

*brance on God's Name. In it are the many sacred shrines of pilgrimage and cleansing baths." (SGGSJ, p.184)*

### **The Naam—Unstruck Internal Melody**

*"The Naam, the Name of the Lord, is austerity, chastity and cleansing baths at sacred shrines of pilgrimage." (SGGSJ, p.153)*

*"Walking sticks, begging bowls, hair tufts, sacred threads, loin cloths, pilgrimages to sacred shrines and wandering all around - without the Lord's Name, peace and tranquillity are not obtained. One who chants the Name of the Lord, Har, Har, crosses over to the other side" (SGGSJ, p.1127)*

### **Humility**

*"The cleansing baths at the sixty-eight sacred shrines of pilgrimage are in the dust of his feet." (SGGSJ, p.224)*

### **The Heart**

*"I do not go to see sacred shrines of pilgrimage, or bathe in their waters; I do not bother any beings or creatures. The Guru has shown me the sixty-eight places of pilgrimage within my own heart, where I now take my cleansing bath. ||3|| I do not pay attention to anyone praising me, or calling me good and nice. Says Naam Dayv, my consciousness is imbued with the Lord; I am absorbed in the profound state of Samaadhi." (SGGSJ, p.973)*

### **Fasting**

Fasting is primarily the act of willingly abstaining from some or all food, drink, or both, for a period of time. It has formed part of religious traditions since the beginning of religion and is mentioned in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testament, the Qur'an, the Mahabharata, and the Upanishads.

Sikh dharma is again probably the only major spiritual tradition that does not promote fasting except for medical reasons.

*"Fasting, daily rituals, and austere self-discipline - those who keep the practice of these, are rewarded with less than a shell." (SGGSJ, p.216)*

*"I have stopped fasting on the eleventh day of each month; why should I bother to go on pilgrimages to sacred shrines? ||1|| Prays Naam Dayv, I have become a man of good deeds and good thoughts. Chanting the Lord's Name, under Guru's Instructions, who has not gone to heaven?" (SGGSJ, p.718)*

*"The mind is not softened by fasting or austerities. Nothing else is equal to worship of the Lord's Name" (SGGSJ, p.905)*

*"Chanting and deep meditation, penance and austere self-discipline, fasting and purification - salvation does not come by any of these means. Please lift me up and out of this deep, dark ditch; O God, please bless Nanak with Your Glance of Grace." (SGGSJ, p.1301)*

### **Let Your Fast be Truth**

*"Those who have truth as their fast, contentment as their sacred shrine of pilgrimage, spiritual wisdom and meditation as their cleansing bath, kindness as their deity, and forgiveness as their chanting beads - they are the most excellent people." (SGGSJ, p.1245)*

### **Conclusion**

Sikh dharma is a spiritual tradition beyond simple ideas such as fasting and pilgrimage. It teaches that humility, compassion, company of spiritual people and most importantly Naam are the ultimate tools for spiritual evolution.



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# Sikh Views on Pilgrimage and Fasting

Sikh Dharma

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## Introduction

Many religions and spiritual traditions of the world recommend a combination of pilgrimage, fasting, austere discipline, asceticism, praying in a particular way etc. This essay looks at the teachings of the Sikh Gurus with regards to such spiritual practices.

## Pilgrimage in World Religions

A pilgrimage is generally a journey to a place which is regarded as special by a group of people such as Mecca for Muslims, Israel for Jews, Christians and Bahai's, Kapilavastu the birthplace of Buddha for Buddhists etc.

The journey to a site of pilgrimage is regarded as one of the most noble or highest spiritually cleansing deeds that a human can perform.

The Sikh Gurus disagreed with the supposed benefits of this common idea prevalent in both Abrahamic and Indian religions and taught that simply visiting any specific physical place will not create spiritual enlightenment.

*"Keeping your fasts, reciting your prayers, and reading the Kalma, the Islamic creed, shall not take you to paradise. The Temple of Mecca is hidden within your mind, if you only knew it. ||2|| That should be your prayer, to administer justice. Let your Kalma be the knowledge of the unknowable Lord. Spread your prayer mat by conquering your five desires, and you shall recognize the true religion. ||3|| "* (SGGSJ, p.480)

*"The egotists may go on pilgrimages to holy rivers, sacred shrines and foreign lands, but they only gather more of the dirt of egotism."* (SGGSJ, p.116)

*"But what is the use of bathing at sacred shrines of pilgrimage, when the filth of stubborn pride is within the mind?"* (SGGSJ, p.61)

*"I have tried visiting all the sacred shrines of pilgrimage, fasting, ceremonial feasts and giving to charities. They do not measure up to the Name of the Lord, Har, Har."* (SGGSJ, p.699)

*"If I am pleasing to Him, then that is my pilgrimage and cleansing bath. Without pleasing Him, what good are ritual cleansings?"* (SGGSJ, p.2)

*"Pilgrimages, austere discipline, compassion and charity - these, by themselves, bring only an iota of merit. Listening and believing with love and humility in your mind, cleanse yourself with the Name, at the sacred shrine deep within."* (SGGSJ, p.4)

*"Filth does not stick to those who are true, but filth attaches itself to those who love duality. This filth cannot be washed off, even by bathing at the sixty-eight sacred shrines of pilgrimage. The self-willed manmukh does deeds in egotism; he earns only pain and more pain."* (SGGSJ, p.87)

## Progressive Revelation

It is reasonable to ask why Sikh dharma teaches a different teaching compared to most of the other religions of the world and the answer is progressive revelation. It was indeed fruitful in past ages for people to perform their various pilgrimages, disciplines and rituals. But this is not the best teaching for the current age.

In today's society people do not have as much time and live busy lives. So they need a method of purification and enlightenment which is accessible in their own homes like Internet!

*"Celibacy, self-discipline and pilgrimages were the essence of Dharma in those past ages; but in this Dark Age of Kali Yuga, the Praise of the Lord's Name is the essence of Dharma. ||2|| Each and every age has its own essence of Dharma; study the Vedas and the Puraanas, and see this as true.*

*They are Gurmukh, who meditate on the Lord, Har, Har; in this world, they are perfect and approved."* (SGGSJ, p.797)

## What is True Pilgrimage?

True pilgrimage is when a human meditates on God in their hearts, practices humility, does selfless good deeds and connects to the Naam. All of these items constitute the true transformation pilgrimage of the self.

## The Guru

*"The Guru is the Boat to carry me across the world-ocean; the Guru is the Sacred Shrine of Pilgrimage, the Guru is the Holy River."* (SGGSJ, p.17)

## The Company of Spiritual People

*"Let the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy, be your cleansing baths at the sixty-eight sacred shrines of pilgrimage."* (SGGSJ, p.47)

*"For the Gurmukh, meeting with the Society of the Saints is like making a pilgrimage to a sacred shrine."* (SGGSJ, p.597)

## Loving Devotion

*"Pilgrimages, fasts, purification and self-discipline are of no use, nor are rituals, religious ceremonies or empty worship. O Nanak, emancipation comes only by loving devotional worship; through duality, people are engrossed in duality."* (SGGSJ, p.75)

## Showing Kindness

*"Be kind to all beings-this is more meritorious than bathing at the sixty-eight sacred shrines of pilgrimage and the giving of charity. "* (SGGSJ, p.136)

## Constant Worship

*"The sixty-eight sacred shrines of pilgrimage are contained in the constant worship of the feet of the Exalted Guru."* (SGGSJ, p.147)

*"Twenty-four hours a day, meditate in remem-*