

RESOURCE 7.3

Hindus and pilgrimage: personal reflections



Tulsi Seva Dasi is a Hindu from within the ISKCON *sampradaya* who has been on pilgrimage to the River Ganges. Here she offers some of her personal reflections on pilgrimage.

What does pilgrimage mean to you?

Pilgrimage is a time for me to be absorbed in all things spiritual. Hearing of the deeds of God (Krishna) in the places he enacted them is an exhilarating experience for me as a devotee. I feel that it brings me closer to God within. It also makes me realise my place in the world and encourages me to act in ways to improve myself and my relationship with others. No phones (except to take pictures), no news channels, no social media – it is a temporary switch-off from these insignificant things in the larger scope of things.

Is pilgrimage important in the Hindu/Sanātana Dharma tradition?

Visiting a temple may be considered a pilgrimage for those who don't have temples nearby, even though they may have a prayer space at home.

Here in the UK, Hindus visit temples like Skanda Vale and Bhaktivedanta Manor as annual pilgrimage, and they may even see it as no different from holy places in India.

We go to be spiritually rejuvenated, to hear from scripture, to become more God-centred, reminding us of our duties and washing away past sinful deeds in the holy rivers. Ultimately, the aim would be to release ourselves from the cycle of *samsara*. Some Hindus go through great austerity when they go on pilgrimage, for example walking barefoot through mountainous terrain and icy weather to reach places of pilgrimage in the Himalayan region. It is said that the more austere the journey the more beneficial it would be for the soul (I would think some degree of sincerity would be required, too). Pilgrimage is there for those of us who want to advance our spiritual knowledge and realisation.

Any other comments on pilgrimage?

Before Hindus travelled outside India they would travel to local and faraway places within India for pilgrimages. The entire country of India would be considered holy, as Lord Krishna and Rama and other avatars performed their deeds there. For many Hindus born outside of India the original concept of a long and arduous pilgrimage is a far-fetched idea, especially if there are economical restraints. Their local temples and *sangas* (gatherings for recitation of scriptures and singing of holy songs) are their places of pilgrimage.



Shiv Prasad, Varanasi, 2019

Links and resources

Hindu pilgrims at Varanasi www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/the-holy-city-of-varanasi-42862228

Chasing Rivers, part 2, Ganges: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkPwEuflhKo