

Pilgrimage in Islam and different religions

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Pilgrimage is an allegory of human life on earth. It is the exteriorization of an inner journey towards truth and adventure of spiritual discovery. Pilgrims from distant lands converge at a center, pulled in by a spiritual magnetism. Thus, pilgrimage is considered a way in which man tries to connect to the Ultimate Reality and live in full harmony with himself and his environment. Most religious traditions emphasize this aspect of pilgrimage and give it a central role in religion. Pilgrimage in Islam

Hajj is an obligatory pilgrimage Alluded by God Almighty on all Muslims who are capable in commemoration of the trials of prophet Ibrahim and his family in Makkah, which included prophet Ibrahim's willingness to renunciate his son Ishmael in response to God's command, Muslims make a pilgrimage to the sacred place of Makkah at least once in their lifetime. This pilgrimage to Makkah and its Circumstance, known as Hajj, is the fifth pillar of Islam. Hajj is an obligatory pilgrimage prescribed by God Almighty on all Muslims who are capable, whereas the pilgrimages of other religions are optional. The origin and history of pilgrimages show that they were initiated by humans much later than the putative origin of those religions, and the purpose of those pilgrimages is set by the pilgrims themselves: for example, the expiation of sins or a special blessing for themselves.

▼ Muslims gathered in Mecca for annual pilgrimage



The real significance of the destination of Hajj to Makkah is that Makkah is the site of the first house built for the worship of the One and Only God of the universe; whereas other pilgrimages derive their importance from their connection to the birth, death, or burial of a prophet or saint. The rites performed at Hajj are commemorative of Abraham, the patriarch revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. Before performing the rituals of Hajj, pilgrims enter a state of consecration known as ihram. The specific rituals of Hajj include circumambulation the Kabah seven times, which is known as Tawaf, walking back and forth seven times between the hillocks named Safa and Marwah, which is known as Sai, standing on the Mount of Mercy (Arafah), throwing pebbles at the stone pillars known as Al-Jamarat and slaughtering a sheep or a goat, and distributing its meat to the poor, which is known as the sacrifice.

Pilgrimage in Judaism

In Judaism, pilgrimage holds a significant place as a way for individuals to connect with their faith, history, and heritage. While the concept of pilgrimage is not as prominent in Judaism as it is in some other religions, there are pilgrimage practices and sacred sites that hold great importance. The earliest notion of pilgrimage in Judaism comes from the Genesis story of prophet Adam and his wife hawwa, in which the happy relationship with God is presented as broken, necessitating a struggle on the human part to move towards God for reconciliation. The Jews believe they are in exile since God chose prophet Ibrahim to be the father of God's chosen people and promised him a land for his people. In the time of prophet Moosa, the Jews were exiled in Egypt, and finally they started to settle in Palestine.

Jews from many countries all over the world make periodic pilgrimages to the holy sites in Jerusalem the second book of Samuel tells how prophet Davood captured Jerusalem and brought the Ark of the Covenant to the city. Jerusalem is the central pilgrimage destination in Judaism. The city is considered holy and holds historical and religious significance. The Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall, is a sacred site where people gather to pray and leave written prayers in



Jewish men pray as they attend a blessing ceremony during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot at the Western Wall.



the cracks of the wall To the Jews, the ark was the symbol of God's presence in their midst, and so the city of Jerusalem became central to the Jewish identity.

There are three festivals celebrated in Jerusalem every year, and the Jewish families were commanded to undertake a pilgrimage to the city to participate in them (Deuteronomy 16:16). These three festivals came to be known as pilgrimage festivals. They are Pesach (Passover) or the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks, and Sukkot or the Feast of Booths. These three festivals commemorate important events in Jewish history (Exodus 34:18-23). Pesach celebrates the Exodus from Egypt and the Israelites' liberation from slavery. Seven weeks are counted from the beginning of Pesach to the feast of Shavuot, which celebrates the giving of the Ten Commandments. Sukkot (Tabernacles) is a nine-day festival that celebrates the booths the Israelites lived in during the 40 years in the wilderness. Another name for this festival is The Season of Our Rejoicing. The Book of Psalms, a sacred text in Judaism, contains prayers and songs of pilgrimage. Psalms 122:1 says, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" These verses reflect the joy and anticipation asso-

ciated with pilgrimage to the holy sites.

Pilgrimage in Christianity

In Christianity, pilgrimage is a practice in which believers undertake a journey to a sacred place or shrine that holds religious significance. It is seen as a way to deepen one's faith, seek spiritual growth, and experience a closer connection with God. Christianity teaches that man was originally in a state of happiness in the garden of Eden, but there he disobeyed God and was banished out of his "earthly paradise." God did not abandon him and gave him hope by announcing the coming of the Son of God, who will conquer evil and return man to his lost home.

The key to the origin of Christian pilgrimage is the devotion to the memory of Jesus. Christianity views man as standing between the recollection of life in paradise and his yearning for a return to that paradise. This means that a Christian has to consider his earthly life as a pilgrimage until he attains his eternal home of peace. From this perspective, concrete aspects of pilgrimage—the specific destination and the rites and liturgies accomplished there—are of little importance. The key to the origin of Christian pilgrimage is the devotion to the memory of Jesus. The faithful visited the places that were filled with the memories of their Lord in his earthly life.

For most people, pilgrimage seemed unequivocally a most holy thing to do; and for most Christians, Jerusalem holds great importance as a pilgrimage destination in Christianity. It is the city where Jesus Christ was crucified



▼ **Orthodox Christian** pilgrims hold wooden crosses as they gather on the Holy Friday procession through the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem's Old City.

and resurrected, making it a significant site for believers. Pilgrims visit places like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is believed to be the site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, as well as other locations associated with his life and ministry. Jerusalem was associated with the earthly life of Jesus. Thus, from the beginning, pilgrims travelled to Palestine with the simple goal of experiencing first-hand the places in which different biblical events had occurred. Many Christians associate a pilgrimage center with "sacral power" — the power to heal infirmity, solve problems,

grant wishes, and have their sins forgiven. Pilgrimages were considered efficacious in this regard. It was mainly in the 19th and 20th centuries that a number of new pilgrimage sites were discovered and developed, often as a result of visions of the Virgin Mary in these places.

Pilgrimage in Hinduism

Pilgrimage is deeply embedded in the Indian culture. There are so many pilgrimage sites in India. Pilgrimage, or Tirtha Yatra, holds a special place in Hinduism. Hindu scriptures mention the importance of holy places and the benefits of visiting them. The Skanda Purana, one of the eighteen Mahapuranas, describes the glory of various pilgrimage sites, stating that even thinking about these places purifies the mind and soul. To the Hindus, pilgrimage is of special spiritual significance.



There are many reasons why Hindus go on pilgrimage. First, it is considered an act of devotion to God. Many of the Hindus believe it will add to their good deeds and bring them nearer to salvation. Other Hindus go on pilgrimage to fulfil a vow as a thank-you to God because they had a good harvest or passed an examination. Some go to make up for a bad deed, and others go to offer a devotional rite for a relative who has died. Many pilgrims take home small jars of river water and other objects they deem holy. Hinduism regards rivers as sacred, and bathing in them during pilgrimage is considered highly auspicious. The Rigveda, one of the oldest Hindu scriptures, praises the rivers and their purifying powers. The Ganges, Yamuna, Godavari, and other rivers are believed to wash away sins and grant spiritual upliftment.



▼ **Hindu pilgrims** in India gathered at Nallur Temple for celebration of special day pilgrimage is of special spiritual significance.

The Kumbh Mela is a major Hindu pilgrimage festival held at four sacred locations in India, Haridwar, Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad), Nashik, and Ujjain. The festival is mentioned in the Puranas. The Adi Shankaracharya, an influential Hindu philosopher and theologian, propagated the concept of Char Dham Yatra (pilgrimage to the four abodes). The four abodes include Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri, and Rameshwaram. Adi Shankaracharya encouraged Hindus to undertake these pilgrimages to seek spiritual enlightenment. The Bhagavad Gita, a revered Hindu scripture, highlights the significance of pilgrimage in Chapter 18, Verse 70.

Hindus honour the concept that Dharma is Karma, or religion

is morally correct action, and pilgrimage is an essential part of it. From ancient times, pilgrims have always been held in high esteem because of the difficulties they undergo in their devotion. One of the hundred pilgrimage destinations in India that attract millions of people every year, and probably the most famous, is Varanasi, which is a holy city and the home of 50,000 Hindu priests. Historically, the city has served as a center of Hindu worship and pilgrimage for nearly 3,000 years, making it perhaps the oldest continually functioning sacred city in the world. Among the several hundred shrines in Varanasi, the most important is the Golden Temple, dedicated to Shiva. The city is also surrounded by a 35-mile sacred road, the Panch Koshi. Devout pilgrims take six days to walk its circuit, visiting numerous shrines, temples, and gardens along the way.