

## Spiritual Magnetism: An Organizing Principle for the Study of Pilgrimage

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*Pilgrimage has been a neglected subject, despite the important place it occupies in world religions. Professor Preston suggests some cogent reasons for this situation, especially the fact that sacred journeys often involve a mystical aspect which is difficult—although not impossible—to penetrate analytically. The problem is methodology. He calls for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of pilgrimage because the multi-faceted nature of sacred places and of pilgrims' quests demands a comprehensive approach that no single discipline can provide. The author also develops several concepts that should prove useful for conceptualizing the less easily accessed dimensions of sacred journeys. In particular, the notion of "spiritual magnetism" to account for the drawing power of the sacred center, and "tracing" as a methodology for analyzing ever-changing pilgrimage patterns through time and space should find a place as useful theoretical tools for the researcher of the future who will tackle the sort of interdisciplinary study pilgrimage demands.*

It is curious that until recently pilgrimage has been neglected as a topic of inquiry by social scientists and historians of religion. What is the reason for this lack of interest over the years? Pilgrimage is not an esoteric phenomenon. It is manifested in one form or another in virtually all the world's religions. Nor is there an absence of documentation, since for centuries many shrines have kept elaborate and meticulous attendance records, biographical histories, and pilgrim travel guides.

What has impeded the study of this important religious custom? The problem is at least partially methodological. Something is intrinsically difficult about studying transitory phenomena like pilgrimage. In anthropology, for instance, there has been a strong inclination to focus on spatially bracketed phenomena at village levels or within particular religious complexes. Unlike village studies that involve clearly defined communities, pilgrimages are unbounded phenomena involving strands of behaviors that transcend geographically confined groups. Another factor that has impeded the study of pilgrimage has been the dominance of Boasian Particularism in anthropology, a school of thought that has insisted on "holism" and neglected the elaborate networks characteristic of complex social systems.

These reasons alone do not fully explain the neglect of pilgrimage as a focus of research. A further aspect of the problem is suggested by Victor and Edith Turner, who characterize pilgrimage as "extroverted mysticism, just as mysticism is introverted pilgrimage" (1978: 33). This apparent kinship with mystical experience has rendered pilgrimage unfashionable as the social sciences have swept the more subjective side of human experience off center stage. Although there is a long and distinguished anthropological tradition associated with the study of mysticism (especially shamanism), exemplified by the classic works of Radin, Wallace, Lowie, and LaBarre, the dominance of behaviorism and particularism has pushed mysticism from the foreground of research. A survey of the psychological literature on "religious experience" reveals an almost thorough retreat from serious investigations of the topic after a period of initial enthusiasm in the early part of the twentieth century (see Preston 1984). Following the widespread use of psychedelic drugs and the popular "discovery" of eastern religions in the 1960s, religious experience has once again attained legitimacy as an appropriate topic for scholarly research. The recent readmission of subjective aspects of human nature as a focus of anthropological inquiry has contributed greatly to the present burgeoning interest in the study of pilgrimage (Preston 1991).

The neglect of pilgrimage in the scientific study of religion is related to an even more insidious problem than the narrow scientism of either behaviorism or Boasian particularism. Pilgrimage defies the kind of compartmentalized analysis associated with the present style of Western thought that organizes everything into discrete disciplines of inquiry. The social sciences are ill-equipped to cope with sprawling, processual phenomena. On the other hand, the physical sciences have been forced to overcome disciplinary compartmentalization by creating multidisciplinary methodologies to resolve the fragmentation of Western knowledge. Medicine, biochemistry, archaeology, and other materially oriented fields of inquiry have synthesized methodologies for investigating complex phenomena. Multidisciplinary research strategies require abundant funding. Unfortunately, generous resources for research projects in comparative religion are rare.

We are challenged both to work within our disciplinary biases and to transcend them. Pilgrimage can be approached from a number of different theoretical orientations, such as structuralism or cultural materialism. Today, however, these once fashionable theories are inadequate for the study of pilgrimage. No single discipline

or theoretical perspective can do it justice. We are challenged, then, to contemplate the potential power of a multidisciplinary methodology.

## SPIRITUAL MAGNETISM AND THE PROBLEM OF LEVELS

Many scholars have noted the tendency for pilgrimages to be arranged in hierarchies, circulating devotees among different levels of sacred centers (Bharati 1970; Bhardwaj 1973; Turner and Turner 1978). The pilgrim flow is usually, though not always, patterned along increasingly more complex levels of sociocultural integration, from local peripheral folk centers toward national or international shrines. While no one doubts the existence of these levels, scholars disagree about how to define them. One common denominator is *spiritual magnetism*, which can be defined simply as the power of a pilgrimage shrine to attract devotees.<sup>1</sup> It is not an intrinsic "holy" quality of mysterious origins that radiates objectively from a place of pilgrimage; rather, spiritual magnetism derives from human concepts and values, via historical, geographical, social, and other forces that coalesce in a sacred center. It develops at a particular place of pilgrimage because of the interplay of traceable forces that seem mysterious to participants but have measurable referents in empirical reality. This attribution does not diminish or in any way disregard attributes of mystery, miracle, or sacrality assigned to the phenomenon by devotees.

Folk explanations of the spiritual magnetism attributed to a sacred center are valid from the participant's point of view. Nor can we neglect extrinsic variables that make a pilgrimage shrine attractive. Places of pilgrimage are endowed with spiritual magnetism by association with (1) miraculous cures, (2) apparitions of supernatural beings, (3) sacred geography, and (4) difficulty of access. The following are brief descriptions of each variable.

### Miraculous Cures

Sacred streams, hot mineral springs, and other natural sources of water are frequently associated with healing. Miraculous cures attract large numbers of pilgrims to sacred centers. Some involve the reported intervention of a deity or saint; others occur by the mere presence of an ill person in the sacred precincts of a pilgrimage site. The range of cures attributed to divine intervention is extensive, including miraculous healings of syphilis, leprosy, tuberculosis and stress-related disorders like asthma, arthritis, delirious fevers, and various mental conditions. Miraculous cures may also involve forms of "social healing," such as the healing of family solidarity or the attainment of jobs. Many of the great Christian pilgrimage centers that developed in the nineteenth century derived from miraculous cures. These centers include the shrines at Knock (Ireland), Fatima (Portugal), Lourdes (France), and La Salette (France). Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims flock to these shrines every year. Miraculous healings enhance spiritual magnetism even after the

introduction of modern medicine. In India, for instance, the eradication of smallpox has not diminished pilgrimage to shrines devoted to the smallpox goddess Sitala. Instead, this goddess has started specializing in the cure of pilgrims who suffer from general fevers and other afflictions. The significant question is how pilgrimage shrines become centers of wholeness for fragmented people and provide atmospheres of physical and psychological healing.

### Apparitions of Supernatural Beings

Deities are believed to speak directly to those persons who, as mediums for divine encounters, deliver messages to humanity or reveal holy laws. Inevitably such revelations call for a shrine to be built where the apparition has occurred, sometimes at the insistence of the deity. Here the original vision is reenacted (Turner and Turner 1978: 210). Pilgrimage sites associated with apparitions are imbued with strong mystical powers. Once the miraculous descent of the supernatural into the world has happened, it is believed it can occur again.

Prophets, saints, and deities may have visited these pilgrimage sites, either as mythological or historical personages. Caitanya, the great Bengali Vaisnava saint, made frequent pilgrimages to the shrine of Lord Jagannath in Orissa, one reason for its elevation to the status of an all-India shrine. The major Islamic pilgrimage center at Mecca is located where Muhammad destroyed pagan icons and established the monotheistic focus of Islam. In Christianity numerous pilgrimage shrines have been founded after apparitions of the Virgin Mary have occurred. Typically she delivers messages to "common folk" (sometimes children) about how to confront problems of corruption, decadence, and evil in the world.

In those cases where the appearance of a supernatural being has taken place or a holy person is believed to have performed some crucial act to found a new religion, special shrines are erected. Spiritual magnetism is enhanced in these places of pilgrimage by the performance of rites of renewal. Pilgrims typically reenact the original experiences reported to have occurred at holy sites, rites that link them back to the core values of their tradition. There is something energizing about locations where encounters with deities once happened, even though these events may have taken place thousands of years ago.

### Sacred Geography

In those traditions where the earth is associated with powerful religious sentiments, spiritual magnetism is strongly linked to sacred geography.<sup>2</sup> The land of Israel is imbued with sacrality for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. Similarly, sacred geography is expressed in the Hindu concept of Bharat—the place where the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Puranas were lived out during mythological times. The holy wells, islands, and mountaintops of Ireland represent a Christianized sacred

geography superimposed over older, pagan Celtic traditions.

Pilgrimage sites are often found in the most dramatic locations on the globe and inspire lofty emotions and high spiritual values. Hiroshi Tanaka describes eighty-eight sacred places on mountain peaks and in valleys scattered throughout the four major islands of Japan (1978: 2). Himalayan sites (like Mount Kailasa, Tibet) and other mountain peaks in the world (Doi Suthep, Thailand; Sri Pada, Sri Lanka; and Croagh Patrick, Ireland) attract thousands of pilgrims each year. Sacred topography is ubiquitous in India, where certain mountains, ponds, lakes, rivers, trees, and abodes ascribed to deities (*dhamas*) are selected for particular reverential treatment (Bharati 1963: 161, 165; Bhardwaj 1973: 95; Clothey 1972: 88-92; Singh and Singh 1987). The Ganges River, from its source in the Himalayas to its mouth on the Bay of Bengal, is laced with pilgrimage sites that demarcate the contours of Indian civilization. Visits to local villages in India spontaneously evoke tales of sacred places in the surrounds where deities and heroic figures from the epic scriptures once roamed.

Sacred geography is not always defined in terms of dramatic features of landscape. There is nothing particularly beautiful or extraordinary about the geographical locations of Mecca, Rome, or Jerusalem, yet they are located at the crossroads of previous civilizations that have been transformed and synthesized time and again into new worldviews by saints or prophets. A principle of *spiritual synthesis* is operative here. These shrines are focal points for movements of large numbers of people toward centers of civilization. Pilgrimage sites strongly associated with sacred geography may diminish in importance as civilizations decline. Many of the great places of pilgrimage of antiquity have faded away after periodic episodes of stellar florescence.

### Difficulty of Access

Some pilgrimage sites attain a high degree of spiritual magnetism because they are difficult to reach due to either intrinsic or extrinsic factors. A shrine located in a precarious place attains some of its spiritual magnetism from *intrinsic* dangers associated with the pilgrimage journey itself. Other shrines impose rigorous *extrinsic* rites of penance for pilgrims to perform as they approach the inner sanctum. In either case, the pilgrimage requires sacrifice, an important ingredient for enhancing spiritual magnetism.

India's Amarnath cave shrine is a place of pilgrimage located in a difficult place of access. This Shaivite shrine has an extraordinary *lingam* of Lord Siva, composed of an ice stalagmite. The shrine is located ninety miles northeast of Srinagar (Kashmir) at 12,729 feet above sea level. It attracts thousands of pilgrims each year who travel to the high Himalayas, where they pay tribute to Lord Siva. Over the years pilgrims have willingly journeyed there, despite the risks of danger along a final thirty-mile trek over a precipitous bridle path. Bad weather in 1928 killed 500 people on pilgrimage to the sacred cave. In 1970 a blizzard took the lives of 18 others.

Instead of discouraging devotees, these events have actually elevated the spiritual magnetism of the pilgrimage.

Factors of risk inherent in journeys to remote locations were also evident in Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land during the Middle Ages. Danger experienced during pilgrimage is a source of spiritual magnetism even today. Young and old alike ascend Ireland's Croagh Patrick once each year on a dangerous three-and-a-half mile climb to the summit at 2,510 feet. In 1972 fifteen accident victims were carried down by stretchers, and in 1106 the Bishop of Ardpark was struck by lightning and killed. Seven years later on the eve of St. Patrick's festival, thirty people were hit by a thunderbolt while fasting and praying at the summit. All of them died (Turner and Turner 1978: 208). The irony of these tragic events is that they attract rather than repel pilgrims, due to the widespread folk belief that dying while on pilgrimage is auspicious.

Sometimes the difficulty of a pilgrimage may be imposed through traditional obstacles created deliberately for pilgrims to endure. These places are not necessarily remote. Extrinsic hardships often take the form of penances. Individuals are expected to demonstrate acts of contrition for sins or to purify themselves through elaborate devotions, including self-flagellation, crawling on one's knees during a specific phase of the journey, or licking the ground while approaching the sanctuary. Exhausted pilgrims may faint, have convulsions, or enter into delirium trances. During the Feast of the Madonna of the Arch near Naples, Italy, pilgrims work themselves into a state of frenzy, exhaustion, and trauma from self-inflicted wounds. Each year over a thousand need special treatment at first-aid stations (Tentori 1982: 100). The penitential aspect of pilgrimage is not unique to Christianity. It is widely articulated in pilgrimage traditions throughout the world.

Modern tourism erodes the penitential dimension of pilgrimages. During fieldwork in India priests and older pilgrims expressed concern about attenuated rites at many contemporary shrines. In their view the decline of spiritual magnetism at some pilgrimage sites can be attributed to the "softness" of an increasing number of "tourist pilgrims." Accustomed to urban comforts, these tourists are typically reluctant to undergo the hardships of long journeys on foot or the routine penances once expected of all pilgrims. One cannot help but speculate that busloads of "tourist pilgrims" and attenuated penitential customs have negative effects on the spiritual magnetism of pilgrimage shrines. The opposite result may also occur as tourism and pilgrimage are forged together, amplified, and orchestrated to reinforce nationalistic/ethnic identities. The recent apparitions in Yugoslavia reflect a fascinating combination of tourism and pilgrimage. Highly touted by the media, this pilgrimage has become a major attraction for hundreds of thousands of tourists, many of whom are also attending as pilgrims. While spiritual magnetism is clearly related to the numbers of people who attend a shrine, it also involves more profound measures of religious experience, such as the pilgrim's sense of being in the presence of the supernatural.

In recent years many shrines have abandoned the imposition of penitential hardships on pilgrims. Others have not, such as the Irish pilgrimage to St. Patrick's

Purgatory in Lough Derg, County Donegal, where an ancient penitential pilgrimage continues to thrive despite minor attenuations. The St. Patrick's Purgatory pilgrimage is nearly 1,500 years old and has undergone many changes. At several points in history it was closed by Protestants. It reached its peak during the famine years but today continues to attract large numbers of pilgrims despite hardships imposed by penitential customs. St. Patrick's Purgatory is located on a small island in a lake. It is easy to reach, and during the summer months as many as 20,000 people spend three days of penance there. Pilgrims must remove their shoes, engage in extensive fasting (only bread and water), stand all-night vigils, and repeat endless prayers and rounds to the various small shrines on the island. It is believed by pilgrims that the more they suffer deprivation on the island, the easier will be the torment their beloved ones will endure in purgatory (Turner and Turner 1978: 121). The willingness of pilgrims to undergo these hardships suggests that even today penance enhances spiritual magnetism at some shrines.

Not every pilgrimage site is endowed equally with the four variables that contribute to the development of spiritual magnetism. Some sacred centers attract large numbers of pilgrims even though they are associated with only a couple factors. For instance, Ireland's popular pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Knock has nothing to do with sacred geography. Nor is it difficult to reach, being located in the gentle hills of County Mayo with easy access by car, train, bus, or plane. The Knock shrine is not situated on the main crossroads of urbanizing culture like some places of pilgrimage. It is located instead in an unmistakably rural setting, like other Irish pilgrimages to places of sacred geography, such as holy wells, rivers, or mountain-tops. The Knock shrine became a pilgrimage site in 1879 at the end of the second Irish famine after the appearance of the Virgin Mary to over a dozen people. Ten days following this dramatic event, visitors to the site reported miraculous healings. The first instance was the case of a twelve-year-old girl cured of deafness and sharp pain in her left ear. The child's mother removed a piece of cement from the gable of the small church where the apparition had occurred, made the sign of the Cross, and placed the cement in the afflicted ear. The pain reportedly ceased at once with no remaining traces of deafness (Walsh 1967: 15). After this incident Knock became a place of intense spiritual magnetism for the Irish people and rivaled the already well-established shrine at Lourdes in France.

The intensity of spiritual magnetism may increase as a shrine becomes better known for miracles or when it develops a focus of intensifying cultural activity. Unfortunately, there are not enough ethnohistorical studies of pilgrimage sites to know exactly how this intensification occurs. It would appear, however, that during certain historical periods some sacred centers become increasingly associated with supernatural efficacy. Sometimes the notoriety of a pilgrimage shrine develops at an almost exponential rate, as if it were involved in a positive feedback system that peaks and then diminishes as dramatically as it flourished.<sup>3</sup> Most intriguing is why spiritual magnetism is more intense in one sacred place compared with another, a fact that establishes the relative stratification of shrines in pilgrimage networks. These questions must await further research to be answered with any degree of

certainty.

The four variables associated with spiritual magnetism are not exhaustive. Other factors should be investigated, such as the role of national identity in forming spiritual magnetism, as in many Catholic Marian shrines like Czestochowa (Poland), Guadalupe (Mexico), and Copacabana (Bolivia) (Preston 1982: 333). Also, the presence of relics at a shrine may enhance its spiritual magnetism. This effect was particularly true in the past, especially in Europe where the cult of relics flourished during the High Middle Ages.

## RESEARCH STRATEGIES

The value of spiritual magnetism as an analytical tool must await empirical testing through systematic fieldwork. Different research methodologies yield a variety of results. What is the best approach for the study of pilgrimage? Some research strategies place emphasis on attendance at shrines; others stress participation of the individual pilgrim. Each approach reveals another facet of this complex phenomenon.

### The Statistical Method

At first glance pilgrimage would seem to be an ideal subject for statistical analysis. Many shrines and communities keep records of pilgrim activities. These data are usually inaccurate, however, and need to be supplemented by systematic strategies designed by professional researchers. In his classic study of Hindu pilgrimage, Surinder Bhardwaj (1973) has employed statistical methods to avoid the subjective factors associated with other types of classification. He relies heavily on counting the actual numbers of pilgrims who attend a pilgrimage, including the distances they travel to a shrine and the diversity of pilgrims (in terms of caste, class, gender, or other variables). Bhardwaj delineates five levels of classification for Indian pilgrimage shrines. He is correct to observe that the "...sanctity (of a shrine) cannot be easily quantified" (1978: 15).

When relying on statistical methods, one tends to emphasize the distance traveled to pilgrimage shrines as a measure of spiritual magnetism. This measure may be quite misleading. In Orissa (India), for instance, virtually everyone would agree that Sarala Temple (located in a small village thirty miles east of Cuttack city) is a major place of sanctity because of its association with Sarala Das, Shudra author of the Oriya *Mahabharata*. Yet few devotees are attracted to this shrine from beyond the district where it is located. The small number of pilgrims who attend the shrine is due to poor access. It is located outside the main transportation corridors running north and south. Nor is Sarala Temple situated in a place of particular beauty or unusual challenge. It is out of the way and consequently attended infrequently. Other shrines in Orissa, believed by devotees to have less spiritual magnetism than Sarala

Temple, are visited more frequently by pilgrims because of their convenient locations. Despite its shortcomings, the statistical method has the important advantage of objectifying otherwise unclear phenomena. It also yields a potential for correlations between different variables of pilgrimage.

### The Indigenous Literary Method

This research strategy employs both linguistic terms and classification schemes found in the sacred literature to extract insights about different levels of sacred centers. Agehananda Bharati (1970: 97) is correct when he insists that indigenous classification schemes should be considered before new ones are constructed from the outsider's point of view. Nevertheless, indigenous schemes are limited, since many of them are dated and do not apply to contemporary pilgrimage cycles. These schemes may have little value because they are frequently vague and poorly defined. In the Indian case, for instance, there are rich epic and Puranic sources that classify pilgrimage shrines, but they are so vague as to be relatively useless with respect to current shrines.<sup>4</sup>

### The Contextual Method

The placement of a pilgrimage tradition within a civilization's religious and political history constitutes the contextual method. In this research strategy the level of spiritual magnetism of a shrine is determined by its place of centrality with respect to the Great Tradition. While some shrines are peripheral to the civilizational core, others are at the epicenter, supporting divine right kingship and the elaborate hierarchy of bureaucracy that reinforces the system. A. Eschmann (1978: 84) uses a contextual methodology to study the multiple levels of sacred centers in Orissan Hinduism. She classifies Orissan shrines along an axis extending from tribal cult temples through higher levels of sociocultural integration, culminating in the great Hindu temple complexes at the core of Indian civilization. In this approach the icon becomes a focus and an instrument of increasing acculturation. This approach is a diachronic rather than a synchronic view of pilgrimage and sacred centers. Several problems are evident. In the first place, the contextual methodology is difficult to apply without good historical records. There is also the danger of placing too much emphasis on large, politically important pilgrimage centers (because of available data) while neglecting other shrines by classifying them as peripheral. Furthermore, a question could be raised as to whether the historical/political context of a shrine tells us anything about its spiritual magnetism. Some of the great Christian centers of healing, such as Lourdes and Fatima, are not particularly important centers of European civilization. These shrines serve a purely religious function for devotees, one that transcends historical and political contexts.

## The Psychological/Linguistic Method

This research strategy has considerable potential for the study of pilgrimage. The psychological/linguistic approach would include a series of intensive interviews with pilgrims to determine levels of spiritual magnetism of shrines in a particular region. In anthropology this method of research is similar to ethnoscience—the development of cognitive models using linguistic categories and concepts carried around in people's heads. The psychological/linguistic approach is employed by anthropologists during fieldwork to elicit the cognitive contours of cultural systems. Are there differences in the mental maps of sacred centers among people from various social classes and different regions? Anthropologists have found cognitive categories to be useful for the study of small groups in complex societies, such as bars, elevators, hospitals, and other social institutions. The method has also yielded intriguing results among tribal peoples, particularly for the classification of color terminology and folk taxonomies of animals and plants.<sup>5</sup>

Each of the methodologies noted here has its advantages and disadvantages. None is sufficient alone for delineating the parameters of a pilgrimage network. Spiritual magnetism is determined by a multiplicity of factors in different religious traditions. Many questions need to be addressed. How does a pilgrimage shrine influence the surrounding secular field? How does it contribute to the economy of the locality? Does it spawn a tradition of miracles? How much of the spiritual magnetism of a shrine is generated by commercial, economic, and political factors?

One of the most critical tasks in the study of a pilgrimage tradition is to establish the hierarchy of shrines and the appropriate relationship among them.<sup>6</sup> This preliminary exercise is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the role of pilgrimage in a religious system. Sacred journeys are like filaments that constitute the superstructure within a civilization. Thus, while pilgrimage is a private and personal event at one level, at another it transcends the individual and links him into the interconnecting fibers represented in the process of sacred journeying.

## THE SACRED TRACE

The key to pilgrimage is found in the flow of people along linkages between different levels of sacred centers. A unique methodology is required for the study of religious movement. I call this methodology *tracing*—a term borrowed from nuclear physics, where the invisible world of atomic structure becomes tangible through traces left in other media. The invisible dimension of pilgrimage is the overall process, a pattern visible only when all pieces of the puzzle have been assembled. Since pilgrimage is always in flux, it requires a methodology that captures its periodicity and the flow of behavior ascending in networks of increasing ritual and cultural complexity toward a point of religious/cultural integration.

Patterns of pilgrim movement are best assessed in the broader cultural context of

the pilgrim field. This general background information brackets the pilgrimage process and places the phenomenon in clear relief, as in the relationship of figure to ground. Since all pilgrimages are stratified spatially and temporally, tracing, of necessity, should be achieved through the movement of a team of experts following the pilgrim flow at various levels. Tracing the flow is essential because pilgrimage is a circulation of people, ideas, symbols, experiences, and cash. Pilgrimage extends humans beyond parochial horizons, as they move both vertically and horizontally into increasingly wider religious/cultural spheres. On the vertical axis pilgrimage is a dual process; pilgrims move upward to higher and higher levels in the religious network, then return to their villages (or urban neighborhoods) with new perspectives that have important influences on local traditions.<sup>7</sup> This feedback mechanism widens horizons for individual pilgrims and occurs at various levels. Pilgrimage cycles connect people on the horizontal axis to large geographical entities. Pilgrims enter extensive marketplaces associated with pilgrimage routes, participate in vibrant religious traditions that extend beyond parochial horizons, come in contact with persons of different classes (who would otherwise remain segmented from each other), experience ethnic groups other than their own, and gain a clearer sense of their own uniqueness.

Tracing probes still further to the very deepest levels of religious experience. Elsewhere I have defined the sacred trace found at the core of the world's religions as follows:

The phenomenon of an invisible reality made visible in the world is what I call the *sacred trace*. Trace is defined in the dictionary "as a visible mark or sign of the former presence or passage of some person, thing or event." It also means, in its archaic usage, "a path or trail through a wilderness.".... The sacred trace is located at the core of every pilgrimage. It takes many different forms. In some cases it is the relics or tomb of a saint; it may be the place where Muhammad delivered his sermon, calling together the Brotherhood of Islam or where Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead. The trace is the source of spiritual magnetism of a shrine, its powerhouse, so to speak. By participating in the epiphany manifested at a particular place of pilgrimage, the pilgrim ingests and carries home the trace of his tradition, then anchors or implants it in his home community. This is part of the reason why sacred objects (sacramentals) of all sorts are purchased and brought home from pilgrimage shrines (Preston 1990: 22).

## TOWARD A MULTIDISCIPLINARY METHODOLOGY

Ideally, the tracing of a pilgrimage cycle would involve a team of experts who conduct research on various aspects of spiritual magnetism. Several disciplinary approaches and dimensions of pilgrimage are sketched briefly here. No single scholar could cover all of them alone. Thus, a multidisciplinary approach is critical.



### Geographical Dimension

A crucial first step in the study of pilgrimage must be to map the pilgrim field. Several types of surveys are valuable: (1) maps of the distribution of pilgrimage sites; (2) visits to major pilgrimage shrines to determine their locations, indigenous categories of classification, configurations of diffusion, and so on; and (3) maps of pilgrimage circulation patterns. Modes of transportation in the pilgrimage process need to be determined. How are vehicles of transportation linked into the civilization as a whole (Bharati 1970: 126)? The geographical dimension requires technical skills in the analysis of spatial networks and demographic movements.

### Historical Dimension

Pilgrim records and other historical documents need to be examined to trace the evolution of a pilgrimage from its point of origin through various phases of sociopolitical and religious change. This information is particularly valuable for "syncretic pilgrimages," which blend two or more religious traditions. It is also useful for the study of "founder pilgrimages," where pilgrims trace the sites of the founder's original vision. This "reenactment of the generating vision" (Turner and Turner 1978: 210) becomes a symbolic vehicle for the paradigmatic pilgrimage. The tracing of historical changes should yield insights about how pilgrimage shrines become transformed in different historical periods.

### Sociocultural Dimension

Several issues are critical in tracing the sociocultural dimension of pilgrimage. To what extent, for instance, does a universal pilgrimage, like the *hajj* to Mecca, entail the dissolving of ethnic boundaries or the imposition of a dominant acculturating motif? A number of studies (Gross 1960: 145; Bharati 1970: 87; and Turner and Turner 1978: 129) have noted a feudal paradigm associated with pilgrimage, the patron being the deity at the pilgrimage site, the client being the pilgrim. In Gross's study of the Bom Jesus de Lapa shrine (Brazil), the vehicle for the patron-client relationship is the *promessa*, or vow of payment. "Worship and the paying of *promessas* correspond to the fealty and labor which a client owes his superior" (1960: 145). This relationship of dependency in the sacralized dyadic contract is a significant element of pilgrimage. Why does the feudal paradigm exist in some pilgrimages and not others? Perhaps the most important issue associated with the sociocultural dimension has to do with how the pilgrimage process fuses together otherwise disparate social groups under a single umbrella. Mexico's Guadalupe shrine is a typical syncretic pilgrimage conceived in a grand "mestizo synthesis" that forges the roots of Mexican national identity (Campbell 1982).

### Economic Dimension

Virtually every pilgrimage is associated with a field of economic exchange, as in fairs, carnivals, and permanent or temporary marketplaces. Materials are redistributed as pilgrims enter sacred centers, then disperse. A relationship of debt between deity and pilgrim, the institution of begging, and the temporary incorporation of peripheral tribal peoples in the process of exchange are examples of secondary (in some instances primary) motives for pilgrimage behavior. The economic dimension is connected to the widespread custom of sightseeing, which has always had some influence on pilgrimage. Tourist activities are common interludes on pilgrimage journeys. It would be useful to trace the general scope of commercial stimuli provided along pilgrimage routes and within sociopolitical spheres.

### Psychological Dimension

Numerous psychological factors contribute significantly to the pilgrimage process. The following represent a few questions that might be addressed in a psychological study of pilgrimage. What motivates people to undertake sacred journeys? How does the pilgrimage change people psychologically? What role do perceived salvation, suffering, and penance play in the pilgrimage process? Psychological studies should consider the important dimension of healing as a by-product of pilgrimage. How are illnesses, both physical and mental, influenced by visits to sacred centers?

### Religious Dimension

The reenactment of the founder's original religious experience is often a potent method for periodically revitalizing a particular religion. Invariably, contact with the sacred center is an act of "rupture" in which the pilgrim crosses a series of thresholds and returns to the source where humanity and divinity are believed to intersect. This "coming into the presence of the sacred" is often experienced as miraculous. We need to know more about sacred thresholds. Critical questions arise concerning the nature of sacrality. As the Turners have observed, all pilgrimage sites are "believed to be places where miracles once happened, still happen, and may happen again" (1978: 6). Even where miracles occurred only in the past, contact with the sacred center in such a place may continue to have religious value.

Other questions about levels of pilgrimage need to be addressed. In the Indian case, for instance, Bhardwaj (1973: 158-60) has observed an important difference in the purposes of visits to higher-level as compared with lower-level places of pilgrimage. Higher-level shrines are visited for *darsana* (viewing the deity) and the attainment of merit, while lower-level shrines (often devoted to goddesses) are attended mainly to fulfill vows (*sukna*) associated with the meeting of specific

needs. How broadly can we generalize these findings to pilgrimages in other parts of the world? The Turners note an opposite configuration for Christian pilgrimages, where Marian shrines are primary rather than secondary places of pilgrim activity (1978: 201-2). Even in the Indian case, it is doubtful Bhardwaj can generalize his findings beyond the north Indian context where he gathered most of his data. My own research in the state of Orissa suggests opposite findings from those of Bhardwaj. Many of the most influential pilgrimage sites in Orissa are associated with the goddess worship tradition. Pilgrims attend these shrines for the fulfillment of vows, not just for a *darsana* or view of the deity.<sup>8</sup> We need to use caution about generalizing from typologies based on clusters of traits that may shift from one region to another.

The "root paradigms" embedded in religious traditions and articulated differently in various cultures are often associated with important pilgrimage sites such as Banaras (Eck 1982) and the holy Ganges River in India (Bharati 1970: 107). At Biraja Temple, an important goddess shrine in Orissa, the sacred well in the temple compound is said to be connected underground to the Ganges River, located several hundred miles to the north. Thus, the local shrine becomes an extension of the great paradigmatic pilgrimage center at Kashi (Banaras). Similar underground connections to the Ganges are reported from a wide range of shrines in South India. The holy city of Jerusalem, a major focus of pilgrimage for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, contains the root paradigms at the core of the religions of the West. A multidisciplinary study of Jerusalem as a pilgrimage center would reveal profound insights into these religions.

The religious dimension of pilgrimage is enhanced by creative imagination. Pilgrimage is concerned with elevation and display, magnification and miniature, awe and terror. Entering the sacred center both enhances the mystery and dissolves it. Even in America, where secular pilgrimages flourish, this same element of revelation is generated as we watch men journey into outer space, explore the awe, beauty, and terror of nuclear fission, and project into nature a romantic vision of Eden. These ventures all involve the crossing of successive thresholds, the rupture of old worldviews, a transcendence of brackets, and reentry shock. The religious imagination operates by both universal and culturally specific principles shaping a wide variety of pilgrimage experiences.

#### TOWARD A NEW COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGION

Multidisciplinary studies have been infrequent and much less broadly funded in the social sciences as compared with the physical sciences. Pilgrimage is a natural topic for pioneering research among scholars from a variety of disciplines. This point is evident from the highly successful multidisciplinary conference on pilgrimage held at the University of Pittsburgh in 1981. Since that landmark event the topic has become increasingly popular as a focus of research.

The study of pilgrimage is a particularly challenging field of investigation for

anthropologists, as we move away from the study of clearly bracketed social groups, like tribes, peasant communities, or communes, toward the analysis of culture as process. Giant strides have been made in the anthropology of religion since Malinowski's classic work on Trobriand magic. Structuralists have investigated common symbolic themes underlying distinct religious systems. In recent years, we have discovered the important role of metaphor, symbolism, and imagery in the relationship of religion to culture. Our attention is drawn increasingly to an appreciation of religion as process. We are now ready to return to a more sophisticated comparison of religions, instead of studying them as discrete entities. More important is the recent interest in the great world religions, not just treating them as "folk religions" or conducting village-level investigations but considering also the powerful symbols they generate as connecting links to the civilizations in which they are embedded.<sup>9</sup> We are on the threshold of a new synthesis in the comparative study of religion. This new approach must be built on a foundation anchored in several disciplines. The emphasis placed here on tracing, spiritual magnetism, and levels of shrines, suggests common points of departure for the integration of disciplinary differences. If we concede that something of religious and cultural significance occurs in pilgrimage and that the root paradigms of the world religions can be revealed in the study of peregrination, then pilgrimage can be a rallying point for the complementary interchange of different disciplines.

What practical steps are needed to launch this new synthesis? Classification schemes and surveys of pilgrim fields are not enough. We must also study individual pilgrimage shrines in depth. It is imperative to emphasize *process* and examine carefully *religious movement* as an expression of transcendence. Why are certain types of movement considered mechanisms for communicating with the supernatural? Since civilizations are linked into the pilgrimage process, it is essential to investigate the subtle distribution of power and political control implied in the movement of disparate peoples into ceremonial centers, along with their dispersal back to local peripheries. Most critical is the pattern of patronage associated with different pilgrimage traditions. Who pulls the purse strings? How much is pilgrimage a residual mechanism by which powerful elites utilize mystical concepts of devotion to land, kin, crown, and deity to impose their suzerainty over subject peoples? These questions cannot be answered from the perspective of a single discipline. They require the insights and methodologies from a multidisciplinary effort.

The field of comparative religion was initiated in the late nineteenth century by scholars like Muller, Lang, Durkheim, Tylor, Weber, and Freud, each of whom contributed to the founding of the major disciplines in the social sciences and humanities as we know them today. They drew on a wide variety of methods and paradigms, asked broad, sweeping questions about human nature, and nurtured elaborate correspondences with colleagues from different disciplines. Their bold, intuitive speculations framed issues that have echoed for over a century in the disciplines concerned with the comparative study of religion. Grand themes were their favorite vehicles for exercising armchair speculations about human nature. A necessary correction for such intuitive abandon was instituted during the early part



of the twentieth century in virtually every discipline they founded. Along with this significant correction, the large comparative questions vanished as each discipline retreated into its own territory and established the rigid boundaries encrusted in present-day academia. The new comparative religion urges us to break out of this entrapment, to reestablish the broad, comparative base of its origins, while retaining the caution and rigor of the more systematic methodologies developed during this century.

Pilgrimage challenges the present canons of academia. It forces us to contemplate the value of more imaginative applications of our various methodologies. It calls for the complementary fusion of our disciplines to forge a deeper, more penetrating analysis of religion. Countless millions of pilgrims have traversed the globe throughout the centuries. The irony of our time is that we know less about them than we do about the remote planets of our solar system. It is now time to remedy that situation.

## NOTES

1. I am greatly indebted to Alan Morinis for his assistance in clarifying the definition of spiritual magnetism.

2. "Sacred geography" is a useful concept developed by Vidyarthi for the study of Hindu pilgrimage sites (1961 and 1979).

3. For a discussion of the transformation of an obscure Hindu shrine into a major focus of religion in Cuttack city, Orissa, India, see my study of Chandi Temple (Preston 1980a).

4. The Puranic term *tirtha* (place of pilgrimage) and *piṭha* (seat or Tantric center) are of little value for the analysis of pilgrimage in Hinduism. The numerous listings of these places of pilgrimage in the Puranas are not very helpful since most no longer exist.

5. For a discussion of problems associated with the ethnosemantic approach see Harris (1968: 579-92). Folk taxonomies include classifications of color categories (Conklin 1955), kinship terminology (Goodenough 1965), and diseases (Frake 1961).

6. For a comprehensive discussion of levels of analysis and classification of Hindu sacred centers see my article (Preston 1980b).

7. The literature is replete with examples of the prestige gained by individuals who have returned home from the *hajj* to Mecca. A particularly valuable documentation of this is found in Antoun (1989).

8. Alan Morinis has observed similar reversals in pilgrimages of West Bengal (see Morinis 1984).

9. For a thematic approach to the new comparative religion see the concluding chapter of my book *Mother Worship: Theme and Variations* (1982).

## Pilgrimage and Tourism: Convergence and Divergence

ERIK COHEN

*Drawing distinctions between the pilgrim and their close relative the tourist points out important characteristics of both types of traveler. These differences are not merely "academic" (in the derogatory sense) or semantic because they throw up the crucial issues of the definition of pilgrimage. In reflecting on the relationship of pilgrimage to practices such as tourism, we ascertain the boundaries of the pilgrimage category.*

*The following chapter by Erik Cohen, a leading theoretician of the sociology of tourism, takes major steps toward answering these questions. Applying a structuralist approach, he develops the contrast between the pilgrim, whose journey is to a center of his world, and a tourist, who travels away from a center to a periphery. Notwithstanding that there are inevitable exceptions to these generalizations and that a degree of uncertainty must remain since no one will assert that there is a clearly demarcatable boundary between pilgrimage and tourism, Professor Cohen's thoughtful essay should be carefully considered for a better understanding of ritual travel, in whatever form it might take.*

*Besides being the basis for differentiating pilgrimage from tourism, the quest for the Center and the search for the Other have been recurrent motifs throughout the imaginative history of humankind. This chapter highlights these themes and so provides an opportunity to contemplate the place of sacred journeying in all civilization, from Ur and Chichen Itza to Las Vegas and the French Riviera.<sup>1</sup>*

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# THE RITUAL PROCESS

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