

## The Spiritual Trouble: Modern Man's Dilemma

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Key Words:

Spirituality; religions; Buddhism; Christianity; supernatural; identity.

**In previous research** on spirituality, many of my informants claimed that they would label themselves as “spiritual” rather than “religious.” Their path of self-cultivation, however, is more or less informed by **sources of** various religious teachings as well as prevailing narratives of the supernatural phenomena. This usually includes these scenarios: 1) a **personal** transformation from atheism and secularism with religious influence in shaping a new identity, which is observed in contemporary Chinese society; 2) a shift in spiritual pursuit marked by a conversion or a growing interest in a religion rooted in an alien **culture** to **make sense** of self and the world; 3) a deviation from organized religions out of disappointment to metaphysics and the occult motivated by an intense curiosity to decipher fate and destiny.

This study examines individual cases and interrogates a new spiritual dilemma **of modern man**: Where are we going? What is the future of religions and the human civilization?

**In previous research,  
sources of personal culture  
make sense  
of modern man.**

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From ‘Worried Moderns’ to ‘New Mevlevis’:  
a Case of Spiritual Search in Turkey

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Key Words:

Worried moderns; Contemporary Mevleviye; spiritual search; spiritual seekers; Turkey.

Last decades, became the mirror of structural and cultural changes in Turkey. **Processes of modernization**, globalization and individualization **created a demand** for spiritual alternatives in Turkey **for** the ones who felt dissatisfied with the normative Islam. Experiencing this atmosphere inspired me to do an ethnographic research where I studied three different Mevlevi communities in Istanbul and Konya throughout 2017. This research showed that Mevleviye became **a place where** some people articulate spiritual search to reach a personal spiritual **meaning** apart from their historical religious tradition. These people are **part of a** segment that is called “worried moderns” who are ‘modern’ in terms of **life-style** but worried that Islam will interfere with that **life-style**. A national survey revealed **that** these people are relatively young, from middle or upper-middle classes, well-educated, professionals who show liberal and proactive tendencies. Findings of my research showed that worried moderns actually **show** very similar characteristics with “new” Mevlevis who

are “spiritual seekers” and “**new**” followers of an Islamic religious path, Mevleviye. In this sense, I asked “How they became new Mevlevis?” The answer offered an insight about spiritual search of new Mevlevis as well as their motivations behind this conversion.

Concisely, spiritual search turned out to be a process that starts with a “**tension**” (normlessness, loneliness, societal constraints etc.) **in** which **the** answer is seen in religion. This would make new Mevlevis to perceive their **quest** as a spiritual one. They “meet” (**through** a two-phased process: introduction and meeting with the community) with Mevleviye which will happen in “**a turning point**” of their lives. After this point, new Mevlevis will start to bond with some other members while their attachments outside of this circle. At the end, the person will be converted fully while spiritual search will evolve from a highly-active one **to** a fulfilling life **change**.

**Processes of globalization  
create a demand for a place  
where meaning  
is part of a life-style  
a life-style that shows  
“new” “tension”  
in the quest  
through “a turning point” to  
change.**

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Identity of the Embodied Self with the Transcendental Self: Ultimate Spiritual Realisation

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Key Words:

Hindu Philosophy; Advaita Vedanta; Upanishad; *ātman/Self*; *ji/va*.

**Spiritual realisation** is nothing more nor less than being, knowing and experiencing one’s true Self. The Self that **knows itself** as the Absolute is the same Self that is the essence of the empirical self; it is just obscured. The Advaita Vedanta Philosophy professes the **identity** of **embodied** self with the transcendental Self by using the illustrious “space in pots” analogy.

The embodied self (*ji/va*) is not something other than the transcendental Self /*ātman* as the space in the jar is not other than **the** great expanse of space/ **ether** itself. The *ji/vas* originate from the *ātman* just as the space-in-pots originate from space. **When** the pots etc. are destroyed, the space within the pots etc. is merged into space itself. In the same way, the *ji/vas* are merged into *ātman* when **ignorance** is removed by the right knowledge. When the space within one pot/jar becomes tinged with smoke or dust, all pot-spaces does not get affected, so are the *ji | vas* with regard to happiness, misery and so on. The apparent origination of embodied self is due to the aggregate of bodies. When the aggregate of bodies disappears, *ji/va* also **disappears** and gets merged in *ātman*. The

names, forms, functions of pots, jars, plates etc. differ in accordance with the limiting conditions but **there is no difference of space**, so is the conclusion with regard to *ji/va*. As the jar space is neither an evolute nor a limb of space itself, so the *ji/va* is neither an evolute nor a limb of *ātman*.

The Ultimate Truth is that “there is neither dissolution **nor creation**; there is no one who is in bondage, no one who is striving, and no one who wants to be released. The ignorance with **all** its effects is **grounded in the** non-dual, ever luminous **Self**.”

**Spiritual realisation knows itself;  
embodied in the ether.  
When ignorance disappears  
there is no difference of space,  
nor creation;  
all is grounded in the Self.**

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**Becoming a Wild Woman:**  
The Redefinition of Femininity in Contemporary Women’s Spirituality  
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University of Ghent, Belgium.

Key Words:

Spirituality; **wild** woman workshops; gender; femininity; female subjectivity; self-development; bricolage; cultural alterity; ethnography; Western Europe.

This presentation will deal with spiritual women’s workshops in Western Europe (Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) centred on the archetype of the ‘wild woman’. The workshops start from the premise that the rediscovery of this archetype benefits the self-realization of contemporary women who, due to living in present-day society, are believed to have lost connection with their inner wildness. Wildness is interpreted here as **following** one’s spontaneous impulses and expressing **one’s true** self and therefore entails a capacity to move beyond habitual patterns and internalized social norms. In this regard, gender norms and representations are challenged, in particular the association of femininity with weakness, compliance, jealousy and cleanliness. A strength based on following one’s intuitions and deep aspirations, a capacity for communion with nature and for affective sharing with other women in a **spirit** of sisterhood are searched for instead. This shift to a so-called wild femininity is **realised by** a number of ritualized body exercises drawing on tantra, shamanism and neopagan goddess spirituality and consisting of breathing and sound exercises, movement, dance, touch, nakedness, visualisations as well as contact with the earth, water and surrounding **nature**.

The study is based on ethnographic fieldwork entailing participant observation in 6 workshops and in-depth interviews with 18 participants and two conveners. In the presentation I will give a detailed description of the workshops and the views that are held by the conveners and participants. Referring to the interviews, I will analyse how women challenge, redefine or re-appropriate existing gender norms and develop their female

subjectivity through embodying the imagined wild woman during the exercises. I will also show how a self-referential process of bricolage with diverse cultural resources enables the embodiment of a wildness that contrasts with the daily life of contemporary western women.

**Becoming wild...  
following one's true spirit  
- realised by nature.**

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HIV/AIDS: The Power of Religion, History, **Social** Class & Gender  
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Key Words:

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV); acquired human immunodeficiency virus (AIDS); HIV prevalence; religion; gender **roles**; cultural **beliefs**.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic in Uganda has been understood as one mainly due to poverty. Originally submitted to Dana Cudney for the course "Desire, Love and Work II" at Laurentian University, this paper examines the influence of culture and religion on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Uganda using research **and** empirical data acquired during a humanitarian mission in February 2018.

More specifically, this paper explores the effects of **colonization** and thereby religion on how local authorities responded to this pandemic, which may explain the current HIV statistics.

The empirical data was **collected** through interviews and observations of men, women and children in Mutungo, Kigungu, and Nakawuka; including **HIV positive patients** and residents of a women's shelter. Along with poverty, religion was clearly identified as an indirect cause for the current prevalence of HIV. Empirical data showed that cultural and religious beliefs lead to inaccurate sex education, which validates and sometimes encourages unsafe practices.

Furthermore, this paper examines the connections between women's rights and the HIV/AIDS pandemic **in Uganda** where gender roles seem to increase the likelihood of women **contracting** HIV.

Based on this, **a** successful approach against HIV/AIDS should acknowledge Ugandan religious beliefs, regional and **cultural** values, and socio-economic **challenges**.

**Social roles, beliefs and  
colonization  
collect HIV positive patients  
in Uganda  
contracting a cultural challenge.**

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**Queer Spirituality: The Buddhist Approach as Lived Out in East Asia**  
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Key Words:

Buddhism; homosexual; East Asia; gay; desire; Chu T'ien-wen; Mahayana.

While homosexuality and Christianity have had a hard time with each other at least since modern times (the past was arguably otherwise), the relation between homosexuality and **Buddhism**, at least as it is being lived out in **East Asia**, seems not only to lack such antagonism but even function well enough for LGBT people to voluntarily embrace the religion. As evident in contemporary literary and cinematic representations of same-sex themes in the region, gay men (mostly, but also some lesbians), while not necessarily practicing as a devout Buddhist, often turn to the religion during or after (a series/life of) emotional turmoil as a way of “relief” or “salvation.” While Buddhism also holds a negative view on sexual desire (though not limited to same-sex), which it sees as one of the sources of people’s “suffering” in life, it is intriguing to see how this view actually invites gay men’s **spiritual investment** in it rather than hinders them from doing so. To try to understand why this is the case, it is therefore more useful to look at the quotidian enactments of Buddhism than its disciplinary tenets. This paper will therefore examine two particularly resonant literary texts of same-sex theme that are imbued with a strong Buddhist aura, namely the prominent Taiwanese writer Chu T'ien-wen's now classic novel *Notes of a Desolate Man* (1994) and its germinating version, the earlier short story “*Bodhisattva Incarnate*” (1989), both of which have widely available English translations. With Chu not being a particularly religious author, these two landmark works of **contemporary** Chinese gay literature are particularly interesting in their nonchalantly deployed Buddhist framework and language, which are extremely sophisticated and revealing about the Mahayana Buddhist view on desire as well as some of its peculiar **ways of dealing with** it that is still worth pondering **nowadays**.

**Queer Buddhism  
in East Asia,  
a spiritual investment, a contemporary way  
of dealing with now.**

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Literary **Reinvention** of the Buddhist Identities:  
Lay Interpretations of Spirituality in Contemporary Poetry  
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Key Words:

Buddhism; contemporary poetry; identity; secular; profane; spirituality; practicality; lay believers; religion; literature.

Buddhist spirituality is a defining element in **demarcating the line between** the secular and the profane. Beginning in the medieval period, lay patrons have already adopted their own **interpretation** upon the doctrines **and** scriptures of the religion by absorbing its **practices** into their native belief and ritual system, forming a tradition of religious culture that has no warrant from spirituality but practicality. Such **an** ideology has a continuity that stretched into the modern period that can be fully exemplified by an anthropological investigation into the daily practices of lay people in contemporary society. Fascinating enough, contemporary poets also contributed to the interpretation of this phenomenon by redefining the religion through the lens of secular alienation and distortion. Soldofsky reads this religion as a secular reinvention of their **ideological framework**. It is described in this poem that monasteries are no longer the sacred shelter for the believers but rather a factory that creates notions and devices for matching the lives of modern citizens. Spirituality seems to be an abandoned domain by the lay believers as, from their perspective, religious faithfulness does not need to involve the cultivation of spiritual practices since patronage can be achieved by monetary devotion. Following these symbolic premises, this paper attempts to explore the new identity of the lay believers within the religion by navigating through the allegories used in the poems to reconstruct the symbolic system of the religion. Such a literary enquiry into the metaphorical interpretation of the religion should hopefully unveil the ideology of lay believers upon the religion.

**Reinvention:  
demarcating the line between  
interpretation  
and  
practice,  
an ideological framework.**

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**Inventing** a Religion: Fictional Religions in Creative Writing  
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Key Words:

Creative writing; fiction; novel; invented religion; Butler; parable; ritual.

Religion provides a fertile source of inspiration for writers of fiction. Although most authors typically create distorted or grotesque versions of real-world **religions**, a minority create entirely invented religions whose rituals and myths are conceived of as wholly original creations. Occasionally, these inventions cross into reality, **blurring** the lines between **truth** and fiction, lending credence to L. Ron Hubbard's view that 'Religion is always different than truth. It has to be. Because the only way you can control a people is to lie to them', an opinion he expounded several decades prior to the legal recognition of Scientology as a religion.

This paper will explore the invention of religion **in** fiction, proposing that even within the relative freedom of a **creative** endeavour, there is a requirement for invented religions to

adhere to a certain rubric or ritualistic **paradigm** in order to be successful. The principle example offered will be the Earthseed religion created by Octavia Butler in *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* (1993, 1998). Octavia Butler (1947-2006) was the first African-American female writer of science-fiction, winner of the Hugo and Nebula Awards, and a recipient of the MacArthur Genius Award.

The *Parable* novels depict the establishment of the nascent Earthseed community in **response to** the socioeconomic and political collapse of twenty-first century America, a **dystopia** triggered by environmental catastrophe and the unbridgeable gulf between the wealthy and the poor. The fictional Earthseed religion is proposed as a solution to the plight of the world and has in turn inspired a new, real-world faith called Terasem (tera:earth and sem:seed).

This paper will consider how fictional religion may break of the creative boundary to become real-world religion and explore the ideological and spiritual appetites these creations seek to satisfy.

**Inventing religions,  
blurring truth  
in a creative paradigm  
(a response  
to dystopia).**

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On Sin, Reality and **Identity**: Phenomenological Insights into Experience of Julian of Norwich  
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Key Words:

Julian of Norwich; mysticism; personal Identity; Phenomenology of Sin; antinomical structures of reality.

In my paper I present phenomenological-metaphysical **reflections on** spiritual experience of Julian of Norwich (1342 – 1416). I emphasize close experiential **interconnectedness** among phenomenon of sin, character of reality, and understanding one’s own identity.

First I discuss the meaning of a profoundly problematic notion of “sin” and analyze a **basic ontological** situation within which it occurs. It is the situation qualified by inherent **conflicts** and antinomies. However, there is no one to blame for such an ontology, it seems to be completely **innocent** and guiltless. Stressing her experience only, Julian qualifies sin simply as pain, isolation, discordance, clash of **intentions**, delusion and having no essence. As “un-natural” and “un-real”, sin **refrains** mind **from** the perception of the real and natural and distorts intentional relations one carries toward **the world**, others and oneself. One way how to explain the inherent discordances of the experienced reality – further **relying on** Julian’s insights – would be to radically employ and expand the Christian term of “incarnation.”

Within the context outlined above, I would like to show how **the** true sense of personal identity is revealed through process of mystical **transformation**. Julian of Norwich encourages us to transcend the conditioned and limited antinomical situation and step toward unbound possibilities **of** divine goodness which may be found and activated in one's own inmost being. As the way out, the English medieval mystic recommends three mutually bound spiritual principles, acceptance – contemplation – optimism: the tree well-known **healing** (re-programming) mindsets which are getting so popular in current forms of spirituality. Moreover, if sin disappears with the mystical transformation of consciousness, may such transformation undertaken on a large scale involve also the overall transformation of the antinomical structures of reality? Was the medieval mystic “taught” something about the relation of mind and reality?

**Identity:  
reflections  
on interconnectedness,  
a basic ontological  
conflict,  
innocent intentions refrain from  
the world,  
relying on  
the transformation of healing?**

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### **Alternative to the Modern Age?**

Nostalgia and Authenticity in Spiritual and Religious Self-Help Books in Turkey

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#### Key Words:

Religious; spiritual; New Age; Turkey; self-help books; modernity; modern age; popular culture; hegemony.

Over the past few years, books aiming **self-help** through both religious themes and spiritual symbols made it into the bestseller lists in Turkey. As they aim to help the self, they start with what's wrong in the contemporary culture and continue to offer directions for the self. Drawing on a cultural studies perspective and considering the dialectic relation between the popular and hegemony, this study aims to examine the ways these bestseller self-help **books** criticize modern age and how they **offer** (if any) alternative(s) to it. Ten bestsellers published between 2014 and 2017 were analysed and divided into two groups. While the books using overtly religious themes and symbols offer **a nostalgic** point of view to revive 'the golden **age** of religion' **and** the 'authentic Islam', the spiritual books find the cure to modern age in exploring the 'authentic self'. The competing conceptions of the terms nostalgia **and authenticity** gains importance, as this study tries **to** consider the **different conceptions of** these terms in relation to the **hegemonic** conceptions of religion, self, modern age and modern life in Turkey. Accordingly, it relates to conservatism and

neoliberalism as the major hegemonic **powers** and how they interact to constitute the hegemony. Thus, historical background of Islamism and Islamists' popular cultural forms, the popular conceptions of spirituality and self-help, competing forms of secular and religious wisdom in Turkey was briefly reflected upon to understand the background of the alternatives these books offer.

**Alternative  
self-help books  
offer  
a nostalgic age  
and an authenticity  
to different conceptions  
of hegemonic power.**

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Domestication and Spirituality in the Cannibalism Taboo  
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Key Words:

Cannibalism, Egypt, monasticism, Abraham, Isaac, communion, sacrifice.

**In antiquity** the beginning of civilization was credited to Egypt, which therefore inspired speculation on the origins of religion and dietary practices. This comparative textual analysis examines four texts that reveal related views on religious prohibition of **cannibalism**.

Diodorus Siculus 1.14 records that humans abandoned cannibalism after Isis and Osiris, euhemerized as enlightened rulers, had introduced grain. The cultivation of livestock and grain encouraged the decline of cannibalism as **distinction** sharpened **between humans and the natural world**. Other writings on Egypt reinforce this distinction. Juvenal's Stoic-colored Satire 15 records **the consumption of** a victim of mob **violence**. The satire castigates Egyptian custom, which deifies edible vegetables and animals, but contemns the divine element in a man by eating him and reversing the natural order.

Egypt's religiosity later encouraged the growth of Christian communities such as those of Scetis. Vitae Patrum 5.18.3, of the 4th century AD, recounts the vision of a monk who doubted the physical reality of **transubstantiation**. He witnesses the angel of the Lord slay a living child in place of the Host, and is **compelled** afterward to consume human flesh and blood. The text alludes **to the sacrifice** of Isaac, widely understood as a parable for the replacement of human sacrifice by that of animals. It hints that the Host's body and blood are eaten precisely because through divine agency they spiritually reverse the acts of human sacrifice and cannibalism.

Finally Mohammad Rabie's recent dystopian novel Otared opens with an act of murder and cannibalism during Eid al Adha, the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice commemorating the sacrifice of Isaac. This crime is a catalyst for a regression of humanity to a bestial animal state.

The texts illustrate a sense of differentiation between human and animal on spiritual grounds, which lies at the heart of proscriptions against cannibalism.

**In antiquity  
cannibalism is a distinction  
between humans and the  
natural world  
the consumption of  
violence,  
transubstantiation  
compelled to sacrifice.**

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**Title To Be Confirmed**

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**Title - abstract**

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Transcendence on the Cut-Rate: A Friendly Critique of Oliver Sacks' 'The Lost Mariner'

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Key Words:

Oliver Sacks, memory, religious experience, transcendence, romanticism, empiricism, Korsakov's syndrome, Jimmie G., Luis Bunuel, Alexander Luria.

"Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it we are nothing" (Luis Bunuel).

"[A] man does not consist of memory alone. He has feeling, will, sensibilities, moral being—matters of which neurology cannot speak" (Alexander Luria).

Put bluntly, I'll argue that Oliver **Sacks** is guilty of being philosophically impetuous in his famous and otherwise delightfully insightful essay "The Lost Mariner." He makes an argument that **invests the human psyche with** a particular (romanticist-style) disposition to authentic transcendent **experience**, but does so **on the cheap**.

In his essay, Sacks, the well-regarded neurologist and author, poignantly describes the mental devastation wrought by alcohol-induced Korsakov's syndrome on 49-year-old Jimmie G., who vividly recollects the first nineteen years of his life but suffers from a "dense amnesia" concerning the most recent thirty years and whose short-term memories are "fugitive in the extreme," almost invariably persisting for less than a minute.

Jimmie is intelligent, analytical, and affable. He recalls high school science and his early years in the Navy with enthusiasm and striking specificity. But when met by the ordinary scenes of his present life in the Home for the Aged, **where** Sacks worked, Jimmie is “lost.” Every morning, Jimmie wakes up unaware of his whereabouts, utterly ignorant of who his long-serving nurses are. Presented with a mirror, he’s horrified when, expecting to see a teenager’s face, he confronts a familiar-looking, lightly graying older man. Jimmie’s “day-to-day” experience consists in an ever-moving, thirty second or so blip of awareness of his immediate physical surroundings, bookended by a haze of almost total unknowing. Asked how he feels—“happy or sad?”—Jimmie doesn’t know. Lost, indeed. Jimmie seems incapable of forming and sustaining new friendships; of doing sustained tasks meaningful to him; of understanding, and so of deeply relating to, himself. Naturally, Sacks asks himself, “were there depths in this unmemoried man, depths of an abiding feeling, and thinking, or had [Jimmie] been reduced to a sort of Human drivel, a mere succession of unrelated impressions and events?” At first, following the spirit of Bunuel’s remark, Sacks answers ‘no depths’—and he despairs.

Despair does not receive the final word, though. “The Lost Mariner” recounts Sacks’ heady philosophical conversion from Bunuel’s “**memory-is-all**” remark to Luria’s belief that “man does not consist of memory alone.” Urged by nuns (who worked at the Home) to observe Jimmie in Catholic mass, Sacks finds Jimmie to be uncharacteristically calm, attentive, and seemingly deeply engaged during the service—a serenity that persists hours after Jimmie has forgotten he took communion. Sacks also sees a “different man” when he watches Jimmie work in the Home’s garden, which, Sacks comes to think, Jimmie fashions after gardens he knew from his childhood.

On the basis of these two episodes, Sacks not only changes his mind about Jimmie’s prospects for connection, meaning, and engagement, he also draws several striking conclusions about the limits of empirical science and the powers of the human soul: “the undiminished possibility of reintegration by art, by communion, by touching the human spirit.”

I am not myself an advocate of strict empiricism, the idea that the empirical sciences are capable, in principle, of explaining everything, nor do I accept a general worldview that treats with near-indefeasible skepticism the belief that people are capable of authentic transcendent experiences. But Sacks’ romanticist analysis of Jimmie, which is hazy and somewhat obscure, fails to consider several plausible, non-romanticist, and seemingly less extravagant explanations for Jimmie’s altered mood—that’s the essence of my “transcendence on the cut-rate” objection. Less friendly critics of Sacks’ reasoning will simply dismiss his thinking as suffering from a “romanticism of the gaps” fallacy. I’d prefer my critique to open up our thinking to other, harder-earned, non-empiricist interpretations of Jimmie’s experiences.

**Sacks invests the psyche  
with experience  
on the cheap**

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The Spiritual and **Pragmatic** Wisdom of Bhagavadgita:

A Continued Guideline to Managing Life-skills

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Key Words:

Bhagavadgita Gita; life-skills; management; **spirituality**; well-being; mental- health.

This paper shall expound on the wisdom that the Bhagavadgita, the scripture drawn from the Indian epic, Mahabharata, and which is based upon the classical Indian Philosophy of Sankhya-Yoga, has provided a continual enlightenment to comprehend and internalise the meaning of leading a meaningful life. Despite being an ancient classic, it has guided humans in excelling in **life skills, and** thereby enabling one to lead a life of purposive action, of doing duty without ulterior motives, practising righteousness and in maintaining a well- integrated mind-body and heart **harmony**. The Bhagavadgita which literally means the Song of the God is a Sanskrit text from the epic Mahabharata. Lord Krishna is the narrator here and its verses are written in a poetic form. It is also called the Gita, and is narrated as a conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, a warrior prince, taking place on the battle-field just prior to the start of a climactic war. Krishna elaborates on a number of philosophical tenets for everyday living, with examples and analogies. I have highlighted, by citing the relevant philosophical excerpts and commentaries, that **the Gita** emphasises on the feasibility of leading an active engagement with life issues and pragmatic concerns and yet, strongly facilitates the process of spiritual elevation in an individual. The meaning of spiritual according to Gita, as I have interpreted here, implies a state of holistic mental and emotional well- being at the individual level in the personal space, and a simultaneous pursuit of professional excellence, through selfless karma, in the public domain. I have, therefore, contextualised the **wisdom** of the Gita in addressing and resolving the mental health **issues** and disharmony both in personal and professional spaces that have become a part of **the contemporary world-view**.

**Pragmatic spirituality;  
life skills and harmony,  
the Gita is  
a contemporary world-view.**

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Bhagavadgītā on Spiritual Progress through the Practice of Virtues

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Key Words:

Spiritualism; charity; self-control; compassion; greed; indulgence; aggression; Dharma; Brahman; Atman.

**The** Brihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad says that an individual is a **blend of** godliness, humanness and demoness. Each of these three aspects has an essential **vice** attached to it. The godly aspect qualifies one to revel in the pleasures **and** splendours through the senses. But without

restraint it gets the individual addicted to sensual enjoyments and makes him egoistic. The human part is greedy and covetous. If not checked it makes one selfish. And the demonic part which is cruel and aggressive harms not only one's own self but also others. Thus, the **virtues** of self-Control (Dama), charity (Dāna) and compassion (Daya) are taught in the scriptures so that these vices in us could be sublimated and we could move towards our spiritual progress. The central message of the upaniṣadic philosophy **is** the realization of the oneness of the individual with the **universal**. This is what Sri Kṛṣṇa through his teachings in the Bhagavadgītā reveals. The Brahman dwells in the Atman and thus the apparent notions of doership, enjoyership and ownership lose significance. **Those who seek liberation** the prescribed dharma is detachment. The three vices: Indulgence, greed and cruelty are impediments in this spiritual journey. These three virtues have been extolled in the Bhagavadgītā where Sri Kṛṣṇa with a self-effacing demeanor stirs up the reader to **sift through** the dross and get clarity of **vision**. These virtues work on the principle that every creature **tied to** the bond of divinity. The teachings of the Bhagavadgītā if properly grasped would capacitate us to dig out the best from our **practical wisdom**. "Such an integral world-view can be very healthy today, when humanity cuts itself apart through competitiveness, threatening to destroy the cosmic matrix of life." In this paper I engage with the ethico-metaphysical landscape of the Bhagavadgītā.

**The blend of vice and virtue is universal.  
Those who seek liberation  
sift through vision  
tied to practical  
wisdom.**

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Spirituality and Culture: Portraits  
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Key Words:

Drawing; cultural bias; poetry; representation; shamanism.

***A spiritual***  
*Connection with culture, lines*  
*Drawn from performance –*  
*Extracting from abstracts the*  
*Breath of a presentation.*

The process of drawing is a close **study** in attention. The process of writing poetry, a close study in **listening**. Both of these influence the way we interact with one another and can create a form of **transcendence**, where one learns to follow what and who is being **observed**, rather than the **illusions** of familiarity: following etheric trails in a search for the observed, learning about ourselves.

Positioning oneself in this middle space, is perhaps a form of shamanism.

In Progressive Connexions' CFP nestles the following incipit: "other forms of participation..." This invitation to innovate was also **present** for the last, which was the first, session on

Spirituality and... Culture, resulting in my responding to the speakers through **poetry and art**. I propose to repeat this experiment, building upon the previous experience to see if the result is a refinement of practice, and if the conclusions that were drawn regarding cultural bias through representation, are resolvable by adapting to the needs of difference, uncluttered by personal orientation; where the intuition, becomes material.

**A spiritual study,  
a listening transcendence,  
observed illusions  
present poetry  
and art.**

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