

The Inner Vehicle: Prayer, Tulpamancy, and the Magic of the Mind

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“The idea (I came to think of it as the theology of magic) was that if you could learn to see mental images clearly, those images could become the vehicle by which supernatural power entered the mundane world.”

T.M. Luhrmann¹

“So what do I think tulpas are? I think that tulpas are our true or idealized selves separate from the self. Our truest and deepest desires given form and a voice. And I think to say they simply "arent real" [*sic*] is incredibly dismissive, reductive, and boring.”

Pirate_Queen_1017²

In this paper, I compare two sets of mental practices by two different communities—Vineyard Church members and tulpamancers. Tulpamancers are people who seek to create an independent, separate consciousness, called a tulpa, within their minds; a detailed explanation follows. This paper explores how both tulpamancy and some Christian communities use mental imagery to facilitate the experience of contact with a non-human other, as well as how religious tulpamancers reconcile their faith with the existence of their tulpas and the similarity of processes used to communicate with both tulpas and God.

In this study, I compare evangelical Christians’ prayer practices as described by Tanya Luhrmann in her book *When God Talks Back* to the tulpa-creation techniques known as

¹ Jill Wolfson, “Hearing the Voice of God,” *Stanford Magazine*, July/August 2012.

² Pirate_Queen_1017, “Older tulpamancers struggling with tulpamancy,” deleted user, r/Tulpas subreddit, March 18, 2023.

“forcing,” focusing on mental imagery as the common ground between these two practices. Because of the similarity of the psychological processes at work, I argue that the forcing practices of tulpamancers foster the experience of contact and interaction with a non-human other using parallel techniques to those that some Christians use during prayer. I also demonstrate that Christian tulpamancers seem to have no trouble placing tulpas and God into separate ontological categories despite the similarity of these practices and show that tulpamancy tends to bolster rather than challenge their faith.

A tulpa³ is “a mental companion created by focused thought and recurrent interaction, similar to an imaginary friend. However, unlike them, tulpas possess their own will, thoughts and emotions, allowing them to act independently.”⁴ Most tulpas are created purposefully, and most tulpamancers (known as “hosts”) do not believe that such beings have an existence outside their minds or any sort of origin besides a psychological one.⁵ The Belgian-French explorer and spiritualist Alexandra David-Neel introduced the idea of a tulpa to Western culture through her 1929 travelogue *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, where she described creating a fat, jolly monk

³ See Jacob J. Isler, “Tulpas and Mental Health: A Study of Non-Traumagenic Plural Experiences,” *Research in Psychology and Behavioral Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2017): 36-44; Jim Davies, “Explaining the illusion of independent agency in imagined persons with a theory of practice,” *Philosophical Psychology* 36, no. 2 (2023): 337-355; Tanya Luhrmann et al., “Learning to Discern the Voices of Gods, Spirits, Tulpas, and the Dead,” *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 49, no. 1 (2023): 3-12; Samuel Veissiere, “Varieties of Tulpa Experiences: Sentient Imaginary Friends, Embodied Joint Attention, and Hypnotic Sociality in a Wired World,” *Somatosphere*, April 3, 2015. Currently, scholarship on tulpas is in its nascency and exists mostly within the realms of psychology and anthropology. Psychologist Jacob Isler explores the relationship between tulpas and mental health, and psychologist Jim Davies studies how tulpas become autonomous through practiced mental action. Luhrmann, in addition to her work on evangelical prayer, is currently conducting research on tulpamancy and has co-authored an article which contains a brief comparison of the two. Anthropologist and psychosocial clinician Samuel Veissière, arguably the foremost academic expert on tulpas, has analyzed the demographics, mental health, and sociality of tulpamancers; he draws on Luhrmann’s theorizing in his own work, particularly that of absorption, but does not directly compare evangelical prayer to tulpa creation.

⁴ Info sidebar, “What Is A Tulpa?”, r/Tulpas, Reddit, accessed April 25, 2024, <https://www.reddit.com/r/Tulpas>

⁵ Shinyuu, “Tulpa Census 2015,” Google Sites, accessed April 24, 2024, <http://census.headmates.net/>. There is a subset of tulpamancers who ascribe metaphysical meaning to tulpas, but it is a small portion of the population—around 4%.

whom she saw as a separate person, living independently beside her.⁶ The concept of tulpa creation then emerged again in the online community of 4chan in 2012, as adult male fans of the show *My Little Pony* discussed the feasibility of, and began to practice, the creation of sentient, internal companions who resembled the ponies featured in the show and who resided in the consciousness of their hosts. Sites dedicated to tulpa formation and discussion then sprouted up and developed into robust communities. Most tulpas are created to have human forms, although many are animals, fantasy creatures, or amorphous (and many are ponies, true to the community's roots).⁷ Most tulpamancers are white, urban, middle- to upper-middle class males typically falling in the age range of 19–23.⁸ Most tulpamancers live in the US or Europe.⁹

I used the r/Tulpas subreddit as the source for this paper.¹⁰ Reddit is an online collection of forums, and a subreddit is an individual forum dedicated to a specific topic or type of content. The Tulpas subreddit draws together those who are in the process of creating, or have already created, tulpas, as well as curious interlocutors and lurkers like myself. I first discovered the Tulpas subreddit in 2014 and have been an avid observer ever since.

Luhrmann's book *When God Talks Back* is an ethnography of the Vineyard church in Chicago and surveys the prayer practices of its members, whom she describes as evangelical Christians. As an evangelical church, Vineyard is characterized by a near-literal interpretation of

⁶ Alexandra David-Neel, *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, (London: Penguin Books, 1937).

⁷ Samuel Veissiere, "Varieties of tulpa experiences: The hypnotic nature of human sociality, personhood, and interphenomenality," in *Hypnosis and meditation: Towards an integrative science of conscious planes*, ed. Amir Raz and Michael Lifshitz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 58.

⁸ Veissiere, "Varieties of Tulpa Experiences." *Somatosphere*.

⁹ Atago Hiroe, "Raw list of countries," Pastebin, July 28, 2018, <https://pastebin.com/vmTD2p31>. 57% (196 of 344) live in the US according to the 2018 Tulpa Community Census. The next largest populations are in Germany, Canada, Poland, Russia, and the UK.

¹⁰ A subreddit is a forum on the website reddit.com that is dedicated to a specific theme or topic (in this case, tulpas).

the Bible, an emphasis on sharing faith with others in hopes of conversion, and interest in a personal experience of God. This expectation of directness influences the church's practices as a whole—Vineyard pastors present Bible passages as directly and clearly related to congregants' modern, everyday lives, and “prayer warriors” interpret visual images that come into their mind during prayer as messages from God to the person for whom they are praying. A strong focus on a personal and active God leads Vineyard members to embrace a disciplined prayer practice whose aim is fostering direct, transformative experiences of God.¹¹

Both the congregants of the Vineyard church who are featured in Luhrmann's book and the tulpamancers of the r/Tulpas subreddit seek to build a relationship with a being whom they understand as separate from themselves, yet able to communicate with them through their own interior experiences. This being is imagined in the sense that it takes shape and is communicated with through the matrix of the imagination. It is important to note that I do not use the term “imagined” to mean something that is wholly imaginary and thus unreal. The presence of an imagined being within the mind does not proscribe the existence of the being outside the mind, just as imagining a loved one in a daydream does not invalidate their reality outside of the daydream. Rather, the imagined being exists in the mind and gains reality in that form specifically. A better term might be “imaginal,” which Jeffrey Kripal identifies as “a tangible presence generated by the imagination” that is real, at the very least, in the sense of William James' pragmatism; it generates real effects.¹² The personal, direct God of Vineyard members

¹¹ Tanya Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 2012), 115.

¹² Whitley Streiber and Jeffrey J. Kripal, *The Super Natural: Why the Unexplained is Real* (New York: TarcherPerigree, 2016), 155-125.

and tulpamancers' tulpas are imaginal beings, inarguably real to their human interlocutors regardless of any ontological fuzziness in naturalistic terms.

The techniques that tulpamancers use to create and foster the connection to their tulpas bear remarkable parallels to the techniques that Vineyard congregants use during prayer. The end result of these techniques is similar as well—they allow practitioners to feel the presence of their tulpa, or God, and receive mental sensations that seem to come from them, such as mental imagery or an internal voice. The main techniques used by both Vineyard church members and tulpamancers consist of 1) sustained mental visualization and 2) mental conversation.

Vineyard members engage their senses with mental imagery through what Luhrmann calls “inner sense cultivation.” She sees this practice as foundational for the Vineyard experience of God. Congregants who are taught to perceive certain internal phenomena as arising from an external source cultivate a deep awareness of their inner mental world and shape it to become more receptive to thoughts, images, or emotions that are seen as stemming from God. Inner sense cultivation gives an imagined presence for the person praying to speak to and interact with, which then gains reality within their mind.

Tulpamancers practice inner sense cultivation through techniques known as visualization and imposition. Visualization is simply the imagining of the tulpa in the mind's eye. Tulpamancers focus on the tulpa itself and thus build a perception of its form within their mind. They often imagine themselves in a mental form interacting with their tulpa in an imagined, internal world known as a “wonderland.” During the practice of imposition, a tulpamancer imagines his tulpa projected onto external reality and visualizes her interacting with the physical world around her and with the tulpamancer himself. The goal is to experience one's tulpa with one's senses, as if from an external stimulus, and it is accomplished through repeated training of

the mind to experience an internally-generated sensation (the mental image of a person or their touch) as externally-generated (the actual sight or touch of another).

Along with mental imagery techniques, internal conversation with the imaginal being is crucial to building its reality within the mind. Vineyard church members are instructed to talk to God frequently and informally, imagining that he is speaking back to them with the warmth and ease of an old friend. This accustoms the pray-er to the notion that God is indeed present and verbally responsive and normalizes the possibility of hearing his voice. The more a person practices speaking to God as if he were real, the more real he becomes to that person.

This principle holds true with tulpamancy as well. The forcing practice termed “narration” entails frequent communication with a tulpa as if they are physically present. Narration essentially consists of talking to one’s tulpa as much as possible, about anything at all. The community views narration as one of the most crucial, elementary steps in the tulpamancy process. Sometimes, tulpamancers learning how to hear their tulpa will fill in the tulpa’s side of a mental conversation. This technique is called “parroting,” and tulpamancers can use it to practice hearing their tulpa before it is able to speak on its own. For example, a host will hold a mental conversation between himself and his tulpa but acts out the role of the tulpa by imagining how she might respond to his comments and speaking her replies on her behalf. The utility of this practice is disputed in the community as it can cause confusion between the host’s mind-voice and that of their tulpa, sowing doubt about whether the tulpa is actually speaking or if the host is unconsciously parroting. However, many tulpamancy guides suggest parroting as a useful means for engaging with one’s tulpa before it gains vocality.

The overlap between tulpamancy training methods and those of specific subsets of Christians such as those at Vineyard Church raises compelling questions about the interplay

between these two communities. In order to better understand this overlap, this study seeks to identify 1) if Christian tulpamancers exist, 2) if they are aware of Luhrmann’s research, and if so, 3) how they might feel about the similarities between tulpa-forcing and certain kinds of prayer.

Discussion of tulpas and God are common within the tulpamancy community. As a whole, tulpamancers are quite familiar with Luhrmann’s work and there are many posts discussing whether or not personal experiences of God could be construed as tulpamancy. Within these posts, there is almost always a comment recommending *When God Talks Back* or one of Luhrmann’s articles as a resource. A search of “god” on the r/tulpas subreddit returns hundreds of results. In the top results, each has a comment linking to Luhrmann’s book or one of her articles. Searching for “Luhrmann” returns 36 posts—a significant number for a subreddit that is not centered around psychology, anthropology, or religious studies. One post titled, “‘When God Talks Back’, by T.M. Luhrmann, is the most important tulpa-related thing I’ve ever read,” states, “If I did a full text replacement of the word ‘God’ with the word ‘tulpas’, *about 80% of this book would still be completely applicable to us ... I’m positively certain that Tanya Luhrmann has written the definitive nonfiction guide to tulpa creation without even realizing it.*”¹³

In terms of tulpamancer religiosity, some identify as religious and some do not. In some cases, the host does not identify as religious but their tulpa does, or vice versa. Christianity appears to be the religion that hosts and tulpas most commonly identify with.¹⁴ Those who do not identify as religious or Christian are typically open to the idea that individuals who form bonds

¹³ Mdnthrvst, “‘When God Talks Back,’ by T.M. Luhrmann, is the most important tulpa-related thing I’ve ever read,” r/Tulpas, Reddit, April 29, 2014, https://www.reddit.com/r/Tulpas/comments/24b7yi/when_god_talks_back_by_tm_luhrmann_is_the_most/.

¹⁴ Nobillis, August 29, 2017, comment on “We found this interesting little thread on christian opinions of tulpas,” deleted user, r/Tulpas, Reddit, https://www.reddit.com/r/Tulpas/comments/6wahf2/we_found_this_interesting_little_thread_on/. Nobillis, one of the mods of the subreddit and herself a Christian (and tulpa), states that another major online hub for tulpamancy, Tulpa.info, is owned by a Christian and the majority of the funding for the site comes from Christians.

with gods are actually creating tulpas unknowingly. For instance, one tulpamancer says, “I believe that much of what is construed as communication with a divine being is actually conversation with a tulpa, or at least a primitive form of a tulpa.”¹⁵ On the same post, another commenter agrees: “The feeling that is described by God by many devout religious people seems shockingly like tulpas. It doesn’t seem a stretch that peoples’ brains created tulpa-like entities.”¹⁶ On another post where none of the participants identify themselves as Christians, the original poster posits that people who talk to God have indirectly forced a tulpa they perceive as God; seven of eleven commenters agree. No one disagrees. One person simply replies with a link to an article by Luhrmann.¹⁷

Christian tulpamancers, however, seem to have no problem differentiating tulpas from God. For them, it is an ontological divide—tulpas are typically viewed as a psychological phenomenon that does not necessarily have supernatural aspects, whereas God is an inherently supernatural being who exists outside the mind of the practitioner. One tulpamancer who identifies as “heavily” Christian acknowledges that the sensation of speaking to and being comforted by Jesus or God is similar to that of their tulpa, but qualifies, “I think I can always tell which is which since God has a bigger and more commanding presence than my tulpa whereas my tulpa feels more like a person than a deity and usually responds back informally the way a

¹⁵ AmbiguousSalt, February 26, 2019, comment on “God as a Tulpa,” d_rea, r/Tulpas, Reddit, https://www.reddit.com/r/Tulpas/comments/av72sw/god_as_a_tulpa/.

¹⁶ SoaringSkies14, February 27, 2019, comment on “God as a Tulpa.”

¹⁷ Remm1e, “Do people who claimed they ‘talked to their God’ actually indirectly made a tulpa of it?” r/Tulpas, Reddit, June 3, 2020, https://www.reddit.com/r/Tulpas/comments/gw8oj3/do_people_who_claim_they_talked_to_their_god/. Many of the comments throughout the subreddit which link to Luhrmann’s work do so with no further text or context, as if it requires none and her work should be common knowledge already.

person would.”¹⁸ Another Christian commenter believes that “tulpas, a psychologically formed entity, are very different from the holy spirit but can manifest in similar ways ... Tulpas can eventually communicate more directly, at least more directly than anything I’ve ever experienced in my own faith.”¹⁹ Tulpas are not God because they feel different (less commanding, for instance) and are “psychologically formed” in contrast to God who exists outside of one’s mind. They also differ from God in the directness of their communication.

In addition to tulpamancers, there are many tulpas who themselves identify as Christian. In a recent post asking about the religions of hosts and tulpas, out of eighteen replies, eight identify both host and tulpa as Christian (the rest tend towards atheism or agnosticism).²⁰ Tulpas who are Christian are similarly adamant that they, as entities, are clearly distinct from God. Nobillis, a self-described secretary tulpa who also acts as a moderator for the subreddit,²¹ states: “I’m a christian (and a tulpa), so from my personal experience I would say I don’t consider The Heavenly Father to be a tulpa.”²² Many tulpas talk comfortably about their faith without any concern that they might represent some type of accidental internal God or could be confused as such by their host.

¹⁸ CorgiTop8344, August 7, 2023, comment on “two questions: why does making tulpa sound like how the church tells me to hear God? I’ve had entities (though part of myself) say things to me that I didn’t consciously produce. What would that be,” pogsnaill, r/Tulpas, Reddit, https://www.reddit.com/r/Tulpas/comments/15k55n9/two_questions_why_does_making_tulpa_sound_like/.

¹⁹ JelloDangerous4567, August 7, 2023, comment on “two questions.”

²⁰ GirlKillsGod, “Hey folks! What religions do the people in your system (hosts and tulpas) have?” r/Tulpas, Reddit, August 22, 2023, https://www.reddit.com/r/Tulpas/comments/15yv9po/hey_folks_what_religions_do_the_people_in_your/.

²¹ Experienced hosts are often able to allow the tulpa to take control of the body in an activity known as “fronting.” It is likely that Nobillis acts as moderator by fronting, using her host’s body as her own in order to read posts, make comments, etc.

²² Nobillis, February 27, 2019, comment on “God as a Tulpa.”

Christian tulpamancers do, however, acknowledge the parallels between prayer and forcing and occasionally express concern over maintaining proper boundaries between both. In one post, someone asks their fellow Christian tulpamancers about their anxiety that they might accidentally create a tulpa that responds to prayer and believe it erroneously to be God. Other tulpamancers reply with reassurance and guidance. One confirms that God and tulpas are not the same and suggests praying *with* their tulpa and testing a potential God-voice by comparing its directives to the contents of the Bible (“if it goes against those it’s not Him”).²³ Another states succinctly, “I don’t expect any direct replies [from God].”²⁴ In a different post, a tulpamancer notes that “narrating to my tulpa feels a bit like praying especially if I speak out loud. It’s not the same, of course, but I make sure I’m intentionally directing thoughts and words so that they don’t get confused in my head.”²⁵ Intentionality and agency are prominent themes in these discussions. Practitioners’ intentions direct their mental activity towards the appropriate target—forcing goes towards tulpas and prayer goes towards God. Tulpamancers’ agency thus acts as a fulcrum, shifting thoughts towards one direction or the other. This intentionality reflects an almost ontological distinction between tulpamancers’ understandings of forcing and prayer. A tulpa does not respond to prayer simply because it is not God. Furthermore, the respondent’s directness indicates their category. Tulpas are typically more verbose and active in their responses, replying more directly than God.

Christian tulpamancers are aware of the possible conflation of prayer and forcing practices, but generally express confidence that it is possible to keep them separate through

²³ TuKnight, April 19, 2016, comment on “? Practicing christians how do you make time for god while avoiding (for the lack of a better term) turning him into a tulpa,” ArconC, r/Tulpas, Reddit, https://www.reddit.com/r/Tulpas/comments/4fglh5/practicing_christians_how_do_you_make_time_for/.

²⁴ Deleted user, April 20, 2016, comment on “? Practicing christians.”

²⁵ JelloDangerous4567, August 7, 2023, comment on “two questions.”

conscious intention, directing their prayers to God and their forcing to tulpas, and testing any potential God-voices against the standard of the Bible. Directness seems to be a major factor in deciding whether an internal voice is generated by God or a tulpa; God's voice is understood to be indirect, whereas tulpas speak directly to their host.

Vineyard Church members and tulpamancers are using what Lurhmann describes as a theory of attentional learning as they teach themselves to speak to and hear God and tulpas. Through this mental mechanism, "people learn specific ways of attending to their minds and their emotions to find evidence of God, and that both what they attend to and how they attend changes their experience of their minds, and that as a result, they begin to experience a real, external, interacting living presence. In effect, people train the mind in such a way that they experience part of their mind as the presence of God."²⁶ It is this same process of attentional learning that is at work when people create and build relationships with their tulpas.

In a similar vein, Ann Taves cites psychological researcher Ernest Hilgard, who found that hypnotized individuals were able to tell stories more vividly than non-hypnotized ones. Individuals not in hypnosis were cognizant of the process of making up the story, whereas those in hypnosis experienced the events of the story as they were unfolding, "as if it were actually occurring or ... as if another entity was actually supplying the words."²⁷ Taves outlines the characteristics of highly hypnotizable individuals who "have the ability to 'represent suggested events and states imaginatively and inactively in such a manner that they are experienced as real.'"²⁸ Moreover, she asserts that an individual does not necessarily need to be hypnotized in

²⁶ Lurhmann, *When God Talks Back*, xxi.

²⁷ Ann Taves, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016: 251.

²⁸ Taves, 254.

order to access this ability and that the ability does not necessitate an obviously altered state of consciousness at all.

Both Luhrmann and Taves offer theories for why certain people are better able to craft believable mental narratives than others. Luhrmann speaks on absorption, the trait of being able to lose yourself in something and have the world around you seem different as a result. It is “the mental capacity common to trance, hypnosis, dissociation, and to most imaginative experiences in which the individual becomes caught up in ideas or images or fascinations.”²⁹ It is related to hypnotizability because both involve subsuming yourself into an experience wholly and intensely.

Luhrmann’s theory of attentional learning and Taves’ conceptualization of high hypnotizability as traits which foster vivid internal imagery bear parallels to research done on authors of adult fiction about the illusion of independent agency: that is, when “a fictional character is experienced by the person who created it as having independent thoughts, words, and/or actions.”³⁰ One study found that ninety-two percent of adult writers of fiction experienced the illusion of independent agency, noting that those who had been writing for longer were better able to experience their characters as independent people, indicating that bringing characters to life in one’s mind is a skill that improves with practice. Characters can become autonomous to the point of rebellion, leading authors to bribe the characters to commit the actions in the storyline that the writer desires.³¹ The study’s authors suggest, “If sustained pretending

²⁹ Taves, 201.

³⁰ Marjorie Taylor, Sara D. Hodges, Adele Kohanyi. “Do Adult Fiction Writers Experience Their Characters as Having Minds of Their Own?” *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* Vol, 22 (4), June 2003: 361.

³¹ Taylor, Hodges, and Kohanyi, 363. Author Sara Paretsky convinced a character distressed by a particularly violent scene to go along with it in exchange for finding true love later in the story.

automatizes the creative process, then anyone engaging in sustained pretense might experience the illusion of independent agency.”³²

Psychologist Jim Davies argues that imagined characters, including imagined companions, hallucinations, and fictional characters in narratives, are by default non-autonomous but can gain autonomy if their personalities are “well-practiced.” Practicing the character’s personality allows the mind to autonomize their thinking so that it becomes effortless and essentially hidden from the imaginer’s mind.³³

Inner sense cultivation through visualization and imagined conversation, when done repeatedly over a period of time, can lead to individuals feeling a presence in their mind as if it is truly there. This is an example of attentional learning, wherein practitioners learn to focus on their mind and the imagined image and speech of a being in such a way that it actively gains reality in the process—in essence, the being has independent agency or at least the illusion thereof. Forcing tulpas and praying to God are not a one-time activity in this case, but require sustained commitment from practitioners, with those who have practiced for longer typically experiencing more success than those who are newer to it—supporting Davies’ theory that imagined beings gain greater autonomy through increased practice of imagining that being. Additionally, those who have higher capabilities for absorption and hypnotizability are better able to succeed in these endeavors. Altogether, the experiences of Vineyard congregants and tulpamancers support these theories that people can train themselves to attend to their minds in order to foster experiences of connection with imaginal beings, that forcing and prayer are skills

³² Taylor, Hodges, and Kohanyi, 367.

³³ Davies, “Explaining the illusion of independent agency,” 342. Davies states that tulpamancy generally fits within this theory, although the fact that every so often the rare tulpa can be spontaneously generated (those known as “walk-ins”) does not align with his notion of automatization through practice.

that develop over time, and that certain personality traits make some people more adept at creating connections with imaginal beings than others.

Despite the fact that the processes of praying to God and forcing a tulpa can look very similar, Christian tulpamancers are adamant that the two types of beings are distinct. Tulpas and God are important in their lives and provide love and guidance, but tulpas are seen as close internal companions who speak to them directly whereas God is an external, transcendent being who communicates through indirect means. Even Christian tulpamancers familiar with Luhrmann's work who understand that forcing and prayer can and have been directly compared do not seem to doubt the reality of God or his relationship with them.

Vineyard members undertaking a disciplined practice of prayer and tulpamancers undertaking a disciplined practice of forcing employ similar techniques to realize an intimate relationship with a being who communicates with them through their minds. These techniques involve believing that the being is actually there, speaking to them as much as possible, and cultivating inner sense awareness to engage with them using mental imagery. Practicing these techniques leads to psychological changes in the mind of the practitioner, training it to identify some mental stimuli as arising from a source other than the individual. The practitioner builds the desired form within the mind, rendering it capable of producing images, sensations, and even voices distinct from those naturally arising within an individual's consciousness. The result is a relationship with an internal, yet independent, being that practitioners feel accompanies them through life as a companion who often provides tangible emotional and mental aid.

A productive route of further inquiry into the subject of tulpamancy and spirituality would be administering the Tellegen Absorption Scale to tulpamancers and non-tulpamancer

groups to compare the results.³⁴ It is my prediction that tulpamancers would show higher scores than non-tulpamancers on average, and that tulpamancers who are able to create tulpas quicker and tackle advanced practices like imposition would score higher on the scale than those who do not. It would also be fruitful to interview Christian or otherwise religious tulpamancers to better understand how they pray, if at all, and compare those activities to tulpamancy practices such as visualization and imposition. The trait of absorption and its impact on the intersection of imagination and spirituality is also a field ripe for research opportunities. Tulpamancers, in particular, provide a promising path forward in which religious studies researchers can interrogate the process of constructing imaginal beings and the ways that they can transform individuals' lives.

³⁴ The Tellegen Absorption Scale measures a person's ability to get lost in an imagined world. Luhrmann gave this scale to Vineyard church members and found that the higher someone scored, the more likely they were to report experiencing God with their senses during prayer. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 195-196.

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