

Spirituality for Wellness and Wholeness in a Secular and Materialistic World

By

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Abstract

Berget is an ecumenical community, in the ocean of the Scandinavian materialistic and consumerist culture, where it exists as an island of hope of spirituality where individual aspirations are sacrificed for the collective common good and pursuing one's own perfection in spirituality in silence and solitude. It is an oasis from where people can drink the living waters of spirituality and warmth. It encompasses a beautiful forest along with a fascinating lake surrounding it. Thus, spirituality for the global village is experimented and promotes wellness and wholeness in a living togetherness of different faiths along with nature and thus trying to counter the materialistic and individualistic life style in terms of community life and a spiritual vision. The paper is based on literature review from various religious books and culture from different civilization. The study also reflects author's perspective on the subject. Materialism and secularism seemed to have succeeded in removing any traces of the divine from public life in Europe and the Western world. Faith should be practiced in the privacy of one's own home and kept secret. Small spiritual communities, however, are playing an essential role in assisting the befuddled and lonely western woman or man in this secular milieu.

Keywords: Berget, Meditation, Religion, Spirituality, World.

1. Introduction

About three hours north of Stockholm, the capital of Sweden you will find Berget (translated as the Mountain), an ecumenical retreat- and meditation house. Situated by one of Sweden's largest lakes, Siljan and on the other side surrounded by beautiful woodlands the setting couldn't be more suitable for its purpose – to each week receive guests who come for a few days' rest, recreation, retreat and meditation. I first came to Berget as a volunteer in 2007, staying for a few months before my final studies as a deacon in the Lutheran Church. The place at once felt like home, as it does for so many who come; community members, volunteers as well as guests. The area and community have slowly but steadily grown from first just being the retreat house in the early 60s to now also the house of meditation as well as a living community of 10 people plus a varying number of volunteers of all ages and all walks of life (Jain, 2021).

For five years I am a permanent member of the Ecumenical Community, members coming from both the Catholic and the Lutheran church families, we are both married and celibates. Our calling is simple yet profound; I'd like to quote the first sentences from our Visionary Statement, written by one of the co-founders Per Mass. "The Visualization I aim to describe is not my own – something I have made up myself. It is neither newfangled, nor old or obsolete. But in every generation, it is new and renewing, since it draws inspiration from the

well of life and existence. Out of nothing God created everything, the riches and beauty of nature as well as the dignity of man". And so, per mass goes on to describe Berget as a community of friendship and fellowship – inviting all who come into a spiritual experience of harmony with nature and humanity in a society so overwhelmed by materialistic and atheistic advertisement and aims. Here, some for the first time in life come to realize their great dignity and hidden inner resources.

Two years ago, Providence sent Fr. Mathew Chandran kunnel CMI to Sweden and one day also to Berget. Through him we have come to open up to a deeper interest in the interreligious dimensions and this December a group of eleven have travelled around south India in search of this interreligious experience, and off course, revived also by the beautiful nature your county, India, has to offer! Living together in harmony, from different religious backgrounds is both a challenge and opportunity. It widens our horizons and breaks down barriers. Both Hindus and Christians we met along our journey witnessed of this peaceful and loving co-existence in such inspiring ways. The blessings were flowing in all directions I can really say, and as one man said as we sat down to share on a roof top: “we prefer to sit up here, no walls, and no barriers”.

So, for me the everyday life at Berget is a varied and rich life. Receiving guests, being responsible for the office as well as leading retreats and courses and cooking food. In all things, we as a community strive to be an oasis of peace and tranquility giving space and time for lives deeper values and the spiritual dimension of life, and so equipping people to find meaning, hope and peace in a society of over stressed and depressed individuals. There’s nothing so fulfilling as seeing lives changed for the better and eyes glowing anew. Two years ago Providence sent Fr. Mathew Chandran kunnel CMI to Sweden and one day also to Berget. Through him we have come to open up to a deeper interest in the interreligious dimensions and this December a group of eleven have travelled around south India in search of this interreligious experience, and off course, revived also by the beautiful nature your county, India, has to offer! Living together in harmony, from different religious backgrounds is both a challenge and opportunity. It widens our horizons and breaks down barriers. Both Hindus and Christians we met along our journey witnessed of this peaceful and loving co-existence in such inspiring ways. The blessings were flowing in all directions I can really say, and as one man said as we sat down to share on a roof top: “we prefer to sit up here, no walls, and no barriers” (Adams et al., 2000).

The figure's placement will be influenced to some extent by the phenomena's philosophical and additional stability, rather than the phenomena itself. For instance, the wonderful sensation of "being lived when staring up at the night sky on a moonless night" may elicit reactions in all three dimensions and be put in the center of Figure 1 as a close-to-body event. However, whether such an emotion is extended as a scientific, religious, or mystical response depends on individual and contextual factors of the person concerned (and the research). The same may be said about the dread of dying during a major sickness (La Cour & Hvidt, 2010).

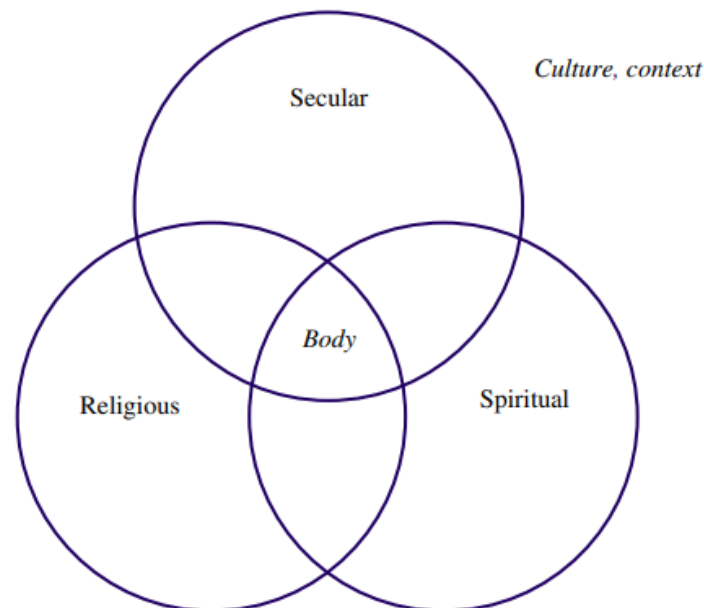


Figure 1: Illustrating the Relation Of Existential Meaning-Making Domains[3]

1.1. Scandinavian Culture at a Glance:

But let's start at the macro level of things. Every small unit, be it a family, a work environment or a community, affects and – in best case scenario – enlivens the world. Looking out over the world today we can see, at least, three areas of concern. First, the environmental crisis – caused mainly by greed and love of luxury living, with materialism becoming a new god. Then we have the areas of conflict, war and terrorism – with fundamentalism, pride as well as poverty being some of the causes – this tragedy of man not being able to live in peace and harmony constantly threatens human existence. And thirdly, I'd like to add the crisis in spirituality. At least in Europe this, I believe, is the cause of great inner pain and confusion for man today. No longer finding a "raison d'être", a reason for being, brings into the heart of humans a void so deep no anti-depressant can fill. With this comes the loneliness that plagues the young westerner of today. Living far from family due to work, or living alone due to divorce or separation and no longer belonging to a greater faith community leads to this expression that in Sweden loneliness is in fact the greatest hidden illness of our time. Although being one of the richest countries in the world, all too often we hear of elders dying alone, all on their own, sometimes found weeks later in their apartments.

1.2. Spiritual Sustainability:

The shared spiritual path brings with it a deep sense of meaning, fellowship and hope. We can see this in all thriving religious communities. The community life at Berget is one of great simplicity. Striving to live in harmony with all people as well as with nature we welcome all as friends. Situated on a small mountain just outside of a small village, the guests can stroll in the woods, walk by lakes and enjoy our garden. Taking time to rest, pray, meditate and be in the nature in an atmosphere of friendship and fellowship helps the over stressed and lonely to regain essential tools for managing their own lives. In our milieu they can once again hear the birds singing, see the stars in the sky and have time to reflect on life as it is, and in this way also reconnect to the divine presence within. Listen to this inner voice guiding them. For many, Berget becomes a second home to return to regularly to recharge their spiritual batteries. They come for a silent retreat or some days of intense meditation, and in this way find clarity of mind, help to make wise decisions concerning work or private life. They seek spiritual guidance and fellowship that strengthens their inner being. For many of our secular society, it is their

first contact with their spiritual dimension. Nature and creation itself is truly a path towards God, and a steppingstone to the deeper experience of Gods living within

1.3. Environmental and Economical Sustainability:

Now also plastic, metals and all paper are separated and taken to the recycling areas – which are found everywhere, where people live. The economic incentive changes people's actions. In a similar way, the government has given great economic support to the development of electrically driven cars and now we see them all around the greater cities. And off course, they have free parking. Many, both private and government, as well as companies and councils are taking environmental initiatives: Solar power, other renewable energy sources, shopping in second-hand shops or trading second-hand on the internet, car sharing, bikes for loan in cities, own cycling roads in all cities, and refunds for recycling plastic bottles. The list could go on. In the 70's we had what was called "the green wave" in Sweden. So, what we also see is a shift in the agricultural field: organic farming growing rapidly, due to increasing demand, the market for "closely produced" vegetables and meat growing, and with that a renewed interest in small scale cultivating for your own needs. A friend of mine has her own hens in the garden – a holistic vision of making sure that animals are well kept and living harmonious lives, as well as a wish for organic and healthy food; another was given her greatest wish for her birthday, a greenhouse to grow her own tomatoes, cucumber, chili and basil. My brother and two friends raise their own pigs every year and fill the freezer. This return to and reconnecting with nature is based not only on the realization that the earth will not manage if we continue living the way we do now, exploiting nature, but also from a deeper longing back to nature and sustainable living.

1.4. Social Sustainability:

In this area I believe the challenge for our time is immense. We can see the effects of social split-up at our retreat center every week as we interact with our guests. Our simple way of life, choosing to receive no more guests than we can manage to actually interact with, has a deep impact. "You saw me, looked me in the eyes", would be the reaction of some guests. This is for some quite overwhelming. They were surprised that they were encountered as a person, greeted and appreciated and that induce them to grow as a human being and as a person. Living as an ecumenical community, with members coming from different Christian churches and denominations we strive to live lives of service and love to one another, to each guest who enters through our doors. Receiving guests to both houses – for retreats and meditation courses - every week, as well as volunteers who share our life for shorter periods of time, we make up a larger family coming from a wide variety of backgrounds. With guests also coming from all walks of life, often well-educated and in good jobs in the larger cities, we see and share in the troubles and challenges they bring. The lack of spiritual life, the lack of a sense of meaning and inner peace, together with an immense loneliness, are the most common struggles we hear of when counseling them.

Sweden is rated to have the highest percentage of single households in the world. With not all marrying, and a divorce rate of around 50% among those who do, many come to spend much time at work and thereafter by a TV or computer at home. With the spread of internet an increasing number can even work from home, and in this way, meet nobody at all in their everyday life. So, living together is something we all have to learn. School will teach you something, but most is done at home, and with homes splitting up, this invaluable deeply rooted human wisdom that has to do with love, self-sacrifice, freedom as well as commitment is being lost. This affects not only families but also the whole of society, as we can see an increasing number of difficulties in cooperation and stress related problems anxiety, depression in both work places and various organizations. In Sweden, I believe we have not yet seen the full

implications of this life of extreme freedom and individualism. Community life is a way of showing that it is possible to live together, in sustainable relationships, as a family and a work place. With all our weaknesses and failures, we share a common goal, common values and together we try to bring out the best of each other and those we serve. For this, a daily portion of patience, tolerance and forgiveness are essential tools. Losing the ego is at first scary and painful experience, but finally the deepest sense of fulfillment a person can have, knows that one's life is given to a greater good. The outpouring of love in a world so in need of love. This brings us to the third and final area (Ellison & Lee, 2010).

Religion is the spirit of an institution. As a result, several faiths exist, each with its own set of beliefs, practices, and teachings. They provide a variety of society worship opportunities. All of these faiths have something in common: spirituality. Religions may lose their spirituality unless they become oppressive organizations rather than agents of kindness, peace, and harmony. They have the potential to divide rather than unite. This, according to history, has happened on occasion. It is stated that the causes of faith have resulted in more bloodshed than in any other purpose. Examples include Europe's mediaeval religious wars, as well as modern-day religious terrorists and disputes. One should recognize that religious organizations are designed to assist us in practicing meditation in our daily lives. Frequent remakes are required to establish religion (Verghese, 2008).

There were just a few empirical studies that looked at the impact of biodiversity on spiritual well-being. We found a detailed description of the numerous interconnections between many spiritual traditions, ecology, and biodiversity protection, as well as spiritual components of well-being, in the literature, which we thought was essential to distinguish. The material found falls into four categories: the impact of various spiritual traditions on diversity; holy locations as biodiversity repository; spiritual domains ecological processes; and the implications of biodiversity on spiritual well-being. The links between biodiversity and spiritual well-being are depicted in Figure 2 (Irvine et al., 2019).

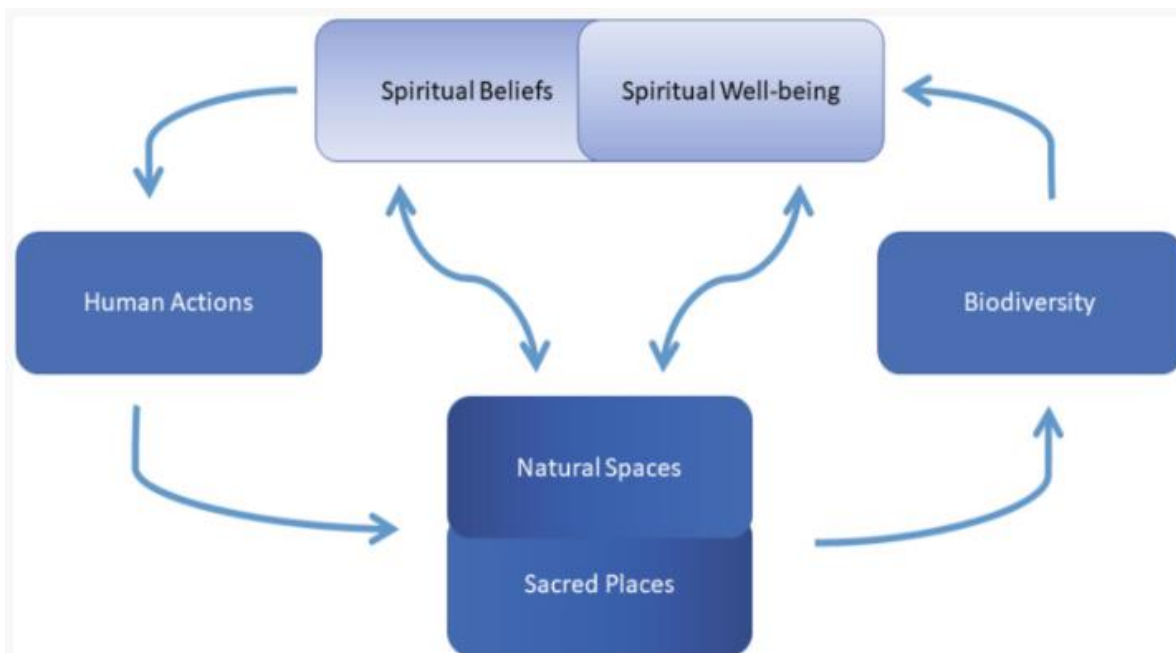


Figure 2: Representing the Biodiversity/Spiritual Well-Being Relationships(Irvine et al., 2019).

To ensure that the patient's religion is grasped from her or his standpoint, a person-centered process is key. The optimum health care for certain people will be that which is congruent with their spiritual or religious beliefs. Figure 3 depicts how healthcare personnel and services might address the issue of satisfying patients' unique requirements. The institutions, the individuals associated with the process, and the patient's unique values are all at risk. Scientific study on the issue, excellent practices established by institutions, and governmental policies that promote these successes are the forces that connect these aspects together (Saad & De Medeiros, 2012).

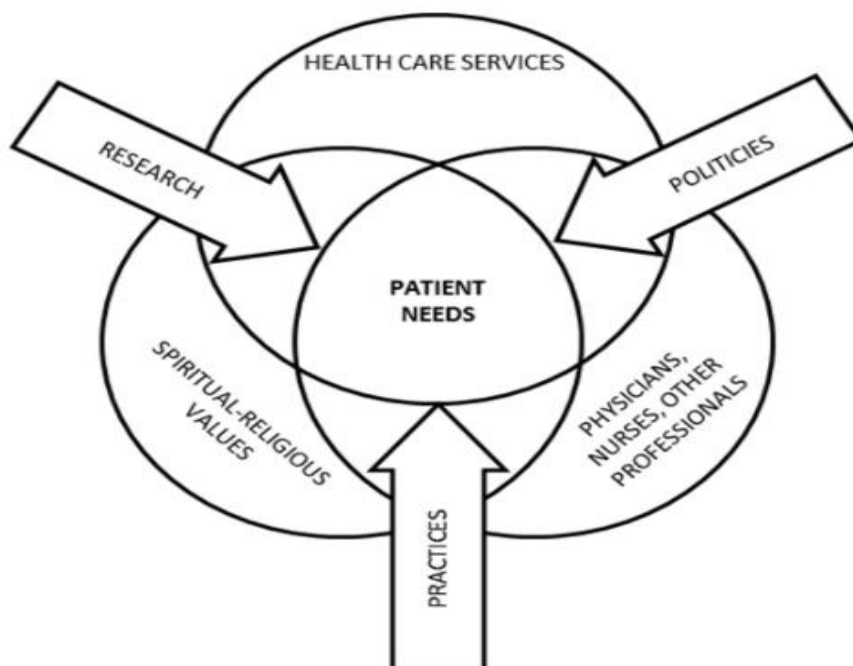


Figure 3: A Scheme on How Balancing the Elements of Attention to the Special Needs Of Patients to Empower Resources on Spiritual-Religious Coping (Saad & De Medeiros, 2012).

2. Literature Review

Rekha Wagani et al. shown that spiritual and well-being have a link. Even though the wide divide between science and faith has led, for even the most part, its marginalization in Western societies until recently, its benefits for health and wellbeing have been acknowledged in Eastern civilizations for a long time. Nonetheless, there have been few attempts to investigate the influence of religiosity and spirituality on wellness, particularly the avoidance of suicidality. We continue by reviewing the research on belief in religion, spiritual, and health and very well. Furthermore, we propose an unique research involving 160 Indian students from a mentally stimulating institution in North India, with the goal of understanding how spiritual influences their lives and its well, as well as their attitudes against suicides. Though additional study on perceptions and behaviors as a cause of difficulties is necessary, our findings demonstrate that spiritual has a beneficial influence on respondents' wellbeing with a potentially beneficial effect towards impulsive conduct (Wagani & Colucci, 2018).

Helen Lockhart explained the role of spirituality and nature for a sustainable domain. The theory' central thesis is that people are estranged and detached from environment, and that we must seek to restore this link in order to solve the present societal and environmental problems that affect our race' existence on the planet. The goal of this investigation is to provide specific tales that may be utilised as research articles in training regarding longevity, as well

as to promote and inspire more in-depth discussions as to what a more sustainable society may appear like. In terms as to whether a spiritual relationship with God can aid in the transition to a more better environment, it appears that it is more of a strong knowledge and conscious mind or recognizing of the inter - connectedness and interconnectedness among both Natural world, essence, and the essential nature to be human, rather than a connection (Lockhart, 2011).

Paul Smoker et al. explored the foundation of inner peace. Peace, according to this study, necessitates a dynamic equilibrium between many "opposite poles" or "extents," including a balancing of intellectual and moral values. Between monotheistic and idiosyncratic religions experience, as debated in the first section of the paper; among both females and males facets of divinity, in just such a direction that our perception of God or Spirit surpasses all contradictions, which include females and males; among anterior and posterior aspects of harmony, in such a way that truce activity and research. There is an inner component, like as mindfulness or meditation, and an exterior component, which deals with world action for peace and social justice. The continued interfaith conversation and exchange of religious practises and problems among East and The west cultural and emotional systems will play a crucial role in assisting the world in finding such a balancing as a basis for peace in the twenty-first century (Groff & Smoker, 1996).

John Fisher explained four domain models. We are spiritual creatures at our centre, or coeur. From a conventional conception of spirituality as a manifestation of devotion in quest of the holy to a humanistic perspective of spiritual free of religious, spirit may be seen in a number of different ways. Spirituality and physiological, intellectual, economic, societal, and occupational well-being are all intertwined in health, according to growing data. Spirituality wellness is presented in this study as a basic feature of people's entire health with well, pervading and incorporating all other areas of care. Spirituality health is a debatable question of being that is represented in the quality of interactions that individuals have in up to four domains: A person's personal domain is where he or she interacts with himself or herself. Environment realm, which connects with environment; Community realm, which has in-depth inter-personal ties; the transcendental realm is concerned with something someone that exists further than the conscious level. The Four Dimensions Model of Psychological Health and Very well encompasses all current views of the world, from the most devoutly religious to the most agnostic (Fisher, 2011).

Dr Deborah Cornah described effect of spirituality on psychological fitness. Theology is a notion that defies previously made, measure, or description, yet it has an impact on our social, psychological, mental, and intellectual culture. The evidence relating spirituality and religious liberty to many elements of psychological health, and in particularly, various mental health issues, has been evaluated in this paper. The study begins to put out a picture of how faith may influence mental health. A variety of ramifications and suggestions are offered with the goal of identifying methods to construct a more complete, vivid image of that connection. The engagement of healthcare professionals and employers is critical to that image, and when their voices blend with those of research from many professions and those working in various mental health treatment, the role of spirituality in psychological disorders may be substantiated (Cornah, 2006).

3. Discussion

This is the one area where I dare say that that we do have some things to be proud of in Sweden (though many black spots too I might add). For the average Swede recycling is as common as waking up. Now, even those who have been slow in adapting are learning. Why?

Let me take my own parents as an example. They would take glass and newspapers to the recycling bins, but it was first when the local council decided to charge for the garbage according to weight those things started happening. Now also plastic, metals and all paper are separated and taken to the recycling areas – which are found everywhere, were people live. The economic incentive changes people's actions. In a similar way, the government has given great economic support to the development of electrically driven cars and now we see them all around the greater cities. And off course, they have free parking. Many, both private and government, as well as companies and councils are taking environmental initiatives: Solar power, other renewable energy sources, shopping in second-hand shops or trading second-hand on the internet, car sharing, bikes for loan in cities, own cycling roads in all cities, and refunds for recycling plastic bottles. The list could go on. In the 70's we had what was called "the green wave" in Sweden. People and families longing back to nature, living in larger collective homes, trying to share life together. Moving from life in a big city, with all family members all split up throughout the day, with traffic and all that comes with city life, to living in smaller villages close to forests, lakes and an own garden. Being able to listen to the birds, cultivate and see the plants that actually give you your crops and food on the table– this brings a great sense of satisfaction and joy.

4. Conclusion

Every area in a common workplace needs to be valued, so at Berget we know that all areas are of great importance for the common cause. Cleaning and gardening, lecturing and administration, finances, prayer and kitchen – all these areas are essential to giving our guests a warm welcome and nothing is 'not' spiritual, nothing is more or less of importance to the whole. All parts of a working community need to be affirmed and valued and included in the greater cause and aim, for the common good. The one who serves in the kitchen one day may lead a meditation retreat the next day, the one who administers the program for next semester many lead the prayer in the evening. The leader is also a servant to all, and no task is below him or her. This creates among us a sense of community, worth and joy in serving also in the simple tasks for the greater good of all. This creates among us a sense of community, worth and joy in serving also in the simple tasks for the greater good of all. Every week we meet for community talks, realizing that through the others God is giving us the answers to our difficulties and hard decisions. In all people and circumstances there are signs showing us the way forward.

Giving time for prayer and meditation in everyday life is like saying: life is more than what we can see with our physical eyes, it is greater, and we are greater. Thus, by completing our daily chores in a simple and humble way, praying together, eating together, working together, we celebrate the fellowship of human co-existence, along with the Nature and towards the Divine, we try to drive spirituality into the individual lives as well into the community and transmit it to all our guests to reflect about their own spiritual roots and to regain and strengthen them to find meaning, wellness and happiness in life. It is an oasis from where people can drink the living waters of spirituality and warmth. It encompasses a beautiful forest along with a fascinating lake surrounding it. Thus, spirituality for the global village is experimented and promotes wellness and wholeness in a living togetherness of different faiths along with nature and thus trying to counter the materialistic and individualistic life style in terms of community life and a spiritual vision. In Europe and the western world materialism and secularism seem to have successfully driven out every trace of the divine at least from all public life. Faith should be practiced in private, and kept private. Yet in this secular context small faith

communities are playing an important role in helping the confused and lonely western woman or man.

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