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Analysing the Joy of Pilgrimage: Effects on Spiritual and Eudaimonic Well-Being

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Abstract

Pilgrimage denotes a profound spiritual journey that cultivates personal transformation, resilience, and psychological well-being. Previous studies have explored the psychological effects of pilgrimage. However, the specific mechanisms through which these spiritual experiences foster enduring happiness still remain underexplored. This study aims to investigate how spiritual well-being enhances the joy of pilgrimage through the lens of eudaimonic well-being, drawing on the self-determination theory (SDT) and the principles of eudaimonic psychology. The study argues that spiritual well-being acts as a fundamental resource, enabling pilgrims to navigate various challenges on their journey (e.g., physical hardship and introspection), achieve self-actualisation, and ultimately experience deep existential satisfaction. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to survey 152 Arbaeen pilgrims. The results indicated that spiritual well-being significantly influenced eudaimonic well-being, which in turn enhanced the joy derived from pilgrimage. The findings suggested that fulfilment associated with pilgrimage was not merely a fleeting emotional response but a deeply rooted psychological state arising from personal transformation, meaning-making, and spiritual elevation. This study contributes to the literature on religious tourism, positive psychology, and spirituality by highlighting the transformative power of pilgrimage as a pathway to human flourishing. It also provides both theoretical and practical frameworks for researchers, policymakers, and mental health practitioners seeking to understand and promote the psychological benefits of spiritual experiences.

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Introduction

Pilgrimage represents one of the most profound expressions of spiritual seeking, with approximately 600 million trips undertaken to religious sites annually (Parker et al., 2024). This vast scale of religious travel underscores the enduring significance of pilgrimage in contemporary society, reflecting a growing recognition that these experiences influence multiple dimensions of human well-being and flourishing (Kim et al., 2024).

Life is inherently valuable, and joy is a fundamental aspect that enriches our experiences and gives meaning to our existence (Emmons, 2020; Van Cappellen, 2020). Joy enhances motivation, mitigates anxiety in the face of challenges, and boosts our resilience while coping with adversities in life (Johnson, 2020; King & Defoy, 2020). Furthermore, joy empowers individuals to navigate tasks, unlocking their potential and driving them toward personal achievements. As such, joy profoundly influences our cognition and actions, ultimately fostering personal growth and flourishing (King & Defoy, 2020; Van Cappellen, 2020). Scholars argue that understanding joy is an essential factor in discussing human flourishing and the components of a good life (Emmons, 2020). For instance, Izard defines joy as a fundamental emotion characterised by five key attributes: it is universal, requires minimal assessment, has lasting emotional stability, influences cognition and actions, and serves as a permanent force of motivation (King & Defoy, 2020).

Certain conditions must be met to foster joy, which is a critical component of human well-being. For example, the presence of spiritual and eudaimonic well-being is indispensable. Eudaimonic well-being, often synonymous with self-actualisation, encompasses recognising and developing one's abilities and talents to reach personal goals (Anderson & Fowers, 2020; Cobo-Rendón et al., 2020; Cromhout et al., 2022; Pritchard et al., 2020). The journey toward eudaimonic well-being is not straightforward. It is marked by multifarious challenges that individuals must overcome. Moreover, often considered an inner source of strength and peace, spiritual well-being can significantly affect this journey. Improving spiritual well-being can facilitate the pursuit of eudaimonic well-being by providing emotional resilience to confront various difficulties in life. This inner support can enable individuals to adapt and grow, boosting their capacity to achieve self-actualisation, which leads to the experience of joy derived from personal achievements and the fulfilment of aspirations.

The pilgrimage to Karbala serves as a powerful context for examining these dynamics. Often viewed as a transformative experience, this journey requires pilgrims to withstand significant physical and psychological hardships in their pursuit of personal growth (Nikjoo et al., 2020). For instance, despite threats from ISIS during the 2014 Arbaeen pilgrimage, millions of pilgrims undertook the journey due to its deep spiritual fulfilment (Nikjoo et al., 2020). On this pilgrimage, individuals face

notable hardships that facilitate an inner transformation, enhancing their resilience and capacity for joy (Inloes, 2024). This study aims to analyse how spiritual well-being influences the joy of pilgrimage, specifically through the mediating role of eudaimonic well-being. Therefore, this paper analyses the intricate interplay of spiritual well-being, eudaimonic well-being, and joy within the context of pilgrimage, emphasising the transformative effects of these experiences on individual growth and happiness.

While numerous studies have linked spirituality with well-being and often considered joy as one of the outcomes of spirituality, there is a lack of research specifically examining the impact of spiritual well-being on joy through the mediating role of eudaimonic well-being. Moreover, the pilgrimage to Karbala -recognized as one of the most challenging and emotionally intense spiritual journeys- offers a unique and underexplored context for investigating these relationships. The existing literature has predominantly focused on ritual participation and the socio-political dimensions of the Arbaeen pilgrimage, while largely overlooking the psychological mechanisms connecting spiritual and eudaimonic dimensions to the experience of joy. While recent studies have begun to explore how social media factors influence tourists' behavioral intentions to visit Karbala (Ahmadi Zahrani et al., 2024), the present study aims to fill a crucial gap by exploring the psychological outcomes of the pilgrimage itself. Specifically, this study investigates how spiritual well-being facilitates the experience of joy through the mediating role of eudaimonic well-being. These findings hold not only theoretical significance but also practical implications, as they may contribute to the promotion of personal growth and development. Furthermore, they provide a foundation for achieving positive psychological outcomes such as flourishing, life satisfaction, resilience, and joy.

literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks

The scholarly investigation of pilgrimage has increasingly incorporated psychological theories to explain its effects on well-being. One prominent framework is the Bottom-Up Spillover Theory, which examines how specific, positive experiences during an event like a pilgrimage can "spill over" and contribute to overall life satisfaction and psychological well-being (Chen & Chen, 2025). This approach, often used with the Centre for Health Promotion (CHP) model, provides a systematic way to understand how event satisfaction translates into broader psychological outcomes (Chen & Chen, 2025). While our study focuses on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as the primary lens, the bottom-up spillover model provides a complementary perspective on the mechanisms at play.

Spiritual Well-Being

Spiritual well-being serves as an intrinsic resource on which individuals rely in the face of challenging circumstances. This intrinsic factor can help them improve their inner power to overcome difficult situations or adapt to adverse events (Durmuş & Alkan, 2021). As individuals gradually learn to develop resilience against stressful situations, boost their endurance, and adapt to circumstances, their physical and mental health will improve (Božek et al., 2020). Spiritual well-being leads to tranquillity and mitigates anxiety and stress (Rababa et al., 2021), resulting in greater life satisfaction. It gives more meaning to life, infuses individuals with optimism and positive emotions, and lowers feelings of hopelessness and despair, ultimately minimising the likelihood of suicide (LI et al., 2021). This positive cycle contributes to an overall improvement in physical and mental health (Coppola et al., 2021; LI et al., 2021; Prakosa & Widyarini, 2021; Singh et al., 2021).

Eudaimonic Well-Being

The concept of eudaimonia originates from Aristotle's works. He described eudaimonia as the outcome of living in accordance with one's true self based on personal values and beliefs to actualise one's fullest potential and become the best version of oneself (Anderson & Fowers, 2020; Pritchard *et al.*, 2020). Eudaimonic well-being denotes efforts at achieving personal growth and self-development, enabling individuals to recognise their talents and capabilities and try to improve and actualise these latent potentials. This process of striving to reach the best possible version of oneself leads to self-actualisation and eudaimonic well-being (Al-okaily *et al.*, 2023; Pritchard *et al.*, 2020). What can the reason be? When individuals successfully progress in personal development across different domains, they cultivate a sense of competence and worthiness. This internal positive perspective leads to personal satisfaction and, ultimately, propels them to a state of eudaimonia and self-actualisation (Anderson & Fowers, 2020; Cobo-Rendón *et al.*, 2020; Cromhout *et al.*, 2022).

Individuals can also achieve self-actualisation through other avenues. In addition to improving their innate potential and realising their best abilities, people can reach eudaimonic well-being by establishing meaningful connections with others, learning from their experiences, and forming friendships with those inspiring positive traits. Social support from family and friends can act as an incentive for personal growth. Furthermore, engaging in travel, tourism, and nature-based activities can enable individuals to experience freedom, gain insight, and leverage these experiences for personal growth and life goals. Such activities encourage striking warm and meaningful relationships with others, which will collectively contribute to eudaimonic well-being and self-actualisation (Al-okaily *et al.*, 2023; Anderson & Fowers, 2020; Cobo-Rendón *et al.*, 2020; Pritchard *et al.*, 2020).

Joy

Joy is considered essential for human existence and well-being because it brings vitality to life and inspires a sense of purpose (Emmons, 2020; King & Defoy, 2020). Joy means an emotional response to a positive event, condition, or experience, where individuals express their elation, react positively to good things in their lives, and feel liberated, light-hearted, and relaxed (Emmons, 2020; Johnson, 2020; King & Defoy, 2020). This positive reaction often stems from the fulfilment of a desire or the hope that individuals anticipated and considered possible (Johnson, 2020).

Joy arises when individuals perceive things as being in order and realise that everything seems perfectly right at present. Trying to make the right decision, they then align themselves, their goals, and their values with this sense of correctness. When people observe that resultant circumstances are inherently aligned with their goals and need no further adjustment, they become greatly motivated to pursue their objectives and advance along the path. Therefore, they benefit from their imagination and creativity, keeping their minds open to leverage unique ideas in reaching their destination. In addition to harnessing these faculties, they must deeply and meaningfully interact with the outside world, engage with others, and draw on their ideas to achieve success. Most importantly, they must trust in the grace and benevolence of God, a notion which mitigates anxiety along the journey and helps them endure potential obstacles and threats. As a result, they become aware that these challenges are temporary and that divine assistance will guide them through the path successfully. If the progress achieved along the way exceeds standard expectations and surpasses anticipated rates, it will lead to personal growth and distinction. Ultimately, an individual who achieves such flourishing will experience joy. The outcome then is gratitude for the moment, leading to the appreciation of the present. Therefore, joy is accompanied by ease, gratitude, and meaning (Johnson, 2020).

Hypothesis Development

The Impact of Spiritual Well-Being on Eudaimonic Well-Being

A review of the existing literature indicates that spiritual well-being has many positive outcomes, *e.g.*, increased tranquillity, reduced stress and anxiety, lowered depression, improved life satisfaction, actual meaning and purpose in life, enhanced optimism and positive emotions, mitigated hopelessness and distress, declined suicide rates, enhanced self-care, and boosted physical and mental health (Durmuş & Alkan, 2021; Božek et al., 2020; Chia-Yu et al., 2021; Rababa et al., 2021). Such positive feelings experienced by individuals with high spiritual well-being can enable them to seek the enhancement of these traits and skills. As a result, individuals can benefit from a point of reference in life, especially in difficult circumstances. Many authors argue that spiritual well-being can be viewed as a reference for resilience and adaptation to tough situations (Coppola et al., 2021).

The research hypothesis assumes that one of these difficult conditions could be the attainment of eudaimonic well-being, *i.e.* the achievement of goals and self-actualisation. Naturally, individuals encounter multitudinous challenges on the path toward their goals, self-actualisation, and personal development. They must also be able to overcome challenges, adapt to adversities, demonstrate resilience, and handle stressful events (Clements, 2020; Coppola et al., 2021). Therefore, if a person wishes to achieve eudaimonic well-being (*i.e.* self-actualisation) and realise their best version, they will inevitably have to endure many hardships. They must use their spiritual well-being to overcome various difficulties and challenges, thereby facilitating the process of reaching their goals and self-actualisation even in the face of adversities. From a Self-Determination Theory (SDT) perspective, the pilgrimage to Karbala provides a clear context for how these psychological needs are fulfilled. Many pilgrims embark on this journey driven by heartfelt devotion and a desire for spiritual growth, a disposition that aligns closely with intrinsic and autonomous motivation. We therefore propose that spiritual well-being serves as a vital resource that facilitates the satisfaction of the three basic needs. The conscious choice to undertake the pilgrimage and willingly embrace its hardships enhances a pilgrim's sense of autonomy; the perceived ability to perform rituals and navigate challenges fosters competence; and the profound sense of connection to the Ahl al-Bayt, fellow pilgrims, and God fulfills the need for relatedness. According to SDT, the collective satisfaction of these needs is the very mechanism that promotes eudaimonic well-being and personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Wang et al., 2024).

This paper aims to analyse this interplay among the pilgrims to Karbala by assuming that they intend to reach their destination (*i.e.* Karbala) after enduring numerous hardships. The pilgrims experience multitudinous challenges along the way, *e.g.*, hunger, thirst, heat, sleep deprivation, fatigue, and interaction with people from different countries and cultures. However, they find the journey so important and admirable that they are willing to endure any difficulty. These hardships often fill them with joy because they know that these struggles will lead to personal growth.

Their goal is like divine love, which enables a person to endure all the pain, suffering, and trials sent by God for spiritual purification and growth. This love can drive the heart toward the Divine (Werbner, 2017). What helps the pilgrims persevere on this difficult journey is referred to as a source of spiritual well-being that is filled with peace, hope, and motivation. Even Carl Jung proposed that spirituality and spiritual forces would lay the foundation of the psyche and motivation (Clements, 2020). Spiritual well-being resembles love in the sense that a person endures great hardship in love but also experiences joy. Spirituality helps individuals focus on joy and ignore hardships (Werbner, 2017).

Therefore, if pilgrims possess high spiritual well-being, they will naturally be motivated to reach eudaimonic well-being or self-actualisation, which they achieve by reaching their destination in Karbala.

They will then overcome harsh conditions and enhance their resilience, focusing only on their goal, *i.e.* reaching the destination, regardless of how arduous the journey might be.

The Impact of Eudaimonic Well-Being on the Joy of Pilgrimage

Pomfert (2021) reports that the primary motivations for participation in tourism activities include adventure, family, and eudaimonic motivations, *i.e.* the pursuit of success and personal development. According to further research by Kim and Yang (2021), tourists' motivations for health influence their eudaimonic experiences, which in turn can lead to positive emotions (Al-okaily et al., 2023).

Based on this premise, we can hypothesise that eudaimonic well-being, or the accomplishment of one's goals and self-actualisation by realising their fullest potential, will lead to joy.

This is reflected in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The highest level of needs in Maslow's hierarchy is self-actualisation, where an individual reaches their maximum potential, and this realization results in a sense of joy. This is observed among the pilgrims to Karbala, who face many hardships along the way. These difficulties compel them to learn valuable lessons and gain experiences that foster personal growth, development, and transformation, ultimately resulting in joy (Papaleontiou-Louca et al., 2022).

These experiences are transcendental in nature. They constitute a process where individuals reach higher levels of spiritual awareness, noble values, self-awareness, and social transformation, leading to positive changes in their lives and fostering empathy and compassion for others (Prakosa & Widyarini, 2021).

When the pilgrims witness this positive transformation and experience many positive changes for the better, they feel joy. Moreover, reaching their goal after enduring many hardships will also bring them joy.

The Mediating Role of Eudaimonic Well-Being in the Relationship Between Spiritual Well-being and Joy

Spiritual well-being gives individuals meaning and purpose in life, helping them face the difficulties of this journey without fear. With the support of spiritual well-being, people can navigate and overcome challenges (Chia-Yu et al., 2021; Coppola et al., 2021; Rababa et al., 2021). Spiritual well-being enables individuals to pursue goals, growth, and self-actualisation, using all their abilities and efforts. Therefore, joy is created once their desires are fulfilled, and they achieve self-actualisation and personal growth.

The pilgrims to Karbala embark on a path filled with hardships. Supported by spiritual well-being, they successfully overcome each of these challenges. Their ability to endure challenges signifies a positive step toward personal growth and development, ultimately leading to joy.

During the process of personal growth, they move from a "self-centred" state to their "true self", *i.e.* they go beyond focusing solely on their own desires and needs and reach their true self (Prakosa & Widyarini, 2021).

From an essentialist perspective, it is said that all human beings have a true self within them, and this true self is fixed and unchangeable (Leuenberger, 2021). In psychological literature, the term "true self" refers to who an individual truly is at their core (Toomey et al., 2024). Recent research in psychology indicates that the concept of the true self refers to fundamental characteristics, and among these essential and foundational traits are moral qualities. Thus, the true self is inherently considered good and moral. This is supported by studies such as that by Christy et al., who showed that when individuals perform good and admirable deeds, they feel connected to their true self and closer to themselves than ever before (Stichter, 2022). Bench et al. found that when an individual undergoes positive transformations and their moral behaviors improve, at this stage they approach and discover their true self, which is often referred to as self-knowledge (Stichter, 2022). When they experience such a positive change and reach this level of perfection, successfully going through their personal development stages, they will be filled with positive feelings and joy.

The Impact of Spiritual Well-Being on Joy

Khoiri Oktavia and Muhopilah (2021) argue that spirituality and spiritual well-being play a pivotal role in Muslims' resilience and adaptability in times of crisis (Fernando *et al.*, 2021). When a person reaches a stage where they can adapt to any difficulty, this adaptability increases their tranquillity, reduces stress and anxiety, mitigates depression, improves life satisfaction, boosts optimism and positive emotions, lowers hopelessness and distress, and enhances self-care and physical and mental health (Durmuş & Alkan, 2021; Božek et al., 2020; Chia-Yu et al., 2021; Rababa et al., 2021).

When facing the hardships of their journey, pilgrims focus on their spiritual health. As a result, they can develop these positive qualities, experience inner purification and enlightenment, and attain spiritual awakening, which enables them to continue striving without despair (Prakosa & Widyarini, 2021). This process leads to joy when it is successfully completed. This relationship can be explained based on the self-determination theory which suggests that humans have three core needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a comprehensive framework for understanding human motivation and the factors influencing personal development toward self-actualization (Wang et al., 2024). The theory outlines a motivation spectrum from amotivation to extrinsic and intrinsic forms (Tang et al., 2020). Extrinsic motivation arises from external factors and is divided into controlled (e.g., external rewards, internal pressures) and autonomous (e.g., alignment with personal values and goals) types, while intrinsic motivation stems from inherent interest and pleasure (Alberts et al., 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Wang et al., 2024). Crucially, SDT posits that fostering autonomous and intrinsic motivation depends on satisfying three innate and universal psychological needs: autonomy, the sense of volition and choice in one's actions; competence, the feeling of mastery and effectiveness; and relatedness, a

sense of belonging and secure connection with others (Alberts et al., 2024; Curren & Park, 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Tang et al., 2020). The satisfaction of these needs is considered essential for ensuring psychological health and well-being (Tang et al., 2020). According to self-determination theory, the spiritual well-being of the pilgrims to Karbala enables them to develop resilience and endurance against all hardships on the journey. The ability to overcome harsh and exhausting conditions, to control and manage problems will provide them with a sense of autonomy.

Thus, the sense of autonomy that individuals gain through spiritual well-being will lead to joy. Additionally, spiritual well-being improves their sense of competence. Since they can adapt to challenges along the way and successfully overcome difficulties, they gain a sense of competence. It then leads to a sense of pride, and this sense of competence and pride will bring them joy.

Finally, spiritual well-being helps individuals find meaning and purpose in life. They seek the pilgrimage to Karbala in an effort to find the true meaning of life, as this journey connects them with something greater, which improves their spiritual well-being. The establishment and enhancement of spiritual well-being within the pilgrims will then lead to joy. The pilgrims who enhance their spiritual well-being not only experience better mental health but also acquire a higher level of satisfaction and joy, as this spiritual state allows them to find deeper meaning on their journey and transform challenges into opportunities for personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2022).

Therefore, spiritual well-being, with its positive outcomes, will lead to happiness and joy (Singh et al., 2021).

Materials and Methods

Sample and Data Collection

The data were collected from a total of 298 distributed questionnaires, out of which 152 were fully completed and deemed valid for analysis, resulting in a response rate of approximately 51%. The target population includes individuals participating in the Arbaeen pilgrimage to Karbala, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world. Although the response rate is moderate, it is considered acceptable for field research involving topics related to personal beliefs and spirituality. To assess the statistical adequacy of the sample size, a post-hoc power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1. Assuming a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), significance level of 0.05, and power of 0.80, the minimum required sample size for models with up to five predictors is approximately 92 participants. Therefore, the achieved sample size ($N = 152$) is considered sufficient for PLS-SEM analysis.

According to the demographics, 88 respondents (57.9%) were male, whereas 64 respondents (42.1%) were female. Regarding the age groups, 35 respondents (23%) were aged 20–30, whereas 48

respondents (31.6%) were aged 31–40. Furthermore, 42 respondents (27.6%) were aged 41–50, and 27 respondents (17.8%) were above 51 years old.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents

Demographics	N (Respondents)	(%)
Gender		
Male	88	57,9
Female	64	42,1
Age		
20-30	35	23,0
31-40	48	31,6
41-50	42	27,6
More than 51 years	27	17,8

Measures

The measurement scales were adapted from prior studies (*e.g.*, Wang et al., 2021), and respondents were asked on a five-point Likert scale ranging between “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). Eudaimonic well-being was measured through a six-item scale with the sample item introduced as “This travel experience helped me feel there is meaning to present and past life”. The questionnaire contains six subscales of positive psychological functioning: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.90$). The eudaimonic perspective focuses on the meaningfulness of well-being, viewing life as a process in pursuit of personal growth and self-actualisation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, a five-item scale (Davidson et al., 2023) was employed to measure enjoyment with the sample item introduced as “The activity was pleasurable to me” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.92$). This questionnaire consists of 25 items which measure positive emotions and happiness in various situations with the dimensions of pleasure, relatedness, competence, challenge/improvement, and engagement. We acknowledge the potential semantic distinction between the term “enjoyment,” as used in the scale, and the more profound, eudaimonic “joy” that is central to our thesis. However, this scale was deemed appropriate as its multidimensional nature (capturing elements of pleasure, relatedness, competence, challenge/improvement, and engagement) transcends simple hedonic pleasure. These dimensions align closely with the eudaimonic experience of finding meaning through challenge and connection, making the scale a suitable operationalization for the multifaceted joy experienced during a transformative pilgrimage. Moreover, spiritual well-being was measured through a questionnaire developed by Golparvar et al. (2015). This instrument evaluates an individual’s connections across four domains:

oneself, others, nature, and transcendental connections. It encompasses four dimensions of well-being: personal spiritual well-being, communal spiritual well-being, environmental spiritual well-being, and transcendental spiritual well-being. The questionnaire consists of 10 items, including: "To what extent do you feel spiritual vitality in your activities?" It demonstrated strong reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80.

Statistical Procedures

Data were analyzed using SmartPLS (version 4.0.9.6). To assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model, we followed the two-step approach recommended for PLS-SEM. For evaluating the significance of factor loadings and path coefficients, the bootstrapping procedure with 5000 subsamples was employed. Since only fully completed questionnaires were included in the analysis, listwise deletion was applied to handle missing data. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the HTMT (Heterotrait–Monotrait) ratio, following the recommendations of Henseler et al. (2015). In this study, a threshold of $HTMT < 0.90$ was adopted as the criterion for establishing adequate discriminant validity among the latent constructs.

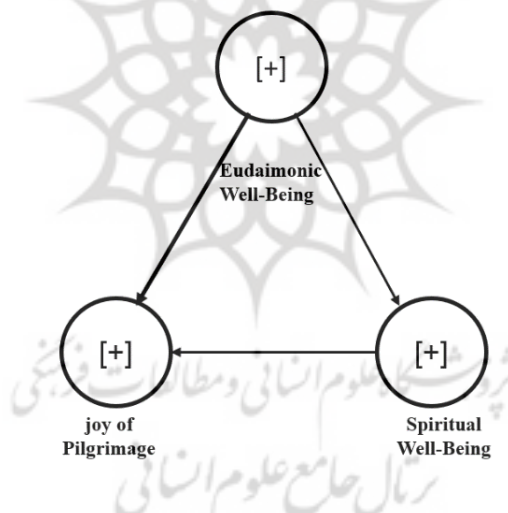


Figure 1. The conceptual model

Results

The reliability and validity of the constructs and indicators were assessed to evaluate the measurement model (outer model). Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for each construct in the model were also determined to be greater than 0.7, and all the indicators exhibited a satisfactory level of reliability (Table 2).

Due to the conservative nature of Cronbach's alpha and the equal treatment of all indicators, the composite reliability is used more frequently in the partial least squares (PLS) method. In this model,

the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha for all variables were greater than 0.7, indicating a satisfactory level of reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE) for all variables was greater than 0.5, confirming the convergent validity.

The discriminant validity is evaluated to ensure that a reflective construct shows stronger relationships with its own indicators than with any other constructs in the PLS path model. The HTMT (Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio) index in SmartPLS is a key indicator for assessing the discriminant validity. Introduced by Henseler et al. (2015), this criterion replaces the older Fornell-Larcker criterion. If the HTMT values are smaller than 0.90, the discriminant validity is considered acceptable. The discriminant validity was confirmed through the HTMT analysis (Table 3).

Table 2. The Indicators of Reliability and Convergent Validity

Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
Eudaimonic Well-Being	0.90	0.91	0.92	0.67
Spiritual Well-Being	0.91	0.92	0.92	0.53
Joy of Pilgrimage	0.93	0.95	0.94	0.53

Table 3. The Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	1	2	3
Eudaimonic Well-Being	0.82		
Spiritual Well-Being	0.59	0.73	
Joy of Pilgrimage	0.77	0.62	0.73

The significance of factor loadings was first examined through the bootstrap method to evaluate the structural model (*i.e.* the inner model) for model (1) and to obtain *t*-values. As viewed in Table 4, the results demonstrate that all factor loadings have significant values greater than 0.5.

Although a few items (such as $q_{24} = 0.40$, $q_{26} = 0.43$, and $q_{27} = 0.31$) showed factor loadings below the conventional threshold of 0.50, all of them were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and conceptually aligned with their respective constructs. Furthermore, the overall measurement model demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties: Composite Reliability (CR) > 0.70 , Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.50 , and Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70 for all latent variables. Hence, these items were retained to preserve the content coverage and theoretical consistency of the constructs.

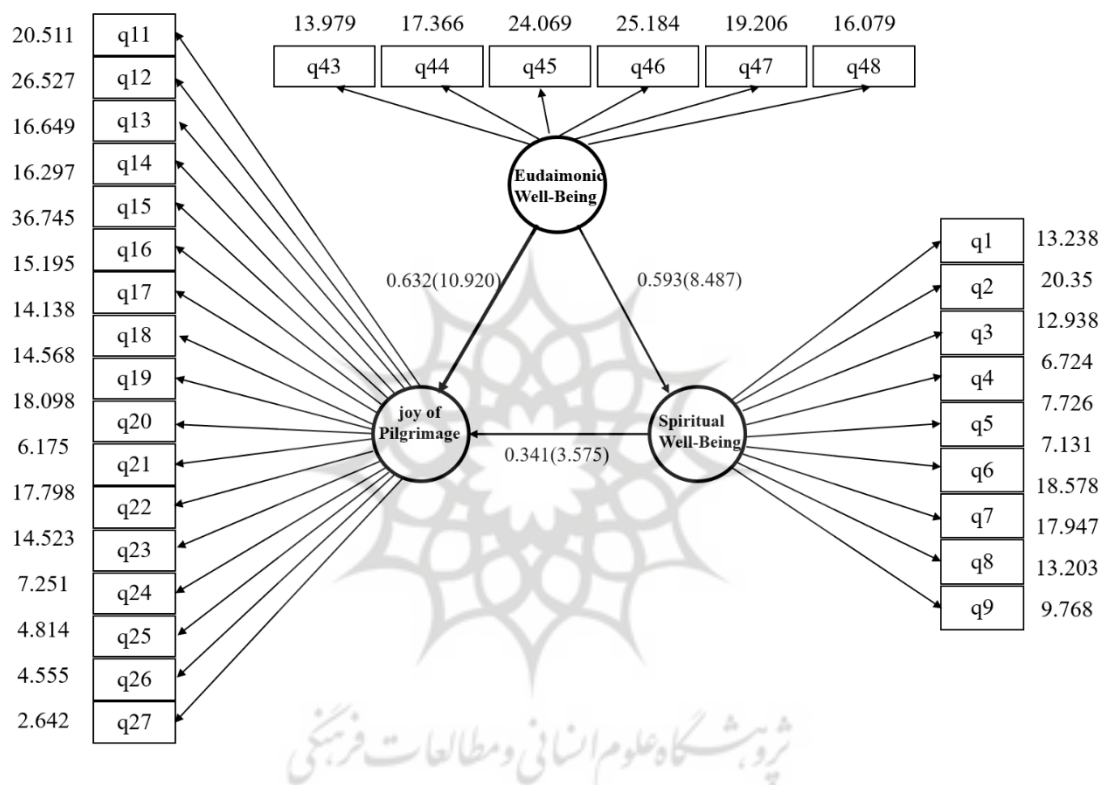
The structural model of the research was then presented along with the standardised coefficients and *t*-statistics.

Table 4. The Factor Loadings and Significance of Components

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Standard Deviation	T-Statistics	P-Values
Spiritual Well-Being	q1	0.71	0.05	13.24	0.000
	q2	0.69	0.05	12.94	0.000
	q3	0.64	0.10	6.71	0.000
	q4	0.71	0.09	7.73	0.000
	q5	0.71	0.10	7.13	0.000
	q6	0.79	0.04	18.58	0.000
	q7	0.81	0.05	17.95	0.000
	q8	0.71	0.05	13.20	0.000
	q9	0.74	0.08	8.77	0.000
Joy of Pilgrimage	q10	0.80	0.04	20.35	0.000
	q11	0.84	0.04	20.51	0.000
	q12	0.88	0.03	26.53	0.000
	q13	0.83	0.05	16.65	0.000
	q14	0.82	0.05	16.30	0.000
	q15	0.90	0.02	36.74	0.000
	q16	0.80	0.05	15.20	0.000
	q17	0.76	0.05	14.14	0.000
	q18	0.79	0.05	14.57	0.000
	q19	0.85	0.05	18.10	0.000
	q20	0.62	0.10	6.17	0.000
	q21	0.70	0.04	17.80	0.000
	q22	0.70	0.05	14.52	0.000
	q23	0.63	0.09	7.25	0.000
	q24	0.40	0.08	4.81	0.000
	q26	0.43	0.09	4.56	0.000
	q27	0.31	0.12	2.64	0.008
Eudaimonic Well-Being	q43	0.75	0.05	13.98	0.000
	q44	0.82	0.05	17.37	0.000
	q45	0.86	0.04	24.07	0.000
	q46	0.84	0.03	25.18	0.000
	q47	0.84	0.04	19.21	0.000
	q48	0.79	0.05	16.08	0.000

Table 5. Direct and Indirect Paths and Their Significance

Path	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation(STDEV)	T-Statistics (O/STDEV)	P-Values	Effect Size
Eudaimonic WellBeing → Joy of Pilgrimage	0.63	0.06	10.92	0.00	0.71
Spiritual Well-being → Eudaimonic Well-Being	0.59	0.07	8.49	0.00	0.54
Spiritual Well-being → Joy of Pilgrimage	0.24	0.07	3.58	0.00	0.10

**Figure 2. The Path Diagram with Path Coefficients (t-Statistics)**

According to Figure 2, all direct and indirect paths in the relationships between variables are significant. Table 5 presents the direct and indirect effects of the variables along with the significance of the paths. The effect sizes for each path are also indicated in the table.

The results indicate that eudaimonic well-being had a positive, significant effect on the joy of pilgrimage. In other words, the greater the eudaimonic well-being, the higher the tendency toward the joy of pilgrimage. Furthermore, spiritual well-being had a positive, significant impact on both eudaimonic well-being and the joy of pilgrimage.

Table 6. The Direct and Indirect Paths and Their Significance

Path	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	T-Statistics	P-Values
Spiritual Well-being → Eudaimonic Well-Being → Joy of Pilgrimage	0.37	0.06	6.19	0.00

Moreover, the indirect effect of spiritual well-being on the joy of pilgrimage through self-eudaimonic well-being was significant, and the type of effect is positive because the path coefficient is positive.

The indirect effect of Spiritual Well-Being (SWB) on Joy via Eudaimonic Well-Being (EWB) was significant ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.01$). Meanwhile, the direct path from SWB to Joy also remained significant ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a case of partial mediation. To evaluate the strength of this mediation, the Variance Accounted For (VAF) was calculated as follows:

$$vaf = \frac{0.37}{0.37 + 0.24} = 0.607$$

Since this value falls between 20% and 80%, it confirms that EWB partially mediates the relationship between SWB and Joy. This suggests that while EWB plays a substantial mediating role, SWB also contributes directly to the experience of joy among pilgrims.

Structural Model Evaluation

In the partial least squares (PLS) method, certain indices are used to evaluate the structural part of the model. The most important indices for evaluating the structural (inner) part of the model in the PLS method include the effect size (f^2), the coefficient of determination (R^2), and the Stone-Geisser index (Q^2).

The coefficient of determination and the Stone-Geisser index (Q^2) were utilised to test the structural model. The coefficient of determination is a measure that connects the measurement and structural parts of structural equation modelling and indicates the impact of an exogenous variable on an endogenous variable. Notably, the value of R^2 is calculated only for endogenous constructs in the model. This value is zero for exogenous constructs. Furthermore, the value of R^2 ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values being more desirable. The values close to 0.67 are considered good, whereas those close to 0.33 are considered average. However, the values close to 0.19 are considered weak. Based on the results in the table below, the values of R^2 for the constructs of self-eudaimonic well-being (35%) are considered average, whereas the joy of pilgrimage (63%) is close to 0.67 and is considered good.

The Stone-Geisser index (Q^2), introduced by Stone and Geisser (1975), measures the predictive power of the model for dependent variables. This index evaluates the ability of the PLS model to predict outcomes. Negative values are not acceptable and should be positive.

Table 7. The Coefficient of Determination (R^2) and the Q^2 Criterion

Endogenous Variable	R^2	Q^2
Eudaimonic Well-Being	0.35	0.21
Joy of Pilgrimage	0.64	0.30

The predictive power of the model was assessed through the cross-validated communality construct. Table 8 indicates that the values for all factors are positive, confirming that the structural model has a satisfactory level of predictive power.

Table 8. The values of the Shared Variance

Model Variable	Shared Variance
Eudaimonic Well-being	0.51
Joy of Pilgrimage	0.45
Spiritual Well-being	0.41

Discussion

This study aimed to analyse the impact of spiritual well-being on the joy of pilgrimage among the pilgrims of Karbala by considering the mediating role of eudaimonic well-being. According to the results, spiritual well-being had a positive, significant impact on eudaimonic well-being. This finding aligns with the results reported by Chow and Nelson-Becker (2010), McLeod et al. (2019), Hart (1994), Boswell et al. (2006) and Tart (1983) (as cited in Durmuş & Alkan, 2021; Božek et al., 2020; Chia-Yu et al., 2021; Rababa et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2021), who argued that spirituality and spiritual well-being would lead individuals to self-development and personal growth, enabling them to transcend their real selves and reach self-actualisation. Moreover, spirituality and spiritual well-being create a positive set of beliefs in individuals, which can bring different benefits such as lowered anxiety, mitigated depression, increased calmness, an elevated sense of hope and optimism, a meaningful life, and a sense of purpose. These positive traits generated through spiritual well-being contribute to personal development, enabling individuals to transcend their true selves and experience self-actualisation, an outcome which is the essence of eudaimonic well-being where individuals fully realise their inner potential. In addition to the significance of this path, it is important to consider its explanatory power. The R^2 value of 0.35 for Eudaimonic Well-being indicates that while Spiritual Well-being is a key antecedent, it explains 35% of the variance in this construct. This implies that a substantial portion of the variance (65%) is attributable to other factors not included in this model. Future research could build on this by exploring these other variables, particularly those grounded in Self-Determination Theory. For instance, the strong sense of social relatedness fostered by the pilgrimage's communal nature, or the

feeling of competence gained from navigating the journey's inherent challenges, may also serve as direct and significant predictors of eudaimonic well-being.

Additionally, the results showed that eudaimonic well-being had a positive, significant impact on the joy of pilgrimage. This finding aligns with the results reported by Ellsworth and Scherer (2003), Carver and Sheier (1998), Meadows (2014), and Lazarus (1991) (as cited in Emmons, 2020; Johnson, 2020; King & Defoy, 2020; Van Cappellen, 2020), who asserted that individuals would experience happiness during their personal development and pursuit of their goals. Therefore, when an individual realises all their inner potential and becomes a better version of themselves, they reach self-actualisation, which ultimately leads to joy because joy is a response to a good outcome. In other words, this good outcome is that individual's self-actualisation.

Addressing this issue, Watkins et al. (2017) stated that joy, as an intrinsic tendency, is linked to gratitude and involves an appreciation for the sources of joy, *e.g.*, meaningful work, intimate relationships, or anything perceived as good. Joy arises from a well-lived life, filled with meaningful accomplishments, personal growth, development, excellence, and virtue. Joy is a transformative virtue that drives individuals forward in their development and self-formation. Happiness not only arises from self-actualisation but also strengthens the path to self-actualisation while pursuing a goal (King & Defoy, 2020).

The third hypothesis addressed the mediating role of eudaimonic well-being in the relationship between spiritual well-being and joy. According to the results, spiritual well-being had an indirect effect on the joy of pilgrimage through eudaimonic well-being.

The findings show that spiritual well-being had a positive, significant impact on the joy of pilgrimage. This finding is in line with the results reported by Holder et al. (2010) (as cited in Singh et al., 2021), who suggested that spiritual well-being would enhance resilience and the ability to cope with challenges, which gradually improves the coping mechanisms within individuals, ultimately increasing joy.

This study makes several distinct contributions to the literature. First, it empirically validates a mediation model that explains how spiritual well-being fosters joy, moving beyond correlational findings to identify eudaimonic well-being as a key mechanism. Second, by integrating Self-Determination Theory with pilgrimage studies, it provides a robust psychological framework for understanding the process of personal transformation, grounding it in the satisfaction of innate needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Finally, it advances a nuanced, eudaimonic conceptualization of joy within spiritual contexts, highlighting that the fulfillment derived from such experiences is deeply rooted in personal growth and meaning-making rather than transient pleasure.

Conclusion

This study aimed to expand the understanding of the effects left by spiritual well-being on the joy of pilgrims to Karbala by considering the mediating role of eudaimonic well-being. The results of statistical analysis indicated that spiritual well-being had a positive, significant impact on the joy of pilgrims through eudaimonic well-being. Furthermore, eudaimonic well-being enhanced this relationship as a mediating variable.

These findings suggest that the pilgrimage to Karbala can strengthen the spiritual well-being of the pilgrims and lead to eudaimonic well-being. This process will ultimately result in their joy. The research findings and the positive impact of each variable on other variables are consistent with the results reported by previous studies.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study provides valuable insights into the psychological dynamics of the Arbäeen pilgrimage, based on a sample of 152 pilgrims. Although the sample size was sufficient to validate our statistical model, it represents a specific subset of a larger pilgrim population, something which limits the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, this study should be viewed as a foundational step. Future research should focus on the replication of this model with larger, more diverse samples as well as the implementation of longitudinal studies to explore the long-term impact of pilgrimage on different components of well-being.

Moreover, the response rate of approximately 51% raises concerns regarding potential non-response bias, especially given the personal and spiritual nature of the research topic. While this rate is acceptable in similar field settings, future studies should adopt strategies to improve response rates -such as personalized follow-ups, shorter digital survey formats, and enhanced anonymity assurances- to ensure broader participation. Additionally, the statistical adequacy of the sample was confirmed through a post-hoc power analysis using G*Power, but the modest sample size still warrants caution in generalizing the findings. Future research may benefit from multi-site or cross-cultural sampling to strengthen the external validity of the model.

Our study shares limitations common in pilgrimage research. As noted in the literature, the predominance of cross-sectional designs in this field limits firm conclusions about causal relationships between pilgrimage experiences and well-being outcomes (Cowden et al., 2025). While our study provides a robust correlational model, future longitudinal research is needed to track the temporal dynamics of these effects. Our findings on the psychological joy derived from overcoming challenges complement recent research by Saud Almasoudi et al. (2025), which highlights the significant

infrastructural challenges pilgrims face in Karbala. Future research could explore the moderating effect of tourism infrastructure quality on the relationship between spiritual well-being and joy.

Future research should also embrace methodological innovations. The development of standardized, real-time monitoring systems for health and well-being during mass gatherings could enhance data quality and comparability across different pilgrimage contexts (Parker et al., 2024). Furthermore, emerging technologies offer new possibilities; for instance, the metaverse and virtual reality could be used to study pilgrimage experiences in controlled environments or create virtual pilgrimage interventions for therapeutic purposes (Thomas et al., 2024). Finally, translating research findings into practical, pilgrimage-based psychological interventions represents a promising frontier for promoting well-being in culturally sensitive ways.



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