

## **How Body and Soul Interact with the Spiritual Mind**

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ABSTRACT:

Cognitive Linguistics as an enterprise provides new theoretical and methodological instruments in understanding the relationship between people’s thoughts and the language they use. Spiritual and religious experiences (particularly the ones involving some type of revelation from or communication with a transcendent being) are especially interesting since they involve some type of external, physically invisible force or agent, contributing an “ineffable” quality to the phenomenon. However, people can and do describe such events, and metaphors and blends pervade the representations of certain concepts of the transcendental when attempting to talk about such abstract ideas. One of the main tenants of Cognitive Linguistics is that people’s views about themselves and the world around them are deeply rooted in their conceptual systems, created by their experiences and their bodily interactions with the world, whether they be physical, psychological or social. People who practice spirituality reach certain states by means of personal or collective rituals, such as prayer, meditation, and bodily procedures involving discipline, as is the case of fasting or re-understanding pain. When they then communicate certain religious and spiritual concepts, they are revealing a great deal about themselves and their world and the way they interact with it. Concepts dealing with people’s system of beliefs are very “meaningful” for the individual, and the more entrenched a frame of mind is, the less plastic it is, a fact confirmed by the neurosciences which claim that it is difficult to break down and reconstruct certain synaptic structures of the brain.

But how do people who have had such awesome experiences represent these supernatural encounters and their states of being? What is the relationship between the concepts of body and soul in devotees who torture their bodies, who have out of body experiences or who describe a body possessed by other spirits? What does the language they use say about the individuals’ concept of themselves and their world?

I will present some of my own research data containing conceptual metaphors and blends collected in various sacred texts and during a series of interviews of people who claim to have had such supernatural experiences. The data includes linguistic expressions as well as gesture. Moreover, the interviewees were asked to draw on paper certain experiences of spiritual nature and then to describe their pictures. My investigation will try to shed new light on the phenomenology of spiritual experiences and personhood, using cognitive linguistics as a prime tool of analysis.

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