

## Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism: A Path to Sufism

Tariq Elhadary, PhD

Ministry of Presidential Affairs, Scholarships Office, UAE

[tariqelhadary@yahoo.com](mailto:tariqelhadary@yahoo.com); [tariqelhadary1@gmail.com](mailto:tariqelhadary1@gmail.com)

Scholarships Office, 73505 Alnajda st., Abu Dhabi, UAE 00971505939028

The paper attempts to shed some light on religious tourism as a broad term which lends itself to cover Muslim tourism, Christian tourism, or any other religion linked with the term 'tourism'. The paper likens religious tourism to Sufi travel and wander. It inquires about the similarities between Sufi wander and religious tourism, and what they both have in common. Moreover, how far and true religious tourism embodies the essence of Sufism in its search for love, peace, and knowledge. Sufism embraces love as a means of transformation to better human beings; Where does religious tourism stand as far as transformation is concerned? Can the experience of exploring the place and interacting with the people render any new meanings of love for both the Sufi as a religious tourist and the religious tourist as a Sufi mystic? Pilgrims often regard the journey they take as a physical manifestation of an inner spiritual journey, with the path travelled being a framework for the travel within (Hall 2006). "The role of tourism is to provide people with a chance to become familiar with the natural world, with animate and inanimate nature as God's creation. They are thus able to use their free time for their own spiritual enrichment, even their moral renewal, by exploring the ultimate cause and meaning of their existence." Jafari (2000:497).

"Travel brings power and love back into your life." "Would you become a pilgrim on the road of love? The first condition is that you make yourself humble as dust and ashes." - Jalaluddin Rumi  
Travel, power, love, and humility are virtues both Sufism and religious tourism render. Much has been said about Sufism in the literature but as a rule of thumb I will only present and emphasize what follows the Qur'anic teaching and I will exclude whatever does not. Sufism has found a reason of belonging in the parable of Prophet Moses with the pious man (Khidr) in Q18:60-83. It is worth noting here that Sufism has not been mentioned in the Qur'an. However, Sufism considers the parable of Moses and Khidr as the main source of Islamic Sufism, this mysterious remote sea full of secrets is the dream of Sufism, Bahgat (1984: 36). Sufi mystic experiences, rituals, and trials are spiritual exercises to purify hearts to God for hope of being endowed by some of these secrets of God's knowledge. Knowledge could be a serious legitimate reason for traveling. We travel in search of education to learn more about all areas of interest. Whose heart has been purified to God, witnesses His wisdom, and contemplates His miraculous manufacture nothing will bother him; even disasters and pains won't affect him. Isn't it what tourists and pilgrims aim at upon disembarkation on religious tourism and pilgrimage? This is the way Sufism learns from the story of Moses and Khidr and hopes to pursue.

{We raise in degrees whom We will, but over every possessor of knowledge is one [more] knowing. Q12:76}

It is interesting to mention here AlAyashi travel as an example of this merge between Sufism and religious tourism. Here the following poem by Jalaluddin Rumi fits as an approach to AlAyashi travel:

"Two there are who are never satisfied -- the lover of the world and the lover of knowledge."  
Literature is teemed with cases where religious tourism and Sufism meet in their search for knowledge, and in achieving that they both handle the process with love. It suffices to mention here the case of Al Rumi and Shams. Both religious tourism and Sufism entail certain elements

of patience and suffering in order to get the sublime knowledge, the knowledge of the few, the elite!

Ahmed Bahgat is of the opinion that Sufism, as a spiritual experience, is the art of reaching to God. This reaching to God may end up in different states but all have something in common which is love. Sufis find out that they love God more than anyone ever does. They see love as an original component of the universe and one of its profound secrets.

Sufism respects silence and considers it a means of keeping secrets coming down. At the same time, silence is the shrine of meditation in religious tourism. Meditation, yoga rituals, and prayers are different forms and different religions but all talk the same language, and lead to the same results. Further discussion related to Hinduism, and Christianity will be dealt with as well.

“Eat Pray Love” by Elizabeth Gilbert is a work of art and true story that epitomizes the essence of what I want to convey in this paper. Liz a divorced, distressed though successful writer left everything behind- a husband, a house, and a successful career- and went on a journey which has entailed religious tourism assignments here and there in India, and Indonesia. She has sought the power of prayer in her travel and that helped her attain that self-discovery, awareness, and spiritual nourishment.

“Every war and every conflict between human beings has happened because of some disagreement about names. It is such an unnecessary foolishness, because just beyond the arguing there is a long table of companionship set and waiting for us to sit down. What is praised is one, so the praise is one too, many jugs being poured into a huge basin. All religions, all this singing one song. The differences are just illusion and vanity. Sunlight looks a little different on this wall than it does on that wall and a lot different on this other one, but it is still one light. We have borrowed these clothes, these time-and-space personalities, from a light, and when we praise, we are pouring them back in.” - Jalaluddin Rumi.

Key Words: Religious tourism, Sufism, Pilgrimage, Hinduism, Suffering, beauty, Love, Knowledge, Peace.

#### References:

- Abu Salem Abdullah B. Muhammed AlAyashi. (2006). *Alreblah Alayashiyyah*. Abu Dhabi: Dar Alsuwaidi.
- Al-Bukhari, Muhammad b. Ismail. (2003). *Sahihi al-Bukhari*. Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm.
- Bahgat, Ahmed (2008). *Bihar alhob end alsoufiyyah*. Cairo: Shorouk.
- Cantwell, Cathy and Kawanami, Hiroko. (2002). “Buddhism”, in Woodhead, Linda et al. (eds.) *Religions in the modern world: traditions and transformations*. London: Routledge.
- Cobbold, Evelyn. (2008). *Pilgrimage to Mecca*. Riyadh: King Abdulaziz Public Library.
- Gilbert, Elizabeth. (2006). *Eat, Love, Pray*. New York: Penguin.
- Hall, C.M. (2006): Buddhism, Tourism and the Middle Way. In: Timothy, D.J.--Olsen, D.H. (eds.): *Tourism, Religion & Spiritual Journeys*. Oxon: Routledge, pp. 172-185
- Ibn Kathir. (2001). *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*. 3 vols. Beirut: Almaktabah Alassriyyah.
- Jafari, Jafar (eds.) (2000). *Encyclopedia of Tourism*. London:Routledge.

Scott, Julia, Selwyn, Tom (2010). *Thinking Through Tourism*. New York: Berg.

Shafak, Elif (2010). *The Forty Rules of Love*. London: Penguin.

Smith, David. (2002). "Hinduism", in Woodhead, Linda et al. (eds.) *Religions in the modern world: traditions and transformations*. London: Routledge.

Woodhead, Linda et al. (2002). (eds.) *Religions in the modern world: traditions and transformations*. London: Routledge.

Zargar, Cyrus Ali. (2011). *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn 'Arabi and 'Iraqi*. Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press.