

# **From *Beginning Anew: Four Steps to Restoring Communication* by Sister Chan Khong. (Parallax Press, 2014)**

## **BEGINNING ANEW ON THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO**

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In 2008, my wife Ann-Mari and I walked a thousand miles from Le Puy-en-Velay in southeast France to Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain. Most days we walked for seven to ten hours, following a trail that pilgrims have used for 1,200 years to reach Santiago de Compostela, where, according to legend and the Catholic Church, the relics of St. James are enshrined. We traveled light, carrying only the necessities in our backpacks.

Most mornings we woke at 6:30 a.m., packed up, ate breakfast, and began walking. Midmorning, we had a “Morning Meeting,” a blend of preschool circle time and the Plum Village Beginning Anew practice. We gave each other a special greeting, sang a song, and then voiced appreciations for each other or for those who had encouraged us in some way. For example, Ann-Mari might appreciate me for being willing to stop at a church she wanted to see, or I might appreciate someone we met the day before who was especially kind to us.

After appreciations, we shared regrets and sorrows. We talked about actions we wished we had done or not done, and about any sufferings we felt for whatever reason. Often our regrets and sorrows were in relation to a comment or action one of us perceived as insensitive. Sometimes it was just the sharing of a sadness, like when a museum one of us especially wanted to see was closed.

With appreciations, regrets, and sorrows shared, we moved on to “news and announcements,” which included our intentions for the day, stops we wanted to plan, or things we wanted to buy, such as stamps or postcards. Often, our sharing turned into long conversations about old habits, childhood hurts, or deep longings. With miles of trail stretching ahead, we didn’t feel rushed. Our Morning Meetings sometimes went on for hours.

The Beginning Anew practice deepened our relationship and made our walk more enjoyable. Even though we had been married for twenty-eight years, our lives had never before been so closely and continuously intertwined as they were during this trip; we were side-by-side twenty-four hours a day for three months. With the daily check-ins, our little hurts and sufferings were quickly aired, apologies were offered, and our appreciation deepened for each other and for the wonders of life around us each day.