

From the Personal to the Global, and from the Past to the Present:

Reminiscences of a Spiritual Tourist

By Saleh Majaj



The term “spiritual tourist” was introduced to me many years ago during one of the several spiritual retreats I participate in each year. The term did not have positive connotations because it was given as a description of someone who, even though may have a genuine interest in developing the deepest parts of oneself, hopped from one retreat to another, changing disciplines, teachers, and groups based on whim. It was not applied to someone who went on pilgrimages to holy sites, nourishing his or her deeper inner nature with the surroundings and the unique energies and the insights that these places provide.

Of course, the reason I became familiar with the term was because I was labeled by my peers as a spiritual tourist, and rightly so. I was globetrotting from one country to another, taking part in various practices and schools under different teachers and formulations, from the ancient to the modern. Even though such an approach gave me the advantage of sampling the many traditions currently available in these “modern” times, the main disadvantage was that I did not stay long enough in any one discipline to harness the forces of the lower parts of human nature (so to speak) and allow my spiritual heart to flourish. Let’s not forget that a short yet honest look at what happens within us is enough to prove that our lower nature, whatever it is made of, cannot be depended upon as the source of wise action in the world.

So, what is a spiritual tourist to do? As I was told by the man who eventually became my guide and my teacher, the minimum period recommended to adhere to any one discipline is three years. And that is only the beginning because it is the period one commits to

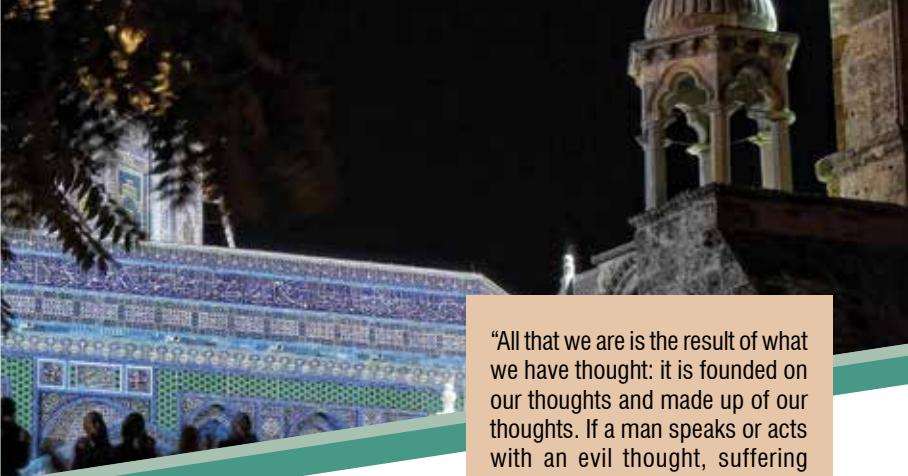


Photo by Mohammad Aqrouq.

before deciding whether this path is the chosen path one is destined for. In the following years, that same man would always remind me to follow a path with a heart and, if that path was lead by a living master, to follow that master as long as his or her heart was open. If we stick to the commonly adopted definition of spiritual tourism, then three years is a long time to go on a spiritual vacation, and I am sure that the organizers of spiritual tourism packages would delight in the thought. Yet, three years is really not that long of a period compared to a lifetime pursuit of spiritual perfection.

Why do some people feel an urge to seek the fruit of a spiritual discipline and practice? Why is there an urge to seek spirituality elsewhere, motivating us to leave our homes, families, and jobs, travel long distances, spend hard-earned money, and live in unfamiliar places? I cannot speak for others, but only for myself, and I have found the answers to these questions in the questions themselves. There is an urge drawing me to seek and be nourished by a depth of being that is not usually accessed in everyday life. By seeking spirituality, I have ended up in places that give me this special something, all the while feeling a sense of satisfaction and comradery with people who were complete strangers only a short while ago.

“All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts and made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, suffering follows him as the wheel follows the hoof of the beast that draws the wagon... If a man speaks or acts with a good thought, happiness follows him like a shadow that never leaves him.”

—Gautama Buddha



Let’s move onto spiritual pilgrimages. Why do we go on pilgrimages? I have had a taste of a few holy sites around the world, and this has helped me harness some sense of the nature of these places and allowed a better appreciation of our local holy sites. Many years ago, I was visited by a friend who is in the psychotherapeutic field, and who is highly intuitive and sensitive to the energies of places and people. Before her visit, I would perceive places and people only with my five senses, clouded with judgment and my own reactions. Her visit initiated a new era for me, that of perceiving with more than what the five senses provide. At first I would sense



something within me that I couldn't define. Then as time progressed and I was "shown," gradually the additional perceptions became clearer and I realized that we naturally possess this extrasensory awareness of the world, but that it disappears because of disuse.

My friend and I toured parts of the country together and I had the extreme fortune of getting a taste of that other world that spiritually inclined people are seeking. It was fortunate, for I had not yet developed the sensitivity to tap into the energy fields surrounding places. By accompanying her and tuning into what she was perceiving, I got to know the holy sites of our dear, beloved country from a totally different angle. We went into the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and there, we sensed the deep suffering of all the Christian pilgrims who had visited that location over the past centuries and silently shared their sorrows and prayed for the alleviation of their pain. Their sorrows resonated deeply within and I felt my own sorrows.

We went into the Dome of the Rock, and there, while looking up into the Dome, she helped me perceive the

nature of a powerfully raw geophysical energy emanating from the ground (the rock) up into the heavens. With that experience very much in every cell of my body, I fully understood and appreciated the story of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him), rising up into the Seventh Heaven on the *buraq*. With that visceral experience, I had the opportunity to transcend the human sphere and enter into a new one that spoke to a part of my nature that I had long forgotten.

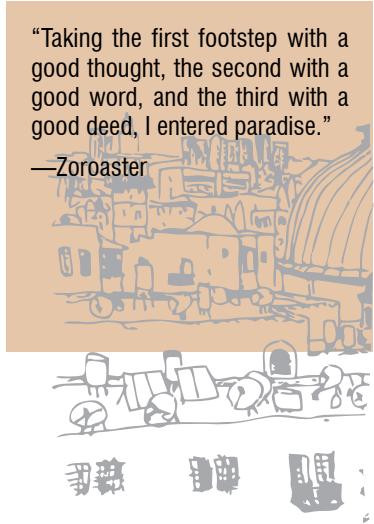
Next we went into Al-Aqsa Mosque, but my friend was not able to enter, so she asked me to go in and spend a few moments there. I went in and sat in a spot that was brightly lit by the sunlight coming in through one of the windows. In contrast to the strong energy of the Dome of The Rock, in Al-Aqsa Mosque I felt like an infant in his mother's arms, safe and at home. We went and visited Qumran, the long-abandoned center of the community known as the Essenes. As we walked through the relics, we could sense their dedication and perseverance in their constant efforts to purify themselves, a purification that spanned all levels of the human

constitution, from the physical, to the psychic and spiritual. It was a reminder that others have traveled this path and consecrated themselves until they reached self-perfection. Yes, here in this land, others have preceded us, and this gives us hope for our own efforts.

On other occasions I had the privilege of visiting other holy sites, and the feeling that was generated is still very clear, as if just experienced moments ago. Once I was with a visiting relative, a kindred spirit, standing near the Mount of Beatitudes on the northern shores of Lake Tiberias. Simultaneously we were both struck by a realization, which at first we could not articulate. Then, within the span of a few seconds, we were able to clearly put that experience into words. It was here, in this same exact spot, that Master Jesus spoke the now famous words of the Beatitudes. And the words started playing in my head, "Blessed are..." Then, as now, I could not understand with my mind the cryptic messages, but with the feeling of the energy being channeled through us while in that place, I realized the importance of being blessed. We were

"Taking the first footstep with a good thought, the second with a good word, and the third with a good deed, I entered paradise."

—Zoroaster



overtaken by the feeling that, of all the places in our country that people claim are the exact spots where something important happened, we were now standing on or very near the spot where it actually happened. And, we felt blessed.

The Holy Land is full of hidden places holding these special intelligent energies that are a conduit for other states of being that are our right, not by birth into a physical body, but prior to birth. Because of the magnetically hypnotic effect of the coarse vibrations of material life, we have gradually succumbed to forgetfulness, yet something keeps nudging us to remember until we awaken to the need to consciously seek what is rightfully ours. One such place is in the northern part of the country, just south of our beautiful port city of Haifa. Hidden in the mountains that contain prehistoric caves are very special energy vortexes that speak of a highly rarefied source of power, perhaps that same power that inspired the prophet Elijah to suffer for and do harsh things in defense of the truth.

Here in the Holy Land, we are part of a very special global network of energy-

acupoints, or, as a dear friend calls them, "places of peace and power."¹ These places are the heritage of the entire human race, testimony to the fact that generations upon generations of spiritual masters, initiates, guides, and aspirants have placed significance onto this singular human pursuit. In many traditions, a group of these places are linked together, serving a specific purpose for the spiritual aspirant. For example, in the Fourth Way, we find an inner exercise that is integral to this tradition, the exercise of conscious stealing.² It is simply an effort to attune to sacred sites of great significance around the world and draw from their intelligent and informing energies, and the spiritual leaders they're associated with, to help us in our own personal work: Lhasa (Lama), Mecca (Muhammad), Benares (Buddha), and Jerusalem (Jesus). Of course, as we can see, spiritual tourists don't really need to physically travel to reap the rewards of pilgrimages. However, it goes without saying that, for some, practice is needed, as well as guidance from experienced people. And, a few pilgrimages in the physical world do help guide the way for inwardly accessing holy sites.

In our hypnotized states, driven by psychotic needs, often times we living in the Holy Land forget that we are part of this network of holy sites. We forget that our role is to give generously to the world the added value of this heritage. Sharing the spiritual heritage of our country does not mean the mere opening up of borders for visiting pilgrims and tourists, this is the least that is expected from us. We are expected to grow and develop with the richness of this place and manifest this into the world. Yet, we find that all of us in this country, Palestinians and Israelis, continue taking more of the world's attention and resources and demanding more. And how are we investing these resources? Siphoning

them for luxury? Preparing for war? What would the Prophet Elijah have to say to each one of us about this? He would have some harsh words, of this I feel certain.

It is very common to witness how our religions, religious sites, ceremonies, artifacts, and other symbols (just like money, power, and other possessions) become items of idolatry. We focus on worshipping our religions, our prophets, our holy books, our beliefs and ideas, and our scepters more than worshipping God, the Creator of all. And this is one reason why the prophets have come to inform, enlighten, and awaken us, again and again: we keep missing the point. Our idols become the supreme embodiment of the truth, and no one else can or should have a superior position to ours. As if truth can be owned or copyrighted! And in this we manifest the extreme egotism that enlightened spiritual masters patiently endure in the hope that one day we see the light ourselves.

A few weeks ago, I was visited by a gentle, insightful energy, the nature of which is difficult to put into words. I felt that all that has been known, experienced, and achieved by humankind to date is but one small part of the greater truth of the totality of the created universe. This is not to belittle the human race and its achievements, but it comes with a sense of a new freedom that results from knowing of the existence of a larger domain of truth, beyond the familiar.

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¹ <http://www.sacredsites.com/>

² <http://www.duversity.org/foundationexercises.htm>