



## Tourism and Escaping Quotidian Interactions; A Philosophical Analysis Based on the Islamic Mystical Vision of Human Nature

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### Abstract

Recreation and entertainment are among the major objectives and intentions of tourism. The reasons put forward by tourists include escaping quotidian life and social interactions. Relying on the Muslim mystics' view of the real nature of human being, this article offers an analysis of escaping quotidian life and environment in the discovery of real identity and studies the role of travelling in this regard. This analysis showed that from the Muslim mystics' viewpoint, the real nature of humans is impoverishment and desperate need for a *raison d'être*. Meantime, social interactions and affiliation with minor and major social groups overshadow such identity and create obstacles in the way of self-awareness. That explains why the disciples of Islamic Sufism were recommended retreatment. Even today, traveling and tourism provide such an opportunity for humans to distance themselves from the social groups and classes they belong to for some time and gain spiritual experience through a more precise perception of their own reality.

**Keywords:** tourism, spiritual tourism, entertainment, social interaction, retreatment

## Introduction

Travelling, as an important human activity, has evolved in unison with other aspects of life from extended to complicated forms and found new diverse utilities in the sectors of industry and technology. Formerly recognized as a form of austerity and a cumbersome issue due to transportation problems, giving moral experts sufficient cause to encourage perfectionist human beings to travel, traveling is now a method of calm and recreation. Recreation and entertainment are among the significant objectives of travellers to the point that it is highlighted in the definition suggested by the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 1995.<sup>1</sup> However, “why do tourists turn to travel for recreation and passing their leisure time?” could be a significant question in the field of philosophy of tourism. Apart from various recreational, scientific, cultural and economic attractions the host area could offer to tourists and motivate them to travel, can the issue of separation from living environment and quotidian interactions persuade them to travel? Some researchers would respond affirmatively, arguing that humans are willing to distance themselves from quotidian life and social interactions because that is joyful per se for humans (Goeldner, 2007: 234).

Such approach to the issue of tourism has led certain experts to consider escape from the environment and cutting quotidian social interactions as an essential characteristic of tourism and incorporate it in their definition of tourism. On such basis, tourism is transitory scape from normal, quotidian interactions (Di Giovine, 2008: 145). This definition looks at this phenomenon from an anthropological aspect instead of relying on the element of social interaction and introducing tourism as a tool for upgrading this objective with a view to exploring the essential and natural features of traveling. In this definition, traveling is recognized as a factor keeping humans away for some time from the circle of social groups where someone belongs and alleviating the psychological burden of the responsibilities created by affiliation with these groups.

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<sup>1</sup>The activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited) Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework, Eurostat, OECD, WTO, UNSD, 2001, paras 1.1and 2.1

Paying attention to this aspect of tourism would prompt us to focus further on the elements and components of this concept in our definition of tourism and not limit it to merely an activity dependent on social interactions. In common definitions of tourism, social aspects are highlighted while natural elements and specifications are rarely concentrated upon. In one case for example, tourism is defined as a tool and way for social communications and interaction between individuals (Tribe, 2009: 45). That is while it seems that interaction and communications with others could not be categorized under the natural elements and components of tourism. Rather, tourism must be seen as an individual activity and be studied from such perspective. Some pundits view tourism as studying humans regardless of their homeland and their conventional and non-conventional world (Jafari, 1977: 6-11).

Although in the aforesaid approach, the issue of escaping the environment would strongly motivate tourists to travel, it remains to be known why escaping the environment is so attractive to persuade humans to travel. Based on a relevant analysis, today, humans are living and working under various environmental conditions. Their professional life is dictated by their social life, employment status, family, friends and neighbours. But, in leisure time and on vacation they emancipate themselves from all such restrictions. However, when they travel as tourists they are placed in a different classification that would contemplate their covert character (Howie, 2003: 50).

Basically, the existence of such pleasant but unknown feeling would encourage humans to travel and would motivate tourism in modern social human being. In fact, the feeling of welfare and comfort obtained from traveling is the effect of self-emancipation from such attachments whose extent has become broader in light of the complexities of modern societies.

Although social responsibilities and the obligations resulting from affiliation with social groups would impose a psychological burden upon humans and finding a chance, albeit short, for emancipation would be pleasant and joyful and persuade humans to travel, finding a better knowledge of humans and considering their metaphysical dimensions one may provide a more precise analysis of the causes of humans' intention to escape the environment and choose to travel.

This research is seeking to philosophically analyze this motivation of tourists. to that effect, the main topic of this research is to provide a

philosophical analysis of the causes of humans' willingness to escape the environment and to explain the role of travel in filling this essential need and tendency of human being

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this research is the Islamic mysticism's view of the essence of human being and his existential dimensions. Theoretical mysticism, as a branch of Islamic sciences, incorporates coherent and systematic principles and teachings about such issues as God, Universe and human being. Muslim mystics began reflecting upon such issues from the very first centuries and finally in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AH, prominent Muslim mystic Mohiuddin Arabi presented a coherent framework. After Ibn Arabi, interpreters completed this framework and in the end, a coherent framework was presented about one of the most important issues of divinity. In this regard, human essence, human perfection and human's status in the system of being are among the most important issues to have been discussed in theoretical mysticism.

In Islamic mysticism, human being represents the Universe on a small scale, thereby incorporating all stages of being. These stages are labyrinth-shaped and each stage is surrounded by another stage. The most profound sphere of human being is his mystery and truth. That is unified with the innermost stage of being, i.e. one God, and that is the main element of human beings' final perfection and their real identity. However, the innermost stage of existence has been mainly ignored by humans who turn to social identity for self-perception, which would mislead them to false self-identification. That explains why retreatment is recommended to wayfarers so that they would remove this false identity and find a clear knowledge of themselves.

### **Methodology**

The method used for this research has been based on documents and the information has been gathered from libraries while data analysis will be qualitative. In this regard, by referring to works from Abu Nasr Serraj Tousi, Mostamli Bukhari, Abolqasem Qashiri, Abu Hamed Ghazali, Rouzbehani Baqli, Abu Yahya Razi, Abdurrazaq Kashani, Abutaleb Makki, Shahabuddin Sohrevardi, Najmuddin Kobra, Muhiuddin Ibn Arabi, and Davoud Qeysri, the identity of human beings in Islamic mysticism has been explained before being analyzed based on the causal relationship between the two dependent

and independent variables of the research. The independent variable in this research is the motivation for recreation and leisure time in tourists and the dependent variable is escaping the environment.

### **Human Identity in Islamic Mysticism and Natural Dependence on God**

Questions about the reality of human beings have occupied the minds of researchers from various branches of science. What primarily distinguishes various viewpoints in this sector is the acceptance or rejection of non-material dimension for human beings. Materialists, including physicalists, dismiss the existence of any non-material dimension and instead attribute all mental and physical behaviors as well as psychological states and characteristics to the material dimension and adopt an evolutionary approach vis-à-vis their formation. But rational philosophers including Muslim philosopher and theologians recognize the non-material dimension of humans, considering non-material origin for every mental and physical behavior, feeling and activity. Muslim mystics have also recognized the non-material dimension of humans and attribute the reality and originality of humans to such dimension. Having acknowledged the non-material dimension, they also attribute numerous grades to it and tie humans' real self-perception and self-knowledge to knowing the innermost levels of the grades of the non-material dimension.

What distinguishes Islamic mysticism from other thinking currents in terms of their views of the non-material aspect of human being is that it considers various stages for the non-material aspect of human being. In the introduction to his interpretation of Fusus al-Hikam, Qeysari views human being as a small representation of the exterior world. As the exterior world comprises overlapping worlds, human beings comprise overlapping grades: mystery (serr), arcane state (khafi), soul (ruh), heart (galb), logos (kaleme), fear (ro'), core (foad), chest (sadr), wisdom (agl) and spirit (nafs) (Qeysari, ۱۴۰۷: ۱۳۸). Among these grades, mystery is the innermost stage of human's existence and the very reality of human being. An outstanding feature of mystery is that it intertwined with the reason of being in such a way that knowing the mystery would mean knowing the reason of God's being. Consequently, journey towards God would be achieved from human's attention to this stage of his own existence (Kashani, 2006: 125). In other words, when someone can personally find knowledge about this stage of his

existence, he will personally know about the Creator and reason of his own being, which mystics refer to as spiritual journey (Tabatabaei, 1987: 76).

Another important feature of mystery in human's being is the intertwinement with incapacity and need. Human beings are indigent with truth and those who have got to know the mystery and their identity can understand this need and dependence. To that effect, Muslim mystics see poverty as a stage of human perfection and define poor as those who are aware of their natural poverty. For instance, Mostamli Bukhari describes indigence in mysticism as follows:

*Know that indigence is a major principle and the principle of the religion of this tribe (Sufism) is indigence. The reality of indigence is supplication and humans are suppliant. This is because adoration is dispossession and he who is not a master will be a slave... Thus, servants remain indigent even though they might have the entire Universe while God remains rich without the Universe. That is because He is naturally rich while servants are naturally poor* (Mostamli Bukhari, 1984, 3: 1040).

Hafez recounts this reality in a poetic form:

*Thank God the tavern door is finally open  
for I've pressed my face to its door in need*

*He is all drunkenness, pride, and arrogance  
we are all desperation, weakness, and need*  
(Divan Hafez, Sonnet 40)

This characteristic of mystery(serr), i.e. indigence and supplication, has been endorsed by revelatory words of Quran in addition to having been witnessed by mystics:

*O mankind, you are those in need of Allah, while Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy.* (The Holy Quran, 35:15)

Such indigence, which has been highlighted in the words of Muslim mystics, is used to prove the being of God (Sadruddin Shirazi, 1981, 1: 152). That indicates that human beings depend on God not only with regard to the requirements of being, but also with regard to the very principle of being and are not independent in existence (Oboudiat, 2007: 257). And under the aegis of communication with his Creator and raison d'être, he would be able to overcome his natural indigence, i.e. his real identity, in which case he would

be enriched with divinity. This reality may be seen as the interpretation of God's words that "If they are poor, Allah will enrich them from His Bounty. And Allah (is) All-Encompassing, All-Knowing" (The Holy Quran, 24:32).

According to RuzbihanBaqli's interpretation of the aforesaid Quranic verse, the virtue granted upon the poor by God is a divine knowledge that would lead humans out of indigence and unreal richness (Baqli, 2008, 3: 9).

By recognizing this standpoint of Islamic mysticism regarding the identity of humans and communications with God, it may be said that wayfaring towards God, which Islamic mystics see as the ultimate destination of wayfarers, is in fact bracing for a purer self-perception and self-identification. The more transparent the wayfarer's self-perception the more transparent his knowledge of God will be. The contrary is also true. Taking more steps in the way of knowing God will lead to more success in self-identification.

In the holy Quran, God says: "And be not like those who have forgotten God, so that God has made them forget themselves. Such are the reprobates" (the Holy Quran, 59:19).

Allameh Tabatabaei explains this Quranic verse as follows:

*After human forget God they will forget His names of perfection and transcendent qualities to which are directly related human beings' natural qualities too. That implies he would natural indigence and need. Humans forcibly consider their soul to be free in the Universe and imagine that life, power and knowledge and every other source of perfection belong to him* (Tabatabaei, 1417 AH, 19: 219).

After knowing the real identity of humans from the standpoint of Islamic mysticism, questions will be brought up about other forms of self-awareness vis-à-vis this real identity and how they take shape in human being and why they could not be considered as self-awareness and true identity. In the following section, we will review the concept of identity from a psychological point of view and try to find out how attachment to social groups has hindered correct identity status to prevent human beings from correct self-awareness.

## 2. Social Interactions and Self-Awareness

Presenting any analysis about the motivational factors of travelling in modern societies depends on knowing the social life and the role of social interactions in the formation of identity and individual self-awareness. In psychology, the

identity of every individual implies his self-perception and self-awareness. Erikson in 1968 defined identity as one's feeling of himself in early ages that would give him stability and integration while distinguishing him from others and resembling the image others perceive of him (Kroger, 2006: 7).

Distinction from others, as highlighted in Erikson's definition as the pivotal element in identity, materializes due to affiliation with social groups. The bulk of one's self-perception depends on the role he would play in communities as well as minor and major social groups. A series of various social roles and affiliation with minor and major groups would create a unique character for a person and mark him among others.

Polish social psychologist Henri Tajfel had effectively known the role and significance of the element of affiliation with social groups and classes in the identity status of individuals. Relying on the "social identity" theory, he showed that people can see themselves as an object and classify, categorize and name themselves in terms of social beliefs, sectors or groups in a variety of methods (Tajfel. 1974: 65). For instance, gender, ethnicity, nationality and social status are titles that would categorize people under different groups. Anyone's affiliation with these groups would bring about a sort of self-awareness and identity.

Based on what was said about the real identity of humans in Islamic mysticism, it may be concluded that the identity created by social interactions is unreal and imaginary. Living in each of these social groups and classes may sound necessary for identity foreclosure and would spare human beings any harm from the identity crisis; however, it would incorporate traumas like creating obstacles in the way of identity foreclosure and self-awareness. It was mentioned in the previous section that in light of the meaning of human being in Islamic mysticism, the real identity of humans is indigene and natural need for their *raison d'être*. As soon as humans realize the relationship between them and their Creator they would be finding a true understanding of themselves.

Whenever humans neglect their own intuitive truth that is natural indigence and dependence on God, they shall have to know themselves for their identity status. To that effect, social identity and affiliation with social groups and classes would meet such a need. Such untrue understanding of oneself, which may have different levels and degrees, would finally cover up the true identity of humans beneath numerous layers of self-awareness and

give rise to social alienation. Meantime, inclusion in such societies would create individual identity and separate one individual from fellows and intensify the sense of retreatment in him by undermining his sentiments and similarities with fellows. That may provide the ground for analyzing the relationship between the expansion of social networks and increased sense of retreatment in modern societies. As social networks expand and more opportunities emerge for strengthening collective relations, the feeling of retreatment gains momentum (Weiten et al., 2014: 272). Although this feeling is attributed to the weakness of element of intimacy in virtual relationships (*ibid*), the excessive socialization of human's identity and development of perception of affiliation with minor groups and classes through social networks are said to be the cause of growing retreatment in modern societies. Such thing did not exist in older societies and human beings were more philanthropic than modern humans and therefore the former enjoyed more peace of mind.

In order to show the utility of distancing ourselves from social groups and classes for the purpose of obtaining a real identity and accurate self-awareness, it would be appropriate to highlight a method recommended to wayfarers in the Islamic mysticism tradition. Retreatment was a wayfaring method in Islamic mysticism, enabling wayfarers to distance themselves from the society and social groups and find a better perception of themselves.

### **Retreatment and Accurate Identity Foreclosure**

Among ambient conditions recommended to wayfarers and truth seekers in Islamic Sufism was retreatment and finding room for contemplation and observation far away from assemblies and associations (Qashiri, 1995: 183). The outcome of such contemplation and observation would be achieving an intuitive self-perception and subsequently finding a more transparent and clearer knowledge of God. Ibn Arabi highlights this fact in *The Meccan Revelations*:

*Hermitage would be the choice of those who know their own souls, who would in turn now God. Such persons would not see God separate from His names and would pursue no objective but assuming these titles both exoterically and esoterically* (Ibn Arabi, 1994, 13: 373).

In some texts on mysticism, the role of retreatment in producing a correct perception of oneself and God is detailed more specifically. For instance, in

*Al-Lam'e fi Tasavof*, hermitage is referred to as a factor aimed at dissuading the mind from any preoccupation and finding a better environment for contemplation and observation:

*Hermitage is the same as renouncing preoccupations targeting humans both esoterically and exoterically. That is achieved after finding a calm spot, choosing retreatment and embracing retreatment and unity* (Sarraj, 1914: 363).

In fact, blending in the society and joining social interactions would preoccupy mind and imagination and would also prevent the soul from self-contemplation. Mystic wayfarers used to cut social interactions and pacify their mind in order to find a better chance and space for observation and self-contemplation. Therefore, finding a chance for self-contemplation has been among the functions of retreatment for Sufis. In this regard, Shahabuddin Sohrevardi describes pseudo-Sufis who had chosen retreatment in an attempt to gain extraordinary power, saying:

*Followers of Sufism opted for retreatment and hermitage in order to save harmless their religion, purify their deeds for God and finally manage to exercise control on their own souls* (Sohrevardi, 1427 AH, 1: 233).

Exercising control over one's state and contemplation thereupon would be actually a step towards correct identity foreclosure and emancipation from the imaginations overshadowing the truth of humanity and hindering identity foreclosure. In parallel with embracing retreatment and hermitage, mystics will have the chance to remove the imaginations born out of quotidian life and social interactions and achieve a clearer perception of themselves by contemplation and concentration. Furthermore, they will understand their natural indigence to know naturally rich God more profoundly. Najm ad-Din Kubra refers to this fact, enumerating the advantages of retreatment as erasing worldly images as well as mundane transactions off the heart and instead making the heart pure and giving way to otherworldly images, states and realities of being, qualities of Almighty god and finally the oneness of God (Najm ad-Din Kubra, 1982: 24). That is why a mystic figure opting for contemplation in retreatment far away from people has in fact started moving from the outer layers of self-awareness towards the inner layers. The point to contemplate is that mystics have interpreted this esoteric journey as one carried out by wayfarer in his own esoteric domain of existence. When asked about hermit's life, Najm ad-Din Kubra replied:

*Retreatment is detachment and separation from creatures and instead moving towards God because wayfarers travel from soul to heart, from heart to spirit, from spirit to mystery and finally from mystery to the Creator. This distance is very far from soul, but very near vis-à-vis Almighty God* (Razi, 1423 AH: 158)

What was said here brings us to conclusion that the retreatment and hermitage which mystics recommended to their disciples was a method enabling wayfarers to distance themselves from their places of living and find a better environment for invocation and self-contemplation.

Although such functions as moral correction and purity of religion are the products of such retreatment, reaching a purer self-perception and achieving an original identity must be considered the significant function of such retreatment. However, the unanswered questions is to know if there is any other method to have the same function and provide the opportunity for a correct identity foreclosure and pure self-identification by overshadowing the social identity. In the following section, we will seek to answer this question in light of reference to travel in the mystics' words and works.

### **Travel and Pure Self-Awareness in Mystic References**

Encouraging travelling and giving pieces of advice to that affect are among topics highlighted in works about mysticism. In all these references, a chapter is about travelling and its related rituals.

In *Qovat ul-Qolub*, Bishr al-Hafi is said to have persuaded his disciples to travel. He told them to travel to purify themselves as stagnant water becomes contaminated (Maki, 1417 AH, vol. 2, p. 345).

Another reason for which mystics persuaded their disciples and wayfarers to travel was the concomitant sufferings and hardships which empowered the traveler to measure his perseverance and patience.

Under normal and ideal circumstances, it would be impossible to make a precise assessment of one's moral particularities. There might be abundant unfavorable qualities that would emerge only under tough and critical conditions and therefore travelling and experiencing tough conditions would expose the traveler to a test and lay bare his moral attitudes. (*ibid*)

In addition to the reasons cited in most of mystic references for travelling, some mystics have highlighted more precise functions of travel. For instance, Najm ad-Din Kubra describes the motivations of travelling as follows:

*The motivation for travelling is mainly seeking or escaping because the traveler either heads off to a favorable destination that would bring him closer to perfection and God or escapes the harmful consequences of something and therefore intends to go farther from religious and mundane bottlenecks (Najm ad-Din Kubra, 1984: 37).*

The important thing here is that the objectives of travelling may be classified under two general categories: one is about achieving something and another one is about escaping something. Tourism may be aimed at acquiring something like money, knowledge and experience. Such destinations may be categorized under the first category of tourism. However, sometimes, travelling is for the purpose of escape.

In *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, Ghazali speaks about some affairs which tourists escape through travelling. He refers to “escaping a cause that perturbs the religion” as a cause of travel and writes:

*Escaping whatever is intolerable for human beings is a tradition of Messengers of God, Peace Be Upon Them. One of places from which escape is obligatory is the place of living, ambitions as well as interests, which entirely disturb the peace of mind. And religion does not reach perfection in a heart that is stranger to God...and that could not materialize in a nation where ambitions are high and interests are abundant. Objectives are not realized unless through suffering and distance from the place of living. Distancing oneself from interests would not happen unless the soul undergoes austerity (Ghazali, 2007, 2: 538).*

The point which Ghazali has underlined is attention to the role of travel in undermining the sense of attachment created in humans when they stay long in their homeland. Someone who constantly lives in a place will see his mind entangled with thinking about such affairs as livelihood problems and social status. Everyone may be preoccupied with such things. Doubtlessly, peace of mind is a requirement for moral perfection and journey towards mystical perfection. That would not materialize until one undermines such attachments. Since travelling keeps humans far from their homeland for some time it would facilitate such detachment. If we want to explain Ghazali’s words in more practical terms we have to say that the social life of modern humans is intertwined with a big volume of social interactions that have taken shape due to commercial, scientific, cultural, administrative and family relations. Individual social lives depend on contemplating these interactions and making

the best decisions for preserving and strengthening them. Such preoccupations would keep the mind busy and undermine the pace of mind required for the heart. Going away from the environments where such interactions are under way would be a key factor in acquiring peace of mind and travelling would make it possible. The example cited by Bishr al-Hafi to describe travel may be interpreted with regard to such reality.

As water gets out of stagnation and is saved from contamination as soon as it runs, travelling would remove the stains targeting the pure truth of soul and its transparency.

### **Conclusion**

The philosophical analysis of one of the main objectives of tourism, i.e. spending leisure time, shows that tourists have chosen this objective because of the opportunity created through travel and distance from living place for pure self-awareness and correct identity foreclosure. Escaping the environment imposing social interactions on people and emancipation from such restrictions and return to one's real identity would bring joy to everyone. Relying on the *raison d'être* and reality of human being in Islamic mysticism, this analysis views the true identity of human beings tied to indigence and natural dependence on their *raison d'être*. Therefore, dependence on groups and classes from which the social identity of people is born are considered as impediments to self-awareness. Therefore, distancing oneself from the living and occupational environment would create an opportunity for identity foreclosure, return to self and acquiring pure self-awareness.

A review of methods of retreatment recommended to wayfarers by Sufi scholars also indicates that this method helped the wayfarer erase any untrue perception off himself as created by social interactions and instead find a chance for contemplation and understanding the existential relationship between the stage of wayfarer's mystery with God.

The common functionality of mystical retreatment and modern world's tourism would lay bare the unknown aspects of tourism and develop the spiritual approach vis-à-vis this important human activity. In modern societies, travelling and tourism would through social life and occupational activities create limited but continuous opportunities for separation from social environments and treatment. Furthermore, by creating the chance for

experiencing self-perception and self-awareness, they would be assisted in acquiring spiritual experience.

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