

Nigel Atkin

The Intention of Travel



The author standing below the Great Ziggurat

The intention of travel is an interesting topic.

On some customs forms, there are two basic options—business and pleasure (or medical), as if there is a separation of purpose. In reality, it's all personal, part of the larger journey, part of seeking balance to attain financial, social, and psychological security.

Travel creates opportunities for insight, openings for comparison, and literally new horizons. One person's material wealth from one perspective can seem like spiritual poverty from another. The abundance of fresh food, clean water, good housing, and electricity taken for granted in most Canadian homes is often momentarily seen as a great gift of birthright by travellers returning from less fortunate places.

There are many benefits to travel, many teachings to embrace. Travel broadens the mind, they say. It can also broaden the heart.

There is great potential, even hope, in travelling with the intent to learn more about humanity and the environments in which other people reside. More and more travellers are returning home, not only with treasured pictures to share electronically but often with a deeper

understanding, a new respect for the people they met in other places.

Travellers often are moved by their growing personal awareness of the commonalities of people and their shared desires for safety, community, and good economy.

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the heart.**

International writer and American revolutionary Thomas Paine captured the spirit of commonalities when he wrote, "The world is my country. All mankind are my brethren. To do good is my religion." That statement can be viewed from many perspectives, as can the words of Sir Thomas More, "No matter where you are, you are always the same distance from heaven."

When we travel, we must be open to the most positive potential of meaning in those and other ideas and not be limited by concepts of cultural domination or the closed possibilities of only "one" way of understanding.

There are many ways of getting to universal truths, teachings, and reasons for particular customs and beliefs. With a broader perspective, an open heart, we can more easily embrace the opportunities and

consequences of travel with ease, learning what might be interesting and, more often than not, useful in days to come.

Recently, for instance, an article in *Islamica Magazine* (Issue 20, 2007) compared the similar aspects of the Greek term *agapé*—used by Christians to mean the boundary-less, self-sacrificing love between believers or between a believer and God—and the Arabic word *mahubba*, meaning quite literally "in love."

Although mahubba is not often used in an erotic sense, Cairo-based author and essayist G. Willow Wilson writes that mahubba can describe love among people or love for the divine. It is used most commonly in a spiritual context in both cases. She writes that implicit in mahubba is service, placing the object of the love at the centre of discourse.

While these similarities exist, Wilson states mahubba differs from *agapé* in one crucial respect. Serving and approaching the beloved is a form of ongoing personal struggle whereby mahubba is a form of the term *jihad* and represents the greatest struggle against a person's own ego.

The term *jihad* has more recently been used by violent and indiscriminate militants and the greater meaning of *jihad* has been co-opted.



Standing in Southern Iraq is the Great Ziggurat of Ur, an ancient pyramid from Ancient Mesopotamia. It was built by the Sumarians more than 4000 years ago and was dedicated to the moon or Nanna, meaning Great Illuminator.

In many ways, the more important concept of a divine brotherhood has fallen away from common usage.

Wilson writes that the struggle to serve God and one another “out of love is the jihad of human potential against the jihad of violent ideology.” She contends using the concept of jihad as mahubba has “the potential to change the world.”

This is similar to understanding two other important concepts—one Chinese and one Canadian First Nation.

The Chinese concept of *guanxi* [gwan-shee], meaning “relationships,” is used extensively in business today. This key idea is about helping one another, building social capital between individuals who help one another and develop a lifetime business relationship. But asking the question “What would your grandmother tell you *guanxi* means?” has elicited responses indicating that the relationships we have in life go far beyond those with business clients.

Relationships extend to all others, and to the heavens and to the earth, as denoted by the character that represents *guanxi* in writing.

In Canada, it is common for Aboriginal people to use the words “all my relations” to close an event or end a talk or a prayer. In this



Standing on top of the Ziggurat, Nigel surveys the Ancient Mesopotamian City of Ur that stretches back thousands of years. Based in Iraq, he recognizes the tourism, academic, and economic potential for the people whose country has more than 12,000 archeological sites.

concept, people go beyond their blood relatives and respectfully include all other things from the Creator. Sacred connectivity and continuous transformation are recognized in the concept “all my relations.”

Being open to new ideas helps the traveller grow. Ideas of global interconnectedness can lead us in many directions to self-explore anywhere in the world. The common understanding and respect and even reverence for these ancient beliefs help guide the modern traveller who searches, with intent, for the best of humanity.

Why do people travel? Ask them. A million different reasons will emerge—growth, balance, respite and revelation, fame, fortune, a connection with themselves and others, a broadened mind, a bigger heart. ▲

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