

The Human Search for Meaning in the Postmodern Age of Speed: The Influence of Ibn al-Waqt as a Sufi Teaching in the Context of Religious Education

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Abstract

The postmodern era has radically transformed the individual's relationship with time and meaning; fixed truths, rooted identities, and coherent value systems have been replaced by temporary, relative, and fragmented structures. This transformation has caused a significant rupture in the individual's quest for meaning. In particular, the culture of speed, consumption, and superficiality has stripped the concept of time of its depth. The concept of *Ibn al-Waqt* (Child of the Moment) in Sufi thought offers an alternative model of existence in response to this crisis. It proposes that instead of being trapped in the sorrow of the past or the anxiety of the future, the individual should perceive the present moment as a divine manifestation.

This study examines the influence of the *Ibn al-Waqt* doctrine on the postmodern individual's search for meaning, exploring its psychological, educational, and spiritual dimensions. Based on an evaluation of relevant literature, it is concluded that this understanding strengthens individual mental well-being, brings inner awareness and depth to religious education, and offers a Sufi perspective on the modern crisis of meaning. The study also reveals that the *Ibn al-Waqt* teaching is not merely a mystical concept of the past but a meaningful and applicable response to the existential problems of modern humans.

Keywords: Ibn al-Waqt, Sufism, Search for Meaning, Postmodernism, Religious Education, Time Awareness, Personal Transformation

INTRODUCTION

Throughout every period of human history, individuals have strived to make sense of the spirit of their age and to guide their own existence accordingly. However, the postmodern era that followed modernity has rendered this quest for meaning more complex and intricate. Postmodern thought, which rejects the fixity of truth and renders reality pluralistic and relative, has left the individual facing a crisis of meaning. One of the most significantly transformed concepts in this era is the perception of time. Time has now been severed from the roots of the past and the goals of the future, reduced instead to a pleasure-oriented, superficial, and transient experience of the present moment. This transformation has deeply disrupted both the spiritual and moral balance of the individual.

The crisis experienced by the postmodern individual has been thoroughly analyzed through Jean Baudrillard's concepts of "simulation" and "hyperreality." According to Baudrillard, the individual, detached from truth in a world dominated by media and symbols, has become a being who experiences reality only through representations [6]. In this context, time too has lost its essence, becoming perceived merely as a calendrical process within a continuous technological flow. Consequently, time has become a consumable commodity for the individual, rather than a lived experience [2].

At precisely this point, the ancient Sufi tradition's concept of *Ibn al-Waqt* offers an alternative model of time and existence for the modern individual. Being *Ibn al-Waqt* means perceiving the present moment as a domain of divine manifestation, freeing oneself from the sorrow of the past and the anxiety of the future. This teaching emphasizes that time is not a mathematical unit of measurement, but rather the truth of the state experienced by the spiritual seeker (*sālik*) [11]. Sufi thinkers such as Ibn al-ʿArabī and Suhrawardī placed this understanding at the heart of the relationship between the human being and divine reality. According to them, time is the moment when God's manifestation appears in the servant; thus, grieving over the past and worrying about the future is considered a state of heedlessness (*ghaflah*).

This study explores, from a multidimensional perspective, the potential of the *Ibn al-Waqt* concept as a response to the meaninglessness experienced by individuals in the postmodern era. In light of existing academic literature and Sufi sources, it analyzes the impact of this teaching on individual mental health, educational approaches, and the construction of social values. It also argues that this approach outlines a map of meaning that stretches from classical Sufi texts to postmodern sociological analyses.

In conclusion, this introduction offers a theoretical framework to demonstrate how *Ibn al-Waqt*, an ancient teaching, provides a foundation for revival and meaning-making in response to the crisis of postmodern temporality.

1. The Culture of Speed in Postmodern Time and the Problem of Meaninglessness

The postmodern era, which followed modernity, has radically transformed the perception of time. Unlike previous eras, time is no longer a space for "remembrance" or "anticipation," but has been reduced to an object of "consumption." Zygmunt Bauman's conceptualization of "liquid modernity" offers an apt framework for understanding this transformation. According to Bauman, the modern

individual is constantly adrift among ever-changing desires, relationships, and goals, unable to hold on to anything. This state of drift prevents the individual from putting down roots, developing a sense of belonging, and constructing deep meaning [5].

The postmodern individual, governed by speed, lives in the “now,” disconnected from the past and anxious about the future. However, this experience of the present differs greatly from the Sufi understanding of the “present moment.” For this “now” is not the result of conscious awareness, but more a product of forgetfulness and distraction. The individual, overwhelmed by the routines of daily life, has postponed or completely lost their search for meaning. Lives surrounded by technology, the compulsion to be constantly connected, and the near impossibility of time management have all contributed to a state of spiritual exhaustion.

Moreover, the weakening of social relationships, the dissolution of bonds of belonging, and the deepening sense of loneliness are among the other negative outcomes of postmodern modes of life. Individuals are under constant pressure to reinvent themselves in order to keep up with a rapidly changing world. This pressure disrupts inner balance and increases spiritual dissatisfaction. As a result, the individual becomes alienated from themselves and their environment, being drawn into a state of inner emptiness [3].

At this point, the Sufi understanding of time and existence offers an alternative perspective to the individual’s search for meaning. Sufism posits that time has a qualitative dimension, that each moment possesses its own unique truth, and that one can live meaningfully by becoming aware of this truth. In this sense, Sufism offers depth and slowness as an antidote to the speed- and superficiality-driven lifestyle of the postmodern era [3].

2. Sufism and the Concept of “Ibn al-Waqt”

Sufi thought emphasizes that one’s relationship with time plays a decisive role in spiritual development. In this context, “*Ibn al-Waqt*”—which means “child of the moment”—emerges as one of the fundamental principles of Sufism. This concept urges the individual to detach from the regrets of the past and the anxieties of the future, focusing instead on the present moment. A Sufi regards time as a trust and strives to live it with full awareness. This perspective encourages not passivity toward time, but an active engagement with the moment through conscious presence [5].

Being *Ibn al-Waqt* is not merely about “living in the moment” in a superficial sense. Rather, it involves deep inner discipline, trust in God (*tawakkul*), and surrender (*taslimiyyah*). The Sufi believes that the moment they are experiencing is a manifestation from God and seeks to make the best use of it. This approach liberates the individual from the captivity of the past and the uncertainty of the future. Thus, for the Sufi, each moment becomes an opportunity to encounter the Divine, to turn toward truth, and to take a step on the path of self-realization.

In this regard, being *Ibn al-Waqt* is not just a mystical experience, but also an existential attitude. This attitude reconstructs the individual's relationship with the world through their bond with time. As a

result, a person can seek divine wisdom within each moment without getting lost in the chaos of everyday life.

This understanding also carries an educational dimension. When a person learns to live the moment with deep consciousness, they become more sensitive to both themselves and their surroundings. Seeing time as a trust makes them a more responsible individual. This, in turn, contributes to social peace and spiritual fulfillment.

3. Ibn al-Waqt and the Search for Meaning

Human beings are existentially driven to realize themselves and, in doing so, are in constant pursuit of meaning. A person who fails to find meaning becomes vulnerable to various crises—spiritual, psychological, and social. This crisis has become increasingly visible in the postmodern age. Under the pressure of speed, efficiency, and perpetual change demanded by modernity, the individual's relationship with time has been severely damaged. Consumer culture has replaced authentic fulfillment with fleeting satisfactions. The fragmentation of daily life, the constant distraction of digital platforms, and the alienation from one's inner world condemn the meaning-seeking individual to a superficial existence[3].

In this context, the ancient Sufi teaching of *Ibn al-Waqt* offers a powerful alternative by redefining one's relationship with time. This perspective transforms the individual from a passive being tossed between the regrets of the past and the uncertainties of the future into an active subject, fully aware of the present moment. Recognizing the moment, sensing one's existence within it, and living with this awareness constitute an attitude that fosters both psychological and metaphysical integrity. For meaning is not merely a goal to be reached in the future—it is a truth hidden within each passing moment. In this way, being *Ibn al-Waqt* allows one to live in harmony with time and to find value in every moment of life [1].

The *Ibn al-Waqt* doctrine also encourages a lifestyle marked by simplicity, slowness, and depth. Here, "slowness" does not merely denote a physical pace but refers to mental and spiritual intensity. Sufi practices such as *tafakkur* (contemplation), *dhikr* (remembrance), and *murāqabah* (vigilant awareness) enable the individual to experience the moment more deeply and to integrate more fully with life. This spiritual deepening helps one find meaning not in external structures, but within the inner layers of each lived moment. Thus, the person becomes more conscious, balanced, and peaceful in both thought and action [9].

Contemporary psychology has also emphasized the importance of living in the moment through rising approaches such as *mindfulness*. However, these methods often remain within a secular framework and may fall short of addressing the spiritual depths of the individual. The Sufi doctrine of *Ibn al-Waqt*, on the other hand, transcends these limitations by aiming not only at mental well-being but also at spiritual growth. This perspective offers a multilayered consciousness wherein the individual connects not only with the self but also with the transcendent source of existence [1]. Such awareness enables the person to live each moment as if in the presence of God, thus understanding meaning not only as an intellectual construct but as a divine reality.

The *Ibn al-Waqt* teaching allows the individual to reinterpret life through a unifying (tawhīd-centered) lens. According to this view, the problem is not the lack of control over time, but the inability to establish a meaningful relationship with it. Qualitative awareness of time entails more than mere physical presence; it requires perceiving the spirit of the moment and transforming it into wisdom. Living time in this way not only rescues the individual from superficiality but also cultivates the ability to generate value, discover meaning, and attain spiritual maturity.

The time-meaning relationship offered by Sufism enables the reconstruction of existential security. For the one who becomes *Ibn al-Waqt*, the past becomes a source of reflection, and the future a horizon to be met with trust. Freed from the burden of both temporal dimensions, the individual develops the ability to live the present moment in the most meaningful way. This brings a holistic, balanced, and spiritually fulfilling quality to one's lived experience.

This model, which emphasizes meaning as something built through inner awareness rather than external structures, offers a strong point of resistance against the existential disorientation of modern and postmodern life. The *Ibn al-Waqt* doctrine transforms the perception of time and reshapes the individual not just as a thinker, but as one who feels, lives, and contemplates. In doing so, it enriches the quest for meaning with not only philosophical but also educational and spiritual depth.

4. The Educational Value of the Ibn al-Waqt Understanding in the Context of Religious Education

Religious education aims not only to impart knowledge but also to offer individuals a meaningful worldview, help them internalize values, and cultivate spiritual depth. In this context, concepts offered by the Sufi tradition serve as powerful tools that resonate with the essence of religious education. In particular, the *Ibn al-Waqt* understanding, by transforming the individual's relationship with time, has the potential to infuse religious education processes with new vitality and content. This doctrine encourages individuals to become consciously present in the moment instead of drifting between regrets of the past or anxieties about the future [5].

Today's children and youth face challenges brought on by postmodern lifestyles, such as speed, distraction, fragmentation, and spiritual emptiness. In this regard, religious education must go beyond theoretical instruction to touch the inner world of the learner, supporting spiritual development and contributing to their existential search for meaning. Here, the *Ibn al-Waqt* perspective provides a powerful contribution. By inviting individuals to focus on the "now," it enhances awareness, attentiveness, and responsibility, thereby fostering a more meaningful religious life [5].

This Sufi approach also supports the development of skills such as stress management and mental focus. Living in the moment reduces anxiety, enhances *tawakkul* (trust in God), and fosters a sense of surrender. From this perspective, the inner balance promoted by the *Ibn al-Waqt* mindset can play a constructive role, particularly in the spiritual development of young people. For this to be effective, educators must go beyond presenting the concept as theoretical knowledge; they must also create opportunities for students to experience this awareness directly. Integrating Sufi practices such as contemplation (*tafakkur*), patience (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), and tranquility (*sukūn*) into educational

settings can strengthen inner awareness, transforming education into a spiritual process as well as a cognitive one [5].

To fully appreciate the educational value of the *Ibn al-Waqt* perspective, it is essential to consider two fundamental emotional issues in human psychology: the sorrow of the past and the fear of the future. In Sufi thought, these emotions are directly linked to the individual's failure to properly engage with time. Sufis do not view time merely as a chronological concept, but rather through the notion of *waqt*, or sacred moment. This approach protects the individual from the corrosive effects of the past and the uncontrollable uncertainty of the future. For someone who perceives time through this lens, the past becomes a source of reflection, the future an arena of trust, and the present the true realm of responsibility [10].

In Sufi thought, *waqt* is the space in which spiritual maturation and inner depth occur. The belief that every moment is a divine manifestation requires living with conscious awareness and attentiveness. This protects the individual from dwelling on the past or becoming consumed by fear of the future. Fear of the future reflects anxiety about uncontrollable time, while sorrow over the past signifies the loss of irreversible time. To be *Ibn al-Waqt* is to transcend both and gain inner peace, tranquility, and balance [10].

This profound relationship with time not only supports personal development but also contributes significantly to psychological well-being. The *Ibn al-Waqt* perspective plays a vital role in achieving psychological integrity. Individuals burdened with regrets and anxieties are more prone to emotional conflicts, while those who live in the moment are freed from these emotional weights. This contributes to the development of self-awareness, self-esteem, and confidence [8].

This approach also functions as a therapeutic tool. By valuing the present moment, individuals can overcome spiritual imbalances and learned helplessness. Common issues in modern life such as depression, anxiety, and identity crises can be alleviated through time consciousness. This awareness instills a sense of personal worth and brings individuals closer to both themselves and the Divine [8]. Including this dimension in education fosters a learning environment that is not just information-based but also emotionally and spiritually nurturing.

Moreover, in light of the effects of postmodern pedagogy on religious education, the depth offered by the *Ibn al-Waqt* doctrine becomes even more significant. Since postmodern pedagogy often distances itself from absolute truths, it presents challenges for revelation-based certainties such as religious knowledge. This undermines the individual's connection with meaning and renders the sense of truth relative [7]. However, *Ibn al-Waqt* provides a stable foundation of meaning and truth through the individual's relationship with time. It seeks to cultivate individuals not only intellectually but also spiritually.

In this context, postmodern individuals tend to construct meaning from internal experiences rather than external authorities. Consequently, education centers on the individual's subjective construction processes. The *Ibn al-Waqt* doctrine deepens this process by enhancing inner reflection and awareness.

Thus, religious education transforms the student not merely into a knower but into one who thinks, feels, and navigates through life with emotional intelligence and spiritual sensitivity [7].

One of the greatest crises experienced by postmodern individuals is the inability to connect with transcendence. This leads to a continual alienation within a fragmented understanding of time and identity. The *Ibn al-Waqt* doctrine offers a way to overcome this alienation by focusing on the present moment. By recognizing the divine dimension of the now, individuals can reestablish their connection with both time and the Divine [4]. In this sense, the *Ibn al-Waqt* teaching is not only a tool for personal transformation but also a meaningful response to the existential crisis in religious education.

The *Ibn al-Waqt* approach provides a consciousness rooted in living the moment with awareness, free from the burdens of the past and the anxieties of the future. This consciousness supports an individual's psychological, moral, and spiritual development and opens the door to a deeper and more enduring learning process in religious education. It is clear that this doctrine holds the potential to instill a new existential awareness on both individual and societal levels.

CONCLUSION

The postmodern era has radically transformed the individual's relationship with time, self, and truth; fixed meanings, stable identities, and universal values have been replaced by transient, relative, and fragmented structures. This transformation has deeply shaken the individual's process of meaning-making; particularly in the postmodern climate dominated by a culture of speed, time has been reduced to a consumable and forgettable phenomenon. This disconnection from time has turned into a crisis that undermines the individual's spiritual, moral, and social integrity. At the heart of this crisis lies the individual's inability to engage with the present moment, becoming trapped between the regrets of the past and the uncertainties of the future. Time is no longer perceived as a direction, an inspiration, or a field for construction; rather, it is experienced as a threat and a source of pressure.

In this context, the Sufi concept of *Ibn al-Waqt* offers an alternative ground to the crisis of the age on both theoretical and practical levels. To be *Ibn al-Waqt* means to live the present moment with full awareness, replacing the sorrow of the past and the fear of the future with a deep consciousness of the now, and to perceive this moment as a divine manifestation. This attitude transforms the individual's relationship with time, leading to spiritual awakening, awareness, and balance. Especially in the works of Sufis like Ibn al-‘Arabī and Suhrawardī, this concept is endowed with profound meaning, showing that time is not merely a material flow, but also a dimension in which truth is manifested. Time is not only measured—it is lived and interpreted.

As explored in detail in this study, the understanding of *Ibn al-Waqt* provides not only a philosophical but also a psychological, pedagogical, and spiritual integrity in the individual's search for meaning. Focusing on the moment, deepening attention, moving away from mental distraction, and developing spiritual awareness are associated with therapeutic benefits even in modern psychology. However, what distinguishes the *Ibn al-Waqt* teaching is its integration of this awareness with divine consciousness and surrender to God. Thus, this understanding has the potential not only to enhance mental well-being but also to reconstruct existential direction.

In the context of education, the *Ibn al-Waqt* approach opens the door to a more meaning-oriented and introspective model that transcends the formal and rote-learning patterns of religious education. When religious knowledge is perceived not merely as content to be memorized but as truth to be lived and contemplated, both the mental and spiritual integrity of the individual is supported. Bringing this understanding into educational settings enables students to encounter Sufi values such as contemplation, patience, and gratitude, and enriches educational processes not only cognitively but also emotionally and spiritually.

Within the framework of postmodern pedagogy—built upon pluralism, relativism, and subjective knowledge production—the question of how to convey revelation-centered absolute truths becomes a major issue in religious education. At this point, the *Ibn al-Waqt* teaching focuses on the student's inner experience of time and transforms truth into a field of awareness to be lived, not just a piece of knowledge to be taught. In doing so, it cultivates a holistic, focused, and balanced consciousness in response to the fragmented, fragile, and scattered structure of the postmodern individual. Religious education, therefore, must evolve from merely conveying information to guiding the construction of meaning and values. The *Ibn al-Waqt* perspective reinforces the ethical and spiritual foundation of such guidance.

Moreover, this teaching has positive effects on psychological dimensions such as spiritual fulfillment, self-awareness, self-esteem, and social sensitivity at the individual level. A healthy connection with time is shown to be directly related to spiritual integrity. An individual who becomes aware of time perceives themselves as standing in the presence of God, the Lord of both time and existence. This sense makes the individual more responsible, attentive, and compassionate. The consciousness built through time transforms one's relationship with oneself, with the Divine, and with society.

In light of all these evaluations, the *Ibn al-Waqt* doctrine is not merely a metaphysical legacy of the past but also a functional solution to the individual and societal crises of the present. By placing the moment at the center of the search for meaning, this approach offers individuals a life lived in harmony with time, rooted in values, and enriched with spiritual depth. Therefore, it is of great importance that the *Ibn al-Waqt* concept be reinterpreted in a multidimensional way and integrated into pedagogical processes, both in terms of personal development and religious education. An educational model centered on this understanding will contribute not only to transmitting knowledge but also to constructing meaning, understanding existence, and transforming time into wisdom.

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