



Making Spiritual Journeys

Randolph's Spiritual Quest and Search for Meaning

Randolph's Spiritual Quest and
Search for Meaning

Making Spiritual Journeys

Tania ap Siôn

Illustrated by Phillip Vernon



Bear Lands Publishing

Published by Bear Lands Publishing
The St Mary's Centre
Llys Onnen
Abergwyngregyn
Gwynedd
LL33 0LD
Wales

Tania ap Siôn and Phillip Vernon are identified
as authors of this work.

©Crown Copyright 2019.

First published 2019.

Sponsored by the Welsh Government.

CONTENTS

The Travels of Randolph the Wise	7
1 Across the Sea	8
2 Along the Way	10
3 The Blessing of Light	14
4 Saints and Hermits	18
5 The Lighthouse	22
6 A Muslim Journey	26
7 A Hindu Journey	30
Can You Help Randolph?	34
Randolph the Wise Returns Home	36





The Travels of Randolph the Wise

Randolph the Wise sat in his chair, scratched his old grey head, and thought about the very big question.

“What *really* matters?” he asked the empty room in a deep, booming voice. As usual, there were no other voices to answer him.

The question ‘what *really* matters?’ had been puzzling Randolph the Wise very much. He had spent many days thinking about it, but he knew that he would not find answers by staying in his room.

“I will go out into the world!” declared Randolph the Wise. “I will find and bring back here some answers from there.”

Randolph the Wise put on his coat and hat, picked up his bag, and gripped his staff. Then, turning his face towards the rising sun, he set out on his journey through Wales.

It was in this way that Randolph the Wise began his spiritual quest and search for meaning.

1 Across the Sea



Randolph the Wise stood on the headland at Uwchmynydd, looking out to sea. He pulled his hat down tightly on his head to guard against the restless wind. There before him was the island, rising from the sea mist.

Behind him, Randolph noticed signs of an old medieval church. Now only a faint outline in the grass remained. Taking a notebook from his bag, Randolph sketched some observations. How many pilgrims stood here before the final stage of their journey to the island across the sea?



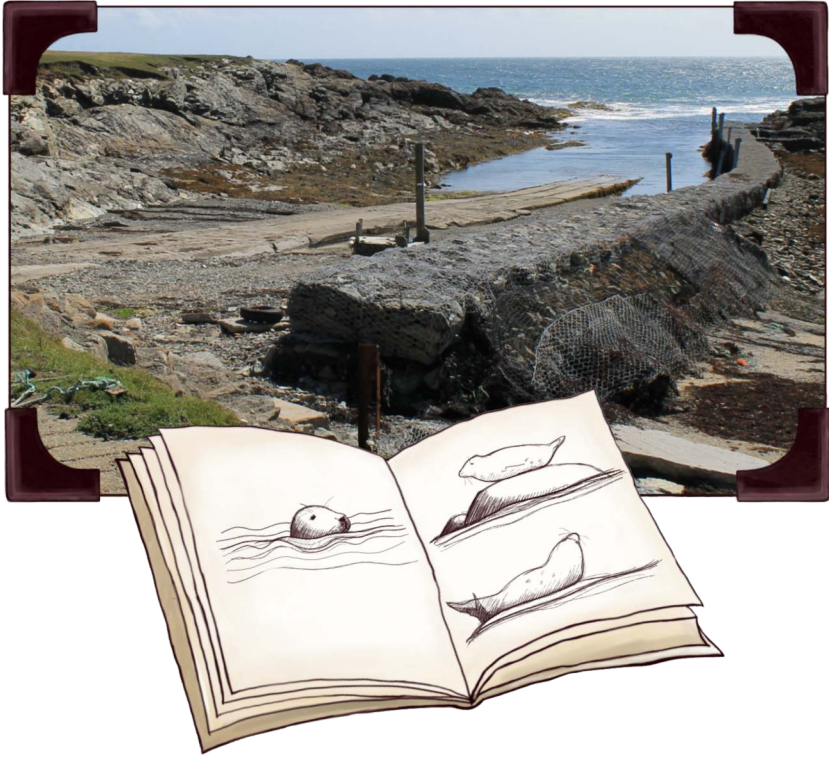
Randolph joined a small group gathered on the rocky beach at Porth Meudwy. They watched their bags and food supplies being loaded onto a small boat from a trailer. Then, one by one, they went up the ladder and climbed aboard. When everyone's life jacket was safely fastened, the small boat sailed from the protection of the cove into the open sea.

The waves grew in size and strength, and the small boat rolled from side to side. Some large waves soaked the travellers, who sat huddled on the benches. While the boat held its course, Randolph looked at his travelling companions. He saw a family with two teenage children and a group of friends. There was also a young couple and a woman by herself.

Suddenly, the island loomed into sight. Everyone was silent as the boat approached 'Ynys Enlli' – the Island of the Currents.



2 Along the Way



The boat docked in the tiny harbour and the travellers clambered ashore. They made their way to the cottages, which would be their simple homes for the week. Randolph started out in another direction for something had caught his eye. There, bobbing in the water was the head and black eyes of a creature watching him. Was this creature following him as he walked along the path?

The path led Randolph to a rocky bay. There, lying on half-submerged rocks, he found grey seals resting. Randolph sat on a rock and wondered at the seals with their mournful cries.

Randolph continued along the path until he came to a hut made of stone and wood. The hut was set high on a cliff top, facing out to sea. From this place, he could see the great sea birds soaring and swooping over the grey-blue water.

Then, the path led Randolph to a sandy beach. At the top of the beach he found another hut made of wood. A man was leaving the hut, holding a pair of binoculars. At first, Randolph was puzzled. What had the man been looking at? There were many small darting movements among the pebbles by the water's edge. When Randolph looked more closely, he saw tiny birds feeding busily. Slightly further out, there was an Oystercatcher bird standing motionless on a sun-flooded rock. Randolph wondered at the different birds and the people who sat in huts to watch them.





Randolph's attention now turned to another movement nearby. A woman was walking slowly towards him on the grassy path ahead. Sometimes, she stopped to peer carefully at something. Randolph moved closer and watched.

The woman stopped for the first time beside a spider's web. Along the fine web thread, droplets of water beamed radiantly in the sun. The second time she stopped beside a pink flower and a lichen-yellowed rock. Both flower and rock marked a gaping dark hole, leading deep into the earth below. The third time she stopped beside a dead bird and an empty crab claw.

When the woman nodded her head towards Randolph in greeting, he approached her. "What really matters to you here?" Randolph asked her.

The woman pointed to the mountain behind her. “This island faces outwards towards the sea,” she said. “The high back of the mountain blocks out the mainland. There is something separate and hidden about this island. It is like being in another world. Every year, I make the journey here to escape the noise and the speed of my everyday life.”

The woman continued. “This place slows me down and I start noticing things around me. This place teaches me about what is really important in life.”

Then, the woman gave Randolph a sketch of a flower and the empty crab claw. “This is what really matters to me here. Please take these gifts back with you,” she said with a smile. Placing the gifts in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued his search.



3 The Blessing of Light



Randolph heard a chapel bell ringing and set out towards it. He cut across fields to a muddy path that led to the open chapel door.

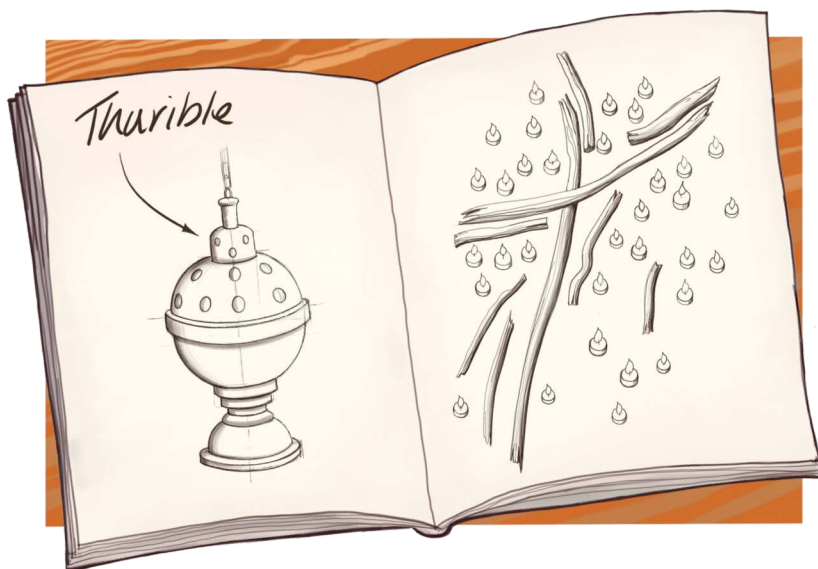
Inside, the first thing Randolph noticed was the great light and warmth radiating from the centre of the chapel. There, candle lights burned all around a large cross of driftwood lying on the open floor. Behind this great light, the shadow of a large pulpit towered above a plain wooden altar table. Bold gold letters on the front of the pulpit caught the light and read, '1875'.

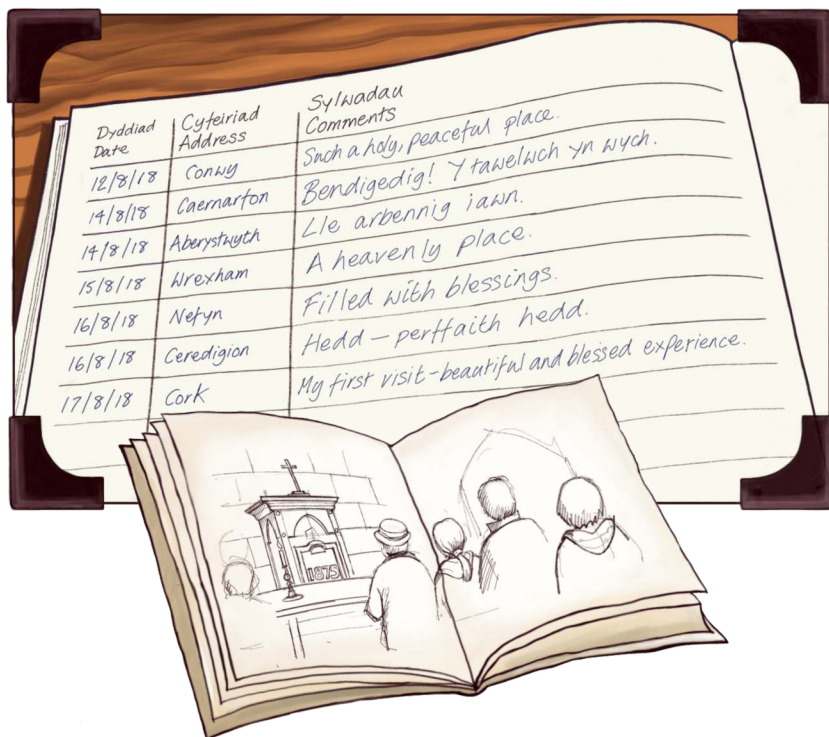
Randolph quietly made his way further inside to join the people gathered around the large cross of driftwood. Beside the altar table sat two robed figures, one on each side. A thurible hung nearby, releasing thin plumes of incense smell and smoke. Randolph noticed that the candles on the altar table had not yet been lit.

“Light and peace in Jesus Christ our Lord,” said the robed priest figure. Soon, he was walking and swinging the thurible, around the cross and around the altar. Thick clouds of incense billowed out and filled the air. As the ancient Phos Hilaron hymn began, a flame from the driftwood cross was taken to light the altar candles. The voices of the people sang,

“O gladsome light, O grace
Of God the Father’s face,
The eternal splendour wearing;
Celestial, holy, blest,
Our Saviour Jesus Christ,
Joyful in thine appearing.”

Randolph watched as they all gave thanks for the blessing of light, and then bowed their heads in prayer.





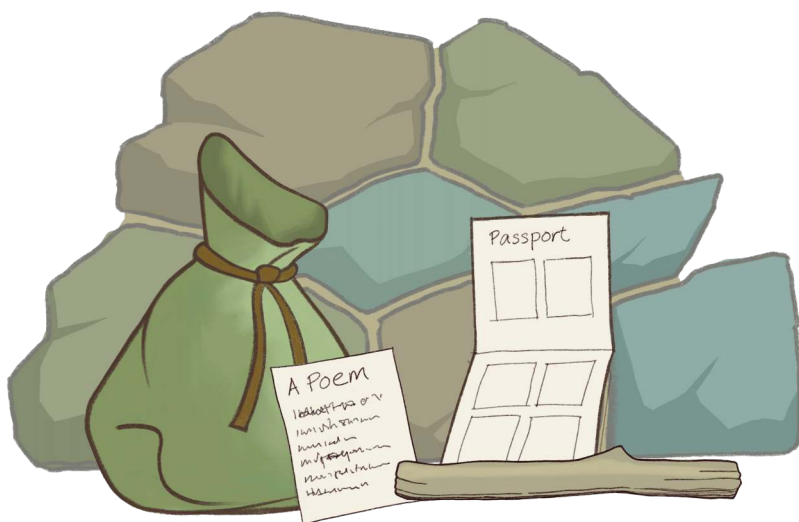
At the end of the service, people stayed quiet and sat still in the glowing candle lights. By now, it was dark outside.

Randolph moved towards an open book nearby. “Visitors’ book,” he murmured under his breath. Turning the pages, he read what people had written about this place and this island. The words spoke of many things, including peace, holiness, heaven and blessing.

When some people in the chapel stood up to leave, Randolph approached them. “What really matters to you here?” Randolph asked them.

One person said, "I am on a pilgrimage with some friends. We have walked almost 140 miles along the North Wales Pilgrim's Way. This island is our final stop and our destination. See, I have the last stamp on my pilgrim's passport." Another person said, "I write poetry and there is a special kind of inspiration here." Another person said, "I am looking for something. In this Blessing of Light service, I didn't need to do anything. I only had to be here and to accept the blessing given. There is truth in that."

Then, they gave Randolph a pilgrim's passport, a poem and a piece of driftwood cross. "This is what really matters to us here. Please take these gifts back with you," they said with a smile. Placing the gifts in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued his search.



4 Saints and Hermits



Next along the path, Randolph came to the ruins of a very old building. The roof had long since gone and the walls had been battered over the years. The remaining stones of the building stood resilient but broken in the sharp island wind. Now, the windows and doors were open to anyone or anything passing by. Randolph wondered at this abandoned place and the people who would have been here many years ago.

Beside one doorway, a woman gazed up at the ancient stones. She was carrying a small book and started to look at something in it. Randolph moved closer to her, trying to see what she was reading. He could see a picture of the ruins and the words, "The Abbey of Saint Mary."

Randolph continued reading the story of the Abbey. The Abbey was built in the 13th Century for monks of the Augustinian Order. The island was a good place for them because it was far away from the distractions of the world. Here, they could devote themselves to God in peace. The island was already known to be a holy place. For almost a thousand years before this Abbey was built, saints and hermits were coming here. Saint Cadfan and Saint Dyfrig were among these saints. It is said that 20,000 saints are buried on this island.

The woman and Randolph looked out to the graveyard and saw the graves and the Celtic crosses nearby. "This island is a place of death and life," the book said. "Here is the promise of new life, of resurrection."





The woman returned to the path and walked down towards the yard of Lloft Carreg Fawr. She disappeared into a room called the Oratory, and Randolph followed her inside.

Here, the woman stayed for some time, sitting quietly. Randolph started to look around. He discovered that this small room was a place for reflection and prayer for anyone who wanted to come here. Not long ago, a hermit nun lived for many years on this island and this room was a special place of prayer for her.

When the woman had finished her prayer, Randolph approached her. "What really matters to you here?" Randolph asked her.

The woman turned to Randolph and said, "I have come to this small room for some shelter to pray. Outside, the island can be wild and harsh. I feel that there is stillness and peace in this place. There is a protection. Maybe it comes from all the prayers that have been prayed here. I think that this whole island is filled with the spirit and prayer of the saints and hermits who have lived and died here. It is a very holy place. But, it is not an easy place."

Then, the woman gave Randolph a card with a 'Bardsey Blessing'. "This is what really matters to me here. Please take this gift back with you," she said with a smile. Placing the gift in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued his search.



5 The Lighthouse



The path led Randolph back to the other side of the island, and he stopped at the rocks near the Lighthouse. He noticed a man and his daughter sitting among the rocks directly below him. Randolph could see that the rocks were particularly dark in this place. They also looked sharp and angular. The father and daughter were studying these rocks carefully and talking.

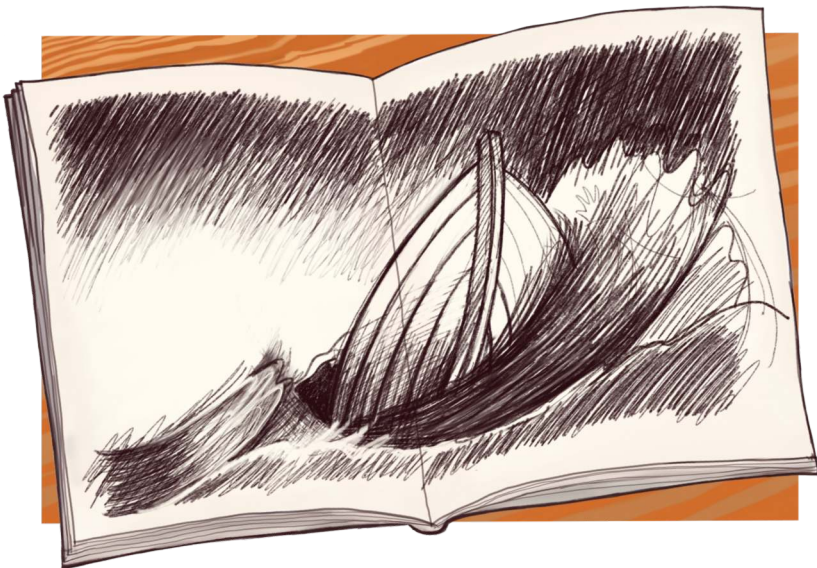
As Randolph listened, he heard about how these rocks had formed millions of years ago. He heard about the danger of rocks hidden beneath the sea. Then, he heard about an old folksong called, "The Bardsey Boat Lament". The father recited the lament,

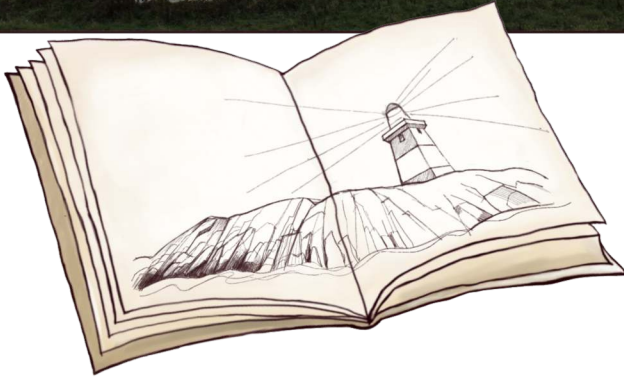
"The last day of November,
Chilled by a rough wind,
In the year 1822
Brought news of a thwarted journey."

The lament continued, remembering a dreadful night and a terrible storm. Struggling in the waves and the wind, there was the boat sailing from Porth Meudwy to Ynys Enlli. Twenty people were aboard.

“Now the boat has very nearly
Reached the sanctuary of the Cafn;
Here is Death opening
His dreadful rapacious maw;
He, our captain on land or sea –
He will gain his ends;
Unto him all are equal,
Chance kills them, the grave swallows them.”

Randolph looked at the sea and thought about the watery graves.





The father and daughter scrambled up from their rocky seats and made their way to the Lighthouse. The Lighthouse stood tall and formidable before them. They saw the automated light and the foghorn. They imagined the warning and the protection that the Lighthouse offered to all sailors at sea.

When the father and daughter saw Randolph and waved hello, Randolph approached them. "What really matters to you here?" Randolph asked them.

The girl pointed towards the scattering of houses and shrugged her shoulders. She said, "Once a whole community lived here. There was even a schoolhouse. It must have been a hard life. I take so much for granted."

Then her father replied, "These rocks are so old. They were here before any human being could walk over them. Our short lives are lightweight compared with these rocks. They will be here when we are gone."

Then, they gave Randolph a picture of the island's houses and a small piece of dark rock. "This is what really matters to us here. Please take these gifts back with you," they said with a smile. Placing the gifts in his bag, Randolph said farewell.

Randolph then frowned and pondered. He could see that making spiritual journeys really mattered. He knew that this was part of his spiritual quest and search for meaning. "But what do other people in different places say about this?" asked Randolph.



6 A Muslim Journey



Randolph trekked north and then south, east and then west. His search led him by mountains and valleys, through cities and towns, around coasts and lakes. Then, in a city street, he finally stopped. A family was gathering by the front door of a house, waiting for something to happen. A moment later, a car parked nearby, and a man and a woman got out. Both young and old were full of smiles as they welcomed the couple home. "You are now Hajjis!" an excited boy exclaimed.

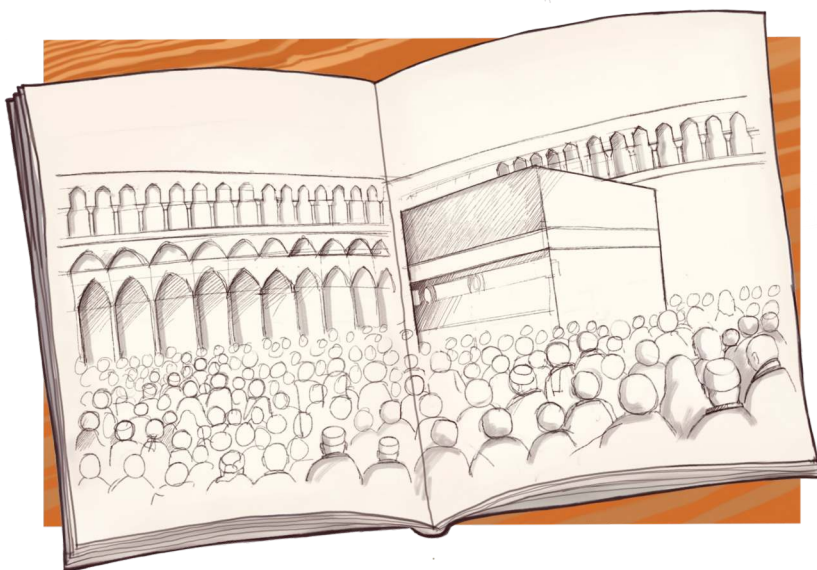
As Randolph walked towards the family, he pondered, "I wonder what a Muslim can tell me about making spiritual journeys?" The family was overjoyed by the couple's return and invited Randolph in.

Inside the house, the couple talked about a place far away called Makkah and a pilgrimage called the Hajj. They spoke of the long journey, the hot dry desert air and the large crowds of people. There were no photographs to show, "We were focused on the pilgrimage alone," they said. So, everyone listened carefully and created pictures in their heads.

Then, the couple opened a bag filled with gifts for their family. They shared out bottles of holy water from the Zamzam Well, wooden tasbeih beads and prayer mats. Randolph wondered at the stories and the gifts brought back from this special place.

As people examined one another's gifts, Randolph leaned forward and asked the couple, "What might a Muslim say about making spiritual journeys?"





The woman replied to Randolph first. "I will never forget how I felt when I saw the Ka'bah in Makkah for the first time," she said. "For me, as a Muslim, this is the most sacred place. There were so many people circling around it, just as Muslims have done for many centuries at this time of year. We were all dressed the same, but we were all different. We had come to Makkah from different countries, with different languages, cultures and backgrounds, but we were there as one before God. I was so overwhelmed, I cried."

The man was thoughtful. "For me, the most important and moving part of the pilgrimage happened on the second day," he said. "I was standing with millions of other Muslims on the desert plain of Arafat, asking God to forgive my sins."

The man continued, saying, “So, you see, spiritual journeys are important to us as Muslims too. We try to go on pilgrimage to Makkah once in our lifetime. In the Qur’an, God asks us to do this and it is the fifth Pillar of our faith. When we are obedient to God’s will, we receive all kinds of blessings. This pilgrimage has changed us. We haven’t come back the same.”

The couple then gave Randolph a bottle of holy water from the Zamzam Well and some tasbih beads. “Please, take these back with you,” they said with a smile. Placing the gifts in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued on his journey.



7 A Hindu Journey



Randolph trekked on and on, braving the sun and the rain, then the gales and the snow. He did not stop until he arrived at the green peaceful space of a park. Here, he stopped to look at the carefully planted trees and flowers. Under the shade of a broad Oak tree, Randolph heard two voices deep in conversation.

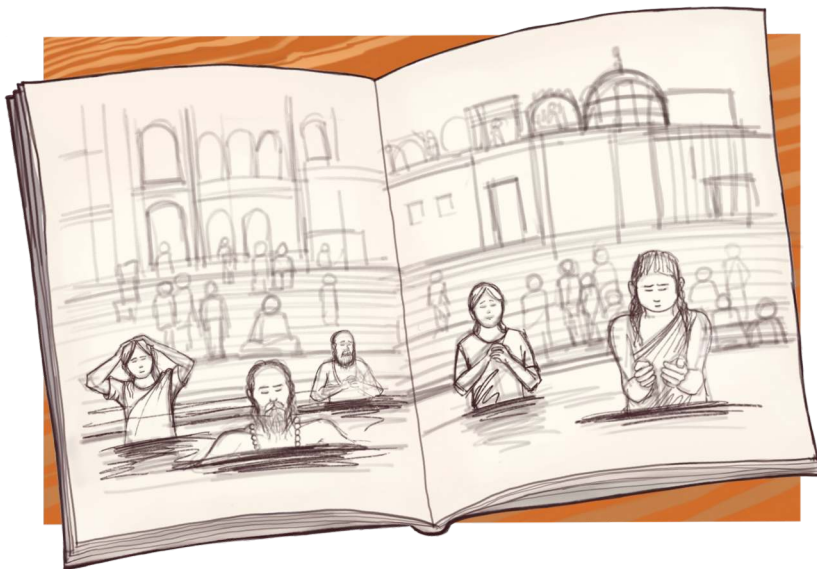
Sitting close by on a bench, a man was talking with his grandson about a journey he made many years ago. This journey took him to a special city and the most sacred river for Hindus, he said. Maybe, one day, his grandson would go to this place too.

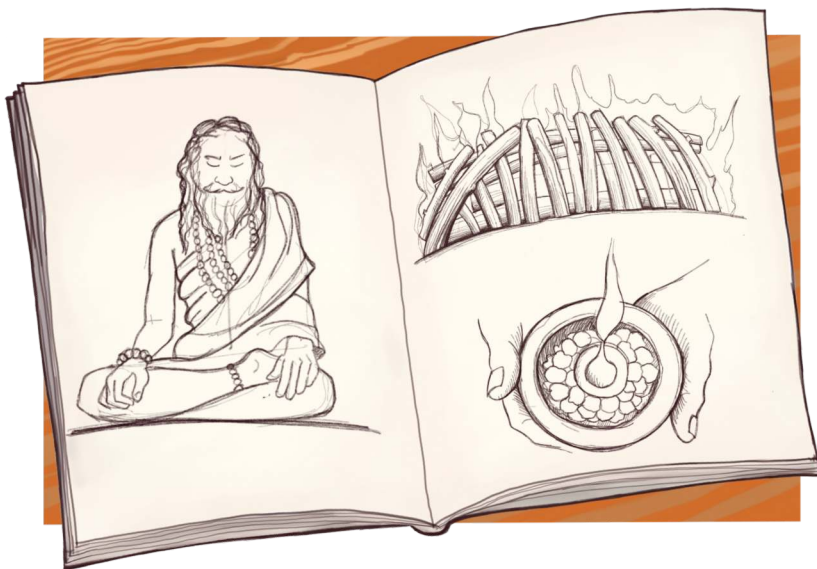
As Randolph walked towards the man and the boy, he muttered, "I wonder what a Hindu can tell me about making spiritual journeys?"

Randolph listened to the man describing his pilgrimage to the city of Varanasi in India. The man remembered the city being full of life with its bright colours, sounds and smells. There were temples for different Hindu gods and goddesses everywhere. All around, there was the clamour of bells and rituals. But the most striking thing was how the whole city was centred on the great river Ganga.

Then, the man shared how the river came to be in that place. The god, Lord Shiva saved the earth by catching the falling river in his hair. This made the river flow safely on the earth. “Now, the river gives life in so many ways,” he said.

When the man paused to recall more memories, Randolph leaned forward and asked the question, “What might a Hindu say about making spiritual journeys?”





The man thought carefully about the question. “In Varanasi, I remember waking up early one morning,” he said. “It was still dark when I made my way through the streets to the banks of the river Ganga. The steps or ‘ghats’ leading down into the river were already becoming busy. There were holy men meditating with their staffs and alms bowls beside them. There were the morning puja ceremonies. There were the funeral pyres burning. These were powerful sights. But, for me, the sight of pilgrims walking and running into the sacred river was most powerful of all.”

The man signed and looked at his grandson and Randolph, saying, “And, I was one of those pilgrims. Like many others, I came to wash myself in this sacred water so that I could become spiritually clean.”

The man continued, saying, "So you see, spiritual journeys are important to me as a Hindu too. There are some places that are very holy, and people come to them for different reasons. Pilgrimage to Varanasi is about being washed clean of what holds you back spiritually. Life and death sit side-by-side on the riverbanks of Varanasi. When I die, I hope my family will be able to release my ashes into the river Ganga."

The man then gave Randolph a small statue of the Lord Shiva and some water from the river Ganga. "Please, take these back with you," he said with a smile. Placing the gifts in his bag, Randolph said farewell and continued on his journey.



Can you help Randolph?

Randolph the Wise has been given many gifts on his travels. He has also made many notes in his notebook. But the quest is not yet over. There is still space in his bag for more things to help him reflect on 'making spiritual journeys' as something that really matters.

Now Randolph needs your help.

What other places could Randolph visit to find out about making spiritual journeys?

Who could he ask in those places?

Do you think that making spiritual journeys is something that really matters?

Where would you go to make a spiritual journey?

What gift would you give Randolph to take back with him?



Randolph the Wise Returns Home

As the sun set, a weary Randolph the Wise returned to his room, where he carefully unpacked his bag. One by one, he placed in front of him *all* that he had collected on his journey through Wales.

Then, Randolph the Wise sat in his chair, scratched his old grey head, and thought about the very big question.

“What *really* matters?” he asked again in a deep, booming voice. This time, *all* that he had collected on his journey answered him.

Randolph the Wise listened carefully and smiled.

“This is an essential part of my spiritual quest and search for meaning!” he said. “Special journeys to places away from home are important to people. They change people in all kinds of ways. Making spiritual journeys is something that *really* matters.”

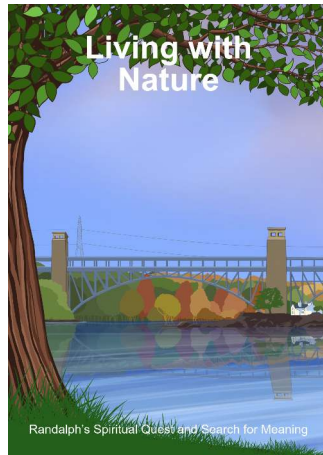
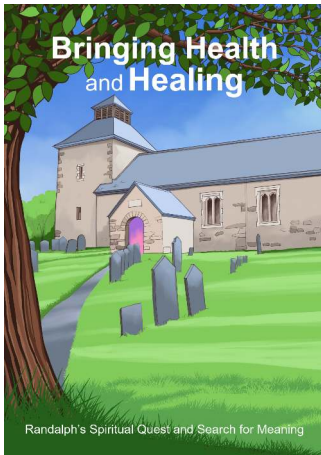


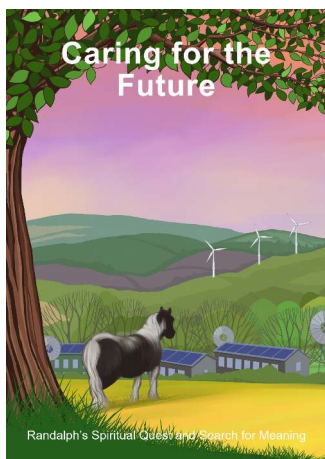
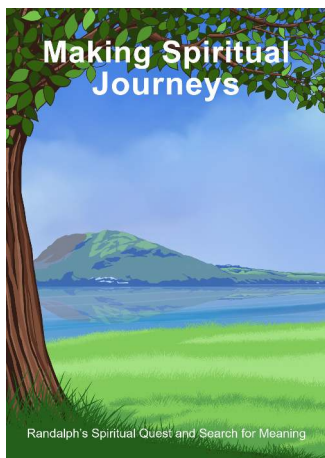



Read more...

Join Randolph the Wise on some of his other travels around Wales.

All storybooks are published in both Welsh and English. Open access copies are available on the Welsh Government 'Hwb' website (hwb.gov.wales) and on the St Mary's Centre website (st-marys-centre.org.uk). Teachers' guidance material, films and music are also provided.







Randolph the Wise is searching for answers to the very big question. He wants to know, 'What *really* matters?' This question is taking Randolph on a journey through Wales. On his travels, he finds some special places and people to help him with his quest.

In this story, Randolph discovers a windswept island off the coast of North Wales. Here, he learns that *Making Spiritual Journeys* is something that really matters. Visits to a Muslim home and to a park where a Hindu is talking with his grandson make him think even more deeply about what *Making Spiritual Journeys* may mean.

Are you ready to join Randolph on his spiritual quest and search for meaning? Maybe you can help Randolph with the very big question too. What *really* matters?

