

Traditional pilgrimage - in all religious or non-religious faiths, serves to enhance established beliefs. The goal is a place where the faith is celebrated and at which the pilgrim becomes more deeply engaged in her or his belief system. However an essential requirement of a traditional pilgrimage is the going to and from the special place: the journey. Whilst this journey is usually to be completed as quickly and efficiently as possible the very fact that the pilgrim is preparing and leaving home and 'normality' means that the journey becomes a part of the pilgrimage process.

The destination may require a variety of tests all of which assist in enhancing one's belonging to 'the faith'. These tests are often based around movement, effort and endurance.

Some traditions have developed this sense of trial by encouraging the pilgrim to make an extended physical journey before arriving at the desired destination. What at one time was merely endured because it was the only way one could reach the goal (eg a long distance walk) has now become a more significant part of the pilgrimage itself. As belief in the traditional efficacy of relics and 'holy places' has declined (as in Protestant Christianity for example) the emphasis has shifted to the journey. The older traditional pilgrimage (and associated beliefs) still survive but a new form of pilgrimage has been developing. Such is the change (which has included the decline in belief in a 'transcendent God') that now the focus can be on a journey in which speedy travel is actually discouraged in favour of the slow journey on foot. Walking, which once was avoided by those wealthy enough to ride (by horse, carriage, or ship) is now frequently viewed as a requirement. Pilgrimage in this form has become thoroughly democratized.

Therefore:

A pilgrimage can be operated as

- part of an enclosed system (of belief) with pilgrims focused entirely on their previously chosen belief system and a goal which strengthens and enhances their existing faith.

In such situations the pilgrim is likely to remain unaware of peripherals to the journey, maybe even trying to exclude them. The chosen companions all share this position and so operate almost in monastic manner.

- a pilgrimage in which the intention is to allow all manner of influence to be received by the pilgrims.

Whilst Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims appear to have been fairly free in their style - actually nothing much of the journey and what it encountered is noted. They are a closed group of the first type.

Pilgrimages in which the journey begins to become as important or even more important than the destination is a comparatively modern phenomenon.

When such happens, then all manner of results are possible. It is its modern style that pilgrimage begins to relate to those who are searching or evolving new patterns of relationship - whether that is social, economic or spiritual. Such a pilgrimage, based on walking through whatever environment is necessary in order to reach a suitable goal, allows participants to relate to a variety of contexts through which they pass. To the attentive, it provides information on which to base an improved understanding of the nature of present society. In such a context the process of personal development which in traditional pilgrimage relates to reinforcing existing beliefs, changes and has a much less decided result. Allowing people to question what they observe and encounter en route cannot thus be prevented once they reach their destination.

Such a pilgrimage thus becomes a creative exercise of the individual pilgrim and as such is its own 'work of art'.

The pilgrimage from Hereford to Birmingham is of the non-traditional type.

*This journey is called a 'pilgrimage'... but to where and for what purpose?*

*Whenever the word pilgrimage is used, whether of traditional or more recent form, it has the implication that there is a journey to a place worthy*

*of making the journey.' Pilgrimage' suggests that the journey has purpose and is journey undertaken to satisfy a need. The efficacy of the pilgrimage in its more recent form relates to needs beyond just the physical. What is shared with any traditional pilgrimage is that the action relates to a participant's 'sense of Being' (and particularly 'well-being'). It is an efficacious journey related to 'health' and 'wholeness'.*

*How then does this particular journey from Hereford to Birmingham qualify as a 'pilgrimage'?*

*It is a physical journey to a place - a specific point, the statue of the Bull in Birmingham Centre.*

*This statue has become 'the centre'. To stand by this particular physical object is unlike standing any any other in the centre of Birmingham. There are other places and points that could justify being 'the central point' of the City: The Town Hall, the Council House, the Old Square, the Conference centre. How is a judgement mad?. One way is by 'attention paid' to a place. In Stratford on Avon - 'the Birthplace' (or tomb) of the Bard, in London 'Big Ben', The Tower (etc). In Birmingham there is one major point - and it is new, completely new - the stature of the Bull. So popular is this statue that there is, during the day, an almost continual flow of people waiting to have their photographs taken by it. It has become the central focal point in the city centre.*

*Thus, for this journey, there is a focal point - but is it the cause of the journey? Has it achieved such status that it alone makes a journey of several days worth the effort?*

*Well it is possible - but for this walk - no.*

*The statue is a suitable destination and can be seen as a significant and valuable neutral point. However it is primarily (because of its social neutrality) a convenience - a point at which it is possible to say 'we have finished'. It is a reasonable point – the image of the Bull is found in positive manner in all cultures and religions, but for this pilgrimage the purpose lies beyond the actual walk.*

*Maybe it is that the walk is rather a quest than a pilgrimage - or maybe it is both.*

*It is a pilgrimage in that it has a clear physical goal - 'The Convenient*

*Bull' situated in a place, Birmingham, that is filled with a variety of images and meanings for 'The Present' and together they make for a journey that can be, for the believer (in this specific journey), efficacious.*

*It is also a quest. The underlying purposes are twofold both related to the forging of new relationships and enhancing of existing action.*

*One purpose is to make contact with multi-cultural and multi-faith groups that may be interested in developing new methods of building dialogue and action. The other purpose for the walk grows out of that - namely to encourage groups that have been largely urban based to expand their experience and explore rural Britain. The method for starting such developments is to share purpose based walking.*

*Thus the walk becomes both a 'statement': 'this' is what could be done and a quest: an exploration for others interested in the idea.*

What matters most to those who are involved in this event is what happens after it has finished.

These questions underlie some of the issues relating to the Hereford - Birmingham Pilgrimage.

Issues related to:

- social cohesion (assisted by cross-cultural dialogue),
- urban - rural partnership (taking differing types of society in both directions) and widening the social and with it economic awareness of more traditional British rural society,
- understanding and then learning from landscape and its reflection of varied views and social patterns over time and that have led us to our own 'present'.

*The struggle for a future.*