

Re-Examining the Idea of Being in New Spirituality

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Abstract

The viewpoint of individuals about the essence of being and about man's and God's relationship with the whole of being affects their way of spirituality. The spirituality of one who thinks that being (nature, the supernatural realm, man, and God) is one integrated and indistinct whole is very different from that of one who distinguishes between the visible and invisible worlds and considers man and God to be two different beings. In this article, we are going to show, by using available studies about the beliefs of new spiritualists,¹ how the idea of being is explained in this school of thought and what impacts the ontology arising from this school has on the theology and anthropology of new spiritualists. In the present article, we shall try to explain this kind of ontology by using the concept of monism and will briefly mention some of its ideological requirements.

Keywords: New Spirituality, New Age religions, post-modern ontology, monism, reincarnation, self-growth.

1. In what follows, the word "spiritualist" is taken in its general and literal meaning and not in its more modern meaning which denotes a person who holds 'the belief that the dead communicate with the living, as through a medium'.

Introduction

In the first days of Christianity *spirituality* used to be defined as ‘life in the Holy Spirit’ and in contradistinction to carnalism; but in the Middle Ages, and in the process of one conceptual turn, this term was applied to anything that was related to the Church and the official institution of Christianity. Likewise, in the modern era another conceptual turn has taken place and, under the influence of humanistic psychology and even materialistic religious scholars and theologians, the term *spirituality* has come to mean ‘meaningfulness of life’ and to be considered as the opposite of futility. But in the twentieth century during the sixties, and especially after the eighties, with the formation of the New Age movement, and of course under the influence of post-modern culture, this term undertook a conceptual change and was defined as the opposite of institutionalised religion, and came to denote a kind of personal, free and non-binding search for transcendence; and even if it made use religious traditions, it nonetheless had no relation to any of them (see Shakernezhad 2017). Although this kind of unbounded and free “spirituality” took on different forms, nonetheless in the final decade leading to the 21st century, it became a socio-cultural movement in Anglo-American countries and was opposed to institutionalised religion, and became well known as New Spirituality or Spirituality Without Religion (see Shakernezhad 2015).

The present article aims to re-examine, by using studies that have been done about this new phenomenon, the idea of being from the viewpoint of this movement, and thus endeavour to understand its ontology. Even if the movement of New Spirituality is a pluralistic movement and cannot be expected to have cogent ontological principles, nevertheless the current article endeavours, by introducing the general attitude of this movement (vis. the re-divinisation of being and man, but on the basis of a purely human understanding and a focus on the life of this world), to present a narrative which is compatible with the idea of being in this movement, and

to present possibilities about this idea's ideological denotations.

1. The Idea of Being

The ontology of different schools of thought is their ideas and cogent teachings about what things exist in the world, what their quiddity¹ is and what relationship they have with each other. Every school (for example materialism, idealism, agnosticism, dualism, monism, etc.) has presented systematic explanations of this topic. Discussions on the heavens and the earth, the manner of their appearance, natural phenomena, the angels, the invisible world, matter, etc., pertain to ontology; but the main discussion in any school of thought, after dealing with the essence of being, is whether that school of thought believes in a thing that transcends matter, and whether it basically accords fundamentality to a material being or to an immaterial being and, in general, what it considers to be the relationship between a physical and metaphysical being.

In traditional ontology, the world has material and immaterial planes, variable and invariable things and temporal and atemporal beings. On the basis of this kind of thought, the material world is a contingent world and is considered to be subordinate to the celestial world. In modern discourse and in contradistinction to traditional discourse, the world has been de-sanctified, the existence of the sacred world is denied and what remains is only the material world. But in post-modern spirituality a kind of sanctity is given back to the world and the existence of insensible, or at least imperceptible, matters, which do not admit of experimentation, are recognised. But in spite of this, like in the traditional worldview, the existence of material things is not related to the existence of sacred things. On the contrary, the existence of sacred matters is considered to be dependent on material things. Matter in the traditional worldview is the lowest plane of being, and is considered to be subordinate to the

1. Or "essence".

immaterial realms. In traditional ontology material beings find validity under the aegis of immaterial beings, but in post-modern thought the issue is opposite, and for as long as there is no materiality there will not be spirituality; and spirituality is defined in lieu of the material realm (see Shakernezhad 2017).

In what follows hereunder, by taking into consideration ideas related to being in New Spirituality (like the denial of the duality of spirit and matter, the adoption of an evolutionary view with regards to being, the narrative of ‘energy’ in place of the spirit, legalism and the definition of the future in the present, seeing the whole world as good while denying the existence of evil, and the reduction of metaphysics to the natural world), efforts will be made to comprehend the different view of being held by the adherents of New Spirituality and its ideological corollaries.

2. Typology

In one general typology, the traditions of spirituality can be divided into two categories:

A) Other-worldly spirituality (looking for salvation outside the world of matter);

B) Worldly spirituality (looking for salvation inside the world of matter and from the essence of matter).¹

Spirituality of the first kind, usually by making a distinction between the material and spiritual worlds, considers salvation to be beyond the world of matter and to lie in the world of meaning; and of course in some of its interpretations, the world of meaning exists only in a place other than the material world, and in other interpretations in order to reach the spiritual world one must fight the material world. Usually the mystical

1. In classic Islamic mysticism, spirituality is accompanied by matter and is at the same time other than matter. Hence in Islamic spirituality a third model is presented which embraces (both) rejection and acceptance of the world.

paths of Eastern religions, Christian monasticism and even the paths of secret mysticism and new esotericism belong to this category. But among traditions of spirituality, paths are also found which look for meaning in the context of material things; because in their view spirituality is not things but having a deep experience of the material world, and basically spirituality is defined in the context of materiality. Some of the schools of paganism in Europe, and similarly religions based on nature, like some ancient religions and the movement of Wicca, belong to this category (Dawson 2017, 86-130).

Gordon Lynch explains, on the basis of his studies about the ideas and beliefs of New Spirituality, that this spirituality clearly belongs to the second category; because in New Spirituality the world of meaning is not distinct from the world of matter, and nature is itself holy, and religious experiences do not indicate encountering another world. Rather, they show having that same deep understanding of the inside of material things and nature, which Lynch calls the 'divinisation of nature' (Lynch 2007, 53).

Of course, as has been said, New Spirituality has various schools, aspects and teachings. On this same basis, Lynch defines two levels for the 'new divinisation', or the divinisation of nature, and holds that in New Spirituality this divinisation happens in two forms: strong and weak divinisation. In its strong form divinisation is equivalent with nature, and paying attention to nature is as a window for understanding holiness, but in its weak form there is a difference between divine matters and the order of nature (although divine matters are in this account still not placed in the other world). Nevertheless, nature is the object of attention because it is considered as the window for experiencing spiritual matters (Lynch 2007, 43-54).

According to this same thought, the symbols and literature of New Spirituality, on the basis that it considers divine matters to be in the context

of nature or after traversing through nature, come to differ with each other, but they are the same on this point that in all cases nature and matter is itself respectable because, although spirituality is may follow from it, it is not beyond or different from it. Hence it is not possible to derive spiritual benefit by abandoning matter.

Some manifestations of this kind of ontological view can be seen in the actions of New Spiritualists, which include attending to the material body, bodily and worldly well-being, environmentalism (global warming, environmental pollution, organic agriculture), performing prayers related to nature or performing exercises in the context of nature.

Of course, according to Gordon Lynch, this kind of conduct and view of nature does not mean that all things are holy. Here nature means virgin nature; that is to say, that which exists outside man's cultural and spiritual activities, although waves, clouds, fire, animals, mountains, trees, herbage, stars and planets are considered to be nature, nonetheless what is created by man or is a result of human activities is not considered a natural thing and is not respectable. Therefore, nature is that which is not human, and is of course considered to be much further than man, and man is a small part which cannot be considered to be nature; and he cannot be considered to participate or to not participate in its order (Lynch 2007, 55).

The most important effect of this ontological view is a kind of secularism based on concern for the present worldly life. According to Mustafa Malikian, "in spirituality there is a kind of secularity; the concern for spirituality is here and now... spiritual man, by becoming spiritual, intends to acquire certain things right here...the meaning of secularity being worldly, in the sense that this world is the centre of attention" (Soroush et al. 1388 Sh, 316-17).

On the basis this explanation, secularity is not opposed to spirituality, but is belief in the fundamentality of worldly matters even in spirituality.

Another ideological result of this kind of view is belief in the existence of mystery in this same world, and not the existence of the invisible world in an independent manner. In other words, in the thought of New Spirituality, the invisible world (the world of angels, the jinn and spirits in an independent manner) does not exist. According to the belief of some contemporary thinkers, New Spirituality is believing in the existence of mystery in the world. Mystery is related to matters which are not understandable to man, not that presently there are no tools for understanding it, or that it can be resolved with more effort (like a riddle or scientific matter), but (mystery) from that aspect that it is beyond the reach of man's thought and is outside the limits of man's intellect. An issue is an unknown matter which can be known, but a riddle appears like an issue; that is to say, it has been put forward in a manner that makes us think it is an issue, and when it is explained more clearly we see that it is not an issue (Malikian 1389 Sh).

According to Malikian, a spiritual man believes in mystery, and mystery is different from a riddle and from an issue, but it should be added to this statement of his that mystery and the mysterious world is also different from the invisible world, and in New Spirituality mystery is indicative of an unknown thing which is in the heart of nature, and not necessarily belief in something beyond it or conviction in the existence of a distinct thing called the invisible world.

3. Comparison of Traditional Ontology, Modern Ontology and Post-Modern Ontology

In order to have a better understanding of the essence of being in the view of New Spiritualists, we will give a brief comparison between traditional ontology, modern ontology and post-modern ontology. In traditional thought, under the authority of Greek thought, a kind of Platonic dualism in looking at being was governing; that is to say, the material

world was known as a shadow of the real world. In classic mysticism this kind of view had a lot of supporters, and the mystic was in search of deliverance from the trap of the multiplicity of nature and to the world of unity, which is the real world (Dabbagh 2011, 3). In modern discourse and in the era of enlightenment, another kind of dualistic thought began, and first the Church was separated from government, and later God went to a higher world (deism) and became unreachable, and to confirm the world of matter the domains of religion and the world were separated from each other. Under the influence of Descartes' dualism, the world was no longer, like in Platonic dualism, a shadow of reality and was consequently not an unreal matter; but while these two were separate, the domain of the material world was the centre of attention.

In modern discourse, a materialistic worldview has become vastly common (Griffin 1988, 25-16). This worldview, by denying a world beyond matter, and by putting emphasis on the human intellect (intellectual empiricism), used to consider the world to be limited in that thing which falls in the domain of sensible experience.

According to Griffin, mechanical conception of nature, together with a sensualistic theory of understanding, is the root of the modern worldview (Griffin 2009, 28); and these mechanic conceptions left no option but acceptance of modern dualism or new materialism. Of course, with the passage of time both of these explanations produced problems, because dualistic thought was incapable of explaining (the relationship between) the mind and soul with matter and meaning, and materialism would cause denial of self, namely the soul and the mind (Ibid., 28). This dead-end produced alternative theories like Hume's and Hegel's phenomenalism and Berkeley's and Kant's idealism, which also in their own way produced problems, because the real existence of the natural world, which was being perceived in daily life, could not be explained with these idealistic theories.

But post-modern thought, by accepting heavy traditional metaphysics, and by accepting the possibility of unknown things (mystery) in the world, and likewise by recognising non-sensory experience while not accepting traditional metaphysics managed to prove a feeble kind of metaphysics inside the physical world (Dabbagh 2011, 4). On this same basis, New Spirituality also, which was affected by this same worldview, without creating a distinction between worldly life and spiritual life and without differentiating between the physical and the metaphysical worlds, managed to define spirituality in the confines of materiality.

Of course it is not such that this view of the world (that is to say, seeing the invisible after matter) is completely new and without precedence, but some mystical paths in the world of tradition and even the modern era did not believe in a world separate from this world, and used to define spiritual matters in the heart of this same world and on another level of understanding; even the heaven and hell of religions also required criticism and, they used to define it as only the inner aspects of worldly matters. Apart from differences of the idea of “heaven of criticism” in the traditional and post-modern¹ worlds it has to be said that such an understanding of the world in the traditional worldview was not the predominant form of religiosity and according to researchers it had not become intermixed with the meaning of spirituality to this extent. The prevalence of this conception that being is one and negation of dualism in New Spirituality is to the extent that the idea of being in New Spirituality can be explained in the best form with the doctrine of monism.

4. Monistic Ontology

The doctrine of monism, which Muwahidiyyan Attar translates as

1. In the traditional worldview believing that the Afterlife is after this same world did not mean that the Afterlife means a matter separate from the material world and does not all have existence in another place, but in the post-modern worldview this claim means negation of the invisible and metaphysical world.

“the fundamental or essential unity of being” (Muwahidiyyan ‘Attar 2009, 128) is essentially related to philosophical viewpoints which only believe in one category of being, although that one (integrated) being may be connected material being or one immaterial spirit. Of course in some mystical schools of thought this terminology is also used to explain the relationship between God and the world, and some have also applied it to theological-mystical unity of being (Ibid., 129).

Monism has to be understood in contradistinction to ontological dualism and pluralism (Fanayi Ishkiwari 2015, 108). In this sense it is possible in one general categorisation to divide ontologies into two categories: monistic ontology and dualistic or pluralistic ontology. On the basis of the context of the term, monistic ontology, from the viewpoint of ontology, has been attached to an ontology that inclines to oneness and denies existential dualism or pluralism. Likewise monism as a viewpoint about man means repudiation of dualism of the soul and body or spirit and body, and as a mystic viewpoint monism means belief in the lack of distinction between spiritual and material matters, or, in other words, belief in this proposition that spiritual and material matters or mental and physical matters are in fact aspects or planes of one unitary being (Hinnells 1995, 323).

Chandler believes that although monism was mentioned as a terminology in the 14th century of the Common Era, it was nonetheless a thought that had prevalence in Europe before Abrahamic religions, and it was again mentioned from the era of modernity with a decrease of acceptance of monotheistic religions. Also in the 1960s CE, with activities of the anti-cultural movement against religions, it became institutionalised; and the prevalence of spirituality inspired by Eastern religions brought this kind of thought from the sidelines to the centre of the culture of spirituality. (Chandler 2011, 254-67).

The central idea of monism (that is to say, unity between macrocosmic

and microcosmic worlds) used to be interpreted as unity between the Transcendent God and the inner God, and distinction between the sky and the earth, spirit and matter, the visible and the invisible worlds, the Afterlife and the (present) world, was removed. According to Chandler, modernity, with its central message - that is to say, "man being God" - prepared the ground for this viewpoint to reach its peak, and prepared the ground for raising man's freedom and giving him divinity in the post-modern era and in the shadow of monism. According to his study, monistic spirituality flourished in the new era, with people like Emmanuel Swedenborg, Anton Mesmer, and (with) schools like Transcendentalism, Theosophy and lately and after the 1960s with the New Age movement. These people and movements, by denying religious authority, which used to present a monotheistic picture of the world, used to present a monistic picture (comprising oneness of God, man and nature) of the world.

According to him, of course the high point of this movement was that same anti-cultural movement in the 1960s (spirituality of the New Age) which, in contrast to religious foundations and explanation of a series of their cosmic planes, used to present an integrated picture of being where all in this picture had one position and could through inner divinity experience their unity with the world of unity. This change of approach in a spiritual worldview also prepared the ground for use of psychotropic stimulants in order to understand experience of the oneness of being and monistic ideas, and the experience of Hindu and Buddhist teachers also helped to explain this New ontology (Chandler 2011, 256-57).

Meanwhile civil rights movements added tangible and social aspects to this monistic idea, and by denying separation between man and woman, black and white, man and animal, made denying separation between man and God more acceptable. On this same basis, looking for spirituality was no longer a kind of purification and perfection of the self from defects, but (spirituality) was in reality a process of uniting and reconciling a holy

matter with an unholy one, and in fact was beyond this incorrect dualism (Chandler 2011, 257). If everything in this world is one thing and this world also entirely has consciousness and holy awareness then all parts of this whole (which some people call Gaia) is also holy.

This worldview, which considers the top and bottom to be one thing, finds different ethical and ideological denotations from the monotheistic worldview, which believes in distinction between the top and bottom (the divine world and the material world). If man and nature, man and woman, black and white, rich and poor, are one thing, then superiority of one thing over another has no meaning at all. If human beings and animals are equal, then the poem “human beings are parts of the same body” will no longer be an ethical allegory but will be indicative of an ontological reality, on whose basis there is no option but care for others and love for them from the window of love for self. Another effect of this idea is sanctification of daily life and seeing everything that happens in life as holy; and another of its effects is accepting varieties and justifying differences with the view of multiplicity (Chandler 2011, 259-65).

Of course it is better, before undertaking to explain the effects of the monistic thought of New Spiritualists, to explain why monism in New Spirituality does not only mean accepting one integrated material being. In New Spirituality unity of the world or monism, apart from the existential integration of matter, is indicative of a kind of spirit, consciousness or energy inside this integrated being. In other words, the main supposition in the monistic-spiritual worldview is that apart from matter, there is also an integrated power all over being which of course, unlike in monotheistic ontology, is not called spirit, but energy, which is a worldly or experiential term. This power is innate to (or inseparable from) the essence of the world (whether in the form of man, herbage, tree, soil, and elements like wind and fire and...) and is existent in the whole world in a continuous manner. According to Collin Campbell, there is in New Spirituality a view called

metaphysical monism. Therefore, on the basis of this worldview, a unitary material being also has a mysterious face which, in the form of spiritual substance, is existent inside everything (Campbell 2008, 196-97).

The monistic worldview, apart from believing that the world is integrated, also holds that the world, while being integrated, is in a process of evolution and self-perfection. According to studies which Gordon Lynch did on the effects of New Spirituality, the world, from the viewpoint of this kind of spirituality, in addition to having one guiding consciousness, is in a state of continuous self-perfection (Lynch 2007, 45). According to him, believing in a world (that is) in a state of evolution and continuous expansion (which others call Gaia in order to avoid the necessity of believing in a world other than the known world) is a kind of sanctification and divinisation of the theory of evolution, so that it may be a replacement of both the theory of creation (a theory which Abrahamic religions support) and both remove the materialistic and nihilistic aspects of the theory of evolution (Ibid., 46). Human consciousness also appears at one of the stages of this conscious process of blossoming and, with the appearance of human consciousness, the world attains self-consciousness; and on the basis of this consciousness, the process self-growth continues in a conscious manner. On the basis of this same view, man has a fundamental role in being, his co-operation in the process of conscious evolution of the world is considered as necessary (Ibid.).

A) Energy Instead of Spirit

In New Spirituality, divinity is also interpreted in this same framework. In this context, divinity is understood to be like the mind, the spirit and the imaginative element, which causes evolution of the world and protection of its growth. Of course, as has been said, according to monistic thought this divinity is not a thing separate from matter, and in this viewpoint metaphysics is defined inside the physical world. For this same reason,

and with inspiration from new theories of physics, spiritualists consider the world to be one expansive field of energy whose every aspect finds life and death by turning into the sphere of continuous energy (instead of the spirit) (Ibid., 47). Thus monistic thought, by using a pseudo-scientific language (energy instead of spirit, evolution instead of creation, blossoming instead of creation and manifestation, consciousness instead of God), both assumes for itself scientific norms and also opens up room for finding meaning in the heart of matter.

This is how monistic thought in New Spirituality changed materialistic determinism in the modern era into a kind of metaphysical principlism. On the basis of this metaphysical principlism, although the world has an orderly and automatic procedure, nonetheless, by supposing energy and consciousness in the world, its possible through man's will (as the central part of existential consciousness and awareness) to change the manifestation and direction of its evolution.

Therefore, according to this viewpoint, although man is part of an integrated whole, he can, not as a caliph under God's command but as an active consciousness, both give direction to the process of evolution - that is to say, both himself - is the determiner (Griffin 1988, 15) - and play a determining role in being. In other words, New Spiritualists believe than man can consciously, with his will and by acquiring knowledge of the process of being, figure out his and the world's future (Ibid., 16-17).

Ideas with many supporters like Karma¹ (the law of action and reaction), the law of attraction², the power of mental imagination, therapeutic prayer

1. In New Spirituality Karma means the law of action and reaction which is indicative of worldly retribution of one's deeds and takes the place of sin and divine retribution in Abrahamic religions.

2. Of course some people like Hanigraph believe that Ideas like the law of attraction are magical or occultist Ideas and/or to ancient religions which have been revived in New Spirituality; although this theory may be true, nonetheless the approach of the present study is to explore areas where revival of this kind of acts and thoughts creates and not finding its roots.

and therapeutic energy all arise from this viewpoint of being, which take the place of supplication, trust in God and divine sustenance. By analysing these ideas, it is possible to understand that the ontology of New Spirituality in various instances can be incompatible with the worldview of Abrahamic religions. Karma instead of sin and divine retribution, energy instead of spirit, the law of attraction instead of trust in God and supplication, mystery instead of the invisible world, and evolution instead of creation, are the most important ideas which New Spirituality accepts.

This ontological view that man is the centre of existential consciousness also entangles man in “self divinisation”. In this view, men’s actions are the most important determining factor for the whole of being and its destiny and long future (Ibid., 1988: 17). That is to say, that which is the centre of this ontology is man; and at whatever level he is, he is considered the centre of existential consciousness. According to Chandler, on this same basis the necessity of belief in monism will be self divinisation; meaning that if the world is one integrated being and divinity is spread in all its cells, man also has divinity, and the nearest window to divinity also is considered to be man himself. Therefore, at every level man can through himself have complete attainment of divinity; because divinity in a deep manner has roots in himself (Chandler 2013, 180).

One of the obvious effects of this monistic view is concealed in the popular motto of New Spiritualists “love yourself”. As has already been said, although New Spiritualists ontologically (not allegorically) believe that “if one member of the body is in pain, the other members cannot be happy”, they nonetheless hold that the way to achieving friendship and helping other members is loving oneself as the most attainable part of being. Man, by helping and loving himself as a part of the whole, in fact helps the whole of being; and this self-love embarks on the law of inner existential movement (existential energy) can be spread in the whole of being. According to Chandler, in New Spirituality the motto “by changing

yourself you can change the world” and/or “how can you help others when you have not helped yourself” and/or ideas like the contagiousness of happiness and laughter have to be understood on the basis of this same monistic worldview (Chandler 2011, 261-62).

According to this worldview, the system of an individual’s moral principles also changes. First there is no longer any God to plant values in man’s mind, but rather man with his introspection and understanding cosmic consciousness creates values in a subjectivist manner (Griffin 1988, 17). Secondly on the basis of this same integrated understanding of being and divinity which dwells in everything, nothing is essentially evil or satanic any more, and the whole of being is good (and man is free to choose between good things); and that which is perceived as evil or a kind and manifestation of evolution and existential creativity whose goodness is not understandable to us (Griffin 2009, 29-30) is either a result of man’s foolishness and lack of foresight, or feelings which create problems for him and the whole of being (Campbell 2008, 200). Of course, on the basis of this worldview, whatever the case being has a happy ending because this law governs evolution and foolishness (like elimination of the unripe in Darwin’s evolutionary thought) is automatically eliminated and New Spiritualists with guidance of existential consciousness will bring about a golden future (Ibid., 200-1).

B) Reincarnation Instead of the Afterlife

Another issue in this worldview is its different interpretation of heaven and hell, and acceptance of the theory of reincarnation. As has previously been said, in New Spirituality (of course like some of the traditional spiritualists) heaven and hell are only esoteric aspects of our deeds and not in the other world; because the world is one integrated and spiritual whole, and apart from this world there is no other world, and heaven and hell are metaphors to explain the inner aspects of this world and the direction and

manner of its evolution and expansion. On this same basis, reward and punishment is imaginable in this same world. It is here that the idea of reincarnation and Karma, as a form and structure of this evolution, and as a clarifier of the system of feedback of deeds, more than the idea of the Afterlife, works for New Spiritualists (Lynch 2007, 45). The discourse on energy and matter here has also come to the help of explaining reincarnation, and the law of changing matter to energy shows the scientific process of reincarnation. But this reincarnation which is based on the idea of unfolding and the idea of orderly expansion of being is different from reincarnation in the thought of Eastern religions. According to Collin Campbell, in this new reincarnation, an individual is not responsible for events of his previous life, because it the collection of actions, states and processes of the whole of being which have built the current personality of an individual and not only his deeds in the previous life. This set of causes can even justify an individual's present mistakes and incompetencies, and offer excuses for him (like projection of faults and weakness of will under the influence of the unconscious mind and environment on an individual's conduct); hence it should not be considered an individual's sin. Therefore, according to Campbell "failure or bad conditions in the present life with reference to past deeds in being - which per definition - the intended person is not responsible" can be explained. For this reason, although this idea is similar to Eastern reincarnation, but because an individual is not responsible for his past deeds, it has a huge difference with it (Campbell 2008, 204).

Another difference between new reincarnation and Eastern reincarnation (for example Hindu reincarnation) lies in this that in new reincarnation an individual's final goal is freedom from the cycle of death, and is not birth, but his aim is unlimited continuity of this cycle and more achievement of evolution and getting pleasure from the unlimited set of being (Campbell 2004). In Hinduism, basically the cycle of reincarnation is repeated death

and continuous pain from which one must quickly come out. But in the worldview of New Spiritualists, the cycle of reincarnation is continuity of evolution and derivation of pleasure, and is a cycle which shows the world's dynamism and self-perfection. This kind of view of being, apart from having behavioural and ethical consequences, also have eschatological consequences which Behzad Hamidiyeh has briefly explained.

According to Hamidiyeh, by denying the worldview of the holy book, the class structure of the world and the objective and real being of heaven and hell, and their special qualities, and likewise the story of creation, the end of time and God's heaven, are interpreted in an earthly and worldly manner, and the resurrection is interpreted as a resurrection of the earth and nature, and a future in the direction of justice, and traditional salvation loses its objectivity. Thus, salvation is just described as a religious-mystic experience and one spiritual and esoteric feeling, and/or that salvation is only efforts to protect declining nature, human society and world peace (Hamideyeh 2012, 362-63). Hamidiyeh, on the basis of this monistic salvation, demonstrates that happiness, instead of being an objective and external matter, is that same welfare and success; and being accompanied by the process of existential self-evolution and in the process of this finding of happiness, instead of emphasis on external salvation and a saviour, emphasis is placed on man's spiritual insight and realisation of the inner self, as the only way of attaining salvation (Ibid., 264).

Of course, as has been said, in the beginning, because of multiplicity and variety, all parts of this worldview can be found in all new spiritualists. Rather, some of its parts can be seen to some levels and stages and with different explanations in many parts of free spiritualists who avoid structure. The abundance of these viewpoints among new spiritualists is also because, according to Campbell, this thought vis-a-vis present Western ideas and elements are more passive the viewpoints of traditional religions like Christianity and Judaism. The main reason also is that

this kind of ontology does not depend on one definite historical matter; hence it does not disagree with Western sciences and its suppositions, like divinity residing in material beings, the concept of energy, creativity and evolution, and an integrated world is so general and vague that they can very easily be manipulated (falsified) and presented as suppositions (that are) confirmed by new sciences. In addition to this, the passivity of this worldview opens an easy window for finding meaning in a meaningless modern world (Campbell 2008, 197-98) which, while giving hope, does not have the responsibility of accepting traditional metaphysics and ethical responsibilities for an individual.

Thus, post-modern spirituality, without reviving traditional metaphysics, has once again bumped into a spiritual matter and found a pseudo-divine world. In this kind of spirituality, inclination to both metaphysics and materialism is negated, but in reality, a kind of “all-naturalistic pantheism” is presented to an individual, on the basis of which divinity in the world and the world in divinity is present. Meanwhile the structure of the world is a result of the activity of God’s Act (like the monotheistic worldview) and/or is not like the act of created beings but the world is a result of both His integrated and continuous action (Griffin 1988, 17). On this same basis, one of the important results of this worldview is new understanding of God and divinity, which must be understood in a manner that is compatible with new spiritualists’ monistic understanding of being.

C) Impacts on Ideas related to God

With the spread of monistic thoughts about being in Anglo-American countries (of which the most important example of these thoughts have been witnessed in New Spirituality), the transcendental picture of God, as presented in Abrahamic religions, has necessarily met a challenge; because, according to Paul Heelas, the theology of Abrahamic religions is mainly based on theism (monotheism), (Heelas 2007, 1-3) and this

theology is based on the idea of God transcending worldly objects, (Hamidiyeh 2012, 227-28) man of the new era, on the basis of his non-transcendental worldview, abandoned this kind of worldview. Besides, in New Spirituality the theistic God of Abrahamic religions (although in reality It is an Absolute, Stable, Infinite, Eternal and Immaterial Being but) because of showing opposition to Judaeo-Christian symbolisations and allegories, He has been presented as a patriarchal, high-handed and intangible God (Griffin 1988, 18) so that it may create a contrast with the new spiritualists' symbolisations of God, that is to say, a god who is present in everything, a god who is a companion, and a god who is kind (Wuthnow 1988, 95-96).

The god of new spiritualists is no longer a transcendent being but an earthly god who resides everything and is detranscendentalised, (Ferrer and Sherman 2008, 19) who is described as identical with the world or present in the world. Thus, the imagination of divine incarnation takes the place of a transcendent god, and the God of the Throne relinquishes his place to a god who resides in everything (Campbell 2008, 196).

D) Impacts on Ideas Related to Man

As has been analysed, monism, in different levels and forms, is the main part of the worldview of New Spirituality and the anthropology of this kind of spirituality must also be known under the shadow of this concept. On the basis of this viewpoint, that is to say, God's presence in everything, man can by knowing himself and by presence in himself, have connection with divinity; because divinity is not a transcendental matter but occurs inside (Chandler 2013, 180).

According to Gordon Lynch, although monism is the cause of sanctification and creation of a positive view about it, and likewise creation of a positive understanding of the soul, it nonetheless creates a challenge to this traditional conception in Christianity that man's soul is basically

soiled with sin and is impure (Lynch 2007, 55). In New Spirituality, the soul is a manifestation of divine consciousness or cosmic energy, hence there is inside man a valid source of knowledge about divinity, and it has more validity than the sayings of the holy book and prophets (Ibid., 55).

On the basis of this viewpoint, man's self as a manifestation of divinity which has divine consciousness and knowledge, plays an important role in the perfection of being and as a form of divinity, is essentially pure; and an individual, by understanding the inner voice and the talk of his inner self, can claim to have infallible understanding and take a step in the direction of perfection of being. In any case, according to Lynch, in New Spirituality holiness of the self has levels. In its strong form, man himself is God, and in its weak form man is an agent of divine causation in the world (Ibid., 56). But in both states, man's self, at every level of evolution and under any condition, is noble and divine, and has those same abilities which divinity has.

Conclusion

According to available studies, being, on the basis of the prevalent viewpoint in New Spirituality, is an integrated and unified matter which is continuously in a state of evolution and self-perfection. The main idea of the present article is that the view of New Spiritualists with regard to being can, more than anything else, be explained on the basis of the theory of monism (in contrast to the theory of dualism). Signs which are indicative of the existence of this view among spiritualists consist of the law of attraction, fields of energy, evolution and being born again, and also reincarnation and Karma.

As has been said, New Spirituality, with a monistic view of being, refrains from dualistic thought about it (good/evil, good/bad, God/Satan, etc.) and, by reliance on non-sensible experience (inner experience), creativity (dynamic conception of being and emphasis on evolution) and use of

pseudo-scientific evidence and taking recourse to rational understanding (instead of reliance on revelation and the history of religion), tries to prove an earthly holiness which flows freely in all parts of the material world, a holiness which does not necessarily depend on believing in metaphysical matters.

This new divinisation is in contradistinction to modern de-sanctification, but is dependent on post-modern suppositions in the field of nature and experience, and has not lost its commitment to modern norms of freedom, empiricism and rationality. Of course, in this new approach the domain of experience has gone further than sensible matters, the meaning of rationality has been expanded, and its claims are humble; but what remains is lack of dependence on revelation and the institutionalised apparatus of religion for understanding being and building the meaning and goal of life on its basis.

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