. I enjoyed talking to you.

[Transition - Interview Ends]

Call for Feedback & Upcoming Episodes

Jessica K: That was a fantastic conversation and wisdom that Kathleen shared with us today. I'm really glad that I was able to share it with you, dear listeners.

So if you have any questions or feedback, here's how you can get ahold of me.

You can reach me by email at jess@themysticgeek.com, or if you want to leave me a voice message, you can do so at speakpipe.com/themysticgeek.

And then, with that, we will talk about what is coming up on our calendar in the next few weeks.

So next week is February 26. We'll have Mark Wendt with us to talk a little bit more about spiritual evolution. We also take a look into politics as well. So this is; I consider this to be one of my spicier interviews, and excited to share that with you.

That following Sunday, March 5th, I'm going to have Amanda Kate on as a guest to discuss prioritizing your internal truth over external influence. So talking about how we sometimes lean a little bit too much on external validation and how to turn that around so that you, one, understand your own internal truth, and two, you can live it despite cultural messaging.

That will wrap up this week's episode of Spiritual AF Sundays. I hope that you have a great week and that you Stay spiritual AF.

[Closing Credits]