Pilgrimage: to journey with and in faith.

One has to abandon altogether the search for security, and to reach out to the risk of living with both arms.
One has to embrace the world like a lover.
One has to accept pain as a condition of existence.
One has to court doubt and darkness as the cost of knowing.
One needs a will stubborn in conflict, but apt always to total acceptance of every consequence of living and dying.

Morris West
What is pilgrimage?

Journeying to a place of special significance plays a part in almost all cultures and religions. The goal may be a site given prominence by particular events, the shrine of a saint or other significant figure, or a remarkable geographical feature. Pilgrimage motivated by religious belief is still very much alive in the twenty-first century. It usually involves:

- journeying, alone or in a group
- reaching a destination
- encountering special rituals, objects and architecture
- enjoying particular experiences and benefits
- returning home

For some people pilgrimage acts as a rite of passage, for others it involves seeking spiritual or material rewards

An image of life

'Pilgrimage' is often used to describe an individual's journey through life, sometimes as a general description of personal growth and exploration, sometimes, as in Christianity, outlining a particular spiritual focus or pathway which it is believed will lead to encounter with God.

Inner journeys

'Pilgrimage' is a term which can be used to portray an inner spiritual journey through prayer, meditation or mystical experience. In some faiths and cultures, withdrawal from the everyday world into a monastery or hermit's cell, choosing to enter into a physically-restricted life of isolation and silence, is seen as a way of setting the soul free to travel inwardly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Pilgrimage' is a wide-ranging topic touching on many aspects of human existence, signifying not only a physical journey to a special place, but also an inner spiritual journey and indeed life itself.</th>
<th>Pilgrimage to holy places has deeply influenced the spiritual and physical landscapes of England and many other countries. Ancient pilgrimage destinations remain key heritage sites today.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differing interpretations of, and attitudes to, pilgrimage can cause considerable controversy and even conflict.</td>
<td>Pilgrimage is important in history, literature, art, architecture &amp; social anthropology, as well as religion &amp; spirituality.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilgrimage has fired the imaginations of writers and artists for centuries.</td>
<td>Pilgrimage is still very much alive. 21st century; pilgrims - from all faiths and none - continue to explore the significance of place and of journey.</td>
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Why is pilgrimage important?
The Origins of the Terms 'Pilgrim' and 'Pilgrimage'

'Pilgrim' and 'pilgrimage' are words that have carried a range of meanings over the centuries. The English words 'pilgrim' and 'pilgrimage' are derived from Latin via French, while their initial meanings have clearly Christian undertones.

The English term 'pilgrim' originally comes from the Latin word *peregrinus* (per, through + ager, field, country, land), which means a foreigner, a stranger, someone on a journey, or a temporary resident. It can describe a traveller making a brief journey to a particular place or someone settling for a short or long period in a foreign land. *Peregrinatio* was the state of being or living abroad.

*Peregrinus* was also used in the Vulgate version of the Bible to translate the Hebrew *gur* (sojourner) and the Greek *parepidemos* (temporary resident). These terms undergirded a central image of the Christian life. Christians were identified as temporary residents in this world whose true home was in heaven. They must therefore live and behave day by day according to the standards of their homeland as they journeyed through life. During the early centuries of the Church this was the primary understanding of the term.

As Christian pilgrimage to places considered especially holy developed in the fourth century, *peregrinus* took on a further sense within Christian thought, describing a traveller with a particular religious goal. *Peregrinatio* was used of the journey undertaken.

'Pilgrimage' as a universal practice

There are those who therefore think that the terms should really be limited to Christianity. However, the types of phenomena referred to - such as people travelling to and returning home from places deemed to be sacred and engaging in acts of worship and faith associated with those places and the routes to them - can be found widely, if not universally, across cultures and religious traditions. Indeed, they appear applicable also (especially, in the modern day) in contexts that are not specifically or directly 'religious' or related to particular religious traditions, to the extent that it is reasonable to view the English terms 'pilgrimage' and 'pilgrims' as more or less universal.

Pilgrimage is not only a widespread and important practice in Christianity but also in other major religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. In each of these traditions, numerous important sacred centres have developed into important focal points to which the faithful are drawn, making journeys that reinvigorate their faith, visiting places associated with the spiritual presence of holy figures at the hearts of their traditions, and demonstrating their piety and faith while taking in the inspirational sights associated with their traditions. It is not, however, only in major world religious traditions that pilgrimage is a key theme; it is as prevalent in religious traditions that are specifically connected to one culture or ethnic community (for example, Shinto in Japan), and in newly formed and developed religious movements that have come into being and flourished in the modern day.

'New Age' pilgrimage

Places associated with 'New Age' spiritual movements have become focal points for the travels and practices of those seeking alternatives to traditional religion. Often such sites were associated with pilgrimage in pre-modern times, and have been co-opted by New Agers because their historical past as pilgrimage centres is thought to have imbued them with a sense of spiritual power. One example of such a site is Sedona in the USA, once a spiritual centre for Native Amerindians and now (due to its striking physical geography) a burgeoning New Age pilgrimage site. Another is Glastonbury in England, a medieval Christian pilgrimage site that in recent times has been overlaid by a variety of legends connecting it to Celtic mythology, along with New Age ideas that interpret its striking geographical setting as an indication that it is a centre of spiritual power and healing.
Secular pilgrimage

Sites that are of no specific religious orientation may form the focus on journeys of spiritual significance for their participants, to the extent that they may be seen as ‘non-denominational’ or even non-religious (or secular) pilgrimages. Memorials commemorating the dead are a prime example of this phenomenon; the war graves of Flanders and northern France have been the focus of organised pilgrimages run by bodies such as the British Legion through the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, while the Vietnam War Memorial Wall in Washington, DC, USA, which bears the names of all the Americans killed in the Vietnam War, forms the focus of both organised and individual journeys by those who lost kin or comrades in the war, and by those who wish to remember and/or commemorate the nation’s loss. Among other contemporary pilgrimage events are the visits of fans (often coming more as devotees than as merely fans) to the home and grave of Elvis Presley at Graceland, Memphis, USA, especially during Elvis Presley Memorial Week around the anniversary of his death (in August 1977), a period which includes candlelit vigils and prayers. Such events are described by many participants as ‘pilgrimages’, indicating the universality of the activity of being drawn to places of special significance and participating in rituals, including acts of commemoration. Pilgrimage can thus be described not just as universal in religious terms but as a practice which also goes beyond the boundaries of the formally religious into secular contexts.

Extraordinary places

Pilgrimages are clearly associated with the extraordinary; it has often been argued that a key element in pilgrimage locales is that they exude a ‘spiritual magnetism’ that draws people to them. Sites of pilgrimage can therefore be seen as places where something extraordinary has happened or (since legends and tales of the miraculous so often are present in the frameworks of pilgrimage) places at which something extraordinary is said to have happened. Consequently, aspects of the spiritual realm are believed to become manifest in and hence accessible at a particular physical location.

Holy figures and founders

Such manifestations are not necessarily associated with apparitions, such as the Virgin Mary, but can also be linked to holy figures and founders, whose traces and footsteps may form the impetus for the formation and creation of sacred geographies that become the framework of pilgrimages, as with the Buddha’s footsteps, in terms of his passage through life. The most important Muslim pilgrimage, the hajj, is also associated with the footsteps and activities of a holy figure, in that it replicates the farewell pilgrimage made to Mecca by the prophet Mohammed just prior to his death in 632CE. Pilgrims on the hajj follow in his footsteps and undertake activities he is said to have performed during this farewell pilgrimage.

Relics

Sometimes such manifestations of the sacred are associated with relics of the holy - a common theme in Christianity, where relics of saints (whether actual or rumoured) may be the focal point of pilgrimage centres or provide the impetus that initially sanctifies a place and draws pilgrims there. Relics, too, are commonly found in and became the focal point of important Buddhist pilgrimages.

Places, landscapes and geographical features

Pilgrimage places are generally marked out by the presence of striking physical constructions - temples, shrines, churches - and their accompanying objects (icons, statues, tombs of holy people) that mark out the physical presence of the sacred and that generally inspire - and are intended to inspire - a sense of awe in participants. The great cathedrals at pilgrimage centres such as Santiago de Compostela and Canterbury, prominent Buddhist temples such as the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya, and mosques at major Muslim pilgrimage sites, all speak of a grandeur that articulates in physical form the believed spiritual power of the place.
What is pilgrimage?

Yet, despite the visual importance and potent attraction of such physical buildings at pilgrimage sites, one should not assume that pilgrimage sites necessarily have to have large or awe-inspiring buildings at them. Nor do all pilgrimage sites necessarily focus on constructed sacred buildings or depend on legends or the acts of humans to turn them into especially holy places. The emphasis in Hindu culture on crossing places such as rivers, as pilgrimage sites, illustrates this point: natural phenomena and remarkable geographical landscape features may in and of themselves provide the impetus for the formation of a pilgrimage site, and serve as the magnet drawing people to them.

**The significance of place and journey**

What remains constant is the notion of people being 'drawn' to places. Factors include legends and the expectation of miracles, narratives marking places as the locus of sacred journeys by significant religious figures, signs (for example, relics and icons) manifesting the presence of a sacred being or indicating the intersection of the spiritual and the physical realm, and the capacity of sites, places and routes to provide frameworks enabling pilgrims to articulate important messages and themes.

**Distance, the international, proximity and the localised**

It has been often assumed that pilgrimages must to be to 'far places'. Equally, because there are a number of extremely famous pilgrimage sites of global significance (for example, Mecca, Jerusalem, Santiago de Compostela, Bodh Gaya) that draw vast international clienteles, much understanding of pilgrimage relates to it as a phenomenon that exists at international levels. Yet to assume that pilgrimage is therefore largely a practice focussed on great and distant centres would be to misrepresent its nature. Although journey and spiritually magnetic places may be key themes, pilgrimage is also very much a local practice that may draw pilgrims from places close to its centres. Those who live in Saudi Arabia and close to Mecca, for example, may also do the hajj and regard their pilgrimages in the same light as would a Muslim from the other side of the world.

**Pilgrimage in Christianity**

Pilgrimage within Christianity is not a single idea but a cluster of concepts which emerged over several centuries. Influences on the development of Christian pilgrimage include:

- the Bible
- the writings of the Fathers of the Church
- the experiences of anchorites and monastic communities in the desert
- the classical pagan world
- the instincts and experiences of ordinary people

**Life as pilgrimage**

Unlike Judaism from which it emerged, and the Greek and Roman religions with which it co-existed within the Roman Empire, Christianity did not at first see pilgrimage to sacred places as either necessary or desirable. Judaism emphasised the centrality of the land of Israel, the city of Jerusalem and the Temple, and had a well-established pattern of pilgrimage festivals. The writers of the New Testament and the early Fathers of the Church chose instead to emphasise the concept of life itself as a pilgrimage, a journey towards the heavenly city of Jerusalem described in the Book of Revelation.
Moral pilgrimage: the path of daily obedience

In both the New Testament and the writings of the Fathers of the Church, Christians are portrayed as ‘pilgrims and strangers’ on earth who have turned away from the disobedience of Adam and Eve which condemned human beings to hardship and exile from God’s presence. As would-be citizens of heaven, they are to undertake a daily life of obedience to God which will eventually lead them to their true homeland in heaven.

Journeying to holy places

During the first three centuries of the Church, the emphasis on life as pilgrimage remained central. Since God was believed to be available everywhere through the Holy Spirit, Christians were not thought to need holy places. In the fourth century, however, the Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity. Used to the practices of pagan religion, including travelling to sacred places and shrines, Constantine and his mother Helena set about creating a Christian Holy Land. Not only was the special status of Jerusalem reasserted and many other sites linked with the Bible ‘discovered’ within Palestine, but a network of holy places was established across Christendom. This development, together with the growth of the cult of the Saints, significantly changed Christian belief and practice. Visiting places considered sacred and ‘seeing and touching’ shrines and relics became very important. Although hugely popular, these developments also provoked controversy and opposition. There was an inescapable theological paradox in the idea of travelling to encounter a God believed to be omnipresent which has created debate and tensions within Christian spirituality ever since.

Interior pilgrimage

From the late third century onwards individuals retreated from Rome, Alexandria and other places to live as anchorites in the deserts of Judea and Sinai. Their goal was solitude and encounter with God. Life in the desert, whether alone or in the monastic communities which sprang up, was seen as a permanent state of pilgrimage-exile. Individuals committed themselves to stability of location so that their souls might journey inwardly. This remained a key concept as the monastic movement grew. During the centuries which followed, however, it was not always observed. Bishops, popes, and Councils of the Church repeatedly forbade monks and nuns to travel outside their cloisters, even to visit holy places, but such decrees were not always accepted or obeyed.

Continuity and controversy

From the fourth century onwards, there have been four main elements in the pilgrimage motif: the core concept of life as a journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem, together with three strands of practical interpretation:

- **Moral Pilgrimage:** serving God and others in daily obedience.
- **Place Pilgrimage:** including journeying to saints’ shrines or other holy places to obtain forgiveness, seek healing and other benefits, to learn, to encounter God and express devotion.
- **Interior Pilgrimage:** focusing on inner spiritual journeying through prayer and meditation, stressing ‘stability’ and seeking an ‘interior Jerusalem’ (the presence of God within the soul). Interior pilgrimage plays an important role within monasticism, anchoritism and mysticism.

The extent to which it is possible to combine these different strands of pilgrimage has generated considerable debate and even conflict. From the fourth century onwards there have been questions about whether ‘place pilgrimage’ actually supports or undermines the daily pilgrimage of life. Critics claimed it was unnecessary, since God was everywhere, and that it involved needless expense and dangers, the abandoning of daily responsibilities and might expose participants to temptation while away from home. Yet although the practice of pilgrimage to holy places and the value of the monastic orders have both been challenged over the centuries, not least at the Reformation, all strands of pilgrimage practice have nevertheless survived to the present day.
Conclusion

Pilgrimage, as a process involving journeys, sacred centres and symbolic articulations of deep religious messages, along with manifestations of localised meaning, is found - and replicated - across cultures and religious traditions, old and new. It also occurs in the secular world and the world of popular culture. In terms of its component parts - the journey and the sacred place(s) to which the pilgrim travels - it has endured as a universal practice across cultures and ages. It is found at international levels at the very core of major traditions; it appears in localised contexts through which universal themes and messages can be enacted and brought down to the level of ordinary people; it is manifested within the secular contexts of the modern world, with the universal phenomenon of pilgrimage observable even at the gravesides and homes of deceased pop stars.

Source: Pilgrims and Pilgrimage Places and Journeys in Cultures and Faiths Worldwide by Ian Reader and Pilgrimage in Christianity by Dee Dyas

University of York located at: http://www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/content/faiths.html
Catholic Pilgrimage......

A pilgrimage not only affects our understanding of the Catholic faith and Church, but also as people called to holiness. It is a quest and expression of one’s faith.

Father Michael F.X. Hinkley

As, part of the Church’s piety, pilgrimages can enrich, purify and lead the Christian people into a closer and more perfect union with Christ. Going on a pilgrimage is an expression of piety that extends the liturgical life of the Church without replacing it.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1674-1676

A lot of talk about Judaism is based on the idea of tradition: Doing what our ancestors did. "Continuity," to use a popular buzzword. But for the forefathers these ideas didn’t invoke the practice of continuity, and their relationship with God was based on being revolutionary, not conformist. It started with Abraham, our first ancestor. According to the Torah, he distinguished himself by heeding God’s call to leave his family and his birthplace. In fact, Abraham was called an ḥorī, or a Hebrew -- one who passes over, or journeys. What would it mean for us to follow in Abraham's footsteps and begin our own journey? What we are describing is looking afresh at our lives and reconsidering our values: An inner journey, with an unknown destination. Jewish tradition asks each of us to question the values of the society around us, especially the values we unconsciously internalize. Through this questioning we leave our homeland -- "homeland" being symbolic for an unexamined life, the place where everything is familiar and nothing is challenged. Questioning thus becomes a powerful tool in the process of change -- the tool with which we begin.

http://www.mishpacha.org/identabraham.shtml

As a historian, nothing matters more to me than the chance to wander through the rooms where my subjects lived and worked, to imagine them coming down the stairs for breakfast, writing steadily at their desks, entertaining guests at dinner, settling down in their favourite chairs to read. The people may be gone, but the houses remain. The landscape may have changed, the furniture, rugs, and draperies may be only the best representation of what was thought to have existed at the time, and yet, somehow, as one moves from room to room, the people who lived there are brought to life.

Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin

‘Have courage,’ we often say to one another. Courage is a spiritual virtue. The word courage comes from the Latin word cor, which means ‘heart’. A courageous act is an act coming from the heart. A courageous word is a word arising from the heart. The heart however, is not just the place our emotions are located. The heart is the center of our being, the center of all thoughts, feelings, passions and decisions. A courageous life therefore, is a life lived from the center. It is a deeply rooted life, the opposite of a superficial life. ‘Have courage’ therefore means ‘Let your center speak.’

Bread for the Journey Henri Nouwen

Pilgrimages are a mode through which we deepen our connection with God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that "pilgrimages evoke our earthly journey toward heaven" (2691)