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Metaphors and Meaning in the Turkish Contemporary Christian Music

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to investigate the musical experience, musical meaning, and metaphors in religious music in the case of Turkish Contemporary Christian Music (TCCM). In the general sense, we can say that Contemporary Christian Music simultaneously carries symbolic, functional, and pragmatic meaning. Thus, this paper focuses on how Turkish Christians apply metaphors in order to give meaning to TCCM in the process of expressing experiences, and what other elements, unrelated to music, play a role in this process. People use the metaphors in music in two ways: to explain their experience of music and to give meaning to music, and to create music according to their ideas or beliefs. In this context, music as practical consciousness affects the metaphors used for musical practices as discursive consciousness; but also metaphors as discursive consciousness affect musical practices by creating proper sound in accordance with ideas or beliefs about music. In the context of TCCM, metaphors are used for expressing supernatural or transcendent experience as well as for sounding worship and link the worship music to the religious belief.

Introduction

Music is not only perceived individually, but it also takes place in social interaction, representation of group identity and social activities. However, people turn to metaphors to convey the experience of music, express their understanding of nature of music and give meaning to music in a broad sense: these are the functions fulfilled by metaphors in the collective dimension of music. This article attempts to describe and explain the experience of music, nature of music, and musical meaning in rituals and religious music in the case of Turkish Contemporary Christian Music (TCCM) through the lens of the concept of metaphor.

According to Blacking (1973: 61), "if feelings could be expressed in words people would not need music" (as cited in Blacking, 1979: 10). Therefore, music functions in individual experiences and it plays a role in strengthening human relationships in society because "its structures are reflections of patterns of human relations, and the value of a piece of music as music is inseparable from its value as an expression of human experience" (Blacking, 1995: 31). From this point of view, this study raises a few questions in the context of the function of music: how do people express their individual musical experiences? How does language, as a vital part of communication, play role in conveying musical experiences or feelings? In which way is the meaning of music understood by the people who create it? By answering these questions we are able to derive the value of music in the system of social interaction and mainly, with regards to the question of what music is ontologically in social structures. Although this paper doesn't investigate what music is, it takes music in ritual context, according to ethnomusicologists, "one of the most pervasive contexts for music cross-culturally" (Tolbert, 2001: 85), in order to demonstrate the meaning of music and its semantic components at the level of religious dimension through "practical and discursive consciousness" (Giddens, 1984: 6-7).

The first part of the paper seeks to demonstrate the meaning of music through different cultural perspectives on the literature, such as symbolic meaning (Vannini and Waskul, 2006; Larsen, Lawson and Todd, 2010), functional meaning (Campbell, 2010; Brown, 2003: 15) and pragmatic meaning. As Meyer (1956: 1) indicates, "composers and performers of all cultures, theorists of diverse schools and styles, aestheticians and critics of many different persuasions are all agreed that music has

meaning and that this meaning is somehow communicated to both participants and listeners". However, the problem is how the meaning of music is conveyed to listeners and how the meaning of music is interpreted by listeners. From this point of view, people might express their experience of music, emotions, feelings and interpretation way of musical meaning discursively.

When people talk about the experience of music and meaning of music, they might apply metaphors, "link music to other aspects of human experiences" (Rice, 2001: 22), in order to communicate with 'others' on the matter of music or convey our experience of music. Nevertheless, the issue of music and metaphor is a 'two-way street' in which questions can be asked both ways. Music as practical consciousness affects the metaphors used for musical practices as discursive consciousness, but there is also a sense in which metaphors as discursive consciousness affect musical practices by creating sound that corresponds to particular ideas or beliefs about music. We can observe both approaches about music and metaphor especially in rituals and religious music practices. Metaphors play a crucial part in religious music practices. For instance, if one distinguishes musical metaphors from the basilar ideas, which create musical sound, it becomes more difficult to understand the essence of religious practices which include music.

The second part of this article considers this phenomenon in the context of Turkish Contemporary Christian Music. I have observed how Turkish Christians apply to metaphors in order to give meaning to Turkish Contemporary Christian Music in the process of expressing experiences and what other elements which are not related to music take a role in this process. At the same time, people use metaphors for music in two ways: to explain their experience of music, and to give meaning to music and make it accord with particular ideas or beliefs.

Contemporary Christian Music as a genre of Christian Music is grouped among Popular Music practices. This music is rooted in the late 1960s and early 1970s Jesus Movement in the USA (Pang, 2017:82). Although Contemporary Christian Music was born in the USA, thanks to the process of globalization, this music can be heard in the different corners of the world. Popular music practices are mostly embraced by the Protestants, especially Evangelists who put an emphasis on sharing the God's

Word with others. From this point of view, one can encounter different kinds of interpretations of Contemporary Christian Music according to different cultural contexts. Turkish Protestant believers turn to popular music practices with blended musical elements in their religious practices in order to express their supernatural experiences and live these experiences collectively in a Turkish cultural context. This musical practice, called Turkish Contemporary Christian Music, has a unique understanding and experience among Turkish Christians with their cultural and religious background. However, metaphors are a crucial part of experiencing Turkish Contemporary Christian Music and conveying this experience. Turkish Christians create music according to their beliefs and at the same time use this music according to their expectations from religious practices. In this case, the process of using metaphors in the production and consumption of music gives another point of approach to the musical meaning. The main research question of this paper then, is how metaphors take place in the scope of assigning meaning to Turkish Contemporary Christian Music, and this question is strongly tied to the issue of musical meaning and experiencing music.

Musical Meaning and Experiencing Music

"Music is sound that is organized into socially accepted patterns, and music-making may be regarded as a form of learned behavior" (Blacking, 1995: 33). In this sense, music has a function which is articulated in cultural practices. However, "we hear music as the socially meaningful presence of another person. We understand music as an embodied voice, produced directly from a human throat or by instrumental proxy" (Tolbert, 2001: 86). This description of music provides a useful tool for approaching the meaning of music. First of all, music is created by people, with a purpose, which can be functional, symbolic, or even pragmatic, and the meaning of music can be diverse depending on culture's social codes. From this point of view, we can say that "a cross-cultural perspective on music reveals that it also involves multiplicity of reference and meaning; a piece or performance is simultaneously capable of bearing many different meanings" (Cross, 2001: 5).

The second approach to music is more individual than music as 'a social construct'. The component of music originates from the nature of music. As Rice (2001: 34) indicates, "it is in the nature of music as text or symbol that composers and

performers cannot control its interpretation and the meanings that subsequently accrue to it". Meaning of music, at the same time, is individual due to the structure of evocation. Experiences outside the music, evocation and symbolic meanings of music can differ from one person to other. Consequently, music can be perceived in a different meaning among individuals.

The meaning of music is partly related to musical experience and "musical experience is essentially temporal" (Mantare, Sillince and Hämäläinen, 2007: 450). People, firstly, hear music and then give meaning to it. Classifying music as 'good' or 'bad' is the next process of perceiving music. However, experiencing music precedes the meaning given to it. Besides that, "ethnomusicologists generally believe that music is emotionally meaningful primarily due to context, suggesting the existence of musical semantics" (Tolbert, 2001: 85). This point of view shows that it is possible to approach the meaning of music via linguistic or semiotic analysis.

Music enables communication among people via the expression of musical experiences through the "language-like features of music" (Tolbert, 2001: 85). Like language, music symbolizes emotions and ideas, functions as an intermediary and is used as pragmatic signs, (such as songs for an election). In this context, linguistic and semiotic approaches provide a useful tool to reach a more profound level of knowledge about the meaning of music.

Firstly, Saussurian linguistic approach and Levi-Strauss's structuralism is used by ethnomusicologists such as Feld (1984). For instance, as Turnstall (1979: 62) indicates "according to Saussure's definition, music must be considered not a system of signs but a system of signifiers without signifieds. Its elements are not signs, but the relations between them are coherent and meaningful" (as cited in DeNora, 1986: 87). Nevertheless, in the structuralist approach of music studies, music communicates and functions communicatively. The main focus of this approach is musical structure itself. However, the relations between elements are another crucial component of structuralism as well. An illustration of this approach, Feld's (1984) *Sound Structure as Social Structure* takes into account musical structure and then applies it to social structure through encoded meanings, symbols, and patterns in Kaluli people.

Secondly, semiotic approaches of Charles Sanders Peirce (1894), Boiles (1982), and Robertson (1976) provide deep insight into musical meaning. Pierce, the inventor of the field of semiotics, talks about three fundamental concepts: "icon, which signifies by resembling what it stands for; index, tied to its object by some kind of causal relationship; symbol, which is an arbitrary but agreed-upon sign such as a word" (as cited in Nettl, 2015: 306). If we illustrate these three types of signs through musical samples, sound itself might be called as an icon due to being a literal sign. Specifically chosen sound, tempo, and rhythm are called as an index due to an implied sign. For instance, the first motif of Beethoven's 5th symphony is a kind of index. It is an index because it is used for conveying specific meaning according to culture such as fear, surprising situation and so on. The symbol might be the word 'music'. The word 'music' is an agreed-upon sign among people although the description of music is problematic among scholars.

Both in linguistic and semiotic approaches signs and symbols are crucial to the investigation of meaning. In the context of music, it is clear that music conveys meaning through signs and symbols. Thus, in any kind of situation the sound of music signifies something, and we give meaning to music. Therefore, attributing meaning to music might be both individual and social depending on culture. However, metaphors occur when meaning is attributed to music. Therefore, metaphors should be considered a component of musical meaning.

Musical Metaphors and Symbols

Metaphors embody the nature of music. They are used for expressing musical experience. According to Rice (2003: 157), "experience is not an inner phenomenon accessible only via introspection to the one having experience. Rather, experience begins with interaction with a world and with others". In terms of metaphor and musical experience, "metaphors make claims about the nature of music and bring music closer to other domains of human experience. These metaphors ideologically ground the behavioral, interpretive, and discursive strategies that put those claims into practice" (Rice, 2003: 159).

When we search for an inclusive description of metaphor, borrowing Zangwill's philosophical language might provide a clear idea of what metaphor is about. "Using

metaphor is a way of trying to make the ineffable affable, or more affable. It is a way of communicating to others what cannot otherwise be communicated" (2011: 2). From this point of view, a metaphor is established by discourse. Zangwill (2011: 2) illustrates this idea via the sample of 'migraine'. 'The word 'migraine' applied to headaches, is not metaphorical; but since I am fortunate never to have had one, someone needs to describe their migraine to me metaphorically if I am to acquire a good idea of how it feels". If we apply this example to the way we express musical meaning through metaphor, it can stand in for explaining how music makes me feel and conveying this experience as closely as possible to its actual feeling.

As the discussion above demonstrates, musical metaphor is about experience and nature of music. However, Blacking (1979: 8) indicates that "as a metaphor of feeling, music can both reflect and generate a special kind of social experience". In further discussion, however, Blacking (1979) talks about symbols and symbolic meaning, which is applied to music in terms of using metaphors for expressing experiences. From this point of view, we can say that understanding symbols in a given musical structure or social system is crucial to the understanding of the use of metaphors. It seems like all these components are interlinked with each other.

According to Rice (2001: 22) "metaphors make a truth claim about the ontological status of music: music is art, music is meaningful action, music is humanly organized sound, and so forth". Nevertheless, a metaphor also makes a claim about the epistemological status of music due to nature of music and its knowledge. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 156-184) "metaphors are not simply literary devices. They are a construction that helps us to understand our world, when we take them as true they powerfully inform our view of the world and our actions in it" (as cited in Rice, 2001: 24).

Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 37) present another crucial difference: one between metaphor and metonymy. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 37), as they discuss in their influential book *Metaphors We Live By*, "metaphor and metonymy are different kinds of processes. Metaphor is principally a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is understanding. Metonymy, on the other hand, has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one

entity to stand for another". If we illustrate these differences in terms of music and worship, claiming that 'music is worship' is a kind of metaphor because it presents music *as* worship. However, claiming that 'I'm worshiping' which includes making music in this action, creates a metonymy because the action of worshiping contains making music and stands for this action as well.

Meaning of Turkish Contemporary Christian Music

Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) functions as a tool for the expression of religious identity and at the same time, takes place in rituals. Therefore, we can say that CCM carries symbolic, functional, and pragmatic meaning simultaneously. It is symbolic because it symbolizes Christianity through the lyrics. Thus, it functions as a religious tool in rituals and it has the pragmatic meaning of introducing Christianity through music.

CCM defines the forms and styles of popular music in religious space of popular music specific to Christianity (Aslan and Yükselsin, 2015: 876; Abelman, 2006: 209). CCM is mostly practiced among Protestant groups, especially Evangelists who aim to share the message of Christianity (Gormly, 2003: 251). For this pragmatic reason, CCM is part of popular culture practices. It also uses mass media to express the message of Christianity. Although CCM was developed in the United States due to Jesus Revival Movement (Dumbauld, 2012: 5), it is spread, now, around the world due to practices of Christian missionaries and the process of globalization. However, this music has been practiced among Turkish Christians, (which for this study means Protestants), since the 1970's due to increasing number of believers, missionary practices and a need for a new identity for this group. Protestants in Turkey embraced the theological approaches of Western countries, such as England and the USA, thanks to missionary movements. As a result, most communities use musical instruments, as opposed to the musical practices of Eastern Christians which are primarily vocal. Although some Protestant communities are against using musical instruments during worship, most of the Protestant Churches in Turkey practice CCM due to Pentecostalism and Evangelism, which came from Western countries. In this context, musical practices of Turkish Protestants distinguish these communities from Orthodox Christian practices both theologically and musically.

Although there were Evangelist practices before 1970, Turkish Contemporary Christian Music had not yet appeared due to a lack of Turkish believers. There were only a few Christians who gathered at home and played English worship songs. As a result of an increasing number of Turkish believers, in 1970, the first Turkish Christian songbook, *Tanrı'yı Yüceltelim* (Lets Glorify God), was published and became the main source for Turkish Christians (Buckley, 2015).

Nowadays, Turkish Christians have three categories of worship songs: 1-) Translated songs from English 2-) songs that are composed in Turkish in mainstream genres such as Pop, Rock etc. and 3-) songs that are composed in Turkish for traditional musical instruments such as *bağlama, kanun*.

TCCM is a crucial component of the religious identity of the Christians who live in Turkey. Therefore, all lyrics in TCCM are written in Turkish. It signifies being a 'Turkish Christian' for the believers. Using traditional musical instruments, composing in 'maqam' (mode of music) and the use of *usûl* (rhythmic cycle) expresses the culture of the place, which is commonly used in the Middle East. Thus, the churches that have more Turkish attendees than foreigners practice these musical elements more than Occidental elements. In this context, Turkish Contemporary Christian Music differs from Western-style through its Oriental musical elements. These elements also function as a tool for expressing Turkish Christian identity.

Secondly, music functions in two ways for them: attracting attention to Christianity in order to spread the message of Bible, and the use of music in their rituals. According to these two functions, the metaphors used for music change in terms of the message conveyed by the music. As discussed before, applying metaphor is about the nature of CCM. If we ask why Christians need to use metaphors, the answer might be what Zangwill (2011) illustrated by the example of 'migraine'. In religious contexts, the emotions that people experience during musical worship might be problematic to convey through words. Although they use terms such as 'supernatural' and 'mystical', they are in need of describing these experiences in more detail by applying metaphors. It is clear that there is no other way to illustrate supernatural experience except applying metaphors. Metaphors also show the

meaning of religious music in this context. From this point of view, analysts should pay more attention to the metaphors, which take place in the discourse of believers in order to investigate the meaning of religious music. In this context, the next section of this paper tries to analyze the meaning of TCCM through metaphors, in addition to analyzing practices during worship.

The church is an organization, and there are specific actors that play roles in this organization. If we talk about music, the worship leader, who is the responsible person for music in the church, is an important actor in the organization. However, their roles, practices, place in the church, and of course discourse should be considered in the investigation of the meaning of Contemporary Christian Music.

Worship leaders should have a healthy relationship with pastors and community. At the same time, s/he should embrace the vision of the church and should spend enough time in this community as a member. Secondly, there are crucial competencies, which a worship leader should have. These are: knowing the worship songs which are sung in the church, musical ability in technique and singing, moral competence suitable for serving for the church, competence in individual features such as leadership abilities, and necessary experience.

From the point of view of these competencies, the worship leader has specific duties in the church. We can sort these duties in an order: 1-) making the order of worship, 2-) ensuring that community has spiritual/emotional experience during musical worship, 3-) conducting the worship, 4-) creating the worship band and 5-) giving music lessons to the members of the community in order to provide new musicians for the worship band.

These competencies and duties of the worship leader are also about the community due to a system of social interaction in the church. It creates the boundaries of the music making process according to the understanding of community and the specific meaning they assign to music. Therefore, understanding competencies and duties of the worship leader is also connected with metaphors, nature of worship music, and therefore, the meaning of Contemporary Christian Music.

Metaphors and the Nature of Turkish Contemporary Christian Music

Stephen Harris, a pastor, asked the following question to the fellowship in a church meeting: "What comes to your mind when I say worship?" The answers widely differed from each other, and there were at least six different descriptions of worship from six different people. One of them said, "looking at the sky and raising my hand comes to my mind". The other answered "spending time with God, praising Him, and coming into His presence". Other answers were about the "music", "giving something to God" etc. These diverse answers also show how the term 'worship' is related to many other religious and non-religious terms, including music. However, Christians tend to describe the music which takes place in the churches as a part of worshiping. Indeed, it is difficult to hear the words 'music' or 'making music' at the church. One hears the words of 'worship' or 'worshiping' instead of music. From this point of view, we might say that the issue of metaphor is at the heart of the music-worship relation. Besides that, worshipping is part of the everyday life of Christians, which consists of culture, including music. In this context, listening to CCM in their daily life is part of worship as well, which results in the blurred line between 'music' and 'worshipping'.

Geertz (1993: 90) describes religion as a system of symbols. Symbols exist in religious music as well. Thus, these symbols might be interpreted in many ways, which convey different messages according to the situation. For instance, baptism in Christianity might be interpreted as passing away and getting born again as well as being cleaned from the sins and being saved. In the context of religious music, the clearest symbols can be traced in the lyrics. In Contemporary Christian Music, there are many repeated phrases such as *Güçlü Tanrı* (O Mighty God), *O Çarmıhta Öldü* (He Died on the Cross). However, these phrases might be both index and symbol according to the interpreter. Thus, these phrases mention specific moments from the Bible and at the same time function in a Christian religious context, which means praising God and 'humbling' yourself. Therefore, one can encounter these issues both in a discursive context as well as during practical activities such as kneeling down during the worship at the church service. However, a question arises after this point: while experiencing the music in a religious space how are these symbols interpreted and conveyed? In this sense, the role of the worship leader influences how music should function in the church service.

According to Martijn Van Den Heuvel (2015), the worship leader of the Lighthouse Church in Izmir, describes the role of leader in terms of leading the worship.

> A worship leader shouldn't explain too much about the worship songs, shouldn't talk so much and shouldn't pray that much to cut the music during worship time on the church services. People don't come to church to watch a show. They are there for God. Worship band should provide people to stay with God at that moment by serving music practice. Also, a worship leader can't know what a worship song means to individuals separately. It is a diverse feeling for individuals.

The worship leader should be also aware of the fact that the meaning of music can be diverse according to the individuals' perception. However, they also try to put a limit to worship at least for the context of worship and they explain this issue by applying metaphor. When Van Den Heuvel explained this situation, he used metaphors to make more sense of the 'imagined' or 'agreed-upon' meaning of worship songs:

> It is so important to create a bordered field in which both musicians and community feel safe with the worship leader. Musicians and community might feel free to worship in this field. If there are no boundaries, there won't be any regularity in worship. Therefore, both worship band and community should know where to go to by the worship leader (2015).

"Bordered field" for worship is one of the metaphors used in the discourse of the interviewee. What he describes in this "bordered field" is that people should know what will come next in the music, and the music in this 'field' should be acceptable for everybody. Clearly, mentioning that "worship band and community should know where to go by [following the] worship leader" means both they should know what will happen next in music and when they will create a space for prayer time through these musical movements.

There is no suspicion that these kinds of metaphors affect the musical practices in the church service. It gives the idea of how music should be during the worship time

as well as in the genre of TCCM. Because these ideas and metaphors are not only applicable to the worship time in the church but also to the recording sounds of TCCM. Recordings of the TCCM also function for individual worship time, similarily to other sacred popular music samples (Bohlman, 2003: 290). In this context, recorded worship songs take this issue into consideration as well.

There is communication between the worship band and community during worship time, although there is no speech. Music makes this communication available. Van Den Heuvel talks about communication during worship time as well.

> It is so important to play worship songs in different dynamics as much as we can in order to get the attention of the community to the worship. If we play worship songs as absolutely straight, worship songs become colorless and boring. Playing dynamic is valid even for the worship songs which should be played loud (forte). In those worship songs, you can't play piano because of the structure of the worship songs but you can make differences in rhythm such as syncopation, knowingly playback from the rhythm (laidback) to attain the dynamism (2015).

What Van Den Heuvel says here is both about feelings and messages which are being conveyed through music. These are chosen even before the worship and create the aim of this specific worship time. However, metaphors show up in these situations. Van Den Heuvel also talks about how music can be played in order to convey a specific emotion or experience.

> For instance, I can sing the part of 'Kutsalsın' (You are holy) in two different ways. First is singing this word by dropping my voice and buckling under. The second one is by shouting out and praising him by saying 'Evet! Kutsalsın!' (Yea! You are holy!) to Him. It is up to worship leader to choose by which one s/he will sing (2015).

This sample shows how social actors' understanding of lyrics and the meaning assigned to them changes the way of singing and musical practice. Thus, it is related to the idea that metaphors are also about the sound of music. It can be said that

ideas and metaphors about worship affect the sound. "Dropping the voice" and "buckling under" also gives clues as to what worshipping is for them. It is also related to 'humble yourself' in front of God according to the belief.

Another metaphoric understanding in TCCM appears especially in the third category (the songs that are composed in Turkish for traditional musical instruments such as *bağlama, kanun*). In the lyrics of these songs, we mostly encounter some transformed terms such as '*Allah*' (means God, which mostly used in Islam) instead of '*Tanrı*' (the term which Muslims do not apply so often in Turkey). These songs (such as, for example, *Allah'ın Kelamı Canlıdır* (Gods' Word is Alive), *Allah'ım Büyük* (God is Great), *Allah Bize Sağlam Kaya*(God is Solid Rock to Us) can also be found in the *Tanrı'yı Yüceltelim,* which is a Turkish worship songs book. Another example takes the *Alevis*' (A sect of Islam which takes place in Turkey as well) terms as they are and uses them in TCCM. Cem Kervan's Turkish worship song of *Sevinelim* (2005) provides a clear connection between *Alevi* musical culture and TCCM. These two examples interestingly demonstrate the issue of intertextuality in terms of Islam and Christianity and create a metaphoric description of Turkish Christian identity in music.

Musical metaphors are not only used in terms of lyrics but also musical structure might be related to metaphor as well. For instance, the pianist Paul Baloche, who is a famous Contemporary Christian Musician, in his workshop called *Worship Band Workshop: Roadmap to a Skilled Team* (2011), mentions that using sustained notes as infracture in playing piano can make people connect to something above such as 'heaven' or 'supernatural'. However, sustained notes or drones are often used in TCCM practices as well. It proves that musical sound itself might be a metaphor and signifies something else such as supernatural things.

Conclusion

Engelhardt (2011: 301) mentions that embracing the description of music as 'humanly organized sound' might raise further questions about the music and religion issue. These questions might be about describing religious experience through music, supernatural or transcendental experience, magic, and spirituality as

well as the description of religion itself. In this context, explaining "what musical sound stands for" may be a problematic and complex issue for researchers in terms of religious music. Analyzing metaphors in terms of music practices seems like one of the most proper ways to hold the meaning of religious music and its function in rituals.

People use metaphors for music in two ways: to explain their experience of music and to give meaning to music, and to make the music in accordance to ideas or beliefs. In this context, music as practical consciousness affects the metaphors used for musical practices as discursive consciousness; but there is also a sense in which metaphors as discursive consciousness affect musical practices by creating appropriate sound for the ideas or belief about music. The clearest appearance of this issue can be seen in religious music, which is connected with supernatural and transcendental beings. People's discourses affect the musical sound in the same way as the musical sound affects people's view of religious practices and discourses about it. TCCM is one of the examples of the way metaphor-music relationship occurs in terms of religion and ritual. Social actors in this scene, consciously or unconsciously, are aware of this relationship and shape their musical practices according to these ideas, or these ideas shape their musical practices in religious rituals.

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