**CATERING TO CONSCIOUSNESS:
From Pilgrimage to Dharma Tourism**

by

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This work is dedicated to Jim and Daisy Couse

Abstract

The study of pilgrimage as an anthropological category reflects broader intellectual movements across disciplinary boundaries. Over the last three decades two prominent paradigmatic models have emerged for the study of pilgrimage within a cross-cultural context: Victor and Edith Turner's (1974; 1978) *communitas* and John Eade and Michael Sallnow's (2000[1991]) *contestation*. This thesis expands on Turner's processual model of ritual symbolism and explores the relationship between pilgrimage and social transformation. Drawing from a case study of Buddhist pilgrimage, it is argued that ethnographic perspectives should take into account the centrality of consciousness in the midst of social action and human change. Phenomenological and experiential methodologies are used alongside multi-vocal narratives to explore aspects of subjective transformation. An examination of these symbolic relations is discussed in the context of altered states of consciousness as an epistemological ground for the formation of mental categories. It is argued that pilgrimage as meaningful symbolic system plays a fundamental role in the reorganization of the structures mediating consciousness. The sacred and secular dynamic surrounding the categories pilgrimage and tourism are also discussed within the context of this case study.

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Table of Contents

Thesis Acceptance Form.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi-vii
List of Plates.....	viii
Note to Reader.....	x
 Chapter 1. Introduction.....	 1
 Chapter 2. The Anthropology of Pilgrimage: Communitas, Contestation and Consciousness.....	 13
(2.1) Durkheim and the Elementary Forms of Religious Life.....	13
(2.2) The Ritual Process: Liminality and Communitas.....	16
(2.3) Turner and Turner: From 'Liminal' to 'Liminoid' in Pilgrimage Phenomenon.....	19
(2.4) From Communitas to Contestation: the deconstruction and re- construction of pilgrimage as an anthropological category...	21
(2.5) New Directions: Exploring the relationship between Methodology and Consciousness.....	27
i. Transpersonal Phenomenology and the Experiential Methodology.....	27
ii. Revisiting Turner and Durkheim.....	33
 Chapter 3. Buddhist Pilgrimage in North India: Mythic, Historical and Ethnographic Perspective.....	 38
(3.1) Accounts of Buddhist Pilgrimage in North India from the time of Ashoka.....	43
(3.2) Pilgrimage Today: An Ethnographic and Personal Narrative	48
i. Rajgir (<i>Rajagaha</i>) – The Capital of the North Indian Kingdom Magadha.....	51
ii. BodhGaya (<i>Buddha-Gaya</i>) – Where the Buddha was Enlightened.....	57
iii. Sarnath – Where the Wheel of Dharma was set in Motion	64
iv. Kushinagara (<i>Kusinara</i>) – Where the Buddha Breathed Last.....	68
v. Lumbini – The Birthplace of the Buddha.....	70
vi. Kapilavastu (Kapilavatthu) – The Capital of the Sakyas	73
vii. Shravasti (Savatthi) – Where the Buddha spent his Last Twenty Years.....	75

Chapter 4. In the Footsteps of the Buddha: Metaphor, Embodiment and Knowledge.....	78
(4.1) Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels.....	81
(4.2) Pilgrimage, Metaphor and Models of Transcendence.....	89
(4.3) From Embodiment to Knowledge.....	95
Chapter 5. The Meeting Ground – Pilgrimage and Dharma Tourism.....	103
(5.1) The Pilgrim - Tourist Path.....	104
(5.2) The Role of Physical and Mental Hardship.....	111
(5.3) The Role of a Guide or Teacher.....	116
Chapter 6. Conclusion.....	123
Appendix A.....	134
Appendix B.....	135
Appendix C.....	136
Appendix D.....	137
Appendix E.....	138
Bibliography.....	139

List of Plates

Plate 1.	Footprints outside the Mahabodhi Temple, BodhGaya.....	ix
Plate 2.	Shantum Seth with armed guard – Bamboo Grove.....	53
Plate 3.	The ruins of Nalanda University – Outside Rajgir.....	54
Plate 4.	Mahabodhi Temple – BodhGaya.....	61
Plate 5.	Circumambulation under the Bodhi Tree.....	62
Plate 6.	Damekh Stupa – Sarnath.....	66
Plate 7.	Reclining Buddha – Parinirvana Temple.....	69
Plate 8.	Ashokan Pillar – Lumbini.....	72
Plate 9.	Main Stupa – Kapilavastu.....	74
Plate 10.	The Ruins at Jeta Grove – Shravasti.....	76
Plate 11.	Geographical Map of India.....	138

Catering to Consciousness:
From Pilgrimage to Dharma Tourism

By David M. Geary

Plate 1. Footprints Outside Mahabodhi Temple – BodhGaya

Note to Reader

In this thesis I have constructed an experiential map of the Buddhist holy sites in North India and Nepal. As an ancient and contemporary religious tradition, Buddhism (and the multiple interpretations of Guatama Buddha) combines layers of both historicity and myth. Through the course of this work I will collectively construct images of Buddhism and pilgrimage drawing from different contextual sources. I have tried to recreate a rendition of pilgrimage from a range of mythic histories without any clear demarcation. Historians, religious scholars, and various Buddhist sects continue to debate the actual year of the Buddha's birth and pivotal events throughout his life. For example, his birth may have been as early as 644 BCE or as late as 540 BCE. Different translations from both Pāli and Sanskrit texts can further complicate the construction of this work. Throughout this thesis I will draw on both Pāli and Sanskrit terms for this analysis. Throughout this text I will also refer to the Buddha (prior to his Enlightenment) as Siddhartha Guatama. I have added a short glossary of terms (Appendix D) and Geographical Map (Appendix E) to assist the reader in this composition.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Bhikkus, after my passing away, all sons and daughters who are of good family and are faithful as long as they live, go to the four holy places and remember: Here at Lumbini, the enlightened one was born; here at BodhiGaya he attained enlightenment, here at Sarnath he turned the wheel of Dharma; and here at Kushinagar he entered Parinirvana. Bhikkus, after my passing away there will be activities such as circumambulation of these places and reverence to them. Thus it should be told to them for they, who have faith in my deeds and awareness of their own will travel to higher states. After my passing away, the new Bhikkus who come and ask of the doctrine should be of these four places and advised that a pilgrimage to them will help purify their previously accumulated Karmas or actions.

-BuddhaNet website: 2003¹

How can we separate the notion of pilgrimage from the primal instinct to set out on a walk, shake off the householder's dust, and simply see something new? Our bones ache with it. The word *pilgrim* along with its Latin original, *peregrine*, simply means a person who wanders "across the land." The old Sanskrit words from India spring from the same irresistible source. A *yatrika* is a rambler, a *thirthayatrika* a wanderer who frequents crossroads and riverbanks. You may think the world of nation states, superhighways, and rigidly drawn borders no longer accommodates such folk, but in India they ramble as they have for millennia – a tradition that traces itself back to a prehistoric pan-Asiatic shamanism.

-Molly Aitken, 1995: 3

Buddhists believe that two thousand, five hundred years ago, the 'Wheel of Dharma' was set in motion by the teachings of the Buddha in the Deer Park in Sarnath (Nakamura, 2000: 242). Before a group of ascetic companions the Enlightened One preached the middle path² by proclaiming Four Noble Truths: (i) *the existence of suffering*; (ii) *the root of suffering*; (iii) *the cessation of suffering*; (iv) *and the path that leads out of suffering*. In order to remove the causes of suffering the Buddha further prescribed a mutually supportive Eightfold path: *Right view or understanding, Right*

¹ A commentary to the Vinaya Sutra known as 'Lung-Treng-Tik' in Tibetan by the first Dalai Lama (1432-1474), the Buddha is said to have emphasized several times in the Parinirvana Sutra the importance of pilgrimage. This information has been cited from the BuddhaNet resources on May 11, 2003 at: <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhistworld/about-pilgrim.htm>

² The 'middle way' refers to those who have gone forth from home life, a way, which avoids both the extremes of devotion to mere sense-pleasures and devotion to ascetic self-torment. Siddhartha Guatama had previously experienced both of these spiritual dead-ends (Harvey, 1990: 23).

directed thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration. These early discourses gave birth to a monastic tradition and today, Buddhism is one of the world's great religions of our time. Underlying the foundation of these teachings is a notion that everything in life is impermanent and subject to change. Using the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path as a guidance system through their own experience, the devotee seeks to cut through the disillusion of the mind towards a state of emptiness, free of all attachments. Given the universal application of these teachings, why would the Buddha emphasize the importance of pilgrimage to sites that are fixed and embedded in a particular historical context? If true liberation involves a mastery of the present moment and a direct experience of reality, what is the value of paying homage to sacred landmarks and ruins, which encourage nostalgia for the past?

From the beginning, the 'wanderer' was placed at the core of Buddhist discipline (Aitken, 1995: 4). It is believed that Siddhartha Guatama, at the age of 29, abandoned his social and family units and sought insight as a wanderer through the central Ganges plains. Following his awakening, movement and wandering remained an integral part of the Buddha's practice throughout his life. Likewise, the earliest Buddhists were from an order of 'wandering alms-seekers' (Aitken, 1995: 2). By the twelfth century, Buddhism and the earliest centers of pilgrimage had nearly been erased from Northern India as a result of Muslim encroachment and the jealousies of the rival Brahmin creed (Harvey 1990).

For nearly a millennium there was a silence, until British archaeologists started uncovering remains in the last century, and Buddhist pilgrims began to turn up once again from Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, Burma, Tibet and the west, from everywhere, indeed, but India (Shrady, 2000: 74).

The revitalization of Buddhist pilgrimage in India is a recent phenomenon made visible by the ongoing development and construction surrounding the holy sites. Lumbini, BodhGaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar, along with Kapilavastu, Shravasti and Rajgir have formed a sacred geography tracing the footsteps and spiritual progress of a historical figure. Today, these sites are a fusion of multicultural Buddhist practices alongside everyday local rhythms of rural India and Nepal. At the cultural intersection of Buddhist pilgrimage and tourism, ancient and contemporary expressions merge, while religious and secular discourses redefine meanings and behaviors associated with the sacred. In the context of ritual experience, the categories 'pilgrim' and 'tourist' often intermingle and, in some cases, cultural boundaries and differences dissolve among a shared sentiment for the human condition.

Pilgrimage can be defined as "a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal" (Morinis, 1992: 4). The practice of 'journeying' is at the heart of pilgrimage and invokes two important dimensions – time and space. "What distinguishes pilgrimage from other journeys is that its time and space are not ordinary time and space. Moreover, pilgrimage is both a 'real' journey and a symbolic or metaphoric one in which spiritual and/or social transformation takes place" (Dubisch, 1995: 35). Deeply rooted in the world's religious traditions, and as a metaphor for the human quest, pilgrimage crosses historical, social and cultural boundaries. According to Morinis (1992: 1), pilgrimage is born out of desire and belief:

“the desire is for solution to problems of all kinds that arise within the human situation. The belief is that somewhere beyond the known world there exists a power that can make right the difficulties that appear so insoluble and intractable here and now.” Pilgrimage as an expression of belief suggests that sites on earth possess what James Preston (1992) calls a “spiritual magnetism.” This magnetism, according to Preston (1992: 33), is not an intrinsic “holy” quality of mysterious origin, but rather is derived from human concepts and values via social and cultural ideals. The destination however, is not always the spiritual goal - the unfolding process of the journey itself provides a fascinating social and cultural commentary on the tensions between structure and experience. Whatever the nature of the journey’s sacred rationale, in all cases there is a geographical movement involving rupture in daily routines towards a special time and space with an intensified participation in ritual actions. Despite variations in motive and purpose, sacred travel also shares a number of perceptible commonalities and cross-cultural homology across traditions. As the largest regular human assemblages on Earth, the quest for the sacred remains a fascination of humankind with unlimited possibilities for anthropological analysis (Morinis, 1992).

Tourism is the practice of ‘touring’ for recreation purposes. As a socio-cultural activity, according to Valene Smith (1989[1977]) tourism is dependent on three operative elements: *discretionary income, leisure time, and social sanctions permissive of travel*. At the heart of any definition of tourism is the person we conceive to be the tourist. The mention of a present-day tourist inevitably conjures up inelegant images such as a “middle-aged man or woman wearing Bermuda shorts and a ridiculous hat” (Redfoot, 1984: 292). In the anthropological literature, a tourist is defined as a “temporarily

leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing change” (Smith, 1989[1977]: 2). Sharing aspects of ‘movement,’ ‘temporariness’ and ‘change,’ a number of travel scholars and theorists have pointed to ritual similarities along the tourist-pilgrim continuum. Nelson Graburn (1983; 1989) for example, suggests that all human life is structured into periods of normal workaday activities separated by charged, shorter periods of excitement or renewal. As a link to the pleasure periphery, according to Graburn (1983: 11), tourism can be interpreted as an analogue of cultural journeying in which the individual escapes the bonds of instrumental life towards “another kind of moral state in which mental, expressive and cultural needs come to the fore”. In Dean MacCannell’s classic study *The Tourist* (1989[1976]), modern tourists are presented as structural equivalents of medieval pilgrims in the search for authenticity across a fragmented world. As a “ritual performed to the differentiations of society,” tourism is the central paradigm for modern life in complex societies, in which the search for authenticity in the Other is the central motivating force (1989:13). In the twenty-first century, tourism as a socio-cultural practice is one of the fastest growing industries in the world and cuts across a number of economic, political and cultural issues. With the development of rapid transportation and the integration of a global economy, the accessibility of experiencing distant cultures firsthand, demonstrates some similarities between tourism-pilgrimage-ethnography.

A third category of social practice that entails an immersion in a special time and space is the role of the ethnographer/scholar. In the quest for knowledge the anthropological endeavor has sought, through methods of participant observation, an understanding of the human condition through the myriad of cross-cultural expressions.

“Like the pilgrim, the anthropologist must leave home and travel to a special place, a place with transformative powers, a place that can provide the pilgrim/anthropologist with answers to prayers/questions” (Dubisch 1995:33). With the reflexive turn in anthropology (Prattis 1985, 1996; Myheroff & Ruby, 1982), researchers have increasingly explored ways in which an analytical gaze leads to the politics of representation and the perpetuation of colonial categories. “To be reflexive is to be self-conscious and also aware of the aspects of self necessary to reveal to an audience so that it can understand both the process employed and the resultant product” (Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982: 6). Pilgrimage and other adjacent discourses in the field of travel and tourism reflect the broader intellectual movements across disciplinary boundaries. Furthermore, alongside issues of modern transportation and global migration, these concepts have become metaphors for a world on the move. “The diversity of contemporary research into pilgrimage around the world and across religious and secular boundaries reflects, in part, the wider changes brought by the interweaving of global and local processes” (Eade & Sallnow, 2000[1991]: xx). At this point a question arises, how is it that a world phenomenon practiced by millions of people, attracting ever increasing levels of participation, has very little to show for itself in terms of ethnographic coverage or theoretical analysis (Turner, 1992: vii)?

One of the main reasons why this field of study has been neglected in academic circles is the general lack of ease with social process. According to Turnbull:

We are too often so fascinated by the tidiness of structure (and anti-structure) and so bent upon the scientific analysis of empirical fact and its reduction to theory and systems, that we tend to overlook the less tangible but nonetheless real fact of process, which is just as legitimate a subject for study (Turnbull, 1992: 259).

Pilgrimage and other transitory phenomena therefore, tend to elude the traditional form of research into physically and socially bounded field sites. As a composite multileveled process weaving practice into ideas, symbols, behavior, social forces and experience, the fleeting boundaries of this processual form often escape our traditional methodologies. Another aspect of concern for anthropologists is that pilgrimage partakes of the mystical. “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” (Preston, 1992: 32). Pilgrimage therefore, offers anthropologists an opportunity to go beyond traditional models of thinking and inquiry toward a “readmission of subjective aspects of human nature” (Preston, 1992: 32). To approach this subject, it requires an inspiration for new forms of writing that take into account the epistemological grounds of processual phenomena. Furthermore, the blurring of boundaries characteristic of the postmodern intellectual critique also mirrors the blurring of religious and secular categories that were once held in rigid separation. In other words, current research in this topical area “not only tell(s) us about the anthropology of pilgrimage, but show(s) us how a study of pilgrimage can tell us about anthropology” (Coleman, 1998 cited in Eade & Sallnow, 2000: xx).

Outside of Victor Turner’s (1974; 1978) groundbreaking theoretical model for the study of pilgrimage, very little scholarship has approached the centrality of consciousness³ in the midst of social action and human change. Contributions within the

³ The study of consciousness and altered states of consciousness (A.S.C.) are central to my theoretical and methodological orientation. However, as a kind of classic conundrum there is very little intellectual agreement about what a theory of consciousness would look like. I will argue that each culture constructs a specialized vocabulary and worldview that codifies experience in specific ways. In Buddhism, the concept of *Vijnana* is often translated as consciousness. As a religious authority Thich Nhat Hanh (2001: 160-168) views consciousness (*vijnana*) as the unifying ground of all our mental formations and it is believed that through altering the process of consciousness one can transcend notions of separation towards an

social sciences tend to ignore the transpersonal phenomenological components that are often inherent in ritual and symbolic systems (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili, 1990). Through objective descriptions, previous studies on symbolic phenomena contain little or no information about the transformative sequences and experiences that pilgrims are engaged with. Here, the word *transpersonal* refers to those experiences in which the sense of identity of self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos (Walsh & Vaughn, 1993: 3).

Keeping this theoretical junction in mind, this thesis will address the following questions:

1. What are the prominent theoretical orientations in anthropology for the study of pilgrimage activity?
2. What is the historic, mythic and contemporary context of Buddhist pilgrimage in North India?
3. What is the relationship between pilgrimage and the transformation of consciousness and how does it address the schism between social structure and human experience?
4. What are the similarities and differences between the categories of pilgrimage and tourism in the context of symbolic transformation?
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of a phenomenological and experiential approach to the study of pilgrimage?

This research is based on two months of fieldwork in North India through the months of January and February 2003. During this time I participated in an organized pilgrimage entitled '*In the Footsteps of Buddha*' which ran from February 1st until February 20th. This included visits to a number of pilgrimage sites relevant to the life of

experience of reality that distinguishes from negative mental states. Meditation for example may be viewed as the intentional manipulation of mental processes towards a systematic retraining of attentional habits. My investigation along these lines will incorporate a Buddhist perspective whereby, one cannot perceive or adequately conceive consciousness through words, but it can only be known through direct experience.

the Buddha. These include Lumbini, Kapilavastu, BodhGaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, Sarnath, Varanasi, Shravasti and Kushinagar. My ethnographic and social unit consisted of a sample of 17 adult English-speaking Buddhist pilgrims from western countries that include U.S.A, Canada, Australia, England, New Zealand, Belgium and Hong Kong.⁴ The use of structured interviews (see appendix A,B,C) along with my own phenomenology during the course of the fieldwork, are the central methodological techniques adopted for this study. During my theoretical literature review, it became apparent that there was a void in phenomenological accounts of pilgrimage practice. The methodological premise of this research builds on the application of the experiential methodology (Prattis 1985a; 1985b; 1996; 1997a; 2001; 2001a) that what is not subjectively experienced, within a known context, cannot be understood. I feel that this model is important for new developments and theoretical questions within this topical area in order to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of an experiential premise for data collection. The pragmatic challenges of adopting this methodological strategy for this thesis will be discussed in my conclusion. During fieldwork it also became apparent that the study of Buddhist pilgrimage in North India also involved a close examination of my informants' perceptions of both pilgrimage and tourism as they relate to the motivation and behavior of the traveler. Although there is a growing discourse related to this culturally constructed dichotomy (Graburn 1983, 1989; Smith, 1992; Cohen 1974, 1988, 1992) there are very few ethnographic case studies of a commercialized Buddhist pilgrimage. To my knowledge, there is no ethnographic literature on the cultural

⁴ In my thesis proposal I had originally envisaged a cross-cultural sample that would include Asian informants. During the course of my ethics approval it soon became apparent that this would be a massive undertaking due to translation issues, resources and a limited timeframe. For operational purposes I refer to my informants throughout this thesis as 'westerners' – in that each of the subjects outside of Hong Kong come from European origins.

interface of Buddhist pilgrimage and secular tourism. If we compare and contrast these different categories of social practice it provides a critical commentary on the symbolic aspects of ritual in contemporary society.

In chapter two I will review larger intellectual orientations concerning the socio-cultural study of pilgrimage as a ritual form. I will begin with an overview of Durkheim's (1912) concept of collective effervescence and the role of religious activity towards a system of social classifications. Following Durkheim, I will explore the concepts liminality and *communitas* and their configuration within the Turnerian (1969, 1974, 1978) paradigm on pilgrimage and social process. Following this examination, I will explore more recent directions in pilgrimage research to position myself within the postmodern debates that challenge the universal applicability embraced by the earlier two theorists. In this section I will also consider recent developments in phenomenology as a link to the anthropology of consciousness. Drawing from these movements I propose a new perspective to the study of pilgrimage, which grounds this form of ritual action at the level of experience. The model will draw on the work of Charles Laughlin (1988, 1994), Laughlin, McManus and d'Aquili (1990), Brian Given (1993) along with Ian Prattis (1997; 2001) towards an experiential and transformative approach to symbolic relations.

In chapter three, I will provide a comprehensive survey of the different Buddhist pilgrimage sites in North India. This will begin with a brief historical and mythic background of Buddhist pilgrimage from the time of King Ashoka to the Chinese monks of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. With the decline of Buddhism in India in the latter part of the first millennium CE, Buddhist pilgrimage was predominantly confined to Buddhist lands outside India. Given this historical separation, I then discuss the

revitalization of Buddhist pilgrimage in India during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This subsection will draw on earlier reports from British archaeologists and discuss the role of Anagarika Dharmapala in the preservation of these sacred sites. Finally, this chapter will outline key destinations (including photographs) and a personal narrative to provide the reader with an experiential map of the various pilgrimage sites associated with the life of Buddha.

In the fourth chapter I will provide an analysis of the personal and religious aspects of Buddhist pilgrimage by my informants. This approach builds on Turner and Turners' (1978) suggestion that research [in the field of pilgrimage] should explore the changing symbolic patterns and to examine their influence upon pilgrims both individually and collectively. From this orientation, "the study of personal documents such as journals, diaries and published narratives of pilgrims can be illuminating" (Turner, 1978 :22). Central to this chapter is the comparison between my own phenomenology and stream of consciousness during the course of the pilgrimage with that indicated by other pilgrims. In comparing and contrasting the intersubjectivity of the informants (and myself), this approach provides a discursive space to examine the transpersonal shifts in awareness that are central to this analysis. My complete participation in the pilgrimage has been helpful in recognizing emerging questions and findings that came prior to any objective form of analysis. Based on these findings, this chapter constructs a model of symbolic transformation drawing on the proposed relationship between metaphor, embodiment and knowledge.

In the fifth chapter the focus of this thesis shifts towards a comparison between both pilgrimage and tourism. A central component of this chapter will be a theoretical

discussion of the pilgrimage and tourism continuum and the metaphor of human quest in (both) sacred and secular discourses. The role of guide or teacher, alongside physical and mental hardship, is also discussed at length. It is important to note, that both these categories reflect a culturally constructed dichotomy.

In conclusion I will provide a comprehensive summary of the five original questions including an evaluation and discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of an experiential methodology.

Chapter 2

The Anthropology of Pilgrimage: Communitas, Contestation and Consciousness

Pilgrimage is a paradigmatic and paradoxical human quest, both outward and inward, a movement toward ideals known but not achieved at home. As such, pilgrimage is an image for the search for fulfillment of all people, inhabiting an imperfect world. The metaphor is well used, but there is still an important perspective to be gained from seeing both pilgrims and anthropologists as people of culture. An anthropological study of pilgrimage is a conversation about life, suffering, and the pursuit of ideals and salvation.

-Alan Morinis, 1992: ix-x

...[the] whole problem of experience versus mind seems to have a solution in the structure of the nervous system, not in the structure of the mind or in experience, but somewhere between mind and experience in the way our nervous system is built and in the way it mediates between mind and experience...

-Claude Levi-Strauss, 1978 cited in Throop & Laughlin, 2002: 40

2.1 Durkheim and the Elementary Forms of Religious Life

The discourse of pilgrimage studies within the field of anthropology reflects broader theoretical shifts in the history and philosophy of social sciences. As one of the most influential sociologists, Emile Durkheim largely informed the anthropological models of religious activity surrounding the topic of pilgrimage (Eade & Sallnow, 2000[1991]). In his classic work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (1912) Durkheim argued the origin of religion is social. As a collective expression of society, religious activity defines a system of classifications as a result of people sharing common sentiments within a community. From Durkheim's functional perspective, religion is regarded as a representation of society that leads to the formation of the principal categories of the human mind. "Religion is an eminently social thing. Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rites are

ways of acting that are born in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain, or re-create certain mental states of these groups” (Durkheim, 1912:10). These fundamental categories of thought derive from the collective and inherently social *conscience*. An intrinsic part of Durkheim’s theory of religion involves a particular mental state he refers to as *effervescence*. Collective effervescence, according to Durkheim (1912), represents a dynamic relationship of social solidarity, where powerful emotional energy and collective sentiment come together.

The very act of congregating is an exceptionally powerful stimulant. Once the individuals are gathered together, a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them to an extraordinary height of exaltation. Every emotion expressed resonates without interference in consciousness that is wide open to external impressions, each are echoing the others (Durkheim, 1912: 217-218).

According to Durkheim, this form of release is intentional and involves symbolic focus to take the individual “outside himself and to raise him to a superior life” (Durkheim, cited in Pickering, 1994: 407). This character of collective effervescence (which will be discussed in greater detail) is important to the study of pilgrimage because it provides a bridge to Turner’s notion of ‘communitas’ and to a discussion of symbolic action.

Another important aspect of the elementary forms of religious life is the social significance of pairs of binary oppositions. According to Durkheim (1912), a general feature of religious activity was the distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’. This is a fundamental distinction in religious experience in that people behave differently towards sacred objects as opposed to the profane. This cultural distinction between categories of things is one of the basic organizing principles for all of social life. However, it also presents limitations to our experience.

Durkheim also discussed the role of a great religious festival as a vehicle for social unification and moral regeneration. “Many writers on pilgrimage have perceived the activity as a crucial operator which welds together diverse local communities and social strata into more extensive collectivities” (Eade and Sallnow, 2000[1991]: 3). From Durkheim’s perspective, we may speculate that the role of pilgrimage provides an integrative mechanism that instills in its participants a wider more inclusive social identity. According to Throop & Laughlin (2002: 41), one of the central themes in the text *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* is that the “heart of religious life for all people lies in the ordering and expression of an elemental logic derived directly from our experience of the social world.” While Durkheim is noted for his functional approach to religious experience, these authors suggest that Durkheim views all religions as grounded in reality - a reality that is experienced immediately and within the context of social activity.

Of central importance for Durkheim is the idea that the same social activity that provides the foundation for religion is further understood to be the generative source for the formation of a limited number of fundamental categories of understanding which serve to reflect our knowledge of reality. (Throop & Laughlin, 2002: 41)

The origin of these categories (such as sacred and profane) is thus informed by direct experience within cultural, social and physical worlds. Ritual plays a key part in this process and serves to mediate between an understanding of reality on the one hand, and the actual nature of reality on the other. It is understood by these authors to be “a mechanism through which individuals are able, at least potentially, to harmonize their subjectivities both with one another and with the cosmological systems as expressed in their particular society’s collection of myth” (Throop & Laughlin, 2002: 43). It is

important for our discussion of pilgrimage to outline the epistemological stance in which the knowledge of reality is grounded in social practice. In turn, the social force of collective ritual generates the fundamental categories of the human mind.

2.2 The Ritual Process: Liminality and Communitas

One could argue that Victor Turner is one of the most influential and innovative thinkers in the field of symbolic anthropology. With his appreciation for the open-endedness of imagination, he explored social processes inherent in religious practice, and unlike his predecessors, he sought a new definition of ritual action that explored the creative and dynamic tension between social structure and human experience. The concept 'rite of passage' was first developed by Arnold van Gennep (1960[1908]), and is an analytical framework useful for examining how ritual marks the passing of one stage of life into another. A rite of passage can be explored using a tripartite classification scheme that involves three stages: i.) *separation*; ii.) a *transitional state*, and iii.) *incorporation*. Although the concept is often criticized for being too broad, the ritual model helped propel an entire genre of writers in the field of symbolic anthropology. Victor Turner (1967, 1969), Edmund Leach (1976) and Mary Douglas (1966) among others, explored rites of passage as they occur at the boundaries of cultural categories. For these theorists, rites of passage provide insights into a society's social and temporal classifications and how, in turn, these symbolic codes are imprinted on the human mind. In theory, rites of passage exhibit a striking uniformity of structural patterns both within, and across, cultures. For these authors, especially Victor Turner, cross-cultural

similarities provide clues to universal patterns of classification and symbolism in human consciousness.

For Turner, rituals are particularly important during periods of transition, when social structure is weakest. *Liminality* for Turner (1969) was the key mediation period between separation and incorporation - the twilight moment of ritual transformation. The liminal (from the Latin *limen*, or 'threshold') is a potent but ambiguous condition of "betwixt and between" that is powerful and dangerous and which requires constraint and channeling to protect the social order (Turner, 1969: 95). According to Turner, these moments were required to complete the ritual process and were necessary for the reinvigoration of culture itself. Unlike van Gennep, who interpreted the liminal phase as occupying a dangerous light, Turner expanded this view to incorporate its positive function as a necessary release from the constraints of prescribed social roles. For him, liminality is by far the most critical phase and involves a prolonged period in which the participant, through a state of ambiguity, is both literally and symbolically marginalized. "The possibility exists at standing aside not only from one's social position but from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements" (Turner, 1974:13-14). The role of identity is central to the liminal phase of ritual as it takes participants out of one existing identity and social bond and propels them towards a deeper sense of interconnection.

According to Thich Nhat Hanh (2001) however, we must be careful with the concept 'identity' as it relates to Buddhism and consciousness. For all identity according to this author is a false attempt to construct our egos through terms of separation. In Buddhism it is believed that nothing is permanent and there is nothing that exists as a

separate self. As illusions of perception and cognition, “when we look deeply we can see that all material and psychological phenomena are evolving and changing in every moment. Then we see the substance of reality, and our insight into impermanence and nonself will prevent us from being caught in illusion” (Hanh, 2001: 160).

Another concept central to Turner’s (1969: 96) exploration of ritual symbolism is *communitas*. This refers to an invigorating state of liminality that applies to shared bonds between people. As an integral part of liminal phenomena, the notion of *communitas* or ‘anti-structure’ was the very negation of social structure that rituals draw upon for their symbolic power. Unlike Durkheim, who viewed ritual as a representation of social structure, Turner explored these symbolic actions as a means of transcending social structure. Within the larger Turnerian (1969) paradigm, all social life is characterized by a dialectical process from alternating exposure to both structure and *communitas*, from different states and transitions. Modern society was regarded by Turner as an institutionalized state, a “superorganic arrangement of parts and positions that continues, with modifications more or less gradual, through time” (Turner, 1969: 126). *Communitas* on the other hand has an existential quality of potentiality, of ‘open-morality’ that challenges our cultural conditioning and basic classifications of reality. Before furthering our discussion of pilgrimage in the context of Turner’s model of social change, it is important to emphasize that society for Turner could not function adequately without this dialectical tension.

2.3. Turner and Turner: From 'Liminal' to 'Liminoid' in Pilgrimage Phenomenon

Similar to the tripartite model of rites of passage, pilgrimage, as a moment of social transition, also occurs at the boundaries of our society's social and temporal classifications. As a symbolic and cross-cultural phenomenon I will argue that pilgrimage provides a ritual context for a deeper exploration of the structures meditating human consciousness. In *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, Victor Turner (1974) discusses the emergent quality of social action and how pilgrimage as a processual rite provides a way of vitalizing and reinvesting with a particular religious paradigm. According to Turner (1974), pilgrimage as a liminal phenomenon, emerges during times of change for complex societies. He argued that we are undergoing a historical and global transformation, whereby institutionalized social forms and modes of thought are in question. The relevance of pilgrimage in this context was seen to have a stabilizing effect. As a cross-cultural practice, pilgrimage highlights the opposition between social life in a stable, structured and localized system of social relations, and that of an open-ended, dynamic sphere of socio-cultural change (Turner, 1974: 176-178). According to Turner, pilgrimage fosters the emergence of *communitas* through creative social energy that is outside our regular structural patterns. With the stripping of structural attributes the pilgrimage process is an attempt to reconcile tension and conflict at the level of the mind (Turner, 1974: 177). With its symbolic interplay between binary oppositions (such as nature/culture and mind/body), Turner speculated that the spirit of the journey presses the mind towards an elimination of diversity, divisiveness and duality. In turn, this leads to a restructuring of consciousness with a sense of universality and unity within a larger community. "I am suggesting that the social mode appropriate to all pilgrimages

represents a mutually energizing compromise between structure and *communitas*" (Turner, 1974: 207-208).

In *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978), Edith and Victor Turner discuss scholarship's general neglect of marginal and liminal phenomena that are inherent in social processes and cultural dynamics. Thus, pilgrimage as a processual form often escapes our traditional descriptions and classification schemes. Turner and Turner (1978: 8) compared the practice of pilgrimage to an exteriorized form of mysticism, where one enters into a deeper level of existence than he or she is accustomed to. "Purified from structural sins, they receive the pure imprint of a paradigmatic structure. This paradigm will give a measure of coherence, direction, and meaning to their action, in preparation to their identification with the symbolic representation of the founders' experiences" (Turner & Turner, 1978: 11). In the Buddhist tradition, we can speculate that pilgrimage as a symbolic practice encourages an experience of the Buddha's insight on Ultimate truth, Nirvana. "Pilgrims...are drawn to a liminal void where the ideal of human potentiality is felt to be real and accessible, where 'the tainted social persona' may be cleansed and renewed" (Turner & Turner, 1978: 30).

We will return to the Turnerian model and its criticisms shortly. At this point it is important to emphasize that for Turner and Turner (1978) one of the key distinguishing features of pilgrimage is its voluntary nature, which is not the same for rites of passage.¹ In this regard, pilgrimage is the "quintessence of voluntary liminality" which was labeled 'liminoid' (1978). For these authors, liminoid represents the optional pursuit of

¹ In some cases, pilgrimage is not a voluntary practice. As described in the Five Pillars of Islam it is seen as a Muslim's duty to go on a Hajj at least once during his or her lifetime (if financially feasible). Although Turner and Turner provide a comparative context for their study of pilgrimage, their conclusions are drawn predominantly from the religious and cultural systems that accompany Christianity.

individual transformation and through the symbolic process, the return marks a new level of status for the initiate.

2.4 From Communitas to Contestation: the deconstruction and reconstruction of pilgrimage as an anthropological category.

From a theoretical standpoint, we have examined the way in which pilgrimage studies have been influenced by both the functional approach of Durkheim, and the Turnerian model of structural change. The analytical groundwork of Victor and Edith Turners' symbolic approach has continued to influence scholars in the field of pilgrimage studies. In many ways the Turnerian models of structural change have initiated the context and debates within the expanding field of scholarship. However, these models of pilgrimage have not escaped controversy and critiques, which reflect broader changes and theoretical shifts in the social sciences. In fact, as Glen Bowman (1988: 21) has noted, "the impact of Turner's theorizing on anthropological work in the field has been too powerful for the second generation not to attempt Oedipal rectification." Over the last thirty years, Turner's theorizing has been put to the test in a number of ethnographic contexts and several features of his model have been criticized. Most important, Turner's work focused on an essentialistic ideal that pilgrimage across cultures share universal commonalities as opposed to differences. The concepts, 'communitas' and 'liminality' - as applied to pilgrimage - have been challenged by scholars for being overtly explanatory and deterministic for such a highly variable phenomena. The Turnerian model, according to Bowman (1985: 3) effectively separated interpretation "from the constraints of history and society and [presented communitas] as a transhistorical and omnipresent archetypal

form.” Rather than being a journey away from the structures of everyday life and into a world of liminality and ‘anti-structure,’ pilgrimage was embedded more accurately in “a complex mosaic of egalitarianism, nepotism, and factionalism of brotherhood, competition and conflict” (Sallnow, 1981: 176). In his fieldwork in the High Andes of Peru, Michael Sallnow challenged the neat set of opposites so characteristic of the Turnerian paradigm:

The simple dichotomy between structure and *communitas* cannot comprehend the complex interplay between the social relations of pilgrimage and those associated with secular activities. The social configurations manifested in Andean regional devotions are neither the sacralized correlates of structured relations, whether political, jural or economic, nor their dialectical antithesis, secular revolts *manqué* (Sallnow, 1981: 179).

In drawing on the terminology of rites of passage for his model, Turner has been criticized for reducing pilgrimage to a ritual form and neglecting the social and political processes that shape the practice of pilgrimage. In his case study of pilgrimage in the Hindu tradition, Alan Morinis (1984) critiques Turner for overlooking the wide range of individual motivations (in addition to the desire for *communitas*) that may inspire the pilgrim for his or her goal. In addition, according to Bowman (1991) pilgrimage sites encompass a wide variety of different meanings, for different groups of pilgrims, depending on social class, ethnicity, and religious background. ‘Anti-structure,’ then, might best be viewed as a dimension of pilgrimage in a wide range of sacred activities and for a wide range of purposes (Dubisch, 1995: 44-45). In the end it would appear that Turner’s approach to pilgrimage “proved hegemonic within an ethnographic and theoretical field that had hitherto barely been ploughed” (Coleman, 2002: 356).

As a critic of the idealizing discourse of Edith and Victor Turner, a new agenda for the study of pilgrimage was formed. In the recent introduction to John Eade & Michael Sallnow's (2000[1991]) edited text *Contesting the Sacred: the Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* these authors assert an alternative vision:

Pilgrimage is above all an arena for competing religious and secular discourses, for both the official co-optation and non-official recovery of religious meanings, for conflict between orthodoxies, sects, and confessional groups, for drives towards consensus and *communitas*, and for counter-movements towards separateness and division. The essential heterogeneity of the pilgrimage process, which was marginalized or suppressed in the earlier, determinist models of both the correspondent theorists and those who adopted a Turnerian paradigm, is here pushed centre-stage rendered problematic. (2000[1991]: 2-3)

From this counter position, the meaning of pilgrimage as a social institution can no longer be regarded as a uniform, universal or homogenous phenomenon. For these authors, pilgrimage is more properly seen as a contested religious void and should be deconstructed into "historically and culturally specific instances" (Eade & Sallnow, 2000: 3). As an arena for competing interpretations, *Contesting the Sacred* has helped initiate a resurgence in ethnographic accounts that mirror contemporary theoretical orientations towards deconstruction, pluralism and postmodern fragmentation. However, the 'contestation' paradigm as an argument against essentialist claims has not escaped criticism.

More recently, Simon Coleman (2002) has asked: what contemporary cultural phenomenon cannot, from a certain perspective be viewed as contested? According to Coleman, the two perspectives of 'communitas' and 'contestation' share a number of theoretical nuances:

Just as the Turnerian argument about *communitas* was rejected by scholars who went looking for it and could not find it in a way that they found ethnographically convincing, so the contestation paradigm could potentially be challenged by a simplistic reading that looks for it at a given site and instead finds a predominance of apparent harmony. (Coleman, 2002: 359)

In this view, contestation is regarded, like *communitas*, as a dominant metaphor with a certain 'essential' character and function - one which houses multiple objectifying, discourses (Coleman, 2002: 360). In exploring similarities between the two camps, Coleman likens Turners notion of symbolism (as being semantically open) to the idea of a shrine accommodating a multiplicity of discourses. In this regard, the dominant theoretical metaphors used by the two camps appear much more similar.

In *Image and Pilgrimage* (Turner and Turner, 1978), the necessary empty space is produced by stripping off identity, which results in *communitas* – ideally a state of unmediated and egalitarian association among individuals who are temporarily set free from hierarchical roles. In Eade and Sallnow's *Contesting the Sacred*, blankness is depicted in the image of the shrine as religious 'void', an 'empty vessel' that is open to the assumption that will be poured into it by constituencies of pilgrims. If the Turners construct a vacuum in order to differentiate pilgrimage activity from the everyday, Eade and Sallnow do so for the opposite reason: they wish to indicate how shrines do *not* strip away mundane conflicts and assumptions, but rather provide exceptionally accommodating (and possibly amplifying) contexts for them to be expressed. (Coleman, 2002: 361)

As mentioned earlier, the anthropological study of pilgrimage can tell us a great deal about the developments of our own thinking in relationship to the material of our investigation. As an analytical concept, does pilgrimage remain a useful category of anthropological understanding or should it be dropped all together following the postmodern impulse to reject any authority of generalization?

Although I feel it is important for theoretical purposes to continue our attempts to construct an etic category of pilgrimage, I agree with Coleman (2002: 362) that the content of any single definition matters little. As different behaviors and meanings associated with pilgrimage activity change over time, we should “not assume that over time we shall collectively achieve an ever more precise and universally applicable set of criteria with which finally to pin down ‘the’ activity of pilgrimage” (Coleman, 2002: 362). One of the reasons why pilgrimage remains an enigma within anthropological theory is due to the kind of methodologies we adopt to explore the subjective realm of human experience. One of the legacies of Victor Turner is that he encouraged an exploration along the lines of structure and experience. Yet anthropologists haven’t taken seriously the more “inchorate aspect of journeying” as it relates to the question of experience itself (Morinis, 1992:17). According to Morinis (1992) there are obvious implications to practices that demand “mountains be climbed, fasts endured, austerities performed,” and so on.

Turner has called attention to the fact of experience with his concept of ‘communitas’, but we are yet to investigate the broad range of psychosomatic sensations that accompany sacred journeys and are often the most significant aspects of pilgrimage in the view of participants themselves. (Morinis, 1992: 17)

Unlike anthropologists, pilgrims negotiate and appropriate actions, meanings and experiences during the cycle of activity and do not spend time unpacking the intellectual meaning and symbolism of the journey. According to Morinis (1992) more research is needed to document the range of pilgrims’ experiences and the ritual mechanism by which these are induced. “Experience must be analyzed in relation to social and cultural

patterns, in the attempt to make sense of why certain experiences are common to some pilgrimages and not others” (Morinis, 1992: 17).

Experience can be interpreted as the ‘direct observation’ of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge. From a Buddhist perspective (Hanh, 2001: 160-168) if consciousness is the ground of all our mental formations and can only be known through direct intuition,² then it requires a different epistemological stance that gives priority to pre-reflective aspects of human experience. To incorporate a view of alternate phases of consciousness within the pilgrimage cycle it requires an understanding of process that gives credence to observation and knowledge that is in “an undifferentiated energy field” (Laughlin, McManus & d’Aquili, 1990:6). This requires a shift away from the concerns of objectivity towards a concern with subjectivity whereby one approaches the dynamic between outer physical events (like physiology, behavior, and speech) and inner mental states (sensations, perceptions, images, thoughts and moods) (Laughlin et al. 1990: 11). For Laughlin, McManus & d’Aquili the active role between phenomenal experience and consciousness is regarded as the *sensorium*. This is defined as the “functional space within the nervous system wherein the phenomenal aspects of the cognized environment are constituted and portrayed in moment-by-moment experience” (Laughlin et al. 1990: 106). However, in the interpretation of the experiences held by pilgrims ultimately this depends upon how the researcher approaches the questions surrounding the mind/body dualism. According to Laughlin, McManus and d’Aquili (1990) our consciousness does not split itself into spiritual and mundane attributes – the split is culturally constructed. Therefore if we are to overcome some of the analytical hurdles in our investigation of

² Intuition refers to a faculty of direct knowledge or immediate apprehension without evident rational thought and inference.

mental states, it requires a subjective position that goes beyond our categories of language and considers multiple phases of human awareness. This new agenda requires an appropriate experiential methodology for the study of pilgrimage and consciousness.

2.5 New Directions: Exploring the Relationship between Methodology and Consciousness

I. The Anthropology of Consciousness: Transpersonal Phenomenology and the Experiential Methodology

To approach pilgrimage from a subjective position entails grounding the activity through direct experience with one's own consciousness. Expanding on Turner's original groundwork on ritual and the processual flow of symbolic action, this implies anthropology move in the direction of phenomenology and an experience-based methodology. According to Spiegelberg (1982), 'phenomenology' in the strictest philosophical sense, is dedicated to describing the structures of experience as they present themselves to consciousness, without recourse to theory, deduction, or assumptions from other disciplines. The principal aim of this philosophical movement can be traced to the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1962, 1964, 1970). As a method of description, Husserl argued that we describe phenomena in the most radical sense - as they exist before they get defined by supposition. From a methodological perspective, phenomenology recognizes the embodied practice of gaining knowledge about the essential structures of human consciousness through direct experience. Adopting this epistemic frame for the study of pilgrimage allows the researcher a window through his or her own subjective transformation through the process of journeying. Following the legacy of Husserl (1962, 1964, 1970); Heidegger (1962); Sartre (1957) and Merleau-

Ponty (1962) phenomenology requires dropping one's presuppositions and culturally constructed views of 'self' and 'other' in order to get at the stream of direct intuition essential to the study of ritual symbolic systems.

According to Charles Laughlin (1988, 1994), Braud and Anderson (1988) and Young and Goulet (1994) there have been a growing number of researchers in anthropology who are acknowledging experience of an exceptional nature surrounding ritual activity. The problem is that they are not easily accessible through standard methodological tools. A movement that was born out of psychology and addresses extraordinary experiences as legitimate and useful data is called *transpersonalism*. This movement acknowledges (as data) the significance of experiences beyond the boundaries of ordinary ego-consciousness (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili, 1990). For example, these experiences include phenomena such as out-of-body experiences, visions, possession states, near-death experiences, and meditative, ecstatic, unitive, and mystical experiences. It is argued by Laughlin, McManus and d'Aquili (1990) that there has been a tendency in western science to avoid the investigation of various consciousness disciplines that involve an extension of identity beyond both individuality and personality. For these authors (Laughlin et al, 1990; Laughlin, McManus & Shearer 1993) our society is built on a *monophasic* assumption that confines the experience of reality and knowledge to a narrow range of phenomenological phases – mainly our 'normal waking consciousness.' It is argued by these authors that for all human societies there exists a *polyphasic* awareness whereby group members operate upon multiple realities and integrate meaningful experiences from alternative phases in consciousness (Laughlin et al, 1993: 190). "A society may inhibit access to and integration of

experience by systematically ignoring or negatively sanctioning the phase of consciousness under which the experience is derived” (Laughlin et al, 1993: 190). It could be argued that most anthropologists (and social scientists more generally), have an ethnocentric and even hegemonic bias towards monophasic consciousness. Whereas most researchers do not hesitate to record the descriptions of transpersonal experiences offered by their informants, rarely have researchers escaped this monophasic objectivity and entered into the phase of consciousness where the experiences are phenomenologically obtained. “The difference here is theoretically and methodologically crucial, for the loss of intuitive insight on the part of monophasic anthropologists into how multiple realities are integrated has been a major hindrance to the formation of a sophisticated theory of consciousness and culture” (Laughlin et al, 1993:191). In other words, to respect the alternate phases of an informant’s experience of reality would demand that anthropology produce scientists that are ‘state-specific’ (Tart, 1975) in that they are capable of participating (through direct experience) with the host culture’s multiple frames of reality. Adopting the hermeneutic of the culture, the transpersonal anthropologist may be in a position to qualify the experience of insight and describe the phenomenology firsthand.

According to Laughlin, McManus and Shearer (1993), training anthropologists in the field of transpersonal phenomenology would be valuable for a number of reasons. First of all, fieldworkers would be “equipped and able to ascertain the degree of cross-phasing inherent in many cultural institutions . . . he or she would seek to master activities in one phase of consciousness designed to catalyze experiences in other phases of consciousness” (Laughlin et al, 1993: 192). Secondly, researchers would be in a

position to explore the polyphasic phenomenology underlying the cosmologies of non-western peoples. If transpersonal experiences are central to the “reinvigoration of ones cosmology”, then one’s direct experience of all phenomenological reality has the potential to dissolve boundaries of personal ego towards an understanding that transcends the limitations of our immediate operational environment (Laughlin et al, 1993:192). Prior experience in a range of meditative techniques may be crucial to the investigation of a Buddhist symbolic system, whereby initiates seek absorption and participation as elements within a wider integrative field of being (Laughlin, McManus & d’Aquili 1990). Third, it has been argued by such authors as Roszak, Teilhard de Chardin, and Weil that there is a universal tendency towards the alteration of one’s natural flow of consciousness and psychobiology towards a transpersonal experience (Laughlin et al, 1993: 192). This is similar to Jung’s (1976) view of individuation, where the organism is seeking a structural unity by integrating the personal ego with a much larger conception of self. Therefore transpersonal anthropologists trained in communicating phase-specific phenomenology would have a more important role as cultural brokers capable of mediating between monophasic and polyphasic explorations. However, it is important to add that this may also require personal transformation on the part of the researcher as a result of suspending one’s culturally conditioned assumptions and directly engaging in the field of experience.

According to Brian Given (1993) in his article ‘*Education for Experience*,’ ritual is primarily about ‘states of mind’ and “scholars have tended to omit from our theoretical discussions of rites of passage detailed investigations of the altered phenomenology that they are often designed to engender” (Given 1993: 91). Although Turner provides a

toolkit for exploring the multivocality³ of symbolic action, our methodologies need to be extended to encompass other “ritually-derived non-ordinary states of experience” (Given, 1993: 92). According to Given, of relevance to our informants (especially non-western), is a willingness to acknowledge the existence of a ritual-based pedagogy that draws upon multiple states as channels of experience in order to forge sophisticated and meaningful dialogue with one’s own consciousness. In the context of pilgrimage as symbolic action, this ultimately requires the ethnographer to engage his or her own direct experience in the field.

When our informants tell us that the cognates associated with that lexicon can only be accessed through the appropriate use of ritual we have little recourse but to examine with great care the extent to which our participant observation methodology addresses the experiential dimension of ritual. We must theorize the concept of ‘participation’ with reference to our experiential involvement in the rituals we study. (Given, 1993: 92-93)

Furthermore, grounding one’s methodology in experience provides a shared hermeneutic space that allows the researcher to frame appropriate questions within the epistemic foundation of the cultural group. In this case, the sample of pilgrims are part of my own cultural group (Euro-American middle-class) and the hermeneutic is situated in a Buddhist context.

For Ian Prattis (1996), the dialectic between observer and cultural *other* requires a shift towards a new form of expression, that goes beyond cultural relativity, and assumes a marked respect between researcher and field person. Prattis (1996) describes this reflexive self-awareness as an ‘interiority,’ where a new two-way relationship between subject and object is created through a hermeneutic process (1996: 1074). “It is essential

³ For Victor Turner (1982), multivocal symbols encompass a range of meanings rather than one singular definition or meaning. For example, work, play and leisure were seen to be multivocal in that as symbolic concepts they have numerous designations.

to deconstruct the subject (the anthropologist as observer) so that the anthropologist's perceptions are understood, then the object must be reconstructed so that a basis of respect is accorded to the cultural other" (1996:1075). In the social sciences we often forget that all language implies self-reference and self-reflexivity (1996:1072). Through our research we are also participating with an experiential aspect of ourselves. "This is a particularly important consideration for research in the domain of symbolic systems, where the task is to code and understand symbolic systems phenomenologically, to recognize that one's experience is in fact data" (Prattis, 2002: 79). This procedure involves the suspension of disbelief and a participatory approach to experience, in order to sufficiently gain access to a clearer understanding of the symbolic system. In *Mantra and Consciousness Expansion in India*, Ian Prattis (2002) demonstrates that this reflexive process of anthropological reporting can be a legitimate epistemological perspective. In this article, the author places his own reflexivity in the context of the experience of the *Gayatri* mantra, a main component of the *Sandhya-Upsana* ceremony in Hinduism. The *Gayatri* is a meditation on OM (primordial sounds), which, according to Prattis (2002: 79), "serves as a multidimensional hologram of energy – where that which is encased in the totality is also incorporated in the minimal units of the totality." In other words, the mantra is a vehicle of transformation that integrates the energy between physical and metaphysical dimensions into a deep inner consciousness. "It takes you away from self-consciousness, mental clutter and ego centered preoccupations into stillness that allows inner consciousness to rise up and integrate with awareness" (Prattis, 2002: 81).

In each of the previous theoretical orientations, these authors provide a new agenda for cross-cultural research on ritual and symbolic systems. Through theory,

practice and knowledge, the anthropology of consciousness bridges our conceptual divisions of 'self' and 'other,' placing the researchers subjective experience at the heart of our ethnographic investigations. To demonstrate these theoretical interconnections for the study of pilgrimage phenomena, let us return to our initial discussion of Victor Turner and Emile Durkheim.

II. Revisiting Turner and Durkheim

One of the main concerns with Turner's use of 'liminality' in the symbolic context of pilgrimage, is that the ritual cycle may not take place over a specific space and time contingency. I am proposing that pilgrimage may act as a shell for other multiple levels of ritual. For Turner and Turner (1978) the concepts 'liminality' and 'communitas,' represent the opposite of social structure, whereby pilgrims move through this dialectic tension and away from the constraints of everyday life. This is where an experience-based methodology is integral for the researcher's orientation in the pilgrimage process as a means of framing the appropriate questions. It could be argued that for some pilgrims, distance and movement are necessary variables in ritual preparation. For example, a 'tour bus' may be a completely different experience as opposed to physical hardship of long distance walking. If the world of our experience is largely a construct of our nervous system then it's important to address the physiological and psychological aspects of 'journeying' that drive a pilgrim's state of consciousness towards cognitive and neurochemical shifts (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1990). Transportation, culture shock, and ritual actions may all contribute to the manipulation of one's neurobiology. For those pilgrims (including myself) who had never been to India,

the experience of culture shock is an overwhelming sensory adjustment. For this reason I feel the necessity to address my own personal phenomenology alongside the unfolding ritual sequences of the pilgrimage process.

Throop and Laughlin (2002), in their re-evaluation of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms* argue that his maturing interest and direction was leading towards a theory of a ritually generated social epistemology. The implications of this perspective, in the context of pilgrimage and consciousness, are critical. Pilgrimage it could be argued, leads to the establishment of a 'proto-social phenomenology,' which seeks to liberate the mind of all "preconceived ideas", "passions" and "habits" in order to "ensure that he/she is able to better approach reality itself" (Throop & Laughlin, 2002: 21-22). For Durkheim (1912), through the experience of collective ritual and effervescence, it provides an underlining formation of mental categories that serve as a generative source for the development of collectively shared categories of understanding. It is argued by Throop and Laughlin, (2002: 43) that Durkheim's model is grounded in experience and that through religious practice there is a feeling of collectivity (or state of effervescence) that leads individuals from objectivity and impersonality towards an "imbued intersubjective attunement between participants." This increasing awareness of intersubjectivity and community through the experience of effervescence has a direct influence on the structures meditating consciousness. For these authors this heightened awareness affects our mental states and awakens within the social group a basis for the formation of the mind's categories. "This embodied, sensed, or felt flow of energy which is experienced as something somehow suprapersonal and 'other-than-self-within-the-self' is, therefore,

the crucial mechanism underpinning the emergence of an elementary category of mind” (Throop & Laughlin, 2002:45).

Another recent argument central to this discussion is Tim Olavesson’s (2002) comparative analysis on the work of both Turner and Durkheim. According to Olavesson, these two writers merge views towards a processual model of ritual and society that is concurrent with recent developments in the anthropology of consciousness. It is argued that both Durkheim and Turner view ritual as the basis of religion and society, and attribute to ritual actions the function of “making and remaking society” (Olavesson, 2002: 4).⁴ In the case of Durkheim, Olavesson suggests that his seminal work in *Elementary Forms* was hinting at a theory of symbolic action based on his analysis of collective representations (such as symbols, concepts, categories, legends and myths) that function to periodically strengthen and recharge the internal structures of consciousness. “Durkheim thus presented in *The Elementary Forms* a symbolic model whereby society’s mythological knowledge of itself, necessarily expressed in collective representations, are re-enacted in ritual, giving their strength, and in the process, giving society cohesion” (Olavesson, 2002: 6). Central to this argument is a comparison between Durkheim’s concept of ‘collective effervescence’ and Turner’s notion of ‘communitas’ in the ritual process. According to Olavesson (2002: 9), Durkheim stresses that the most important characteristic of collective effervescence is its communal aspects. Similar to Turner’s use of ‘communitas,’ effervescence is not some vague social quality but a ‘communion of conscience’ that is brought on through intention and volition vis a vis symbolic relations. Central to both concepts, is the inherent creative dimension that

⁴ This perspective is also concurrent with the more explicit view of Anthony F.C. Wallace (1966). In the text *Religion: An Anthropological View* the author highlights the integrative process of religious experience for the revitalization of the individual and society.

presents a “transgressive” possibility to dissolve limitations and differentiation towards a more “heightened emotional intensity” among the social group (Olavesson, 2002: 14).

“Collective effervescence...implies a dissolution of regular social and normative structures, and is sometimes seen as a danger to these structures. This is exactly the process Victor Turner describes in the emergence of *communitas*” (Olavesson, 2002: 10).

As processual models it would appear that both ‘collective effervescence’ and ‘*communitas*’ provide symbolic penetration into the fundamental structures of consciousness that revive common bonds between social group and cosmos. “It reinforces the collective representation society is based upon, and permits the existence of knowledge” (Olavesson, 2002: 11).

Drawing from these discussions, if pilgrimage involves a separation from social structure, then perhaps it has an underlying symbolic intention at the level of consciousness to resolve tensions within the mind. Through the dialectic relationship, the pilgrimage process may counterbalance our structural and morally regulated social existence in order to both ‘purify’ and ‘revitalize’ human relationships. In turn, this also leads to a healthy dialectic for the functional equilibrium of society (as discussed in both Durkheim and Turner). From a transpersonal and phenomenological perspective, pilgrims may incorporate ritual techniques (such as meditation and physical hardship) to assist in the fostering of altered states of consciousness (A.S.C.). Through symbolic focus, we can speculate that the pilgrimage process marks a shift in consciousness or a ‘retuning’ of the autonomic nervous system that is outside the normal waking state, and may potentially lead to new models of re-creative functions, as discussed above. To approximate the experience as best as possible, we must enter the world of the pilgrim to

test our own experience as primary data. This requires dipping into phenomenological training, in order to suspend disbelief and discern different states and insight as they arise to self-awareness. Advocating an experiential methodology towards the study of pilgrimage and symbolic systems must therefore incorporate subjective transformation as data. As outlined by Laughlin, McManus & Shearer (1993), Given (2003) and Prattis (1996, 2002), this requires both discipline, and training in mental states (such as meditation), in order to shift cognized capacities to capture the 'spirit' of experience and meaning from the A.S.C. These researchers provide an enriching perspective and groundbreaking methodology that goes beyond our epistemological confinements towards a transformative ethic that integrates consciousness into the construction of a new experience based paradigm.

Buddhist Pilgrimage in North India: Mythic, Historical and Ethnographic Perspectives

It was in the central Ganges valley in particular, or what was called the Middle Land (*Majjhimadesa*), that many of Indian civilization's greatest ideas and innovations sprang up. The Buddha was born in the Middle Land and spent his whole life walking its dusty roads, meditating in its dry forests, and teaching in its cities, towns and villages. The Middle Land nurtured Buddhism during its first crucial centuries, and although it soon spread all over India and eventually beyond its borders to distant parts of Asia, Buddhists have always looked to the Middle Land as the home of their religion.

-Ven. S. Dhammika, 1999[1992]: 1

While some have made pilgrimage to shrines associated with traces of the Buddha as an end in itself, most have continued, as did Ashoka and Fa-hsien, to see pilgrimage as a preliminary step along the path to enlightenment. The pilgrimage that begins by turning toward the Buddha in this world finds its culmination in an inner pilgrimage that leads to a true understanding of the Dharma.

-Mircea Eliade, 1987: 349

Born at the edge of the Brahmanic society of the day, Siddhartha Guatama carved a middle road between the 'ritualist exclusivism' of Brahman religion (now known as Hinduism) and the extreme ascetism practiced by the Jains (Gombrich, 1988). As a son of an aristocratic Hindu chieftain (some say king), *Siddhartha* (meaning one who has achieved his purpose) *Guatama* (the name of his 'gotra', or clan) was born in the small republic of the Sakya people, which straddles the borders of present day Nepal and India. The capital of this republic was Kapilavastu, described in legends as prosperous and beautiful. According to early texts, Guatama's birth in the Lumbini Grove was an event of cosmic importance that spread light throughout the world and shook the grounds of the Earth.

The *Nidānakathā* relates that at the time of the conception, Mahāmāyā, his mother, dreamt that she was transported to the Himālayas where a being in the form of an auspicious white elephant entered her right side. On recounting this dream to her husband, Suddhodana, he had it interpreted

by sixty-four Brahmins. They explained that it indicated that his wife had conceived a son with a great destiny ahead of him. Either he would stay at home with his father and go on to become a *Cakkavatti*, a universal emperor – which the *Suttas* say that he had been six times in previous lives – or he would become a wandering ascetic and become a great religious leader, a Buddha. (Harvey, 1990: 16)

As Guatama grew older, his father King Suddhodana watched anxiously for signs of spirituality. He surrounded his son with luxuries to ensure he remained attached to worldly life (Harvey, 1990: 17). At the age of sixteen, a marriage was arranged to Yasodharā. Twelve to seventeen years later, a child Rahula, was born, which further tied Guatama to the king's desire. According to legend, fearing the young prince would be too naïve to fulfill his destiny:

the gods placed first an old man, second a sick man, third a dead man, and finally an ascetic on the road outside the city, where they would catch the Bodhisattva's eye on his pleasure rides into the countryside. Disturbed by these sights, Siddhartha resolved to leave the city and look for a solution to the sorrow of impermanence (*dukkha*/suffering). (Aitken, 1995: 19)

Despite his father's best efforts at providing a pleasant and wealthy background, Siddhartha renounced the courtly indulgences and worldly life of pleasure. Exiting Kapilavastu's East gate, Siddhartha left his home and family to set forth on his own religious quest. To rid all traces of royalty, he removed his clothes, cut off his hair and became a wandering ascetic.

The future Buddha then set out in the world as a homeless wanderer in search of teachers from whom he could learn spiritual techniques. Siddhartha, hoping to find a resolution to the cycle of death and suffering, consulted the sages Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta, who practiced various forms of meditation (Nakamura, 2000: 126). However, they were unable to fulfill his quest for liberation and Guatama went on to try severe austerities and ascetic self-mortification as possible routes to this goal. "For six

years, he lived with five ascetics, eating, in a full day, no more than a grain of rice or a berry. His flesh fell away and his body became ghastly, skeletal and weak” (Aitken, 1995: 60). At this point, Siddhartha realized that it was impossible to continue this path to wisdom and still live. Abandoning asceticism, and strengthened by food, Guatama sought another path to awakening. Shunned by his companions, Siddhartha settled under the shade of a large fig tree near a village called Uruvela on the banks of the Nairanjana River. Resolved to remain in that position until he achieved the knowledge he was seeking, Guatama sat for forty-nine days with single-minded determination. “Piercing the shell of ignorance, he discovered that only by conquering desire could he attain the true path to *Nirvana* (liberation)” (Mitra, 1999: 13).

The ‘fig’ or ‘pipal’ (*ficus religiosa*) tree where Guatama resolved his final struggle has become known as the ‘bodhi’ tree of ‘Enlightenment.’ It was in a state of deep concentrated insight that he attained that which is at the heart of Buddhist liberation. Guatama realized the fundamental truth that lies at the base of his Dharma - that impermanence and emptiness of self are precisely the conditions on which life depends (Shrady, 2000: 77).

I have gone round in vain the cycles of many lives ever striving to find the builder of the house of life and death. How great is the sorrow of life that must die!

But now I have seen thee, housebuilder: never more shalt thou build this house. The rafters of sin are broken; the ridgepole of ignorance is destroyed. The fever of craving is past: for my mental mind is gone to the joy of the immortal Nirvana. (*Dhammapada*, cited in Shrady, 2000: 77)

With these revelations, Guatama, freed from rebirth and samsāra become the Perfectly Wise, the *Bhagavat* (Blessed One), the Arhat (Enlightened Person), the *Tathagata* (Thus-gone or Truth-attained one).

Following his Enlightenment, the Buddha pondered the possibility of placing this experiential insight into words. As an act of the Buddha's compassion and a necessary compliment to his Enlightened wisdom, the great Tathagata set forth to Sarnath, to express this wisdom to his ascetic companions (Nakamura, 2000). On arriving in the Deer Park at Sarnath, his five former companions could now see that a great transformation had taken place. After questioning him respectfully, the Buddha presented the novices with the essential tenets of his profound insight preaching his first sermon, *Dharmachakrapravartana*, or 'Turning of the Wheel of Law':

The Four Noble Truths:

1. The world is full of misery and suffering;
2. Desire and attachment is the root cause of all misery and suffering;
3. Cessation of suffering can be achieved by extinguishing desire; and,
4. The path, which leads to the cessation of suffering, is the Noble Eightfold Path.

The middle way (which avoids the extremes of devotion to sense-pleasure and devotion to self-torment), which he had found led to Enlightenment, was revealed to the converts. This set in motion the Dharma wheel as a symbol of a new era of spiritual influence (Harvey, 1990: 23). The message of the Buddha spread rapidly through the Gangetic plains. Soon a large monastic and lay community developed, known as the *Sangha*. A number of stories and legends have been recorded in ancient Sanskrit and Pāli narratives which emphasize the enormous impact and spread of Dharma teachings into every strata of society. According to Harvey (1990: 24), "the general picture conveyed is that he spent his long teaching career wandering on foot, with few possessions, around the Ganges Basin region." Accompanied by his chief disciples Sāriputta, Moggallāna and Ananda, the Buddha spent most of his life preaching the humanistic teachings of the

Dharma around the towns of Shravasti, Rajgir and Vesali. Buddhist egalitarianism was attractive for those seeking a new spiritual outlook that emphasized individual moral and spiritual destiny (1990: 25). Since he came from a royal family, the Buddha's teachings and life history were also of interest to the more affluent and powerful leaders of the time.

At the age of 80, the Buddha is said to have fallen ill. Anticipating death, the Buddha insisted on moving with the Sangha towards the town of Kushinagara. The *Mahā-Parnibbāna Sutta* describes the last years of the Buddha's life. Suffering from his illness, the Buddha's faithful companion Ananda was instructed about the fate of the Sangha after his inevitable death. It was expressed that the Dharma and one's own self-reliant discipline would be their guide for the release from samsara. Suffering from illness the Buddha continued to teach from his bed-side. "A wanderer asked whether other *samana* leaders had attained true knowledge. Rather than say that their religious systems were wrong and his right, the Buddha simply indicated that the crucial ingredient of any such system was the Holy Eightfold Path: only then could it lead to full Arahatsip" (Harvey, 1990: 27). On the full moon day of *vaisakha* (the same date of both his birth and Enlightenment on the lunar calendar), and in the midst of an assembly of practitioners, the Buddha asked his monks if they had any final questions. The crowd was silent. Out of the somber reverence of his followers, the great Tathagata gave his final words: "all conditioned things are subject to decay. Attain perfection through diligence!" From a state of meditation, the Buddha exited the world into the deathless realm of Nirvana.

3.1 Accounts of Buddhist Pilgrimage in North India from the time of Ashoka

According to the Buddhist scholarship, it was around 543-544 BCE when the Buddha gave his very last discourse to his faithful attendant Ananda. Prior to his parinirvana (parinibbana), or 'final cessation,' the Buddha prescribed four holy places of pilgrimage to his followers and "enshrined the activity of pilgrimage as an important act of a Buddhists' life – an act sanctioned by scriptural recommendation" (Coleman & Elsner, 1995: 170). These four sacred sites were equated with the most significant events of his own life: *Lumbini* – where he was born; *BodhGaya* – the site of Enlightenment; *Sarnath* – the first sermon and *Kushinagar* – where the Buddha died and entered Nirvana. During his lifetime, the Buddha attracted a large number of followers who came to constitute the *Sangha*. According to Eliade (1987: 348) "while the *Sangha* could be entrusted with the responsibility of perpetuating the Dharma through practice and teaching after the Buddha's death, there remained still the problem of how people were to be attracted in the first place to the Buddhist message." In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* it is said that Buddha instructed his attendant Ananda to arrange for his cremated remains and relics of other Enlightened persons to be divided and enshrined in separate stupas. The erection of these symbolic landmarks would instill peace in the hearts of the devotees who pay tribute. "A stupa should be erected at the crossroads for the Tathagata. And whomever lays wreaths or puts sweet perfumes and colours there with a devout heart, will reap benefit and happiness for a long time" (*Mahaparanibbana Sutta*, cited in Coleman & Elsner, 1995: 172).

The first historical record of someone going on Buddhist pilgrimage is from the time of the great Indian emperor Ashoka. During the reign of this Mauryan King (270 – 232 BCE), his conversion to Buddhism “established the possibility and practicality of pilgrimage” in India, at that time (Coleman & Elsner, 1995: 174). In the influential poetic myth *Ashokavadana*, the stories claim that king Ashoka made his own pilgrimage to the sacred sites associated with the life of Buddha and upon each site erected a commemorative monument. In addition to this pilgrimage, King Ashoka collected all the relics from the original shrines and had them redistributed into 84,000 parts, each destined for a new stupa (Coleman & Elsner, 1995: 173). As a model of the ideal Buddhist pilgrim, the poem *Ashokavadana* (which has not escaped skepticism) provides historical and chronological parameters for the spread of Buddhism and pilgrimage during the third century BCE. “The real Ashoka did indeed convert to Buddhism and has left numerous edicts carved on pillars and rock faces attesting to his concern for the *Dharma*” (Coleman & Elsner, 1995: 173). In this regard, the importance and significance of Ashoka’s reign of imperial power has been fundamental for the legitimacy of pilgrimage within the Buddhist tradition.

In this sense Ashoka’s actions as emperor, convert to a new religion and pilgrim-builder extraordinaire form a remarkable parallel to those of Constantine and mother St. Helena in conquering an empire, converting to a new religion and building a series of exceptional pilgrim churches. Such rulers transformed not only the sacred landscape but also the very means of travel within it, as well as the whole environment of the sacred centers which were the pilgrim’s goals. (Coleman & Elsner, 1995: 174)

The reign of Emperor Ashoka and his efforts to popularize Buddhism as the principal religion of India helped propel the migration and influence of Buddha’s teachings to other Asian countries. It was not until 400 CE that Buddhist pilgrimage and

the quest for Dharma were once again recorded in India, this time by a famous Chinese monk known as Fa-hsien. In the company of a traveling sangha, Fa-hsien made the arduous journey to North India in search of a more complete version of the *Vinaya Pitaka* (the book of rules for Buddhist monks) (Coleman & Elsner, 1995: 175). In the next fourteen years, Fa-hsien traveled as far as Sri Lanka and Java. Throughout these explorations, he wrote numerous accounts on the Ashokan model of pilgrimage and the sacred topography outlined in the Buddha's own *sutras*. According to Keyes (in Eliade, 1987) it also reveals another emerging model of pilgrimage centered on the popularity of relics. "Of particular interest, given the later development of Buddhist pilgrimage in lands outside India, Fa-hsien observed 'footprints' of the Buddha in areas as far removed from the region where the Buddha actually lived" (Keyes, 1987: 348). Fa-hsien's pilgrimage also illustrates the importance of Asian pilgrims and non-Indian residents for the documentation of holy sites and continuing growth of Buddhist pilgrimage in North India.

As Buddhism spread to China and South-East Asia, pilgrims would increasingly be foreigners in the Buddha's homeland, until – with the extinction of Buddhism in India in about the thirteenth century (following Muslim and some Hindu persecution, as well as the loss of royal patronage and a certain amount of Buddhist-Hindu syncretism) – the only pilgrims at the Ashokan holy sites would come from abroad (Keyes, 1987: 176).

Fa-hsien's narrative of his journey to India contributed to the transformation of a sacred geography for Buddhist pilgrimage. His quest for the Dharma not only provides a historical context for Buddhist pilgrimage in India in the fourth and fifth century CE but also paved the way for a growing number of Chinese pilgrims that would follow in the sixth and seventh centuries. The most famous of all these monks was Hsuan-tsang (or

Huien-tsiang) who wrote twelve books on Buddhist pilgrimage in India between 629 and 645 CE. His biography, *Si-Yu-Ki* or 'Records of the Western World,' became the paradigmatic model of Buddhist pilgrimage for Chinese monks including practical and geographic information for travel in India (Coleman & Elsner, 1995: 177). However, according to Coleman and Elsner, the pilgrim's prime motivation was to detail the Buddhist remains, monasteries and relics associated with each holy place. The importance of Hsuan-tsang's work goes well beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is important to note that the "very act of pilgrimage" and the "mythologizing" of the pilgrimage process contributed to the "immanent sanctity and miraculous powers" of the Buddha's traces in the Indian subcontinent (Coleman & Elsner, 1995:180). In China, the pilgrimage of Hsuan-tsang was elaborated into numerous texts and folklore (such as Wu Ch'eng-en's *Monkey*) that became an "allegory for the process of enlightenment" and a popular form of evoking the purpose of pilgrimage to a wider audience (Coleman & Elsner, 1995: 177).

During the Hindu Gupta Dynasty (320 – 540 CE), which ruled much of North India, there was a resurgence of devotional Hinduism which incorporated popular cults and Buddhist practices – narrowing differences between religions (Keyes, 1987: 348). As both Hindu and Muslim religions grew over the centuries, pockets of Buddhism continued to weaken. Major Buddhist centers such as the historical university of Nalanda were subject to invasions. By the eleventh century the Muslim empire continued to expand towards eastern India. By 1192 CE, the northeastern stronghold of Buddhism collapsed and "Buddhist refugees fled to South India (where Hindu kings resisted Muslim power), South East Asia, Nepal and Tibet" (Harvey, 1990: 139). With the Islamic dislike

of 'idolatry,' numerous images and traces of the Buddha were destroyed and major monasteries were sacked. Until recently, Buddhism in India survived only in small isolated pockets in the western and eastern Himalayan regions. With lay Buddhists merging into Hinduism or being converted to Islam, Buddhism as a major religion only recently returned to the land of Sakyamuni's birth.

It was not until the late nineteenth century that Buddhism returned to India. This was due to renewed interest in the restoration of sacred sites by British archaeologists, such as Sir Edward Alexander Cunningham and foreign scholars such as Sir Edward Arnold. The latter's book, *Light of Asia* was a famous poem on the life of Buddha and attracted widespread interest in Buddhist literature and philosophy which garnered further support for ongoing restoration. Out of this context a Sri Lankan by the name of Anagārika ("Homeless One") Dharmapala ("Defender of Dhamma") became a key figure in the resurgence of Buddhism in North India.

In 1891, he visited Bodh-Gayā, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, and was distressed by its dilapidated state and its ownership by a Hindu priest. He therefore founded the Mahā Bodhi Society, an international Buddhist organization whose aims were to win back the site for Buddhism by court action (achieved only in 1949), and established an international Buddhist monastery at Bodh-Gayā. (Harvey, 1990: 291)

Throughout his life, Dharmapala tried to arouse public interest and support, not only in Buddhist countries, but also at the parliament of religion in Chicago in 1893 (the first time Buddhism had been preached in the West). Just before he died in Sarnath in 1933, he said: "I would like to be reborn twenty-five more times to spread Lord Buddha's Dharma" (cited in Dhammika, 1999: 20).

A combination of factors, such as the influence of the nineteenth century colonial administrators, the intellectual curiosity of Buddhist scholarship, the Ambedkar movement¹ and the flight of His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama from Tibet in 1959, has led to a revival of Buddhism in modern India. The emerging importance and restoration of specific sites for religious, tourist and economic purposes has once again reestablished a sacred map for Buddhist pilgrims and travelers in North India.

3.2 Pilgrimage Today: An Ethnographic and Personal Narrative

In each of the following subsections I will describe the mythic history of each holy site associated with the Buddha's life. Drawing on photographs and ethnographic materials I will also discuss the different landmarks associated with Buddhist pilgrimage in North India and Nepal. I have incorporated a personal narrative and phenomenological account (single spaced) to provide the reader with an experiential map of the chronological events during the '*Footsteps of the Buddha*' pilgrimage in February 2003. Some of these accounts reflect topical discussions that were part of the evening 'strucks.' The strucks are literally: "what struck us today." Each evening the Sangha² came together and discussed particular aspects of the day that were brought to our attention. This was an important dialogic vehicle for my understanding of individual and group experiences.

¹ The most numerous 'new' Buddhists in India are ex-members of certain 'untouchable' castes, who are followers of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956). The Ambedkar Buddhists number around 4.5 million. In 1956, Ambedkar and around 500,000 scheduled caste members converted to Buddhism at a mass public 'consecration' ceremony (Harvey, 1990: 298-299).

² The Buddhist concept *Sangha* has a wide range of meanings in different contexts varying from: a monastic community, a field of merit, as refuge and so on. Throughout this thesis I will refer to my informants from '*In the Footsteps of the Buddha*', as a Sangha – in that as a group we were a community of practitioners.

The first meeting. The Oberoi – one of New Delhi's most prestigious hotels. We share brief introductions with the group of ten pilgrims. Shantum Seth takes control of the dynamic with his cool and graceful presence. I detect a soft English accent alongside the classic Indian expression: the bobbling head. The Sangha is born. I am clearly the youngest pilgrim in the midst of nine middle-aged seekers. Our first stop in the afternoon is the Gandhi Smriti memorial site. In my opinion Shantum brought us here to demonstrate the similarities between Gandhi and the Buddha – both manifestations of Indian culture. In the garden I come across the fading inscriptions on a carved rock face:

Gandhi: A Living Truth

He stopped at the thresholds of the huts of the thousands dispossessed. Dressed like one of their own. He spoke to them in their own language. Here was living truth at last. And not only quotations from books. For this reason the Mahatma, the name given to him by the people of India, is his real name. Who else has felt like him that all Indians are his own flesh and blood? When love came to the door of India, that door was opened wide. At Gandhi's call India blossomed forth to new greatness. Just as once before in earlier time, when Buddha proclaimed the truth of fellow-feeling and compassion among all living creatures.

Non-violence was his weapon, the spinning wheel his meditation, and compassion the bridge which binds us all. This was an interesting place to start the pilgrimage and as we wandered through the garden there was something strange and beautiful in its calmness. I could feel something stirring inside me, but shortly misdirected by the mind's struggle to manufacture the experience through the frame of a camera.

That evening we had dinner with Shantum's family. It is an intimate communion of East and West and there is a great sense of anticipation generating through the group. After dinner we make our way to the loft and the symbolic pilgrimage begins. Not only do we sign waiver forms but we are also provided with a set of symbolic items: handbags, maps, mugs, meditation cushions and mats. We share our first space of meditation before retiring to our extravagant hotel.

Our early morning begins with a turbulent excursion from Delhi to Patna (the state of Bihar). Through the clouds of confusion I converse with Michelle about the reoccurring themes of life and death. When we arrive at the Patna airport we are faced with our first unexpected dilemma: the bus has been delayed as a result of large protests on the outskirts of the city. After some lengthy bargaining, Shantum assigns the group a set of shared taxis. We set forth to Rajgir. In the taxi a number of us highlight the drastic contrast between the aesthetically pleasing 5 star accommodation and the sudden visual feast of rural India. In the evening struck a number of pilgrims commented on the kaleidoscope of culture and poverty that flooded our taxi windows. It was noted by Tom "that even if you give a beggar one thousand rupees it may improve his life on short

terms but it will not resolve the underlying issues of poverty.” For other pilgrims, it was expressed that the people have such dignity despite their physical and economic hardships. A sense of awe, numbness, repulse and extreme aversion were a few of the emotions used to describe the long road trip from Patna. Shantum emphasized the importance of the Sangha for our unfolding journey.

The morning meditation with the Sangha brings a sense of freshness to the day. Birds sing quietly through the open chamber and emptiness drifts through. Shantum reads a Sutra on the full awareness of breath. Our first stop of the day is Bamboo grove – the Buddha’s retreat during the rain seasons. Large shoots of bamboo align the entrance of the grove. The sanctity of the park is disrupted by three armed guards tracing our quiet footsteps across fallen leaves. I try to recall what it must have been like in the Buddha’s time. The Sangha settles at the side of a large tank and begins to read some of the Buddha’s early discourses. Sarah attempts a photo of Shantum poised along the steps of this massive bathing tank. He swiftly replies: “If you take a picture of me, please allow me to take one of you.” It is clear that our guide does not want to be seen as a leader.

After lunch in the grove, we make our way to Vulture peak before sunset. After passing a series of beggars and busloads of Asian pilgrims spraying perfume, we reach the summit of the hill. Shantum has timed it perfectly. After kneeling before a small shrine of offerings, Shantum lights a stick of incense and we sit in meditation. Two of the Sangha members take turns reading the Buddha’s Heart Sutra. This is followed by a series of chants that dissolve into the fading skyline. A large ant makes its way through the circle – I am sure it is the Buddha himself. Strange emotions stir within me – hard to translate.

During the evening strucks a number of pilgrims shared some comical Indian anecdotes. Shantum brings some insight on the dynamic: “the beggars, the armed guards, the aggressive gifts sellers – all these exhausting people who consistently rattle you along the path are merely doing their thing. At some point or another, someone gave them money and so they continue.” I admire the way Shantum treats them with compassion rather than ignoring them. On the other hand, Sarah expresses that the culture shock was really rubbing up against her American way of life. She asked: “why are these people so lazy?” This led into a discussion about our culturally constructed perceptions of time and space. For myself I continue to find this delightful quality that surfaces here in India. With a compassionate smile one can easily break through the walls of culture and difference.

“Morning meditation, bamboo grove calling.
Heart wide open,
bodhicitta dancing with
graceful sweepers of fallen leaves.
Shadows creep across
The fresh scraped earth,
as the city awakes
to crows calling loudly.”

-Prattis, 2003: www.ianprattis/footsteppoems.htm

I. *Rajgir(Rajagaha) – The Capital of the North Indian Kingdom Magadha*

100 km southeast of Patna is Rajgir (the abode of kings). It can also be accessed via BodhGaya from a long and treacherous road. Rajgir is a picturesque ancient site that was the supposed setting for a number of important events in the Buddha's life.

Surrounded by rugged peaks, this capital of the Magadha kingdom was ruled by the virtuous King Bimbisara who was sympathetic to the teachings of the Buddha. During the Buddha's lifetime it was a popular setting for spiritual teachers, ascetics and philosophers. When prince Siddhartha renounced his royal heritage he visited the region and was received by King Bimbisara who offered him half of his kingdom. Siddhartha politely declined the offer but promised that if and when he attained Enlightenment, he would return and teach the truth he had discovered (Dhammika, 1999: 91-92). The Buddha indeed returned to the kingdom and was provided his first grant of quiet, secluded land known as Bamboo Grove (the Veluvana). The cool shade in the Buddha's time was a haven for his disciples during the rainy seasons.

Vulture peak, which gets its name from its distinctive rock face protrusion, is located on Griddhakuta hill (or Gijjhakuta) and is the site where Buddha gave a number of key sermons including the principal Mahayana sutra – the 'Perfection of Wisdom' or *Prajnaparamita Sutra*. On this hilltop are a number of small natural rock caves where the Buddha and his disciples went to meditate for long stretches. According to some legends, Rajgir was also the site that some of his disciples turned against him towards the end of his life (Dhammika, 1999: 92). For example, his proud and ambitious cousin Devadatta plotted his murder after the Buddha rejected his cousin's request to lead the Sangha in his

old age. In humiliation Devadatta not only attempted to roll a giant boulder on the Buddha, but also summoned a recluse bull elephant named Nalagari to charge him. Both attempts failed. Other significant sites in the Rajgir area include the Suttapanna Cave where the first council was held, Jivanka's Mango grove and Boar's grotto where both Sariputta and Moggallana were Enlightened (two of the Buddha's chief disciples).

Today there is a 38-meter high marble Vishwa Shanti Stupa that has been constructed by the Nippunzan Myohoji sect of Japan on Ratnagiri Hill. It is a short 15-minute walk from Vultures peak to the Stupa or alternatively one can take a small chairlift which scales the hillside from the main parking lot. Rajgir is also popular for its Jain shrines, hot sulphur springs and numerous caves.

It is also worth noting that on the outskirts of Rajgir are the monumental remains of one of the most renowned universities in ancient India. 11 kilometers from Rajgir, Nalanda (Na-alam-da, meaning 'Insatiable in Giving') is the sanctified site where the "Mahavihara was first established in the reign of Emperor Kumargupta in the fifth century ACE, a tradition which carried forward by his successors in the Gupta dynasty" (Mitra, 1999: 116). As an architectural masterpiece, Buddhist scholars converged on this holy institution for hundreds of years. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Nalanda is spread over an area of 14 hectares, with ruins of 11 monasteries and 5 temples. At the south end of the complex is the large and impressive Stupa, built over the mortal remains of Buddha's chief disciple, Sariputta. As a result of both the schism between different Buddhist sects, and the resurgence of Hinduism, the Nalanda institution declined in the eleventh century (Mitra 1999: 116). Nalanda is a magnificent architectural site and an important excursion for most pilgrims and tourists entering Rajgir.

Plate 2. Shantum Seth with Armed Guard – Bamboo Groove

Plate 3. The ruins of Nalanda University – Outside Rajgir

The morning meditation is caught in the day's projection: I am returning to BodhGaya! I am far from the present moment. Today's sightseeing at Nalanda weighed heavy on the mind. When the tourist separates from the pilgrim path it also gives way to a tiring foreign gaze and a sense of exhaustion. Nonetheless, the Nalanda ruins were spectacular. As our guide points out, it is hard to believe that only one tenth of the site has been excavated – what a monumental institution. Out of the tourist ramblings we were met by a young Indian woman who decided that we were the spectacle worth capturing on film. She comfortably takes a snapshot of the group. Outside of the Nalanda sightseeing, the remainder of the day involved a long arduous journey along a terrible road to BodhGaya. But somehow, despite the infinite series of bumps – the long trip was quite captivating. I also shared a number of conversations with different pilgrims that were very comforting. And as the great white monster [bus] roared through rural India the scenery was enchanting: a small bird rests on the back of grazing buffalo, streetside defecations and urinary arches, cattle markets, women bearing piles of wood on their heads, a young boy using a sewing machine on the side of the road, stretches of fields – everything blurring into this equilibrium. Although at times I could not help myself from feeling a sense of intrusiveness as the bus blazes through the villages shielding us from the locals.

Under the Bodhi tree the Sangha takes refuge together. Falling Bodhi leaves reach the marble tile as grasping hands come forth. From all four quadrants of the temple an orchestra of Tibetans echoing each other. Bright orange garlands dress the enclosure of the Mahabodhi temple. Rituals at every glance. It is hard to describe my phenomenology in this setting. The meditation is extremely difficult. I am occupied with the extraordinary faces which continue to circumambulate the grounds. It is beyond words. After a stopover in the OM cafe the Sangha make their way across the river to Sujata. This beautiful village is brought to life with Shantum's compassionate heart. Guided by local children (eager to hold our hands) the villagers lead us across rice fields to a Hindu/Buddhist shrine. In the distance a group of children parade through the fields singing songs while carrying the Saraswati goddess wrapped in white cloth. That evening I am suffering from some strange debilitating chills and am unable to attend the evening strucks. Today there was a dissolving of my fear of tourism as we stepped off the sightseeing agenda and experienced Indian culture firsthand.

We begin the early morning with a guided meditation by one of the Sangha members. After breakfast we make our way back to the Niranjana river for a hike to Malakala cave. Our shoes are released, my flesh sinks into the dried river basin – the sand surrounds the sole of the foot. The cold water infiltrates my entire body creeping up the spine. The first crossing – the threshold of adventure. Shantum and Rajesh [local Sheppard] lead the way. Immediate impermanence – each footstep in the sand washed away by the flowing stream. The second threshold repels Sarah and unfortunately the Sangha is broken – I am concerned for her stability. She is really struggling with her growing sense of aversion. The morning stretches across the divided plots of land, green blades of rice worship the sun as palm trees carefully shade their awakening. A bicycle

sounds intrusive – the serenity of each step, the Buddha’s footprints. My cool feet touch the Earth and the present moment is my companion. The skylight of interbeing enters my consciousness. After ascending the hillside we reach our destination. Tibetan prayer flags cling to the rocks. A row of candles line the way to the entrance of the cave. We settle into the dark and haunting setting for a powerful stretch of meditation. After a nice lunch we return to BodhGaya strolling through local markets and shops. That evening during the strucks, Shantum echoed the words of Buddha: “How sad it is that all humans have the seed of Enlightenment but do not know it?” We discuss aspects of pilgrimage and the emotional intimacy of the process. The hike to the caves (accept for Sarah) really solidified the Sangha. She has decided to opt out of the strucks for a second night. We all reflect on the magical day that was had.

“Water walking pilgrims
trace Gautama’s searching footsteps.
Thread strands of Mother India,
through sand, mud and fields
of quiet walking.

Footsteps shared happily.
Deeply silent journey
to emaciated Gautama’s cave,
yet to receive succour
from Sujata’s grace.

Then with awakening stirring
-asceticism abandoned
for the Middle Way.

This the Buddha’s gift to all pilgrims,
seekers of the same Truth.”

-Prattis, 2003: www.ianprattis/footsteppoems.htm

II. *BodhGaya (Buddha-Gaya) – Where the Buddha was Enlightened*

To honor the Buddha's enlightenment, a testimony to the powers of mental discipline, pilgrims often prepare themselves to enter BodhGaya with an altered state of consciousness, walking the distance on foot, reciting prayers at every step, even prostrating themselves hundreds, sometimes thousands of times. From pilgrimage accounts, it becomes apparent that many people have been affected by this extraordinary place and have succeeded, despite the distractions of the journey, to prepare themselves for their own moment under the Bodhi tree. (Aitken, 1995: 59)

Having renounced his royal heritage and the extremes of asceticism, Siddhartha retired under the shade of a Bodhi tree until his Enlightenment. From the time of Ashoka to the present, BodhGaya has remained the most important Buddhist pilgrimage site in India (Eliade, 1987:348). This historical site of Enlightenment is the spiritual home of Buddhism and attracts tens of thousands of pilgrims annually. BodhGaya is located in the state of Bihar, 115 km south of Patna. The small town known as Uruvela in Buddha's time (for the amount of sand, '*vala*' in the region) has been transformed today into an international center of Buddhist activity, "often punctuated by a sense of community, shared with the people who converge there from all over the world" (Aitken, 1995: 78). Through careful restoration in the nineteenth and twentieth century, BodhGaya houses a number of sacred landmarks.

The Mahabodhi Mahavihara temple complex, with its magnificent 52-meter sandstone tower, lies in a depression outside the main village square. No one knows who built the original foundation, but it is clear that part of the temple was constructed by the Emperor Ashoka around the third century BCE and then rebuilt by the Palā Kings of Bengal in the seventh century CE (Mitra, 1999: 82). With the invasion of the Muslims in the twelfth century the temple was once again destroyed, but restoration began 200 years

later under the Burmese kings (Mitra 1999: 82). However, due to severe floods, the temple remained buried under silt until Alexander Cunningham (Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India) visited the site in 1861 and recommended excavation. With the founding of the Mahabodhi Society of India, Sri Lankan Buddhist Anagarika Dharmapala vowed to reclaim the temple from Hindu priests. In 1949 the BodhGaya Temple Act went into effect, turning the ownership of the temple complex over to a managing committee run by both Hindus and Buddhists (Aitken 1995). In 2002 the Mahabodhi temple was declared a World Heritage site by the United Nations.

The oldest object to be seen in BodhGaya is the diamond throne or *Vajrasana* – the seat of Enlightenment. Although it has shifted from its original location, the red sandstone slab of the diamond throne is now kept at the spot in which the Buddha sat in meditation for 49 days.

The Vajrasana is the place where the Buddhas attain the holy path. It is also called Bodhi Manda. When the great Earth is shaken, this place alone is unmoved. Therefore when Tathagata was about to reach the condition of Enlightenment, and he went successively to the four angles of his enclosure, the earth shook and quaked; but afterwards coming to his spot all was still and at rest. (Hiuen-tsang, cited in Mitra, 1999: 83)

In the basement of the temple is a large image of the Buddha in the *Bhumisparsha mudra* – ‘touching the ground pose’ - calling witness to his awakening. The image is said to be 1700 years old and faces the east, exactly at the place where the Buddha, in meditation, with his back to the Bodhi tree, was Enlightened. The sunken courtyard in the Mahabodhi Mahavihara is a garden of carved Stupas and *chaityas*, along with numerous reconstructed images and statues of the Buddha. There is also a large water tank south of the temple where hundreds of pink lilies bloom. During my 3 ½ weeks of fieldwork in

BodhGaya, the Kalachakra ceremony was being hosted by His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama. This 10 day event attracted close to 30,000 Tibetans. During this time the Mahabodhi temple was thriving from dusk till dawn with clouds of incense as monks, nuns and laypeople swung their prayer wheels, performed prostrations and circumambulated the holy grounds. The devotion continued after sunset as thousands of candles and butter lamps surrounded the Mahabodhi temple while Tibetan practitioners chanted throughout the night.

At the back of the main temple is an ancient pipal tree (more commonly referred to as the 'Bodhi tree'), which is said to be a descendent of the original. According to some legends, out of jealousy that the 'Bodhi' was an object of King Ashoka's devotion, his wife secretly ordered to have it cut down (Aitken, 1995). But the Bodhi tree grew again and this time a protective wall was constructed around it. Shoot offsprings from the original Bodhi tree were also taken to Sri Lanka in the third century BCE where it continues to flourish. Today's tree has become a central focus of devotion and one can spend hours in meditation under the base of the tree or simply observe the young children and pilgrims competing for fallen leaves. However, despite the large protective railings, which date as far back as 150 BCE, this axis mundi of the Buddhist world continues to struggle with environmental constraints. Recently it has been infested with a mealy bug, raising some concerns over its preservation (BodhGaya news, 2003).³

³ BodhGaya news is founded by Peter Friedlander of La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia. The website aims to present a picture of what's happening in the state of Bihar concerning the Buddhist pilgrimage centre of BodhGaya. The site www.bodhgayanews.net was visited on May 23: 2003.

Since the Temple Management Act of 1949, BodhGaya has continued to grow into an international place of pilgrimage for devotees around the world. Monasteries and temples from Sri Lanka, Tibet, Bhutan, Japan, China, Taiwan, Nepal, Vietnam, Thailand and India have been constructed, all within walking distance from the main temple. Pilgrimage and tourism between the months of December to March provide local communities with an alternative source (outside of agricultural production) of revenue. Hotels, guesthouses, restaurants and Internet cafes continue to establish BodhGaya as a modern religious center. A small airport outside of BodhGaya was constructed in 2003, but at the time of writing access was restricted to international flights from Bangkok and Sri Lanka only. The revitalization of BodhGaya is a vibrant experience of local and global processes in a multicultural context.

Plate 4. Mahabodhi Temple – BodhGaya

Plate 5. Circumambulation under the Bodhi Tree

It is 4:30 am – Gaya railway station. A young boy suffering from polio shuffles by with his dissolving limbs. After a few chai teas the Sangha set forth on our railway excursion to Varanasi. The train rocks me to sleep like a child - it's nice to ride first class for once. When we reach Varanasi we are once again met with incredible accommodating luxury. The Taj Ganges hotel. Late in the afternoon we make our way to the great holy city of Benares. On route to the Ganges river the streets are alive with a parade of humanity. We move like a snake through the deep corridors and passageways. Large bulls, dogs and people of all shapes and sizes shuffle through the dim lighting. Sunlight cuts through the shadows and the dust dances in the dry air. A procession of men suddenly dart through the walkway carrying a dead body. Suddenly we come across the Ganges and the Manikarnika Ghat – 9 pyres of burning bodies. Impermanence. The ash circles through the sky. Stacks of wood surround the perimeter. I am speechless – caught in the net of my own mortality. Death – there it is before me, within me and somehow I feel a great sense of release, lightness. The camera wielding energy sets in: “I cannot believe this?” We move across the steps of the great Ganges river before retiring on a long outstretched slab of stone – children flood the group with postcards and candles. Shantum has carefully orchestrated another classic ritual sequence. As the sun begins to fade in the distance we witness a great Hindu ceremony – the ‘Arati’ – offering of light. During the Puja my heart is at ease and I can feel a great, great love and appreciation for all of life. It was so beautiful. The chanting still rings in my heart. As the ceremony came to a conclusion and the crowds dispersed a sudden electrical failure left the entire Ghats in complete darkness. Light and dark as One. Shantum leads the Sangha through the dark mist to the base of the Ganges. We enter an old paddle boat and make our way along the mighty river. Light offerings and prayers are sent to our ancestors. The candles flicker in the distance. The Ghats are quiet and peaceful. Nothing in my life has been so vivid. No metaphor could describe the ‘absolute’ which seized my senses and sent my heart pouring outwards into the Ganges river. This empty space of sacredness.

“Black specks of ash,
caught by wind,
deposit mortality of unknown others
upon my shirt.

Each smudge a stark reminder
of my own physical death.

The smudge marks
from my powdered ashes,
when caught by wind,
upon whose shirt and heart
will they leave their mark?”

-Prattis, 2003: www.ianprattis/footsteppoems.htm

“There’s a difference between a tourist and BEING there” – notes Shantum. The morning meditation was a pleasant experience in the garden of the Hotel. But when the great white monster [bus] pulled up – I was struck with heavy eyes and weak footsteps. We make our way to Sarnath. The grounds were beautiful and it was nice to see all the young Indian couples stretched out along the emerald grass. The central Stupa was surrounded by a collection of pilgrims from different sects and cultures. Prostrations and meditations. I was informed that we must walk around the Stupa three times – but with blazing sun I was more inclined to nap in the shade. Are you a Buddhist? This has become a question that continues to plague me along the journey – and yet I am not sure how to answer it. Ruins and historical nostalgia can be dreadfully boring when my heart seems so captivated by the presence of local people. The group rests in the shade of a beautiful crooked tree. Shantum is perched like an ancient storyteller at the base of the trunk. Surrounding our teacher he recites the ‘first sermon’ and the Dharma rushes through me. There is suffering – and there is a way out of suffering. This timeless wisdom echoes through me. Later in the evening we had comic relief at the Mahabodhi museum dedicated to Dharmapala. When the Sangha entered the museum we were invited for tea by a respected Sri Lankan monk. To our surprise there were a number of small guinea pigs sprinting around the floor. As we sat down for a forum of questions Susan immediately posed a question regarding the Guinea pigs. This led into a timely discussion about rodents.

In the strucks that evening I shared some of these reflections during the day and told the group that this pilgrimage feels more like a journey through humanity rather than a Buddhist pilgrimage per se. For those who attended the evening strucks there was a great sense of community and laughter as we trolled through the day’s events.

III. *Sarnath – Where the Wheel of Dharma was set in Motion*

The serene and quiet ruins of Sarnath are located 13 kilometers outside of Varanasi. It was at this site that Buddha first proclaimed the Dharma to his five companions who had previously abandoned him. It was in this sermon at Deer Park where he taught two discourses, the *Dharmachakrapravartana* (“Discourse setting in motion the Wheel of Dharma”) and *Anattalakhana* (“Discourse on Non-Self”). Sarnath is one of the four main pilgrimage sites prescribed by the Buddha and was his home for the first rain retreats following his Enlightenment (Nakamura, 2000). Through the subsequent centuries Sarnath continued to grow as a major institution of Buddhist scholarship and art. The remains of a great monastic tradition which flourished for over

1,500 years can be seen on the park grounds. A large Ashokan pillar was erected on this site from the third century and the crowned remains of the four-lion capital (which is now India's national emblem) can be seen in the nearby Sarnath Archaeological Museum. The lions are a symbol of imperial rule of Ashoka and the kingship of the Buddha. As one of the earliest Buddhist pilgrimage sites to be explored and excavated by the British, a number of beautiful sculptures, inscriptions and pottery are on display in the museum. With its solid cylindrical tower reaching a height of 33 meters, the Dhamekh Stupa is the most impressive monument in Deer Park. The original brickwork of the Stupa dates back to the Ashokan period. The word 'Dhamekh' which derives from an inscription found on the site appears to be a distorted form of the phrase 'Dharma Chakra' that means 'turning the wheel of Dharma' (Dhammika, 1999). A modern temple called Mulgandhakuti Vihara was constructed near the ruins of the original site of the Buddha's residence. This temple was established in 1922 by Anagarika Dharmapala and houses relics of the Buddha and a beautiful interior fresco painted by a Japanese artist in the 1930's. Several modern temples have also been built in close proximity to Deer Park and the Sarnath Museum. There is also a small, yet insightful museum dedicated to Anagarika Dharmapala at the Mahabodhi Society of India. Half a dozen deer wander in a large fenced enclosure and small bags of carrots are for sale by the young entrepreneurs.

Plate 6. Damekh Stupa – Sarnath

In the early morning I recall a very sharp and vivid dream. I am with the Sangha and they are summoning me. There is a strong sense of commitment and trust from the group. Outside there is a kind of shuttle where a number of my old high school friends are bidding me farewell. My emotions are aroused and I feel a sense of sadness. I beg to the Sangha that I cannot continue, I cannot do this.

The Sangha begins with an early morning boat trip across the Ganges river. The air is misty and there is a breath of antiquity along the riverside. At the footsteps of the burning Ghats, the pyres continue to glow and everything moves in that Indian rhythm – dogs and cattle rest in the warm morning ash. Later in the day I feel a calling to return back to Varanasi for one more day of personal explorations. The traffic in the mid-afternoon was complete rickshaw gridlock. Bicycles, cycle rickshaws, auto-rickshaws, people, herds of goats and the occasional taxi all fuming together under the blazing sun – a symphony of horns. This is India – this is the face of India I imagined. And yet while it may appear like chaos - underneath it feels like everything and everyone flows together with some pattern. Each one taking care of the next through the river of traffic. Through the labyrinth of streets I wander – purposely moving without direction or goals. The intestines of Benares. Another metaphor in action – wandering without aim through the maze of perceptions. After a few hours of wandering and 12 business cards later I make my way back to the Taj Ganges. For the remainder of the afternoon we were blessed to have a question and answer period with the Venerable Ajahn Sumedho, Abbot of Amaravati monastery in England. Genuine insight flows through this great Dharma

teacher. Of particular interest was his view on trusting your experience: “what touches you, what reaches you at the heart level.” It also became clear to me that like the pilgrimage – the Buddha and Gandhi are both part of my nature, their seeds of awakening are within me – and this capacity to liberate myself from suffering is not a far off concept or ideal.

A long road through the dusty back roads of Uttar Pradesh. The window shields my intimate reflections of rural India – fleeting images. After a long day on the road we finally reach Kushinagar. Another flattering hotel – the gluttony continues. That evening Shantum and I slip away from the dinner table and head towards the Buddha’s cremation Stupa. 900 white ghosts circumambulate the Stupa – complete silence. The cremation Stupa is set ablaze with hundreds of candles mirroring the pyre of the great Tathagata. A different taste of Buddhist pilgrimage – it was beautiful and unlike anything I have ever seen or felt before. They are pilgrims who had been on a 10 day walking pilgrimage from Shravasti: they walked through the night as shelter from the sun, and rest in small tents during the day. The majority of pilgrims were from Thailand, Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries. White robes, short hats and little slippers. Some of the pilgrims were clearly in there late 70’s and 80’s – and here we are resting at 5 star hotels? The head nun was referred to as the ‘mother’ and we were very fortunate to spend the final steps of the pilgrimage with her. She provided a series of blessings to the different temples along the common road offering donations. The group of white angels would literally barge through the temple gates and demand they receive the funds. It was an incredible energy. The mother had such a magnetism to her. All of the pilgrims we conversed with testified that during the course of the trip the ‘mother’ walked above the ground. At that point I remember pondering: this is a pilgrimage! ‘In the Footsteps of the Buddha’ is a tour – Dharma tourism! If it weren’t for our cultural hardships, everything else would be a ‘walk in the park’. However there is devotion, there is faith, there is a Sangha and an unfolding journey. But the journey is groomed and so at times we just graze across the surface.

A troop of monkeys settles by the side of the street chewing on sugarcane. We share glances. We have our morning meditation along side the great reclining Buddha in the Parinirvana temple. Sri Lankan, Thai and Japanese monks all share the small auditorium praying and chanting in their own language. Over lunch there was a lengthy discussion of Buddhism and the western world. Jennifer described her monastic calling. Each of us elaborated on personal experiences with suffering and how we use lifestyle band-aids to cover up the pain. The reap and sow mentality of the western world.

Today India was alive inside me. With every footstep, every breath I could feel the mystery and sanctity of the Dharma. Shantum led a series of Dharma talks about impermanence at the cremation Stupa. We also witnessed a herd of water buffaloes being bathed in the river. At one passage in the late afternoon we observed a group of children doing their evening chores: collecting wood while the goats grazed on the grounds of a dissolving archaeological site. As the sunset retreated in the distance, the moon emerged against the backdrop of a bright blue twilight sky. A large sal tree climbs towards the cosmos. Everything, all my preconceived notions of pilgrimage, of tourism, slipped away and there is a great sense of joy. In that short brilliant space – everything

comes crashing down to the present moment – everything is meant to be as it is – my whole life gearing towards this moment, with this Sangha. This special time and space.

IV. *Kushinagara(Kusinara) – Where the Buddha breathed last*

Then Ananda said to the Lord: “Lord, do not pass away into final Nirvana in this wattle-and-daub town, this jungle town, this town in the woods.” (Dhammika, 1999: 165).

The place where the Tathagata made his final exit, was known as Kushinara in the Buddha’s time. Despite being the principal town and capital of the Malla republic, (one of the republican states of Northern India), Kushinagara was only a small place. On the full moon night of *Magh* (January/February), the Buddha (at the age of eighty) gave a discourse to the Sangha near Vaishali (Mitra, 1999). He spoke of the impermanence of all living things, and said to his faithful companion Ananda, that his own life on earth would soon end (Mitra, 1999: 137). After falling ill from a meal just outside Kushinagara the great master gave his disciples the *Parinirvana Sutra* and within that discourse, the Buddha outlined the four holy places of pilgrimage. According to the legend, it was in the full moon of the month of *Vaisakha* (April/May) in 544-543 BCE that the Buddha entered Parinirvana.

Today, Kushinagara is identified with the modern village of Kasia, 51 km from Gorakhpur city, in the eastern state of Uttar Pradesh. This small and quiet town houses a few hotels, monasteries and temples in easy walking distance from the main sites. In the Mahaparinirvana temple there is enshrined a 6-meter long statue of the Buddha in the *Parinirvana* posture. Although originally carved in black stone, this beautifully carved piece appears metallic gold as a result of the gold leaves left behind from pilgrims (Mitra,

1999: 140). Outside of the temple are a series of monastic ruins in the midst of beautiful gardens. Rambhar Stupa is the other main attraction for pilgrims and is the site, which marks the Buddha's cremation. As a final note, Kushinagar is also the proposed future site of the Maitreya Statue project – a 51-meter high monument of the Buddha.

Plate 7. Reclining Buddha – Parinirvana Temple

The morning meditation in the Buddha's chamber before his final Nirvana – I contemplate death and the continuation of matter. Death - nothing is more frightening. 'Letting go.' Outside the dew is glowing on the blades of grass as the morning mist unites with the sun. After breakfast Shantum takes us to a local school and we are treated to a gracious welcome. Shantum had previously funded the construction of a concrete roof for the school. Beautiful children sit in a long straight line squatting like frogs. Nothing seems to fill my heart with more joy - than a brief and subtle connection with a small lotus smile. The group was so well disciplined. The Sangha and the children exchange a number of songs together. Shantum provides the group with a set of translated texts by Thich Nhat Hanh. There was also a question answer period.

On the ride to Nepal I found myself once again, mesmerized by the reflections of rural India. Fields of mustard seed glowing throughout the horizon. I contemplate the nature of pilgrimage in conjunction with my experience of the trip. I remember hearing somewhere that 'pilgrimage is about going home' and the sacred center is your own heart. Perhaps, sometimes we have to go across the world to realize where that sacred center lies.

Lost along the road to Lumbini. Stretching fields of mustard seed light the horizon. Massive temples under construction. The Sangha settles under the shade of a tree as Shantum lights a stick of incense. He begins his gentle storytelling. There are two groups of Thai pilgrims drawing long plastic sheets across the grass. The megaphone is ignited and the monks and lay Buddhists settle on their tarps. The chanting rises. Almost simultaneously the two groups are chanting the same verse of a sutra. It resonates like waves across an ocean. The Sangha rests like a boat across an infinite sea of Dharma. A high-heeled woman settles behind a group of monks as a well tailored Nepali man flashes the camera. With her restrictive clothing, the young woman falls on her back before the group and laughter ensues. At the nearby Bodhi tree, Tibetan prayer flags spread in every direction.

That evening we discussed the meaning of pilgrimage as it relates to the recent archaeological findings. Shantum remarked that whether it is in India or Nepal – it doesn't really matter. On one level it is important for the pilgrims and devotees to know that this is the site of Buddha's birth. But according to Shantum, the Buddha would have possibly argued that "every tree is a Bodhi tree." "It may be easier to draw in the energy from the shade of the 'historical' Bodhi tree. But once you have that energy within you, every tree becomes alive with that same light."

V. *Lumbini – The Birthplace of the Buddha*

According to the ancient commentaries, towards the end of the last month of her pregnancy, Mayadevi (the mother of Buddha) set out from Kapilavastu so she could deliver her first child at her paternal home of Devadaha, in accordance with custom

(Dhammika, 1992[1999]: 29). On the full moon of May (*Veshaka*) between 644 BCE and 540 BCE, it is believed the future Buddha was born.

The location of Siddhartha Guatama's birth is located 77 km from Sonauli (the Indo-Nepali border), in a small village at the foothills of the Himalayas. As one of the four holy places of Buddhist pilgrimage, Lumbini has seen enormous development in the last two decades. The ongoing construction of temples and modern hotels is situated in the midst of a quiet wetland sanctuary. The ruins and the Ashokan pillar are Lumbini's central attractions. Some scholars have noted that the temple Mayadevi was constructed over the foundations of more than one earlier temple or stupa. The dates have yet to be confirmed. The Rummendei pillar, though broken, bears the Ashokan inscription: "Here the Buddha was born." Some central ruins are currently undergoing extensive excavation. One recent finding includes a large stone, purported to be the exact location where the Buddha was born. The Nepalese government is funding this large excavation process in an effort to claim ownership over the birthplace of Buddha and create a new center of international Buddhist activity.

The sacred tank known as the Pushkarni, is the place where Queen Mahamaya supposedly bathed before her delivery. In Hsuan-tsang's time, the water was described as "clear and bright as a mirror and the surface covered with a mixture of flowers" (Dhammika, 1999: 31). This is also the supposed site where prince Siddhartha had his first purificatory bath. The ruins of Mayadevi temple and the nearby tank occupy the Lumbini complex. In the nearby temple there is a marble image of the newborn Siddhartha emerging out of his mother's right side. Mayadevi is shown holding the Sal tree with one hand, while the young prince is depicted upright on a trail of lotus petals

with an oval halo around his head. Two figures to the side of the nativity scene pour water and lotuses from vessels of the celestial sky. Local Hindu people worship the image as a goddess variously known as Rupandevi or Ruminidevi (Dhammika, 1999: 30). There is an older panel carved from stone that can be seen inside the Mayadevi excavation compound. This stone slab is dated to the early Gupta period. Also in the vicinity is a Lumbini Research Institute, which has an impressive collection of Buddhist literature.

Plate 8. Ashokan Pillar – Lumbini

Sun rise circumambulations around the World Peace Pagoda in Lumbini. The sound of cranes give flight to each breath in mindfulness. A guided meditation on parents with the Sangha. We are once again back on the bus making our way to Kapilavastu. We stop for chai in a lovely wooden hut with a thatched roof – the wooden benches, clay pots – a fantastic social institution. The spectators emerge from the streets with their fixed grins. I am feeling sick to the stomach throughout the day and am unable to attend the evening strucks.

Another day of travel on the bus. Our first stop: Kapilavastu. My eyes are entranced by the scenery. Banana trees cling to the side of the streets. Water buffaloes by the dozen receive their afternoon baths. There is little to see in Kapilavastu. The Sangha settles under the shade of a tree. We roll out our mats and Shantum revisits a number of legends describing the extraordinary beauty of the Sakyan Kingdom. After a circumambulation of the central Stupa we find ourselves loading back on to the bus – our secluded vehicle transporting our fantasies. Outside the window, the wonderful world of India amplifies my heart – at every chance, my eyes make contact with a local. My three second relationships. The sickness has stretched into another day. But if there is ever a time to be sick in India it is now. Life is suffering and suffering is always an opportunity for awakening. When we reach Shravasti I decide to take another easy night in.

VI. *Kapilavastu(Kapilavatthu) – The Capital of the Sakyas.*

Named after the hermitage of the sage ‘Kapila’, the magnificent city of Kapilavastu was the chief town of the Sakyans and is identified by scholars as the town where Prince Siddhartha spent his first thirty years (Dhammika, 1999: 35). Destroyed sometime before the Buddha’s final Nirvana, the capital of the Sakyans was never rebuilt or inhabited again (Dhammika, 1999: 36). If not for the detailed reports from Fa-hsien and Hsuan-tsang, the distance and direction of this site from Lumbini would have never been identified. However, the controversy surrounding the exact location of Kapilavastu has continued for over a century. For example, the Nepali government still insists that its actual location is found in the Nepali territory of Taulihwakot. However, in 1973 a ‘sealing’ was unearthed by archaeologists, which included the word ‘Kapilavastu’ putting to rest some of the ongoing historical and political debates.

The ruins of Kapilavastu are located on the outskirts of the small village of Piprahwa in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Today this legendary city of magnificent proportions is nothing more than a few sets of ruins in a quiet, rural village. The ruins are representative of a religious centre that grew up around the Stupa the Sakyans built to enshrine the Buddha's relics (Dhammika, 1999: 39). Towards the trees to the west of the ruins it is also said that the Buddha, on one of his return visits, gave the profound *Madhupindika Sutta* from the middle length discourses. During our visit, there were only a handful of pilgrims at the site. A small Sri Lankan temple offers rustic accommodation one kilometer from the ruins, but outside of this basic lodging, there is little in the way of infrastructure for pilgrims.

Plate 9. Main Stupa – Kapilavastu

Morning without meditation – the head is still screaming. After some strength in my soul I emerge from the bed to greet the Sangha. We make our way to Jeta Grove – the principle home of Buddha during the rain retreats. It is a beautiful park with a set of ruins, a Bodhi tree, gentle pilgrims, children and gardeners. Shantum reads a number of delightful stories about the Buddha and the events of Shravasti. An old ‘untouchable’ Ambedkar Buddhist couple join the outskirts of our reading. I wander through the calm green grass. Is this really the site of Buddha’s miracles? How could this be true? Since when did a historical being become a super-human character? Or should these miracles be seen through a poetic lens as an expression of his awakened character. This was a key discussion during the evening strucks. When you are the Buddha – perhaps you see everything as part of the miracle of life.

VII. *Shravasti(Savatthi) – Where the Buddha spent his last twenty years*

Situated in the Gonda district in the state of Uttar Pradesh is Shravasti, the historical capital of Kosala Mahajanapada (in Buddha’s time). According to Dhammika (1999: 151), the Buddha visited Shravasti several times before finally making it his headquarters in the 20th year of his Enlightenment. From then on, according to legend, he spent every rain retreat in Shravasti prior to his final Nirvana. Shravasti is particularly famous for Jetavana Grove, which was the principal home of the Buddha for over 20 years. According to some texts, a rich merchant by the name of Anathapindika (after meeting the Buddha) began looking for a plot of land to accommodate this wise teacher. After locating the ideal setting, he was confronted by Prince Jeta – the owner – who demanded that the entire ground of the Grove be paved in gold. To his astonishment “Anathapindika exhausted his funds with just a corner of land left to cover. Impressed by the merchant’s devotion, the Grove’s owner, Prince Jetavana, decided to donate the rest” (Aitken, 1995: 256).

The peaceful and attractive gardens continue to cast a spell on visitors today. Monkeys swing through the trees and pilgrims from all over the world come here to pray

and meditate in its serene atmosphere. The Ananda Bodhi tree, situated on the monastic grounds is itself, a sapling from the original Bodhi tree in BodhGaya (Aitken, 1995: 256). It was in these monastic ruins that the Buddha delivered more discourses than in any other place. The ruins of Kosambakuti and Gandhakuti are the sites where the Buddha stayed during these series of retreats. In addition to Jetavana grove, some pilgrims know Shravasti as the site where Buddha participated in a contest of faiths - performing miracles in front of six non-Buddhist philosophers. “The Lord levitated on a thousand petalled lotus, causing fire and water to leap out of his body and multiplied his person in the air” (Mitra, 1999: 124). There are plenty of modern temples and accommodations in walking distance from the ruins. Just outside the main gate of Jetavana Grove is a Sri Lankan temple that houses extraordinary detailed paintings as a visual biography of the Buddha’s life.

Plate 10. The Ruins at Jeta Grove – Shravasti

From the Garden of Gandhi's last breath, the sanctuary of Jeta's grove – the Dharma is the fabric in a spinning wheel of change. The pilgrimage has come to an end, the thread binds our wrists, the insight poetry revealed - but the journey continues. After days of fatigue and a general lack of (dis)orientation within my fragile body, today I am finally beginning anew and the footsteps of the Buddha are now my own. The generosity of the local people, our Sangha community. What a beautiful tribute and reward that I can treasure for countless years to follow. I am not sure at this point what to make of the pilgrimage as a whole, perhaps unlike these words I record in my diary, I know inside there is never a complete end to the pilgrimage cycle. If the sacred destination is one's heart, then it implies the pilgrim alive in the world continues to radiate the wisdom of life's changing seasons. This is when the true pilgrimage begins. Our whole life is a pilgrimage and when we water the seeds of awakening we open ourselves to an experience of the world that is beyond our conceptual shortcomings. In my lifetime I have walked the path of Buddha, the heart of Gandhi and the warmth of mother India. My dreams dance with these local settings. I re-enter the world with the Sangha in my heart.

Chapter 4

In the Footsteps of the Buddha: Metaphor, Embodiment and Knowledge

I listen to the chanting, surrendering to the deep silence that underlines it. I am so grateful to be here, for I understand that no matter how different we may appear, in skin colour and size and costume, all of that falls away before the flame of shared humanity that burns in us, our potential for enlightened mind.

- Molly Aitken 1995: 113

When I look back on what I have been through . . . my heart begins to pound and I start to sweat. I risked all those dangers with no thought for myself, because I had a fixed purpose and, simple as I am, was single-minded. That is why I embarked upon a journey in which death seemed almost certain, and I had one chance only in ten thousand of surviving.

-Fa-hsien cited in Dhammika 1999[1992]: 10

This chapter explores symbolic aspects of Buddhist pilgrimage through a case-study of ten western practitioners on an organized pilgrimage entitled “*In the Footsteps of the Buddha*.”¹ Five additional informants (who had recently participated in an organized 2 week pilgrimage) were also interviewed in BodhGaya.² There are also two unstructured interviews that contribute to a third source of data. On February 10, 2003 our traveling Sangha was fortunate to spend an afternoon with a respected western Theravadan monk by the name of Venerable Ajahn Sumedho. He is a seniormost western disciple of the late Thai meditation master Ajahn Chah. Sumedho is part of the Forest Monks Tradition and is the Abbott of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in the UK. This interview took place over 3 ½ hours and when appropriate his comments are highlighted to provide an additional perspective on Buddhist pilgrimage. The second unstructured

¹ For more information see www.buddhapath.org.

² During my fieldwork in BodhGaya I came across a set of Buddhist practitioners who had recently completed a 2 week pilgrimage from Kathmandu to BodhGaya. I felt that it would be useful to incorporate a comparative perspective through these informants.

interview took place on February 23, 2003 with Shantum Seth – the guide and founder of “*In the Footsteps of the Buddha*.” Shantum is a Buddhist Dharma teacher of Indian descent who has led pilgrimages bi-annually for over 15 years (his role as a guide will be discussed in chapter 5). The interview was recorded over 3 hours and provides a key source of information. Both Ven. Ajahn Sumedho and Shantum Seth have provided verbal permission (that is recorded) to use this material for the purpose of this thesis. Together, these interviews (see appendix A, B, C) form the basis of this chapter’s analysis. Multi-vocal narratives are used extensively throughout the text to highlight central themes and patterns for discussion. I have assigned fictitious names to each of the informants so the reader has a link between the different voices. At times in the following two chapters I will also incorporate my own phenomenology (single spaced) as a ground for comparing subjective experiences.

All of the pilgrims are English speaking and outside of two informants aged 21 and 30, all are between the ages of 42-60. Although this research was not approached from a gender perspective it is important to state that five informants were male and ten were female. Their countries of origin include the United States, Canada, England, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong. All of the informants consider themselves Buddhist, but not necessarily exclusively. Each of the informants see themselves within a particular tradition ranging from Mahayana, Vajrayana, Zen and Theravadan. Most pilgrims acknowledge (in some form or another) their involvement or affiliation with a particular teacher, such as Thich Nhat Hanh or Llama Zopa Rinpoche (both of whom have a wide appeal among western practitioners). In some cases, meditation such as Vipassana (S. N. Goenka), Transcendental (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi),

mindfulness and socially engaged Buddhism (Thich Nhat Hanh) helped bring their awareness towards a more formal commitment with the Buddhist precepts. In a few cases, it is important to note that some of the informants acknowledge that Buddhism helped deepen their appreciation of their own religious ancestry.

Michelle: I was raised a Christian in the Anglican Church. I maintain my Christianity while living by the Buddhist teachings and practicing mindfulness trainings to deepen my own tradition and enhance my spirituality. I study the teachings and practice the trainings within which I see the ten commandments of Christianity. I use the Buddhist trainings as a recipe for healthy happy living.

Lorne: Currently I feel very versed in the Buddha's life and that has grounded me further in my meditation and Zen study practice. The other benefits have been a deeper understanding of Judaism through Buddhist philosophy and awareness practices. I am also attracted to Indian culture and am yearning to explore a more devotional practice like the Hindu ceremonies they do in India (like Arati).

Except for Lisa, a Buddhist nun, all of the pilgrims are lay practitioners and integrate Buddhism within a larger network of spiritual practices that may include: meditation – both sitting and walking - on a regular daily basis (average of 30-45 minutes), Yoga, mindfulness, Qi Gong, seasonal retreats, physical exercise (as a spiritual discipline), mantras, prayers, chanting, attending lectures, participation in a Sangha, following the five precepts and improving wisdom through Buddhist texts, studying the Sutras and listening to Dharma talks on the Internet.

It is important that we now shift our focus towards the significance of pilgrimage in the context of emerging socio-cultural patterns. There are three main components and subsections, which will be used to address the symbolic relationship of pilgrimage towards a transformation of consciousness: (i.) Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels, (ii.) Pilgrimage, Metaphor and Models of Transcendence, (iii.) From Embodiment to

Knowledge. In each of these subsections, this analysis will draw on multi-vocal narratives in conjunction with other theoretical streams. I will demonstrate that pilgrimage in the context of this case study provides a meaningful symbolic system of personal and social transformation.

4.1 Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

The relationship between Buddhism and pilgrimage has its roots in the *Maha-Parinirvana Sutra*. In this final sermon, the Buddha prescribed four holy places and suggested to his disciples, that visiting holy sites with a devout heart has spiritual rewards. In the twenty-first Century, according to Shantum Seth - a guide for western Buddhist pilgrims - there are two central motivations for the pilgrim. The first (and most common) is to have a deeper understanding and practice of the Buddha-Dharma. The second is that pilgrimage as a mode of travel offers an alternative way to experience India and Buddhist culture. Outside of four people who came on pilgrimage to receive the blessings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, all of my informants were motivated to undertake pilgrimage as a step towards knowledge and understanding.

Justin: It was to deepen my understanding of this practice and my devotion to it. To actually identify with this thing and take it in completely. To know the Buddha better, as a person, to feel the actuality of this history.

Emily: My motivation for doing the pilgrimage apart from the personal reasons was to experience the Buddha's life directly and make the pilgrimage that brings all the teachings to life.

Rebecca: My first wish to do the pilgrimage was when I read the book by Thich Nhat Hanh '*Old Path, White Cloud*.' And in this book he made the historical Buddha very much alive and described the places . . . and this became . . . almost, real to me – the idea of them . . . through the thoughts

and his feelings, through great writing. I had a great feeling inside that I would also like to go on and see these places out of respect and homage to the Buddha and to understand more about his life and the story.

Neil: Pilgrimage has confirmed a lot of what I already know but made it more present. I was aware of how you don't have to go anywhere to get enlightened or awake and here we were traveling half way around the world for a pilgrimage that really was internal more than external.

Jason: Pilgrimage has to do with self-exploration. A genuine pilgrimage must be open to deepening your experience of life whether it is through faith or practice. Pilgrimage has geographic focus to it. It also has mysticism to it. It's like....a letting go, just being really open to intuition, magic, faith, insight, wisdom, hardships – just like the whole thing – its like a Mandala of experience. Everything! For me sitting down here is part of the pilgrimage.

Anna: Pilgrimage inspires me to keep living in faith and trusting the words with the growing awareness of Oneness.

Lisa: I think pilgrimage is a practice for inspiration...I don't know how you say...but if you have some faith, then on the basis of that, visiting the holy places inspires and encourages you to follow the example of the Buddha, in this situation and in this context. Mostly I think pilgrimage depends on your faith and so by going on pilgrimage you give yourself an opportunity to increase your faith and inspire yourself.

For a number of these informants, pilgrimage was not only a step towards an enlarged awareness of the Buddha-Dharma, but it helped to clarify one's spirituality at an energetic level. As Justin from the UK noted: "I was nearing 50 and realized that if I didn't 'kick-start' my practice, I could easily drift through my remaining years." For Ajahn Sumedho, pilgrimage - as a voluntary practice - was not absolutely necessary for spiritual growth. However, he thought that for western practitioners it was a good way to overcome the isolation one feels from the experience of a non-Buddhist society.

Sumedho: Pilgrimage to me is, you know, if you say 'everyone should go on a pilgrimage' I can't say that, but to me it is....the experiences I have had on pilgrimage are an increase in devotion, an increase in confidence along the path, and gratitude because you are seeing people, like in the Buddhist holy places, you are actually seeing people, your joining in a

mass sense of devotion and gratitude to a God or Buddha, whatever, and to me that is very wholesome, you know, it's humanity sometimes at its very best.

Gary: While we recognize that Buddhist practice does not really depend on such "extras," and that sitting at home or with our own Sangha is perhaps equally effective, such "extras" do go a good way in overcoming the isolation from the experience of a full-blown Buddhist society that is the lot of most American Buddhists.

For a number of western practitioners, incorporating Buddhist principles into a non-Buddhist culture had its share of obstacles. Pilgrimage in this regard, was seen as a practice that helped shift their experience of Buddhism away from an intellectual exercise.

As the first Noble Truth, Buddhism acknowledges that all human life involves suffering (Hanh, 1999). A key expression of commitment for the transformation of suffering is taking refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. According to Harvey (1990:176) the notion of 'refuge,' "is not that of a place to hide, but of something the thought of which purifies, uplifts and strengthens the heart." As a self-conscious symbolic orientation it is believed by Buddhists that each affirmation provides a guidance system for a 'a better way of living' and thus transforms suffering at its root. As a variant of each refuge, Thich Nhat Hanh (1999: 161) writes:

*I take refuge in the Buddha,
the one who shows me the way in this life.*

*I take refuge in the Dharma,
the way of understanding and love.*

*I take refuge in the Sangha,
the community that lives in harmony and awareness.*

As a symbolic expression for all Buddhist sects, the Three Jewels are also considered a reflection of universal values that transcend sectarian and cultural boundaries (Hanh, 1999: 161). According to Thich Nhat Hanh (1999) taking refuge in the three jewels is not blind faith. As the fruits of practice, it does not mean accepting a theory that we have not personally verified (Hanh, 1999:161). “When we touch the three jewels directly and experience their capacity to bring about transformation and peace, our faith is strengthened even further. The three jewels are not notions. They are our life” (Hanh, 1999:162). For a number of informants the pilgrimage cycle provided a context for a deeper unfolding of the Three Jewels.

Taking refuge in the Buddha was seen as an important step in faith that helped to bring the actuality and history of the Buddha to life. Being situated in a culture and landscape where the Buddha spent his historical years, provides an opportunity to trace the Buddha’s own path to Enlightenment itself. For some of my informants, this helps to dissolve the tendency to mythologize the Buddha as a God or deity and take refuge in one’s own experience as a faculty of wisdom.

Emily: The pilgrimage did indeed bring the Buddha's life to life for me. He became a real person who lived and taught and died in all these places and not a mythical figure.

Caroll: The effect I would say has been strong. I feel that my heart is more open, and that the Buddha is no longer a far off stranger to me.

Michelle: I think it helped to bring the Buddha to life, seeing a landscape and way of living that was basically unchanged since his day. Most of all, I had the sense that the Buddha was just a little ahead of us, that he had just passed through this spot.

Justin: It made the Buddha come to life, I ended the journey with a far greater understanding of the Buddha as a person. Not only by seeing the places where he was born, enlightened etc, but by seeing the culture he was brought up in.

Neil: Most of all, I had the sense that the Buddha was just a little ahead of us, that he had just passed through this spot. Like walking up to Vulture Peak - on the way up it seemed likely that the scene was relatively unchanged over the 2,500 years since the Buddha walked this way.

Sarah: By exploring the footsteps of the Buddha, we have the opportunity to understand his life and to experience him in us.

We can speculate that the act of pilgrimage provides an integrative foundation for the self-conscious incorporation of Buddhist symbology. From my own subjective experience, *'In the Footsteps of the Buddha'* helped me go beyond the historical significance of the sites and to recognize the potential for Buddha-nature within myself. During the course of the trip, there was one afternoon that involved traversing a river bed and walking a number of kilometers to a cave outside BodhGaya. It was in this cave, according to local legend, that Siddhartha followed the path of extreme mortification prior to his Enlightenment. This was an extremely powerful day for a number of Sangha members. I would like to highlight a passage from my own phenomenological diary:

Our shoes are released, my flesh sinks into the dried river basin – the sand surrounds the sole of the foot. The cold water infiltrates my entire body creeping up the spine. The first crossing – the threshold of adventure. Shantum and Rajesh lead the way. Immediate impermanence – each footstep in the sand washed away by the flowing stream. The second threshold repels [Sarah] and unfortunately the Sangha is broken – I am concerned for her stability. The morning stretches across the divided plots of land, green blades of rice worship the sun as palm tree's carefully shade their awakening. A bicycle sounds intrusive – the serenity of each step, the Buddha's footprints. My cool feet touch the Earth and the present moment is my companion. The skylight of interbeing enters my consciousness.

A common theme along the pilgrimage circuit is this capacity to bring the Buddha to life, to turn the mind inwards and reflect on one's own awakened potential. As Michelle described: "Walking the land let me feel the Buddha all around and within me."

According to Thich Nhat Hanh (1999: 162), when we take refuge in the Dharma, we enter the path of transformation, the path to end suffering. For my informants, the '*Footsteps of the Buddha*' pilgrimage provided an opportunity to take refuge in the eternal truths as discovered through the Buddha's teachings. According to Ajahn Sumedho, unlike other religious traditions, the historicity of the Buddhist holy sites are secondary to the teachings:

Sumedho: Ultimately it does not matter. Like the Buddhist teaching, if somebody came out and said "there was never a Buddha, - we can prove it historically that he did not exist" – his teachings still work you know, so its still a good teaching that works, so I mean it doesn't depend on actual historical fact or proof.

For some informants, revisiting the sutras in their original setting led to a deeper appreciation and understanding of the core tenets of Buddhism:

Rebecca: At the point of taking refuge, when you are in these places, like I said, so much of the experience is so very unfamiliar because its so overwhelming – there were many times when I had to take refuge which to me symbolizes having trust in enlightenment, having trust in the Dharma and having the Dharma available between us and from the teachings I've received before, in order to help understand intellectually what was happening, and also being able to let go and not understand. And that letting go – the space between, where one takes refuge in order to let go and just allow what's happening to happen, without having an intellectual understanding of it – that is something.

Caroll: I think it strengthens my faith and especially as you watch other fellow pilgrims and the devotion and faith, prostrations, prayers, meditations, mantras, whatever you know. And I guess some of these places to me were like ruins, and it was hard for me to conceptualize it. This was the place where Buddha walked some 2500 years ago, or something. But certain places...maybe with each place, would obviously be a practice associated with it – like maybe this place is where Buddha passed away – so you know, you do this – you meditate on death and impermanence or whatever, some of the places if there is a practice I'm familiar with... and I'm just talking about me, then it had more of an effect on me, you know.

Neil: Shantum's Dharma talks about the Buddha's teachings in the places where the Buddha was, when he spoke them...The stories get a deeper meaning.

Through these voices it would appear that Buddhist pilgrimage provided a symbolic context where historical and universal realities merged.³ Not only does the practice appear to reinforce one's faith and trust in the teachings, but it helps to transform words into action.

Jason: The Dharma just became real. I had a distant relationship with Buddhism it was more like a game I had to do. I had to force it upon myself, it was like a comfort. But it even cut through Buddhism – Dharma is like the universal truth – it's the natural law of things – it has nothing necessarily to do with Buddhist affiliation. Just self-realization – connecting with the heart. It's limitless blessings.

Emily: Pilgrimage is a profound practice of embodying the teachings, bringing the practice into one's life, processing and purifying.

Anna: My main transformation was the realization that feelings are universal and not 'my' feelings. I had always known this on an intellectual level but now I just know – I hope that makes sense. It was most profound.

Angela: I was profoundly impacted by the trip which has led to greater understanding of the Ultimate and Relative realities in which we exist. The experience raised my awareness, understanding and compassion for life and the human predicament. It reinforced my personal practice and deepened my ability to counsel and teach. It has furthered my interest in the experience of death and dying.

According to Thich Nhat Hanh (1999), to help realize the qualities of liberation within ourselves, the Sangha provides a necessary focus to our spiritual progress. Along the pilgrimage circuit, devotees not only have an opportunity to travel the same path

³ In Buddhist terms, the Ultimate reality implies that no such self-existent substance exists: the world is a web of fluxing, inter-dependent, baseless phenomena (Harvey, 1990). The Dharma for example is a statement of Ultimate truth that transcends conventional language and can only be verified through one's own experience of the wisdom.

together but also open themselves to an international network of Buddhist pilgrims.

Taking refuge in the Sangha therefore, was seen as an integral aspect of the pilgrimage experience providing a faculty of support along the path. This was a critical turning point for a number of informants who had previously viewed Buddhism in light of their individual practice.

Angela: The Sangha, of course, is so necessary, to support and encourage one another. Also living in community is so important to deepen our practice of understanding, compassion, patience, sharing. The Sangha builds a certain energy, which would be missing if traveling alone. Each pilgrim brings a unique characteristic to the Sangha, which we all benefit from. Each pilgrim raises issues, which are pertinent to each and every one of us, causing us to bring up and look at our own internal issues.

Justin: In the past I haven't really belonged to a Sangha and most of my practice has been at an individual level but I was surprised at how our own little Sangha helped my journey. It made me realize the true value of spiritual friends and how being part of a group advanced my practice.

Caroll: The experience of being connected into the small Sangha group and into the environment erased a sense of separateness, an important realization and reminder for me on the spiritual path. Relating to each other on a level that transcended personality assisted me in my continuing relationships.

Neil: As a group we bonded very closely. I trusted all of them deeply. Sometimes it felt as though we existed in a way that protected the whole group.

Rebecca: Personal and social transformation takes place all the time, you can feel it happening - and you acknowledge it and continue because it can be quite overwhelming. A lot has happened, lots of tears, lots of laughter, lots of stories – an openness for us all that we allowed to happen. We trusted the environment that we were in, we trusted the places and allowed ourselves to heal together and separately. It also continued because there was a few of us who stayed on here in BodhGaya. So you could see it happening and watching each other grow in such a short space, the love and the trust, it was really something very special.

As a temporary community, the Sangha provides a social arena for the convergence of spiritual practices. As a context based relationship, this is similar to Durkheim and Turner's notion of 'effervescence' and 'communitas.' We can speculate that the experience of a Sangha during the course of journey suppresses differences and highlights similarities along a shared path. In this regard, pilgrimage makes the Sangha a very tangible experience.

Pilgrimage in the context of this analysis provides a vehicle for refuge in the unfolding symbology of Buddhist practice. If the Three Jewels are indeed a set of universal values (as outlined by Hanh 1999) then pilgrimage as a religious practice encourages an experience of refuge within a Buddhist hermeneutic. As a journey of both personal and collective suffering, one could argue that Buddhist pilgrimage helps to construct an experience of truth within one's own embodied awareness.

4.2 Pilgrimage, Metaphor and Models of Transcendence

Pilgrimage has been well used as a ritual metaphor for the spiritual quest and can be defined as a "a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal" (Morinis, 1992: 4). A closer look at the relationship between metaphor, altered states of consciousness (A.S.C.) and the 'embodiment' of an ideal in Buddhist pilgrimage suggests an alternative perspective towards an anthropological construction of the pilgrimage process.

A metaphor can be defined as a 'figure of speech' in which a word or phrase denoting one kind of object or action is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. An important argument developed by Levi-Strauss (in Prattis,

1997: 3) is that “categorization of phenomena in the external world follows similar universal paths, as the segmenting and classifying of stimuli is ordered by the structure of the apparatus through which man does his apprehending – the human mind.” Symbolic metaphor is central to the nature of this classification system and process of thought since it bridges the natural and cultural components of human consciousness. According to Prattis (1997: 220), contemporary culture no longer knows how to use codes that express the interconnectedness of human essence. Pilgrimage may thus be interpreted as one metaphor that enables human beings to grasp their place in a wider and more coherent set of forces.

In a critique of an earlier positivist tradition in the social sciences, Victor Turner (1974: 24) pointed towards the dynamic role of metaphor in capturing the actual flux and changefulness “of a world in becoming, not a world in being.” According to Turner (1974: 25), “metaphor is, in fact, metamorphic, transformative. Metaphor is our means of effecting instantaneous fusion of two separated realms of experience into one illuminating, iconic, encapsulating image.” It could be argued therefore, that as a “way of proceeding from the known to the unknown,” metaphor has an analogical function of producing new paradigms and models for understanding (Turner, 1974: 25). According to Turner (1974), it was in the sphere of anti-structure and liminality where social creativity emerged and innovative patterns for behavior and thinking were arranged. Ian Prattis (1997: 212) has noted that as a process of analogy, metaphor is the quality between meanings and properties assigned to a symbol. Therefore as a kind of engaged ritual sequence, pilgrimage (as metaphor) enables a symbolic concept to register with the mind and senses, towards the engineering of some behavioral transformation. In

applying the external metaphor of pilgrimage to our latent internal symbolic structure it is important to consider the neurophysiologic aspects between pilgrimage and social transformation. Before we examine this symbolic relationship in the context of Buddhist pilgrimage it is instructive to highlight two comparative models of transcendence which demonstrate an important link between metaphor and social change.

For Joseph Campbell, 'The Hero's Journey' provides a model of transformation central to the universal structures of mythology. In the *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) Campbell outlines a set of common mythological themes which cut across the world religions. These statements of cultural myth are essential to a "fundamental psychological transformation that everyone", according to Campbell (1988: 152), "has to undergo." "To evolve out of this position of psychological immaturity to the courage of self-responsibility and assurance requires a death and a resurrection. That's the basic motif of the universal hero's journey – leaving one condition and finding the source of life to bring you forth into a richer or mature condition" (Campbell, 1988: 152). Similar to the pilgrim, the hero must move out of the conventional safety of the known – profane time and space – towards transformative tests and trials. According to Campbell, this journey follows a common structural path whereby the hero may perform two types of deeds. One is the physical deed through which a hero performs "a courageous act in battle or saves a life" (Campbell, 1988: 152). Another is the spiritual deed whereby the "hero learns to experience the supernormal range of human spiritual life, and then comes back with a message" (Campbell, 1988: 152). As a kind of hardship continuum, it is the interplay between physical and spiritual deeds that are central to the pilgrim's progress.

In our own lives, from birth, it could be argued that we are all heroes undergoing continuous development involving psychological and physical transformation.

According to Campbell, the first step in the hero's journey is the 'call to adventure' where the hero undergoes a departure from his or her society. This is often accompanied by some form of spiritual aid, which may manifest itself in a variety of forms. Should the hero accept the quest, he or she then proceeds through a significant number of trials, tests and ordeals of extreme psychological and physical hardship. "The trials of the hero's journey are a significant part of life . . . there's no reward without renunciation, without paying the price" (Campbell, 1988: 154). The result of these adventures, according to Campbell, is that he or she 'sacrifices himself for something' and brings back some form of wisdom that has the power to transform the hero's society. However, the hero may also choose to refuse the 'call to adventure' which signals the undoing of the hero, whereby he or she falls prey to the collective consciousness of society. Secondly the hero may accept the calling but refuse to return to his or her society, which signals the destruction of the hero by that fact that he or she does not belong in a supernatural realm.

According to Campbell (1949), the Buddha in his Enlightened state of liberation contemplated the doctrine of Nirvana and its truth beyond words or forms, and chose to return to the mortal world and show others the *way* to Enlightenment:

Then he doubted whether his message could be communicated, and he thought to retain the wisdom for himself; but the God Brahma descended from the zenith to implore that he should become the teacher of gods and men. The Buddha was then persuaded to proclaim the path. And he went back into the cities of men where he moved among the citizens of the world. Bestowing the inestimable boon of the knowledge of the Way. (Campbell, 1949: 33-34)

According to Campbell (as in all myths), the structure of this mythology is intimately part of the human mind's struggle with the mysteries of existence.

If you realize what the real problem is – losing yourself, giving yourself to some higher end, or to another – you realize that this itself is the ultimate trial. When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness. (Campbell, 1988: 154-155)

In other words, the essentialist claim of Joseph Campbell suggests that all myths are about the transformation of consciousness, and the chosen adventure is a symbolic manifestation of the hero's character (Campbell, 1988: 158). The hero's journey can be considered parallel to Carl Jung's metaphor of 'individuation' where the idea is to bring the ego into dialogue with the self in order to unify one's personality. For Jung there is a dynamic relationship between the ego, personal unconscious and the collective unconscious (Jung, 1971: 70-138). Each human being, according to Jung, has the potential to obtain a fully realized self that is in touch with the psychic center of their being.⁴ It could be argued, in the hero's journey the course of the adventure mirrors the ego's descent into the unconscious in order to dialogue and realize the higher nature of the self. However, according to Jung, the 'unconscious' is not a homogenous psychic entity but includes both personal and collective content. To attain individuation it requires dialogue, both with the repressed material of one's personal unconscious (self/historical realm) and secondly, the impersonal nature of one's inherited archetypal material in the collective unconscious (godhead-archetypal/ultimate realm). Through dialogue with the collective unconscious the ego permits the highest level of human

⁴ For Carl Jung the point of individuation was to bring about increasing dialogue between the ego and other repressed unconscious domains. By engaging with archetypal material – as expressions of the collective unconscious – it accelerated the process of individuation vis-à-vis the manipulation of symbolism toward a link between the unconscious and conscious parts of the mind.

growth and unfolding. This is similar to Campbell's statement about placing ourselves in situations that evoke the highest (rather than the lowest) nature of the self (Campbell, 1988: 159). Through individuation and the hero's journey as metaphors of transcendence, both authors point towards a way of becoming that is similar to Turners view on symbolism and ritual transformation. As an attempt to break through the ego, pilgrimage may be viewed as an archetypal adventure of an inward experience. Furthermore, we can speculate that pilgrimage as a symbolic journey serves to accelerate the process of individuation. Like the hero's journey, the pilgrim goes beyond the individual (historical realm) towards a connection with the divine (ultimate or universal realm). According to Clift & Clift (1996) pilgrimage is an archetype that is part of the deep repository of our human psyche and a constant repeated experience of humanity. Therefore, we can speculate that pilgrimage shares a similar model of transcendence leading towards a renewed configuration of the self within the collective society.

I will argue that pilgrimage as a ritual metaphor, involves a phenomenological relationship of engaging with unconscious structures and bringing them to the level of personal experience and awareness. To investigate this dynamic it requires a re-evaluation of the symbolic process of pilgrimage as it is registered through the mind and the senses. As emphasized earlier, in the pursuit to define pilgrimage as an anthropological category, we often overlook the pre-rational aspects of direct experience as route of transformation. Through my analysis of the different subjective commentaries provided by my informants it became clear that there was a pattern to the journey which involved a dynamic relationship between metaphor, experience and understanding. For most informants, the metaphor of pilgrimage provided a symbolic foundation that

mirrored the internal spiritual journey of the practitioner. Through physical experience, Buddhist pilgrimage (in the context of this analysis) provides an engaged context for the mediation of intellectual abstractions that encourages an experience of unfolding symbology within the framework of the Three Jewels – Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. This is similar to the findings of Alan Morinis (1992) in that pilgrimage as a ritual metaphor works as an active ingredient that extends beyond our ‘polarization of meanings’ to support and illuminate a sense of cohesion from the known to the unknown. In this respect, pilgrimage may be interpreted through a language of transcendence that is contingent on the mediation of opposites such as structure/experience, known/unknown, human/divine, social/ideal and of course history/universal (Morinis, 1992: 26). An aspect of pilgrimage that is often overlooked in anthropological models, and which needs to be examined, is the dynamic movement between these constricting binary oppositions and how the process leads to the resolution and transcendence of these constraints.

4.3 From Embodiment to Knowledge

Let us take a closer look at the relationship between metaphor, embodiment and knowledge. According to Prattis (1997, 2001), metaphor is the external mental form which corresponds to a latent internal symbolic structure that is not yet known through personal experience. With the detachment of structural social bonds, and through the role of a mediator (such as a guide or teacher), pilgrimage provides ritual focus which in turn, allows the metaphor to register in the mind and senses. At this stage it is crucial that the

metaphor translates into physical experience and becomes part of an embodied consciousness.

In using the term embodiment, I am referring to a concept in cultural analysis that challenges the Cartesian dichotomy of Mind/Body. Embodiment reminds us of the concrete relationships between people and the full complement of senses and feelings with which they communicate (Strathern, 1996: 2). The experiencing body in a phenomenological sense reminds us that there is a physical component in all our mental states which collapses the principal dualities of perception/practice or structure/experience.

As a link between the mind and body, I will use the concept of embodiment as it applies to the symbolic expression of Refuge. As indicated previously, this process is important for many western practitioners who feel limited to the intellectual experience of Buddhism. As a symbolic medium, pilgrimage can in part be a physical medium that draws the experience of awareness to the present moment (free of mental abstractions). The physical experience in part mediates the construction of pilgrimage as a vehicle of transformation, whereby multiple levels of the metaphor are holistically embodied. For example, the physical experience alters the intellectual abstractions of the Dharma and is in turn experientially linked to an embodied awareness. Therefore, Buddhist pilgrimage may be viewed as a vehicle of transformation where the unfolding symbology is acted out physically. At this stage, one cannot overlook the role of process and preparation (such as meditation), as important ritual variables that help induce a kind of experience that Buddhists' believe dissolve ego-based thought and dualistic thinking. As the pilgrim

develops an integrative awareness between social, physical and intellectual levels it can also drive the experience towards an alternate phase of consciousness (A.S.C.):

Sumedho: Things just drop away, your mind becomes very, very simple and the next step is what you are interested in. Not in the big stuff or even the ideals and so you become quite calm and centered and grounded.

Michelle: I felt a magnificent peace in the countryside, letting me melt into nature. With that, I felt a sense of real freedom. I felt cleansed walking through the river. I focused on my ancestors and came to a greater understanding of who I am, experiencing an awaking of my own basic emotional truths.

According to Ian Prattis (1997: 213), the consolidation of a metaphor into personal experience requires entry into a “void-energy” which is a pivotal part of the A.S.C. As a transcendent state that lies beyond our regular temporal and spatial classifications, this step allows access to a heightened awareness of the multi-leveled stimulus provided by the symbol. Although the experience may vary between informants, entry into an A.S.C. was often described as a suspension of dualism, a dissolving of separation and a great sense of openness.

Neil: A willingness to be opened, to awaken, to be present even if only for a moment. To feel the interconnectedness of all beings.

Anna: During the pilgrimage I felt a sense of universal oneness – no sense of time or space - simply being. I also felt at one with God.”

Jason: I’ve met a lot of nice people and there’s this common focus, common energy that we’ve been sharing and I’ve picked up on. There’s a respect, a gratitude and an awareness of a sacred and special time. You are really surrendering, dedicating your life for a certain amount of time to this mysterious faith of yours and this spiritual practice. Your mixing everything – you come out of the Kalachakra Puja or you are down at the temple all day and come out for lunch and you have the beggars bouncing off you and people shoving toys and cotton candy in your face. It’s like the Mandala principle, everything is interpretation. Objectively everyone’s been nice and focused. Just talking to people – this is part of it – we are faced with these teachings of spirituality and we are also faced

with this other reality – the more mundane reality – they really mingle alongside each other. Probably more so then when I'm at home where the mundane reality is very comfortable, automated and familiar and you can therefore kind of segment the spirituality and have that in a pocket sometimes.

For others, the character of the A.S.C. was often described at an energetic level, akin to a 'vibration.' According to Prattis (1997: 212), in orchestrated ritual sequences a vibration reflects the "physical experience of the metaphysical and 'numinous' meanings attached to symbols."

Sumedho: Any kind of religious place, you know, where people worship or do Pujas – there seems to hold that kind of energy or vibration.

From this participation and deep immersion within a heightened social solidarity, it would appear that for some informants 'communitas,' unlike 'contestations,' was a peak experience. For example, both Lorne and Angela described their experience of pilgrimage as a "re-awakening of their essential being" or "symbolically going 'home' to the source of Being." On a phenomenological level, my own experience matched the subjective descriptions of my informants in that I could also feel a subtle release in mental abstractions that led to an extremely vivid experience. The following passage was recorded in Varanasi during an evening 'Arati' – the Hindu ceremony of offering the light to the Ganges:

During the Puja my heart is at ease and I can feel a great, great love and appreciation for all of life. It was so beautiful. The chanting still rings in my heart. As the ceremony came to a conclusion and the crowds dispersed a sudden electrical failure left the entire Ghats in complete darkness. Light and dark as one. Shantum led the Sangha through the dark mist to the base of the Ganges. We enter an old paddle boat and make our way along the mighty river. Light offerings and prayers are sent to our ancestors. The candles flicker in the distance. The Ghats are quiet and peaceful. Nothing in my life has been so vivid. No metaphor could describe the 'absolute' which seized my senses and sent my heart pouring outwards into the Ganges river. This empty space of sacredness.

The experience of an A.S.C. (however fleeting) can also be interpreted as a transpersonal shift in awareness that takes the individual beyond his or her sense of egoic thought towards a sense of interconnection and immediacy free of conceptual mediation.

Lorne: I feel initiated into something that is transcendental, not explainable in words that occurred while on the pilgrimage.

Emily: I had been to BodhGaya previously and loved it but on the pilgrimage I had a very strong experience there with all the other pilgrims practicing together...it is beyond words.

Rebecca: There's just this part of it you cannot really explain but we all know because we've all felt it. And my mom has a saying "who feels it, knows it," so unless you have been there and felt it you don't really know. It's very much that experience that's difficult to explain but we all feel it, so we know it. It connects you. We then led onto another conversation of being very inter-connected, and well 'same, same but different' another saying but we are really all the same or how else would we all feel this thing. So that's helpful because it takes away from the separation, and that's something very nice – it's a great feeling. It feels like refuge and it's nice.

At a phenomenological level, the significance of one's internal experience is crucial for the shift in cognitive and perceptual changes. According to Prattis (1997: 213) within the realms of the A.S.C an alternate phase of awareness allows the qualities of the metaphor ("numinous") to be translated into personal experience. Through direct contact with the 'void-energy' it may also stimulate a clarity of discernment where the usual self-experience and intentional (subject-object) structure of consciousness becomes more transparent or may dissolve all together. To shed light on this issue there is an article by Rishi Prabhakar (2003), where he describes the relationship between Padyatras [pilgrimage] as an important training for Samadhi meditation.

When you participate in a Padyatras, you will come to a state where you do not have any body anywhere, the body simply walks without you thinking and then Dharana begins. When there is total Nobodiness,

physically, mentally, spiritually in every way you are a total nobody...your mind is totally clear. There is nothing in the head...Then you start realizing that you can probably spend your whole life doing Padayatra alone. (Prabhakar 2003: 3)

In this regards, the vehicle of transformation is one's consciousness and the pilgrimage process provides a symbolically mediated activity of awareness that can lead to an increase in one's capacity to take deeper and wider perspectives into account.

Emily: The process of pilgrimage naturally brings about transformation. You see things differently, you open to a larger perspective.

Neil: Then one might also say that pilgrimage is a way of living life. That each day is a pilgrimage. Then it gets clearer that the refuge I take each morning is that which is awake in me and in the world and in every sentient being and this is the ground from which authentic experience arises.

Angela: The pilgrimage experience reinforces my belief in the Zen teaching: Life is experienced, not understood. Pilgrimage is necessary for understanding. Whether it is to nature, historic sights, family history, or spiritual ground, I cannot 'know' without experience."

From these accounts (including my own personal phenomenology) there emerges a symbolic relationship where the intellectual construct of pilgrimage (as metaphor) is different from the way of knowing based on direct experience. As one of the central tenets of Buddhism, there is an epistemic assumption that experience is an unfolding process and that through insight practice (such as meditation) the experience changes. According to Hart (1988) the Buddha always emphasized that he taught only what he had experienced by direct knowledge and encouraged others to become their own authorities. "The only real refuge in life, the only solid ground on which to take a stand, the only authority that can give proper guidance and protection is truth, Dhamma, the law of nature, experienced and verified by oneself" (Hart, 1988: 15). Therefore, the process by which your experience is constructed (paired with ritual techniques – such as

pilgrimage/meditation) can serve as a vehicle of integration between multiple levels of awareness such as: social (Sangha), physical (experience), intellectual (metaphor) and transpersonal (A.S.C – ‘void-energy’).

As an epistemic event, I suggest that pilgrimage provides a ritual context that encourages these shifts in awareness allowing for a restructuring of the categories mediating consciousness. As mentioned previously, this is characterized by a sense of openness, clarity and interconnection. The act of pilgrimage itself may be interpreted as an act of cleansing where one’s increasing self-awareness is at the same time a self-transcending process. Shantum Seth provides valuable insight on this dynamic:

Shantum: It’s the mind you go with that is important. So in one sense the pilgrimage is an outer/inner journey, an outer journey often away from your regular framework so it allows the inner to be hit more easily. You start seeing things, which you do not normally see because the familiar becomes mundane, its everyday so the unfamiliar allows the inner to be exploded a bit, but its not some sort of mega-transformation explosion initially, just little blips. But it can lead to quite a fundamental shift in consciousness and transform someone...and that’s what I would like to seed in people, its not that it will happen in this journey, but the pilgrimage is not something which is only these 2-3 weeks, it’s a journey which continues for life, it’s a way of seeing things.

The picture that emerges from these informants cross cut a number of themes that are central to both Buddhist and transpersonal anthropology: 1. *authenticity* – that this is one’s own knowing; 2. *immediacy* – there is little or no conceptual mediation; 3. *connectedness* – the boundaries that separate and create the sense of an isolated self seem to dissolve; 4. *transformative capacity* – the knower is changed by the knowing and at the same time, openness to change in one’s sense of identity opens one to the knowing (Hart, Nelson, & Puhakka, 2000: 5). As Shantum Seth noted, pilgrimage is “a way of

seeing the world”, a way of flowing with the vicissitudes of everyday life, a way of “linking to the cosmic dance.”

In this chapter I have argued that pilgrimage is a symbolically mediated context that corresponds to a latent internal drive to transcend culturally constructed binary oppositions. As the metaphor progresses from a symbolic construct in the mind to an embodied practice, this transition has an important physiological component in that it provides a kind of ‘ritual preparation’ leading to a shift in awareness. Through the experience of an A.S.C it allows unconscious material to surface which can then become a part of the pilgrim’s awareness. As the pilgrim continues to progress along a ritual continuum, the symbolic metaphor may be released, whereby the regular structures of culturally constructed thought dissolve, and out of which a new form of ‘knowing’ emerges afresh.⁵ This form of symbolic action has an important transformative capacity in that it can potentially lead to the deconstruction and reconstruction of a new epistemic position whereby ‘knowing’ liberates itself from its own ground. In this context, taking refuge in the Three Jewels provides physical ownership not just intellectual acceptance of Buddhist values. Taking refuge in the Dharma for example, becomes a symbolic vehicle for producing a unitary experience that may be perceived as that of timeless wisdom. Through the mediation of symbology, it could be argued that pilgrimage as a transformative activity helps link conscious and unconscious parts of the mind towards an integrative experience. Through a heightened awareness stimulated by the symbol it provides a context for the pilgrim to fuse historical and ultimate realities, leading to an actualization of the Buddha archetype within – the potential for Enlightenment.

⁵ This process is parallel to Laughlin, McManus and d’Aquili’s (1990) notion of *entrainment* where there is a linking of neural structures that can result in a warp in consciousness and a retuning of the autonomic nervous system.

The Meeting Ground – Pilgrimage and Dharma Tourism

A tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist.

-Victor Turner, 1978: 20

The human organism . . . is . . . motivated to keep the influx of novelty, complexity, and information within an optimal range and thus escape the extremes of confusion [This is Tuesday, so it must be Belgium] and boredom [We never go anywhere!]

-D. Berlyne cited in Graburn, 1989: 21

Pilgrimage commonly conjures images of courageous travelers embarking on epic journeys towards a higher purpose or spiritual goal. The accounts of the early Asian pilgrims Fa-hsien and Hieun-tsang are testament to this. However, with modern transportation and the secularization of society, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between the various categories of travelers (Smith, 1992). In the introduction to this thesis I suggest a relationship between the categories of pilgrim and tourist. Given the level of urban comforts during the three-week pilgrimage, one could think that '*In the Footsteps of the Buddha*' is an elaborate example of Dharma tourism. Therefore, it would be a mistake to generalize that this case study is a representative model of Buddhist pilgrimage in the twenty-first Century.

In this chapter I will focus on the sacred and secular dynamic of this provisional relationship. It will begin with an overview of some theoretical perspectives which illustrate the 'nature of human quest' in both pilgrim and tourist activities. I will then investigate the perceptions of my informants surrounding this culturally constructed dichotomy. Through this emic approach I will turn to a discussion of physical and mental hardship as it relates to the experience of poverty and culture shock in North India.

Thirdly, I will discuss the role of a guide or teacher in its application for a complete cycle of meaning. Drawing on the proposed model of metaphor, embodiment and knowledge I will conclude by illustrating a clear symbolic distinction between my construction of the concepts 'tourism' and 'pilgrimage.' It is important to note that throughout this chapter I draw on tourism (in general terms) to provide a counter perspective for our discussion of pilgrimage.

5.1 The Pilgrim-Tourist Path

The similarities and differences between tourism and pilgrimage have been part of a growing discourse in the social sciences (Smith, 1989[1977]; 1992), (Graburn, 1983; 1989), (Cohen, 1979; 1988; 1992). Both tourism and pilgrimage are defined as activities that are dependent on three operative elements: discretionary income, leisure time, and social sanctions permissive of travel (Smith 1989[1977]). An important criterion to distinguish pilgrims from tourists is to explore the role of individual belief or worldview. According to Smith (1992: 11), with the secularization of religion and the progressive modernization through time, personal belief has been subjected to great stress. In this contemporary context, secular vacations have become a medium through which deep personal meaning is constructed. A common perception held of pilgrimage is that it involves "faith in some type of divine order and with single-mindedness of purpose embarks on a journey of sacred wish fulfillment" (Smith, 1992: 2). In contrast, tourism is often interpreted as superfluous, lacking purpose and meaning. But the sacred is not necessarily restricted to the pilgrim. For the secular tourist, discretionary money and leisure time provides a kind of wish fulfillment involving pleasure, relaxation, change,

new friends or other desires (Smith 1992). According to Smith (1992: 15) the meaning of both pilgrimage and tourism will always remain closely linked to the prevailing socio-economic-political thought and will undoubtedly change through time. As a result, this particular linguistic dichotomy reflects a “culturally constructed polarity that veils the motives of the traveler’s quest throughout history” (Smith, 1992: 1). Despite obvious differences, according to Smith (1992: 15) there appears to be one common quest for all travelers: a search for the betterment of life. For Colin Turnbull (1981: 81) both forms of quest “stimulate dreams that, however, unmatched by reality, have the ability to enrich and enlighten, giving the dreamer fresh hope and fresh life.”

Expanding on the writings of Turner and Turner (1978), Nelson Graburn (1983, 1989) suggests that tourism invokes a diversion from the ‘ordinary’ [structure/profane] that makes life worth living. In this regard, tourist activities appear to serve a sacred function in that they are supposed to renew us by temporarily abandoning social structure and becoming a “non-entity, removed from a ringing telephone” (Graburn, 1989: 22). As the author points out, ‘vacation,’ (Latin *vacare*, “to leave [one’s house] empty”) suggests a “structurally-necessary, ritualized break” in routine that “define[s] and relieve[s] the ordinary” (Graburn, 1989: 22). Furthermore, as an alternative mode of existence, this symbolic form of “human exploratory behavior” serves to “change the stimulus field and introduce stimulus elements that were not previously accessible” (Graburn, 1989: 28). In this regard, tourism and travel are similar to an A.S.C., where “upon return [the tourist] attempts to prolong the ‘high’ – to remain in the sacred and delay the comedown as long as possible” (Graburn, 1989: 26). According to Graburn, because the touristic journey “lies in the nonordinary sphere of existence, the goal is symbolically served and morally

on a higher plane than that of the ordinary workaday world. Tourists spend substantial sums to achieve the altered state – money that could be invested for material gains or alternatively used to buy a new car or redecorate their homes (Graburn, 1989: 28). Similar to Victor Turner's view of structural change, Graburn (1989: 25) interprets modern life as a dialectic succession of events marked by breaks between the sacred/nonordinary/touristic and the profane/workaday/stay-at-home. As a voluntary self-indulgent choice, a vacation or (holi)day can be likened to a sacred journey in that it marks a passage of time providing a sense of definition to the nature of life itself (Graburn, 1989: 20). As (re)creation therefore, both tourism and pilgrimage share a common path in their personal and internalized quest for meaning beyond the boundaries of regular structural bonds. As metaphors of human quest, it would appear that the boundaries between pilgrimage and other cultural journeys cannot be easily demarcated.

According to Dean MacCannell in his classic text *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Working Class* (1989[1976]), tourism is a practice of self-discovery in the postindustrial era. MacCannell (1989: 13) argues that the central motivating force behind the tourist is the search for authenticity across a fragmented world. As modern ritual performed to the “differentiation of society,” tourism and the “search for an Absolute Other” is regarded by this author, as the principal theme of our civilization (1989: 13). A main component of the tourist's consciousness is a desire for a “deeper involvement with society and culture” (MacCannell, 1989: 10). However, as MacCannell points out:

...*sightseeing* is a kind of collective striving for a transcendence of the modern totality, a way of attempting to overcome the discontinuities of modernity, of incorporating its fragments into unified experience. Of course it is doomed to eventual failure: even as it tries to construct totalities, it celebrates differentiation (MacCannell, 1989: 13).

In his neo-Marxist critique, MacCannell links tourism to the failure of an industrial ideology, whereby modern man's quest for identity and soul is in off-the-job activities. "Work in the modern world does not turn class against class so much as it turns man against himself, fundamentally dividing his existence. The modern individual, if he is to appear to be human, is forced to forge his own synthesis between his work and his culture" (MacCannell, 1989: 33). In this regards, tourism may be interpreted as a journey of the suffering soul rather than the traditional journey of a suffering body often attributed with religious pilgrimage. For Dean MacCannell, ultimately tourism is an expression of the quest for authenticity – a modern version of the universal search for the sacred.

As this culturally constructed dichotomy continues to be explored and redefined through new case studies, the interplay between 'categories of quest' may become clearer. For this purpose it is important that we turn towards the perceptions of our informants surrounding this relationship.

As a distinguishing feature between pilgrims and tourists, Shantum Seth suggests that "it is the mind you go with that is most important." In this sense, the actual destination for the traveler is secondary to *how* one travels including preparation, commitment, attitude and faith:

Shantum: I think with a pilgrimage we are going with an attitude of openness, of humility, we are going for...not only self-development, but learning and we are going with reverence, some sort of faith but not saying some great belief, but some faith.

Shantum: The tour is the eight sites and the pilgrimage is the journey, the whole unfolding.

As Justin suggested, “pilgrimage is ultimately about mindfulness.” According to Thich Nhat Hanh (1999), as a component of the Noble Eightfold Path, right mindfulness, is the energy that brings us back to the present moment. “Right mindfulness accepts everything without judging or reacting. It is inclusive and loving. The practice is to find ways to sustain appropriate attention throughout the day” (Hanh, 1999: 64).

Neil: Well, each day is really a day of practice. How do I approach patients, how do I greet people I meet, how do I walk? The more mindfulness, the more happiness and the less suffering. Pilgrimage is a part of strengthening this sort of belief system.

Although the tourist and pilgrim may share a number of common characteristics, for some of these informants, the separation between categories of quest is visible at the level of awareness.

Shantum: And the journey is important, like I said - the family, the whole journey – that it’s not just not about getting to a site at all, it’s the whole journey that’s the pilgrimage, its not just the moment of arrival, we are really arriving at every moment if we can do that.

Neil: If I’m a tourist, I’m checking things off a list, watching the map to see where we are going, watching the scene out the bus window. As a pilgrim, I do the same activities, but get more aware of what I am doing, where I am. Aware of my steps or my breath. Aware of the other pilgrims in a place like BodhGaya. I can also get distracted, even in these holy spots. What about the seemingly fake monks who are asking for money in the temple who piss me off and then I’m working with anger instead of taking in the place. Or I can interact with the kids selling leaves and postcards with real joy and understanding without getting hooked or waylaid by them or their schemes.

For most of these pilgrims, tourism and the tourist conjured negative images and superficial stereotypes. Although some informants admit their own contribution to the construction of this tourist critique, most express a dislike of being identified within this

social category. Unlike a vacation or holiday, pilgrimage as symbolic action was seen as a type of practice with a specific spiritual goal, versus 'pure escapism.'

Gary: Where, in other words, does "pilgrimage" fall in relation to "tourism," "traveling," and "exploration"? Anyone who has undertaken difficult independent travel probably has a sort of snobbish dislike of being considered a tourist, since that word is heavy with pejorative undertones. So naturally it is pleasanter to consider oneself a pilgrim in the sense of traveler. Explorer is out of the question since one goes on pilgrimage to a place that has already been well established as such a destination.

Rebecca: I think its not always the place but your attitude towards it.

Lorne: Being a pilgrim is like sharing your destiny with everyone you meet. Being a tourist is like being an interested outsider learning and having experiences. Pilgrimage experiences are internalized, tourist experiences are externalized.

Emily: I consider myself to be a pilgrim on a pilgrimage. A tourist is someone who is not on a spiritual journey--although sometimes traveling can open one up to the spiritual dimension. A tourist is not cultivating awareness in an intentional way whereas a pilgrim is going with the conscious intention to learn and grow and offer one's life for the benefit of all beings. A pilgrimage is a journey of intention to discover the spiritual purpose of one's life, to understand a particular piece, or to uncover the roots of suffering and transform and heal and purify one's self-clinging in order to be of service. Often pilgrimage involves sacrifice or is a journey that puts one in touch with uncomfortable things, where we must confront our selves, overcome limitations, etc. We go holding an intention and stay focused on that intention for the duration of the pilgrimage....what the journey brings up we look at and learn from. I enjoy going for a vacation to the beach or being a tourist in a fabulous city to see great art, but those trips are about 'time out', relaxing and letting go. A pilgrimage involves staying focused and holding an intention all the while staying open to the moment, to the unexpected, to receiving guidance, recognizing the signs, getting out of the way. Learning from or about something larger than ourselves.

However, in some cases the boundaries between tourism and pilgrimage were not as rigid. For Angela, it was possible to move in and out of a pilgrim/tourist framework: "I began my trip as a tourist. As the days progressed and events occurred I became a

pilgrim.” From my own experience of the ‘*Footsteps of the Buddha*’ pilgrimage, I also shared a similar transformation of identity in that initially I experienced a sense of distance from the sites and community of travelers. As a result, this led towards a gap between my expectations and perceptions of the journey.

... the group dynamic begins to solidify as our pack of tourists/pilgrims make our way with herded behavior across a busy street in Delhi ... at times I feel somewhat restricted by the group dynamic – it feels like tourism and its much more difficult to set yourself free from the bubble and engage with the everyday currents I had been accustomed to in BodhGaya.

My separation from the group was most evident in the evening ‘*strucks*’ where I was hesitant to speak about my internal reflections during the day. However, as the pilgrimage progressed I was able to see through my own restrictive thinking and let go of these constructed perceptions. This shift in awareness helped strengthen a heightened experience and a deeper appreciation for the unfolding events. This acceptance and trust in the present moment was also shared by other members of the Sangha:

Justin: I only considered myself a tourist during our visit to Nalanda, which I think relates to it being a Mahayana University and not of my tradition. Until this point I hadn’t realized it would make any difference – as I said in the strucks, something for me to work on. At all other times I considered myself a Pilgrim and the sites visited had an inner meaning on top of their physical presence – they seemed to bypass the intellect.

Michelle: I considered myself a pilgrim while participating in the footsteps of the Buddha. I was not moved by ancient ruins or temples, although I greatly admired them - the architecture and the carvings. Instead, I was moved by actually walking the land, stepping back in time, focusing on my ancestral roots. It was about feeling the energy within, feeling the presence of Buddha, connecting with the group. As a pilgrim I was looking internally at my mental formations, my prejudices, my desires, my regrets - all to change my consciousness. As a pilgrim I would walk blissfully, feeling integrated with the nature that surrounded me, accepting India just as it was and really feeling a part of it.

Unlike certain variants of tourism, one characteristic of pilgrimage is that it involves spiritual discipline. As a practice of mindfulness, for these informants pilgrimage provides a context for examining negative mental states in order to transcend notions of identity and difference.

5.2 The Role of Physical and Mental Hardship

Considering the Buddhist holy sites span across two states and two countries, modern means of transportation are a valuable asset for people migrating through the various sacred localities. In chapter four I suggested that physical movement and hardship can be an integral part of ritual preparation that leads to a transformation of consciousness. In comparison to other pilgrimages, *“In the Footsteps of the Buddha”* provides a substantially high level of modern comfort compared to a walking pilgrimage for example. Our prepaid hefty travel fee covered three meals a day (usually fine Indian cuisine), first-rate accommodation and modern transportation such as planes, trains, taxis and private buses. A question arises, how is it that my informants (including myself) still believed in the experience of transformation? In our interview with Ajahn Sumedho, Shantum Seth posed the following question: “I just wonder whether we need all this suffering part of it? I try to organize the pilgrimage to limit that to a large degree because I found the external sensory bombardment is so great that people need to have the Taj Ganges Hotel [5 star accommodation] to process it.”

For my informants, it was clear there was some disagreement on the function of physical hardship and suffering in the pilgrimage cycle. Most informants suggested that

an increase in physical hardship (such as walking) would have significantly enhanced the experience of pilgrimage:

Caroll: I can't say that I felt physical hardship - as we were so well cared for. I think more hardship (walking more, eating less, staying in lesser hotels), would have deepened and enhanced the pilgrimage. I think hardship would have integrated us more with the local people, making me feel more a part of India.

Gary: Our transportation was usually so much better, and our physical hardship usually so much less, than that of the occupants of the places we visited, that it would be embarrassing and irrelevant to complain that our suffering was somehow ennobling or proof of our seriousness of purpose. We traveled by a private, fairly new, and well-sprung bus, not the old, dirty, and vomit-streaked ones we routinely saw along the roads, and we slept in clean linen most of the time.

Michelle: Regarding the 'mode' of transportation, for me it is necessary to walk as much as possible. (I would have preferred much more walking). I realize that the white elephant [reference to the Bus] was necessary because of the distances within the time period that we were traveling, however, the white elephant separates us from the native people - sometimes making me feel like I was intruding.

On the other hand, some of the pilgrims felt that modern transportation and comfort were by no means obstacles for their transformation and increasing insight:

Angela: The 'Footsteps' pilgrimage was generally very comfortable. We traveled by plane, bus and train. Sometimes the standard was less than grand, but always acceptable. I would not describe my pilgrimage as one of physical hardship. (Some say that hardship is important to growth. My experience is that internal struggle and growth does not require physical deprivation.)

Emily: Traveling together in a bus. This was great. We were together, and formed a unit that helped stay focused. I personally did a lot of practice on the bus and appreciated the time to integrate my experiences and deepen my practice. I seldom chatted on the bus, but that was my trip--so to say. I used that time to practice...

Justin: To me there was a timeless feel to the journey but having said that I was glad to be in the level of accommodation provided.

Sarah: Going by coach gave us much more time to appreciate the landscape, people and distances involved. It amazed me that the area we covered seemed so vast but was only a tiny rectangle on the map of India.

For some informants it would appear that stress reduction helped enhance their experience of the journey, while for others, it provided a distraction for their increasing awareness. Despite the varying degrees of urban comforts along the pilgrimage circuit, through this analysis it became clear that North India itself leaves a profound cultural and spiritual impression on the traveler. Culture shock, when viewed from a Buddhist perspective provides an experience of change that can become a valuable and insightful means of observing emotional and cultural conditioning. In this respect, for a number of informants, it was not the physical hardship that triggered a shift in awareness but rather, mental confrontations with extreme poverty, squatters, beggars and so forth.

Angela: The most profound impact comes from being with the full spectrum of Human Experience in its most raw forms. Being immersed in a culture that radiates acceptance of life's experience was amazing. Being in a culture that has the capacity to face suffering directly...and 'not mind it' (accept it), while remaining full of joy and passion was unique by western standards...People doing what they can with the troubles and problems of life...and moving on. Beauty and ugliness in one. I feel so fortunate that I got to experience the old India...much as it probably was in the Buddha's time.

Jason: Its intensity is really a blessing. Like the Mandala principal appropriating everything. Learning patience like it has to come. If you don't have patience in India you are going to suffer immensely. Its life and death, it's everything. India is like an open wound – sucking on a lollypop – the sweet and the sour. It can be very sharp and lucid. A lot of fears for me came up. Death is right there. Health, learning about my struggles with survival and comfort – it just throws you around. I've been sick more times in the last three months than I have in 5 years. The comfort is just not really there and its okay! It has really cut through a lot of perceptions that I've created in my western life. It just really brought reality into my face. Actually smacked me in the face.

Sumedho: India touches me in many different ways but that particular word effects me in a spiritual sense – to me it's a powerhouse, where

spirituality is held up very high and is very kind of, almost, you know it permeates the culture and it is so important to everyone that lives here. So I find just being in India has a strong effect on turning me more in that direction or re-affirming what I'm doing. You know in Western Europe you have this kind of soulless feeling, it's so materialistic and people don't know what they are doing anymore – something seems to have slipped out and you don't feel that here in India.”

Emily: I think going to India in general is like making a pilgrimage because whether you like it or not you are going to go thru some hardships, you are going to see things differently, you are going to discover things you didn't know before. You become very vulnerable in India, exposed to life and death, disease, poverty, joy, laughter, beauty and grace, horror and the unthinkable, all co-existing together in front of your very eyes, not closed off behind some institutional doorway, protecting us from the realities of life as it is. The fact that the pilgrimage is in India is a great teaching. India is the birthplace of the Buddha, the home and origin of so much life and culture and spiritual traditions of a whole other way of experiencing life. We westerners have much to learn from the Indian way of life and culture. For me, India is not just India, it is Mother India.

As a backdrop for pilgrimage, India can be interpreted as a psychological drama through an experience of varying human emotions. Taking refuge in the Three Jewels provides symbolically mediated experiential context for observing one's awareness of arising perceptions. For some informants who adopt a meditative perspective, being vulnerable and exposed to a wide spectrum of humanity became an opportunity to practice mindfulness (as outlined by Thich Nhat Hanh). Furthermore, by calmly observing our reactions to unpleasant experiences, pilgrimage provides a space for eroding these conditioned responses. In this regards, mental hardship can be an asset along the pilgrimage path in bringing personal and collective suffering to the surface and fostering a trust in one's own awareness.

There are two large passages from Ajahn Sumedho's interview that I would like to quote in their entirety, to shed light on the role of suffering and awareness in the context of pilgrimage activity.

Sumedho: I think that India can be an awakening experience. But we come from wealthy countries so we compare it with our own standards and that is where we often misunderstand and then we feel emotionally confused by it. But that's where the Buddha's teaching is in being able to see things the way they really are which means acceptance, you know, it means, with awareness. It's not a critical function. It's not saying how it should be. And this is why you trust this awareness. Like even if you feel emotionally distressed of what you see in India, trust your own awareness of what you are feeling. I mean it's like this, it's the way it is, and so that you are actually accepting the way you are feeling but you are not making anything more of it, you know you are not winding yourself up or you are not repressing it, so then you begin to learn a lot about your self, you know, and see where your own tendencies to create suffering around the suffering you see around you.

Sumedho: But that experience really awakened in me the trust and goodness of humanity because you know, coming from a kind of middle class American family where security is the ultimate goal in life and suddenly you have no security except your alms bowl and your robes and it works. I have hardly few memories of anything bad happening in those five months. And it did teach me how, you know, just by worry and wanting things to be like this, how I would create my own suffering when I was actually, you know, I wasn't suffering like I saw them suffering but I would create emotional anguish around it. So I realized that it wasn't doing anybody any good, you know it wasn't doing me any good and it wasn't helping them. So when I saw the difference, I could drop that tendency to wish it were otherwise or to want to blame somebody for it, the government, or whatever, for allowing this poverty or these people to be like this. I stopped doing that. Then more and more I was open to people, and then living in the UK for so long you see that people really suffer there (laughter). It's not physical so much as mental. We live in areas where people are quite well off, so you see so much anguish, anger, resentment and fear in these affluent countries. Sometimes I wonder which is worse. It goes on and on, no matter what you do, no matter how wealthy you get, your mind is already fixed in this complaining mode or blaming mode. Unless you get beyond that, then no matter what you are doing you create suffering, whether you are a beggar in India or the Queen of England.

As a commercialized pilgrimage, the stress reduction provided in the '*Footsteps of the Buddha*' may shield participants from physical hardship, but suffering remains a prominent theme throughout the course of the journey. However, this suffering appears to be a manifestation of struggles at the level of consciousness. The sensory bombardment and intensity of travel through rural India encourages a meditative perspective to avoid the traps of aversion and craving. Through the practice of mindfulness, pilgrimage provides a context to confront human suffering and in the process, cultivate new mental habits based on one's individual awareness.

5.3 The Role of Guide or Teacher

Shantum Seth is a Buddhist practitioner and an ordained teacher (Dharmacharya) in the Zen (Dhyana) tradition of the Vietnamese master Thich Nhat Hanh. As a Buddhist of Indian descent, he has been leading pilgrimages since 1988. For the past twenty years he has also been working in the social development sector as an advisor to the United Nations. In the last three years Shantum chose to make pilgrimage his primary livelihood source.

Shantum: I've been working with the UN since the early 1980's around the time of the first pilgrimage. My income source was really coming from social development issues, the UN and things but then about three or four years ago I decided I didn't want to make a livelihood through social development or poverty issues but more in the market place, and I felt that would give me a better sense of what are the difficulties and suffering that the people face or the elation people face in general society.

One of the challenges of my participation in this case study of Buddhist pilgrimage is the enormous price-tag required for a packaged three week excursion through rural India and

Nepal. But during the course of the pilgrimage process I began to see the importance of a guide in the context of ritual transformation. As a journey through the unfamiliar, a knowledgeable and compassionate guide is very helpful to integrate the cultural and spiritual experience into an enlarged awareness of the Buddha-Dharma.

Shantum: I really feel great compassion for people who come. I sometimes feel that they are not able to touch the ground of the Buddha – they are able to touch the Buddha in name or place but not really in the way he came from . . . what culture he came from . . . or not being able to see with Buddha eyes. One of the motivations of this journey is that we walk in Buddha's feet and see with Buddha's eyes. But to do that, you cannot be rushing too much and planning too much, so in that sense I feel you know these places.

Shantum: I think I've always tried to be free flowing with the journey in the sense that I keep a skeleton of the essential things to be done, but I always kind of keep a flow so that the unexpected can be part of the journey. That's what India is you know. 'Always expect the unexpected.' And it's true, it's inevitable in India and that's where we really learn. So to me it's not just necessarily the Buddhist sites but to me it's India as a great teacher in the context of the Buddha-Dharma. And then maybe it is changed somewhat, my advertising is still directly on Buddhist pilgrimage but it is really not that, it maybe on Buddhist pilgrimage but it is a journey through India in the context of Buddha's teachings and life.

The interjection of a wise leader and teacher can also play an important role in the symbolic process of pilgrimage that verifies central tenets of Buddhism.

Gary: A trusted and wise teacher makes pilgrimage (or any growing experience) more valuable. Shantum Seth's character is perfectly suited for guiding such an experience. He is an intelligent, gentle man who is wonderfully knowledgeable of spiritual, religious, cultural, political and social aspects of the Hindu/Buddhist world. His personal relationship to raising consciousness, mindful living, and the material world is remarkable, thus allowing him to be a wise leader for guiding others as they grow their own consciousness.

Emily: Shantum brings an awareness of social concerns and Indian culture to the pilgrimage and I think that also has a great effect on participants, especially those of us from insulated western cultures far removed from the kind of suffering that you encounter on every street corner in India.

Angela: Shantum created a pilgrimage which gave every participant the opportunity to be immersed in The Three Jewels: the Buddha (God), the Dharma (teachings) and the Sangha (like-minded group)...My pilgrimage to India offered a complete understanding of the Buddha's teaching. (That life is constant change; to succeed in life we must remain aware of a greater power; follow teachings that promote understanding and compassion; and be surrounded by others of like mind.) This pilgrimage with its wise leader was a finger pointing ... Not to tell me what to see and how to believe, rather to give me the opportunity to grow in knowledge, experience and understanding.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, pilgrimage can involve the integration of multiple levels of awareness. A guide can play a crucial role at this juncture in allowing alternate phases of consciousness to be experienced and verified within a Buddhist symbolic system. When facilitated by the guidance of a teacher who can enrich and deepen the symbolic meaning, one's personal experience can be translated into knowledge. This is very similar to the 'cycle of meaning' described by Laughlin, McManus and d'Aquili (1990) that provides a positive feedback system, whereby symbolic expressions of a cosmology lead to an experience, which is in turn, a way to verify and vivify the cosmology. "The impetus of all viable cosmological traditions is to guide members from belief, through understanding, to some degree of realization via experiences that verify the 'reality' of the cosmology" (Laughlin et al, 1990: 228). For example, if taking refuge in the Three Jewels is caught at the level of belief and understanding without a direct experience of affirmation, the faculty of wisdom is restricted to the intellectual level of the mind. According to Hart (1988) the Buddha emphasized that no one else's realization of truth will liberate us from the prison of our own minds. Therefore, without an experiential base that is guided through ritual focus,

our realization of the Buddha-Dharma remains independent of an embodied consciousness.

Through metaphor, embodiment and knowledge (as discussed earlier) the distinction between categories of pilgrimage and tourism become clearer. We have seen how pilgrimage as a meaningful symbolic system provides an experience-based context for a coherent sense of unity and balance. As a specific ritual stimulus, pilgrimage as symbolic action evokes elements of the unconscious in an ongoing process of reconstruction and healing. The role of metaphor provides a symbolic platform that enables dialogue between deep organic structures of the mind in order to release unconscious structures to the level of human awareness. “As metaphorical meaning is imparted to symbol by our minds in the first place, there is then an engagement of the mind’s products with the mind’s sensibilities” (Prattis, 1997: 212). Through this engagement within a well defined ritual sequence the journey allows the pilgrim to move beyond analytical modeling towards an embodied understanding based on non-duality. In this regards ‘*In the Footsteps of the Buddha*’ is really a symbolic rite of passage providing an impetus for behavioral transformation. For example, at the conclusion of our pilgrimage Shantum Seth conducted a final ceremony that signified a transformation of the collective group. Each of the pilgrims was asked to construct an insight poem that was read during a formal ceremony. In this convergence of insight, Shantum provided each of the Sangha members a symbolic band of red threads that signified and sealed our pilgrimage journey. As a rite of passage I interpreted this ceremony as a transformation of identity, whereby the individual was now incorporated into a larger social collective –

the Sangha. As statements of change and transformation I would like to incorporate two insight poems:

Shattered Perceptions
Michelle

Shattered perceptions, Who am I?
Perceptions of self being washed away
Like the impermanent nature of my foot print on the river's bed
Washed away by the icy cold waters of the morn,
Waters now warmed by the afternoon sun
Each step unraveling another layer
Each step taking me closer to my ancestral roots
Each step taking me one step closer to God

Untitled
David Geary

From the Garden of Gandhi's last breath
to the sanctuary of Jeta Grove
the Dharma is the fabric
on a spinning wheel of change.

Shielded from our senses,
the great white monster roars through rural India.
Our pampered appropriating western eyes entangled,
awe, numb, stillness, aversion, repulse.
India creeps inside you like a parasite,
I am coming undone.....

The miracle of life surrounds you,
our mind the only obstacle.
Poverty shattered through dignity and generosity,
difference evaporates through a smile.
The skylight of interbeing is there,
penetrating my consciousness.

Both pilgrimage and tourism share a similar structural break from the profane (ordinary). Furthermore, both practices are often accompanied by a set of non-ordinary behaviors. For Dean MacCannell (1989: x) the tourist was seen as a postmodern figure, alienated but seeking authenticity across a fragmented world. Tourism as metaphor,

shares a similar language of transcendence implying a process of “self-discovery through a complex and sometimes arduous search for an Absolute Other” (MacCannell, 1989: 5). However, for the tourist, the differentiations of the modern world are the central attraction (MacCannell, 1989: 13). Although tourism and pilgrimage may evoke qualities of the same metaphor, it could be argued that tourism lacks a complete cycle of meaning to integrate ritual symbolism into a total view of reality. Thus tourism, unlike pilgrimage, remains a “ritual performed to the differentiations of society,” a celebration of surface and otherness (MacCannell, 1989: 13). Pilgrimage on the other hand incorporates process, preparation and mindfulness that help facilitate a restructuring of behavioral and perceptual changes in the individual. According to Shantum Seth:

Shantum: It's like us eating, we don't have time for eating so we cook instant noodles. It depends where our priorities lie, instant coffee, it's all that. I think all these things are valid and people do realize soon enough that the depth of the experience is in the cooking, not just in the taste of it. But sometimes you have to realize it by tasting it first!

Through a phenomenological relationship, pilgrimage engages with unconscious structures bringing them to the level of personal experience and awareness. Although tourism may have elements of physical and mental hardship, when (and if) there is a release of unconscious processes it lacks the application of ritual focus to integrate the experience of transformation into knowledge. One could argue that tourism as a social practice is held on the surface level, a superficial acting out of the deeper connections that are available. In this case study of Buddhist pilgrimage, Shantum Seth is both a guide and Dharma teacher who has the requisite knowledge of entire cycles of meaning integral to the process of symbolic transformation. In my opinion, *'In the Footsteps of the*

Buddha’ demonstrates a meaningful symbolic system based on nonduality that serves the interest of transformation and social change.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Their song is the theme melody that has played in hearts and minds since the dawn of consciousness. Life is hard, uncertain, fearful. I suffer. I am incomplete. But I have heard tales, in my childhood I heard legends, and I recall scraps of stories about another place, hundreds of difficult miles away, where all answers abide and problems dissolve as the chains of time and space are lifted from the soul. I set out on feet, in my heart – to find that jeweled place, to tap that boundless power that will solve the dilemma of my life.

-Alan Morinis, 1992: 27-28

For those willing to make of anthropology itself a pilgrimage, a quest for the Sacred, there is no telling where it will lead. For the true pilgrim it demands a willingness to abandon the self, both the intellectual and the religious self; it demands a total act of self-sacrifice, however momentary that may prove to be. There are pilgrims who never return from their sacred journey or who return transformed into something other than what they were. So with the anthropologist. From my own experience as an anthropologist, I can only avow that only by my working in this way can I respect and make the fullest use of the work of others, those with different goals and techniques that make up for my own deficiencies and fill in my own blind spots. Further, in terms of the personal satisfaction to which we are all entitled in our lives and in our work, no intellectual consideration has ever come near to persuading me otherwise, for if the effort has revealed anything, it is that the quest for society is one and the same thing as the quest for Self, which for some of us is also the quest for the Sacred that ultimately unites us all.

-Colin Turnbull, 1992: 274

In this thesis I have explored the transformative aspects of pilgrimage as a symbolic system. Let us return to the original five questions I proposed in the introduction. (Q. 1)¹ For anthropologists' in the past, the study of symbolism and ritual life was often restricted to objective descriptions and various classification schemes (Prattis, 1997). According to Ian Prattis (1997: 206) this is a necessary first step in "understanding the regularities and common processes underlying the enormous diversity and richness of human symbolic activity." Initially these studies were concerned "with aspects of control and order" and how symbolism was used in ritual settings "to coerce

¹ *What are the prominent theoretical orientations in anthropology for the study of pilgrimage activity?*

and constrain behavior” (Prattis, 1997: 206). For Victor Turner (1974, 1978) pilgrimage was a voluntary symbolic process that stressed a dialectic between social structure and human experience. In Turner’s words, “I am suggesting that the social mode appropriate to all pilgrimages represents a mutually energizing compromise between structure and experience” (1974 :207-208). Pilgrimage was also characterized by Turner (1974) as a liminal and transitional practice that emerges in complex societies during times of historical change. However, on a deeper level, pilgrimage was seen as both a personal and social expression that sought to reconcile tension and conflict in the mind. Through the symbolic process, pilgrimage provided a ritual context to eliminate divisiveness corresponding to a deeper level of existence. *Communitas* was central to this process in providing an emergent social energy that leads to an unstructuring of the mind’s categories and a restructuring of the self within a wider totality.

Over the last twenty years the Turnerian model of pilgrimage has been challenged as a uniform and overtly deterministic model. For John Eade and Michael Sallnow (2000[1991]), pilgrimage was seen as a contested religious void and an arena for competing interpretations. It was argued by Simon Coleman (2002) however, that both of these models share a number of theoretical nuances and we should not assume that over time we will achieve an ever more precise and coherent set of definitions. According to Dubisch (1995: 47), as a particular category of human activity, pilgrimage can be interpreted itself, as “a creation of the anthropologist’s culture”. Although I agree with Simon Coleman (2002), Dubisch (1995) and Morinis (1992), that we should continue to define and redefine the concept in various ethnographic cultural settings, it is important to avoid trying to ‘pin’ down the activity through our analytical craft. Through

problematizing the concept we should draw on our ability as researchers to weave through different theoretical paradigms such as 'communitas' and 'contestation' and open ourselves to new methodological possibilities.

I argued that it was in the direction of consciousness that we should turn in order to get at the symbolic significance of pilgrimage activity as it relates to personal and social transformation. In the last fifteen years the investigation into altered states of consciousness has become a more legitimate epistemological viewpoint (Laughlin, McManus & Shearer 1990; Given, 1993; Prattis, 1997). Despite the postmodern turn towards plurality and extreme cultural relativism, one could still argue that there exists a similar repetitive nature to certain ritual processes across cultures. I argued that if we are to explore the subjective field of transformation it requires a methodology based on experience in order to grasp reality as it is within the cultural and religious based pedagogy. In my opinion, examining the symbolically mediated components of consciousness is critical to unlocking the gap between subject and object and moving towards a deeper and more integrated level of understanding. If we agree with the teachings of the Buddha (Hanh 2001) that consciousness is the ground for all our mental formations, then this requires a different assumption of symbolism and ritual transformation to escape the dualities at the conceptual level. Subjective experience thus, becomes the ground of comparison to get at the components of consciousness prior to our intellectual assumptions. In my opinion, the study of pilgrimage can benefit from phenomenological accounts that examine the way in which pilgrims mediate between multiple phases of awareness. According to Prattis (1997) anthropology is central to this investigation in that different cultures have templates to resolve the suffering at the level

of mental formations, yet they follow a similar investigative and therapeutic path. As long as we remain attached to a particular identity (ie. pilgrim-tourist-ethnographer), our ego resists the true pilgrimage towards an experience of being totally interconnected with everything else.

(Q. 2)² When the Buddha prescribed the act of pilgrimage just before his death, he enshrined the activity as an important step along the spiritual path. “Ananda, there are four places the sight of which will arouse strong emotion in those with faith... And the monk, the nun, the laymen and the laywoman who has faith should visit these places...” (Commentary from the Mahaparinibbana Sutra, in Dhammika 1999: 1). Through the centuries following the Buddha’s final Nirvana, pilgrimage continued to be an act sanctioned by spiritual recommendation (Coleman & Elsner, 1995: 170). The pilgrimage travelogues of emperor Ashoka and the Chinese pilgrims Fa-hsien and Hsuan-tsang played a pivotal role in the rediscovery of the holy sites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Harvey (1990: 190), pilgrimage in the Buddhist tradition today has become a fairly common practice and may be done for a variety of purposes: “to bring alive events from the life of holy beings and so strengthen spiritual aspiration; to make ‘merit’, to be suffused by the power-for-good of relics and *Bodhi*-trees; to receive protection from deities at the sites; or to fulfill a vow that pilgrimage would be made if aid was received from a certain *Bodhisattva*.”

For my informants, Buddhist pilgrimage was viewed as a step towards faith, providing a deeper awareness of the Buddha-Dharma. For a number of pilgrims the journey helped shift their experience of Buddhism away from an intellectual exercise to

² What is the historic, mythic and contemporary context of Buddhist pilgrimage in North India?

an embodied practice. Similar to the internal pilgrimage of meditation (which likewise brings one closer to the goal of Nirvana) the external pilgrimage provides an important step in the experiential mapping of the Buddha's life by retracing his historical footsteps. "Today pilgrimage in Buddhism is seen to offer not only the possibility of venerating the sacred traces, but even the much rarer and ideal opportunity to follow the Buddha's own path to enlightenment itself" (Coleman & Elsner, 1995: 195). From my own participation in the field, the revitalization of the holy sites is a testament to the growing importance of Buddhist pilgrimage in the twenty-first Century. As the 'Wheel of Dharma' continues to turn, the holy sites will inevitably continue to attract an ever increasing number of pilgrims who have faith in their own awakened potential. An interesting fieldwork project would be an exploration of local and global processes shaping the Buddhist holy sites. In the Hindu cosmology, the Buddha is seen as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu. However, according to Shantam Seth, Buddhism in modern India is primarily equated with economic development. In the context of globalization and social change, exploring the cross-section of local and global perspectives would be a fascinating ethnographic enterprise.

(Q. 3)³ In this thesis I explored the symbolic process of pilgrimage as a participant. Grounding my methodology in subjective experience I assumed a phenomenological stance dissolving (as much as possible) the subject/object polarity. From this position I feel that I was able to approach the significance of transpersonal experiences that I felt were central to the unfolding relationship between symbolic action and social transformation. In chapter four I pointed towards the construction of a ritual

³ *What is the relationship between pilgrimage and the transformation of consciousness and how does it address the schism between social structure and human experience?*

and symbolic continuum involving metaphor, embodiment and knowledge. Drawing from my experience in comparison with other pilgrims I argued that pilgrimage provides a metaphor of transcendence that corresponds to internal processes of meditation between conscious and unconscious structures of the mind. As the metaphor becomes activated through the ritual process it entrenches the qualities of the symbol into the mind and senses. At this junction, physical and mental hardship help to facilitate a context of awareness where the symbolic metaphor is experienced in ever deepening ways. The role of guide (as mediator), together with consciousness disciplines (such as meditation and mindfulness), help further the integration of the symbol into direct experience. The key to the operation of this symbolic system is the shift from the metaphor as a mental construct, towards metaphor as a part of an embodied consciousness. As the metaphor enters the body through physical experience it allows what Prattis (1997) defines as a step into the “ineffable” (the field of transpersonal experience). In this context the pilgrim engages with unconscious processes bringing them to the level of personal experience. This meditating phase of transpersonal experience refers to the archetypal imagery (Jung & Campbell) and the supra-individual repository consciousness (Hanh 1999, 2001; Laughlin, McManus & d’Aquili 1990) that is not confined to the individual organism. This passage is often accompanied by an altered state of consciousness that reflects a consolidation of the essential structures of the mind through a “void-energy.” According to Prattis (1997), this void is a pivotal part of the A.S.C. where one transcends notions of time and space towards an experience of interconnection and integration within a wider field of consciousness. Attention must be given to the role of process as an important vehicle for dissolving polarities and abstractions towards a final release of the symbol

itself (Prattis, 1997). In this regard, the metaphor of pilgrimage provides a symbolic bridge to prepare us for a transformation of consciousness. As the symbol itself is released, it provides a context for “dropping away all external identifications and worldly concerns before discovering the essence of self underneath the masks and identities gathered throughout life” (Prattis, 1997: 238). One of the legacies of Victor Turner was that he demonstrated an understanding of symbolic events pointing towards the interplay of structure, process and anti-structure as it played out in the mediation of consciousness. With recent developments in transpersonal anthropology and the experiential methodology, these practical orientations provide a toolkit for further investigation of underlying transformative processes. A symbolic perspective that takes into consideration the centrality of consciousness allows us to go beyond previous theoretical endeavors towards an understanding of the neurophysiological processes that lead to behavioral and perceptual changes.

For some of my informants it was in this unbounded state that one could take refuge in the unfolding symbology of the Three Jewels. For example, the universal qualities of the Dharma were felt to be experienced and verified firsthand within the Buddhist hermeneutic. The dialogue between conscious and unconscious processes was characterized by an enlarged perspective of interconnection that was formerly not possible. From this perspective, the Buddha-Dharma is no longer a set of mental constructions but an embodied knowledge mediated by dialogue in Buddhist symbology and pilgrimage. According to Prattis (1997), a transformation of consciousness takes place when there is a direct experience of reality that is not bound by historical and existential constraints of time and space. “We yearn for these glimpses, fleeting

experiences, and the lack of them, drives the hunger in our civilization for meaningful symbolic systems” (Prattis, 1997: 226). In Buddhism there is a cosmological premise that there exists an Ultimate reality that is beyond our conventional language. From this case study, Buddhist pilgrimage as a context of symbolic action allows the practitioner to take steps towards this reality.

(Q. 4)⁴ According to Prattis (1997) there is a deep hunger for ritual in our contemporary society. We are living in “a civilization that has apparently lost touch with the unconscious, the symbolic significance of myth and with how ritual enactments lead to personal transformation” (Prattis, 1997: 220). As examples of modern ritual, it could be argued that both tourism and pilgrimage share a similar metaphoric language of transcendence. As a continuum of cultural journeying I argued that tourism can be an example of the fragmentation of a symbolic system that in some cases, may not serve the interests of transformation and societal change. On the other hand, I argued that the pilgrimage process provided a meaningful symbolic base that allows deeper unconscious structures to be integrated with personal awareness. An important aspect of the pilgrimage journey for my informants was this capacity to recognize their own Buddha-nature. If the archetypal experience of Enlightenment lies outside our mental categories of both time and space, it requires a ritual process that transcends notions of opposition and separation.

The blurring of boundaries between tourists and pilgrims is in many ways, characteristic of the postmodern condition and the crisis of historicity. I agree with MacCannell (1976) that both tourists and pilgrims are on the leading edge of the social

⁴ *What are the similarities and differences between the categories of pilgrimage and tourism in the context of symbolic transformation?*

construction of reality, but I disagree in that it has to be a celebration of distance and differences. Unlike aspects of tourism, pilgrimage may be an attempt to dissolve the modern consciousness that seeks boundaries of differentiation, otherness and identity. This reflexive construction towards consciousness raising requires a transformation at the base. Pilgrimage in this context, can be interpreted as the root metaphor and paradigmatic model that presents a dynamic space to liberate the mind from its own self constructed prison. If pilgrimage and tourism share the common sentiment towards the betterment of human life, than this particular study points towards a social and cultural practice that seeks to reconstruct a new consciousness for the twenty-first Century.

(Q. 5)⁵ Throughout this thesis I have situated my writing in relation to my own subjective discoveries. This has been met with some successes and failures. When the pilgrimage began in early February, I dropped my identification as a graduate student and with complete participation I assumed the role of a pilgrim. Unlike previous explorations along the tourist path, my understanding of pilgrimage was based primarily on literature and exotic tales of spiritual quest. Furthermore, Buddhism and the religious wisdom of Dharma was predominantly a recent exploration in my own spiritual journey. As a result, I set forth on the organized pilgrimage walking the fine line between scholarship and belief. Like most of my informants, this particular journey provided a great deal of insight that extends well beyond the scope of this thesis. One of the challenges I have had in adopting a phenomenological and experiential agenda to the study of pilgrimage was that my diary was often caught at the descriptive level. In hindsight, my phenomenological diary was not paying enough attention to my own mental states. As a

⁵ *What are the strengths and weaknesses of a phenomenological and experiential approach to the study of pilgrimage?*

result, I have been unable to provide comprehensive phenomenological accounts that would qualify the experience of the pilgrimage process in greater detail. Secondly, pilgrimage in the context of this case study provided a very subtle process of transformation. In this respect, the journey facilitated a much more gradual and long lasting impression that was not immediately recognized in the course of the '*Footsteps*' pilgrimage. However, if it had not been for some previous background in meditative training it may have been impossible to recognize the range of altered states pertinent to these findings. Furthermore, the analysis of subjective transformation in the context of pilgrimage is a challenging conceptual endeavor. As a result, I have had to fall back on the vocabulary of symbolic anthropology in order to provide some coherent structure to outline this processual ritual form. One thing is clear, it would have been impossible to uncover these insights at the level of symbolic transformation without direct experience of the pilgrimage process.

In conclusion, to approximate the experience of both pilgrimage and tourism it requires a sensitivity and sincere effort at participant observation to find a vocabulary that expresses the human aspirations of these informants. Despite the apparent differences between categories of travelers, it is important that we maintain a reflexive position to see that all categories of social practice are valid human experiences. If we are to respect our subjects in the field then we cannot deny the importance of human emotion and human aspirations in the process of cultural journeying. As the tourist is both motivated and guided by these aspirations, so is the pilgrim through the power of faith and spiritual inspiration. We often forget that the anthropological endeavor shares a similar motif in its search for knowledge. Further studies in the field of pilgrimage are going to be

seriously deficient if they do not pay attention to the effects of human emotion and spiritual aspiration. As an internal process of transformation, readmitting one's own subjective involvement alongside the spiritual experience of others is still likely to take us closer to the spirit of the process. Colin Turnbull (1992: 262) provides valuable insight on the dynamic of the researcher in this field:

If religious belief is difficult enough for the anthropologist to deal with adequately, religious faith by its very nonrational nature seems to present even greater obstacles...for the only way that I can see by which we can effectively tackle faith is for the fieldworker to be willing to sacrifice his academic self and perhaps his personal, moral, and 'religious' self and, through this self-sacrifice, open himself to total, unfettered participation in the process of spiritual quest and subject himself as nearly as possible to the same conditions in time and space to which the other pilgrims are subjected. However intensive the intellectual preparation for such a venture, in itself it is not enough. The degree to which we can project our own resultant experience upon that of the other pilgrims is, of course, questionable; but we can at least follow the model, as part of our participant technique, of those other pilgrims, some of whom make such projections, or seek to compare experiences, while others are content with their personal experience and prefer to keep it private...but the experience itself may determine a change of preference. All these facts will be revealed only by total participation (Turnbull, 1992: 262).

If anthropology claims a holistic and eclectic approach to the study of social and cultural phenomena, than it would be intellectually arrogant to shield our vision of analysis away from the inherent subjective aspects of our work. If we reexamine consciousness as it caters to the pilgrimage process then it brings the scholar and pilgrim closer to a vision of ourselves in the unfolding quest for human truth.

Appendix A

Letter of Introduction

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is David Geary and I am a graduate student pursuing a master's degree in Anthropology (MA) at Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. I am in the process of gathering information about Buddhist pilgrimage and tourism, particularly as it relates to the transformation of consciousness and I would like to request your participation in this project. The supervisor for this MA thesis is Professor Ian Prattis, Department of Anthropology, Carleton University.

I am aware that the topic of religious belief and spiritual practices are of a personal nature and you may choose to withdraw from the research at any time. Please note that your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. Your choice to participate will require the completion of the attached consent form. Please respond only to those questions you feel comfortable answering.

This information you give me will be used solely for the purpose of my research, and will be held in strict confidence. Completed questionnaires and interview materials will be read only by myself. I will eliminate any identifying information from my thesis product, and from any research, articles, or books not yet written or published. All interview material will be stored in strict confidence from this date and destroyed following my thesis submission in July 2003. All materials will be locked in a safe or remain on the researcher at all times. This interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes.

Thank you very much for your time and input.

Sincerely,

David Geary
499 Bay Street
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K1R 6A9

Phone: (613) 234-9115
Email: dgeary@connectmail.carleton.ca
Please send attachments to the above
Address.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

I have been approached by David Geary to participate in an interview for his MA thesis on Buddhist pilgrimage and tourism. I have been told and understand the following ethical guidelines:

- Participation in this project is entirely voluntary.
- I can refuse to answer any questions and may withdraw from the interview at any time.
- The information I provide will be held in strict confidence and will read only by the researcher, David Geary.
- All identifying information from this interview will be eliminated from the thesis product, research, articles, or books not yet written or published.

This consent form clarifies the nature of my involvement in this research project: the rights as a researcher participant, and the responsibilities of the researcher.

I _____ agree to participate in David Geary's study as described to me. I understand that I am free to respond to only those questions I feel comfortable answering, and that I may withdraw from this study at any time. I understand that David Geary may quote parts of my questionnaire responses in any written material resulting from this study, but that he will do so in a manner that fully conceals my identity. Information you give me will be used solely for the purpose of my research, and will be held in strict confidence.

Signature of Interviewee _____

Date: _____

Any complaints relating to the nature of the interview and the research process may be communicated to Professor Brian Given, Graduate coordinator of the Anthropology Department at Carleton University. He can be reached at the following number: (613) 520-2585. Alternatively you may wish to contact the Chair of the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee, Klaus Pohle, Klaus_pohle@carleton.ca, (613) 520-7434.

Appendix C

Sample of Questions for Structured Interviews

-What is your age and country of residence?

1. Please describe your regular spiritual practices (example: meditation, yoga, chanting, etc.)? How often do you partake in these activities?
2. Do you consider yourself a Buddhist practitioner, please briefly describe your tradition, background, etc?
3. What were your motivations for participating in "the footsteps of the Buddha" pilgrimage with Shantum Seth?
4. What effect (at this stage) has this pilgrimage had in your life? What experiences or impressions do you recall that are still close to you? Please describe.
5. How do you see pilgrimage situated in the context of your practice? How has this assisted you in your own spiritual journey?
6. Do you consider yourself a 'tourist' and or 'pilgrim' while participating in "the footsteps of the Buddha."? Please explain your understanding of these categories and your experience of them.
7. Did you ever experience or feel any personal or social transformation within the pilgrimage process? If applicable please describe this experience.
8. What has been your experience of other pilgrims (outside the sangha) during this trip?
9. How did the physical hardships of India contribute to the pilgrimage cycle?
10. Do you feel that the 'mode' of transportation contributes in some way to the pilgrimage experience?
11. How does pilgrimage in your opinion address taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha?
12. Please discuss any opinions and experiences that were not expressed in response to the above questions, but which you believe could enhance my understanding of your personal experience of pilgrimage.

Appendix D

Glossary of Terms¹

- Bodhi: Enlightenment, realization. Also called samma sambodhi. The papal tree (ficus religiosa) came to known as the Bodhi tree or Bo tree after the Buddha attained Enlightenment under this tree at BodhGaya.
- Bodhisattva: the ideal of the Mahayana tradition, an individual who delays his own Enlightenment in order to lead other sentient beings to deliverance.
- Chaitya: a sacred place; most commonly used as halls of worship.
- Dharma: translated variously as the natural law, the truth, the teaching of enlightened ones, religion, social order, righteousness and so on. Used through out this text to refer to the teachings of the Buddha.
- Dhammapada: religious book containing the sayings of the Buddha.
- Nirvana: simplest translation, Enlightenment; it is also peace; the death of craving, detachment; extinction. Nirvana is a condition to be experienced by a person who has eliminated the notion of self.
- Pali: the Indo-Aryan language that was written down in the first Century BCE.
- Parinirvana: the final extinction from samsara, the cycle of birth, life and death.
- Puja: the chief mode of worship in Hindu tradition.
- Sakyamuni: another name of Lord Buddha. Sakyamuni literally means the saint of the Sakyas, the clan to which the Buddha was born.
- Samsara: the endless cycle of birth and rebirth.
- Sangha: the Buddhist community of monks and nuns, founded by the Buddha in Sarnath.
- Sanskrit: classical Indian language; language in which the Hindu religious texts were written.
- Stupa: a dome-shaped Buddhist reliquary.
- Sutra (sutta): aphoristic scripture: said to be the original teachings of the Buddha.

¹ Definitions provided in Mitra (1999: 184 - 186)

Appendix E

Geographical Map of India¹

¹ Map provided by Mitra (1999)

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