



## ***Spiritual but not religious (SBNRS): A critical analysis of Sam Harris's waking up***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Religion and spirit always go side by side. In this era spirit and religion are studied separately with the thought of an anti-religious phenomenon is there with its vast impacts. Non-religious minds and religious ones have a lot of things that differ, they have spiritual struggles. The theme arises in the name of non-religious spirituality (NRS). The thought prevailed in the west and now in the east in reverse of the religious institutional thought and spirituality. Religious disputes created an image to the world that is nontolerant and companionate, rising a question of God existence and self-existence. Thus, giving rise in Atheism, nihilism, free thinking. The thinking of spirituality also has gone in another side with superstitions and spiritual meditation. The religious narrative is there but denied. Practices amalgamated with spirituality. The study introduces the phenomenon and the theorizer of SBNR who initiated it with potential. This article will critically analyze the theory presented in waking up with its impact in a broader sense.*

**Keywords:** *Free thinkers, spiritual meditation, superstitions, rituals, romanticism, spiritual struggles.*

### **Introduction:**

In recent years, the West has promoted a non-religious and neo-romantic culture, which has had a significant impact on cultural values and ethical norms. This culture promoted free living without any ethical boundaries, and it has been reflected in literature and academia. Recent research has shown that this culture has replaced religious and spiritual values, and it has changed the way people think. There is an effort to present that religion is not essential in life without it life is easier and more enjoyable.



*Spiritual but not religious (SBNRS): A critical analysis of Sam  
Harris's waking up*

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The literary effort to interpret the anti-religious and anti –Islamic agenda is common in western scholars. This effort is to expose the agenda to the best sellers of the west. They promote the rhetoric against dogmatism that is called SBNR, could be defined as

“Non-Religious Spirituality represents spiritual works and practices that reject every traditional religion. People who consider themselves followers of Non-Religious Spirituality call themselves Spiritual but Not Religious (SBNR). This term defines people who are considered unchurched, freethinkers, spiritually eclectic, etc.”<sup>1</sup>

The phenomenon has different names i.e. SBNR (spiritual but not religious) Spirituality movement, Atheist spirituality, neo romanticism, religious Critique. It is followed by meditation<sup>2</sup> to get spirituality.<sup>3</sup>

**Significance:**

The topic gains a wide interest of the people who attracted by the tempting attractions of being non-religious get almost all the interests what we have in the religious bodies apparently. The notion has an attraction of what the carrier of this motivation needs to negate religious narrative. The importance of research and the gap can be found when we talk about its prevalence and spiritual meditation, getting fame day by day. That thing is not only a disaster for religion, but the spirit of true teaching has been negated by this. The importance of religion in one's life denied by the baseless things that were also gathered by different religions. If we go through history, we will find it, as the result of lust which people need to fulfil by any means, and religion was in the way of them. The moral decline of society tends to fulfill the unlimited cravings and desires that need no limitations and boundaries. It is needed to counter and there should be a counter narrative of the movement.

**Background History and Literature review**

It is a personalized and self-exploring phenomenon that is felt a century ago with the background of the movement of romanticism<sup>4</sup>. According to various sources it's a critique on religion and a revolt against religious narrative countering its bases and nullifying the mainstream spiritual aid of a person to be spiritual being associated with religion. “Spiritual but not religious” is also known as “spirituality movement”, “Atheist spirituality” and “Neo-Atheist”, it is out sprout of Atheism and anti-religious efforts. They emphasize being non-affiliated with any religious doctrine but being spiritual at the same time.

It invites the interests of social specialists, psychological physicians, affiliated and non-affiliated personalities, i.e. philosophers and theologians. It takes philosophical intuition from the Greek roots of Plato and Aristotle traditional history of human nature like Hume<sup>5</sup>. It has its own psychological roots based on

“mind heal movement”<sup>6</sup>. There is also a psychological impact. Then it turns towards humanistic idea<sup>7</sup> and then takes a turn towards compassionate thinking. There are also revolutionary changes in Christian’s perspective after Martin Luther presented his views. Enlightenment has changed the meaning of being religious and modernity came with all its impacts on people’s minds. The enlightened thought was symbolic of free will, Morality and worldly progress. The rituals, belief and divinity considered backwardness. Enlightenment prompted many thinkers against orthodoxy; the bold thinkers coined the term “deism”<sup>8</sup>. They rejected the concept of biblical God and promoted rational thinking.

A diverse range of metaphysical movements, including Freemasonry<sup>9</sup>, Swedenborgianism<sup>10</sup>, Transcendentalism<sup>11</sup>, Mesmerism<sup>12</sup>, and Spiritualism, converged in the early 19th century to form the first "metaphysical awakening".<sup>13</sup> The new thought movement, psychological theories and ideas give it a new twist. The theorizers effected the mainstream religious talk and diverted the people thinking actualized by the impacts of 9/11/2001 events. These events disturbed all communities in the world. The portrayal depicted religion against humanity especially Islam. The topic gains a wide interest of the people who attracted by the tempting attractions of being non-religious get almost all the interests what we have in the religious bodies apparently. The notion has an attraction to negate religious narrative. Because of the rage against inhumane activities done by the affiliated ones.

Western perspectives have extensively studied SBNRs. There is Christian critique in form of articles, blogs<sup>14</sup> and books<sup>15</sup>. The theory of SBNR has been presented as a response in Christian perspective in some articles<sup>16</sup>. Historically it faced a religious tilt and destroyed the image of Christian Cult. Emily Durkheim<sup>17</sup> has presented a balanced thought as a response. At various platforms (Pod casts)<sup>18</sup> especially academic SBNRs faced critique. Recently Ann Taves did research and presented a theory of Building block approach to study religion and told how to find and make meaning in secular and religious experience.<sup>19</sup> The Jewish response to the spirituality movement is in form of “*in Defense of Faith*”<sup>20</sup>.

After William James, many writers put forth the theory about free will and thinking like Paul Kurtz, “*living without religion*”<sup>21</sup> influenced by Huxley, Tillich and John Dewey. Seven Erlandson drafted his book in 2000 on spiritual but not religious that’s about religious revolution in America<sup>22</sup>. In Americans the motivation of being religious is prevailing against orthodoxy, traditional religion, resembling spiritual movements, in their endorsement of mystical and exotic ways.

*Spiritual but not religious (SBNRS): A critical analysis of Sam  
Harris's waking up*

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Popular increase in popular and scholarly intension Dr. Pargament has been related to sociocultural trends towards deinstitutionalization, individualization, and globalization.<sup>23</sup> The meaning of spirituality has been leaned against the original meaning of religion.

Sam Harris is the writer of 'waking up', which also is the guide of non-religious spirituality.<sup>24</sup> That covers the spiritual struggle with meditation and the theory that he represented about SBNR. Likewise, Steve Antinoff presented "spiritual Atheism"<sup>25</sup>. he continued the legacy where Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens left, Antinoff's unique and prescient take on deity and spirituality makes this eloquent book a critical contribution to the understanding of the quest for salvation and enlightenment. The Atheist's Way: Living Well without Gods, in this book Eric Maisel (2009)<sup>26</sup> explores how atheists can create rich personal meaning without relying on divine benefactor. The back-to-back publications give this thing a rise in society to an inclined thought. Atheists have the profound influence towards Buddhist practices yoga and meditation. They took the concept of spirituality and meditation from religion to give religious bodies a level playing field. It posed a major challenge to religion when it took over society. The target is the spirit of religion that could be managed with the specific theory.

This book "Spiritual, but not religious: Understanding unchurched America by RC Fuller (2001)"<sup>27</sup> suggests us the American's believe transition history and the reason they are unchurched. There are the article shows the ratio and proportion of the religious choice in British population. "Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging"<sup>28</sup> by David Voas and Alasdair Crockett talk about British inclination among religion. The research shows many people understand the lifestyle. Now spiritual but not religious and its prevalence is the talk of the town in west, the article "Selling spirituality: The silent takeover of religion by JR Carrette and R King (2005)"<sup>29</sup> and "Restless souls: The making of American spirituality"<sup>30</sup> by LE Schmidt (2012)". Sven Erlandson<sup>31</sup> authored his book in 2000 on spiritual but not religious that is about the religious revolution in America. It was under discussion everywhere in the west, but the east is known for its spiritual values and mystical approach. The topic gain interest in eastern perspective, A very comprehensive and detailed study is "Why are Japanese non-religious"<sup>32</sup> by Toshimaro Ama (2005), is done in Japan to calculate and confirm the reason Japanese are non-religious. Now it provoked other scholars to do a work like "Disenchanted India: Organized rationalism and criticism of religion in India"<sup>33</sup>. J Quack (2012) is showing its assortment and effects in diverse cultures. A worldview study in Muslim perspective is needed in eastern side is required to measure the thought inclining in east.

The recent study is published in issue of the Journal named ‘religions’<sup>34</sup> about religious studies. There are 12 articles that depict the importance of the phenomenon. Mostly are from a psychological point of view. The article by Linda Marcandante<sup>35</sup> expressed the mainstream problem of spiritual problems of Nones and SBNRs. One of the articles represents the Roman Catholic priests’ spiritual, behavioral and religious struggles presented by Thomas.G plante.<sup>36</sup> Another talk about the psychological trauma and its meditation with religious and other means under the title ‘psych spiritual development risk factors and moral injury’.<sup>37</sup> An article talks about religious and spiritual and psychological issues and their meditation. Some authors examine the causes, while others statistically analyze SBNR. By the title ‘open ended and close ended measures of religious struggles’.<sup>38</sup> Which is highly informative and eye-opening work from scholars of present year.

There are several reports that present literature on individuals who identify as religious but not spiritual, and those who are spiritual but not religious. These reports include statistical data shared by scholars, notably in Gallup reports from 1999 and Roof’s interviews conducted in 2000. A 1997 study by Zinn Bauer and a 1991 interview survey of Protestants also exist. Another study by replication of the questions of Zinn Bauer 1997 to conduct a survey poll from Scott (2001)<sup>39</sup>. Now the new comparable research of Pew Research center England did in 2024<sup>40</sup>.

There are some responses in Muslim perspective but to evaluate the thinking there are little efforts not enough to explicit it. The efforts are in other means they objected to anti-jihadist thoughts and movements. There is numerous literatures on the said topic but not as a response of spirituality movement. They present Sufism as alternate of this theory, but the contradictory part needs an evaluative examination, historically and theoretically.

### **3.3 Description of phenomenon (reasons, types, culture)**

The recent phenomenon of SBNRs has a specific mindset and culture. There are several reasons to make it happen.

According to Linda Marcandante,

“There is many varieties within the population of Nones. Unlike organized religions, Nones do not share a common culture and resources, internal communication, or identity the way a “milieu” would. Rather, Nones represent more of a statistical or “social aggregate.” That is, while there are some cultural similarities, there is not an organized internal communication or shared identity.”<sup>41</sup>

Those who have no affiliation with religion. Those who have rejected every type of traditional religion. They are prevalent from a cultural rhetoric they choose one

*Spiritual but not religious (SBNRS): A critical analysis of Sam Harris's waking up*

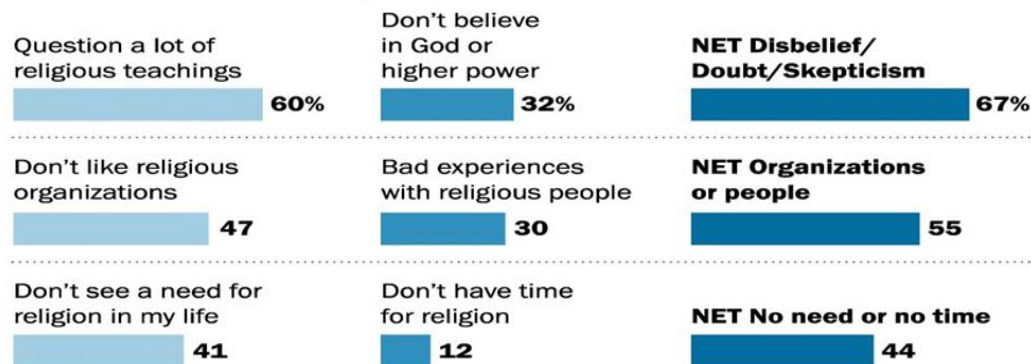
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thing (spiritual) no other thing (religious) they refrain the whole religious notion but following some moral boundaries, are known as “SBNR”. There are more types of spiritual but not religious people who can be categorized more according to the research the people who just follow moral and rhetoric boundaries to some extent spiritual but not religious at all (reject religion and practices) are called ‘Nones’. They can be Atheists or agnostics; they can be humanists they can be secular even they can be religious or the people who left their religion.

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**Most ‘nones’ cite disbelief or skepticism as reasons they are not religious**

*% of religious “nones” who say each of the following is an **extremely or very important reason** for why they are nonreligious*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 31-Aug. 6, 2023.  
“Religious ‘Nones’ in America: Who They Are and What They Believe”

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

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42

The research by pew research center showcasing Religious ‘nones’ in America who they are and what they believe.

**3.4 Types of Nones or SBNRs:**

Linda’s research showed more types and mentioned five more types of SBNRs based on their rationale:

1. Dissenters
2. Casuals
3. Explorers
4. Seekers
5. Immigrants.

**1. Dissenters:**

Are those SBNRs who stay away from the institutional religion by the number of the reasons? They got some sort of moral injuries; they refrain some of religious bodies and think get rid of them. They are called drifted or protesting SBNRs. The offended by some of the religious bodies and never returned either have fewer compelling reasons to remain active.

**2. Casuals:**

Whom spirituality is neither an organizing principle nor the subject of sustained attention. These SBNRs may “read books on spirituality, seek out a teacher, attend services or rituals occasionally, but only on an ‘as needed’ basis. They drop these things when no longer applicable. The main thing is whether a given practice, teaching, or guide helps them feel better.”<sup>43</sup> this type is more prevalent among the youngsters.

**3. Explorers:**

They are the SBNRs who try one thing then another to get stronger spiritually to get settled for long. “They move to get satisfied the curiosity and the desired novelty from disappointment finding the destination less, almost touristic, fun stimulating and exiting journey or a welcome anti dote to a crass secular world.”<sup>44</sup>

**4. Seekers:**

They are looking for spiritual home, a place of belonging, deep suffering disappointment tend them to seek refuge in spirituality. Not every person who experiment the spiritual practice is a seeker. There is a considerable debate.

**5. Immigrants:**

These are the SBNRs who are in the process of moving towards a new spiritual heritage but are not fully satisfied or feel at home at the new spiritual structure. New spiritual designation requires consistency and loyalty, and those characteristics which specify SBNRs like free thinking, non-dogmatism, and an open questioning attitude.

**Analysis:**

The discussion of being religious spiritual and non-religious spiritual started from the church’s moral illness that is seen clearly when pope himself acknowledged of child abuse in front of public and before this many rumors and many stories are there for that moral decline<sup>45</sup>. The moral decline of religious bodies tends to protest religion. The moral decline also includes the greed of materials and getting the utmost power to do whatever you wanted, so the behavior and the thinking changed, time by time. The moral values changed, and lust came in place. Thus, Protestants came into being other than orthodox. Religion is affected in every case. Because the presenters are not there to explain those true teachings to the world. To people the teachings are not that valid because the popes and bishops

*Spiritual but not religious (SBNRS): A critical analysis of Sam  
Harris's waking up*

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are not practicing them, or they nullified those by their own actions, so the people acknowledged to be fooled by them. It seems anti catholic but the main reason in my opinion the refrain from religion is only this.

There are several reasons which are promoting non-religious spirituality. The first and main reason is the church as it is challenging situation for church the article that is written by Thomas G. Plante entitled "Clericalism Contributes to Religious, Spiritual, and Behavioral Struggles among Catholic Priests" his study talked enough about challenging religious and spiritual situations. Like he said in his study,

*"Press attention from other outlets quickly followed and the story of sexual abuse of minor children by celibate Catholic priests and the cover up of these behaviors by Church leaders (e.g., bishops) was an outrage to the general public as well as to rank-and-file Catholics. The enormous impact of the Boston Globe's reporting was made into a highly popular motion picture entitled Spotlight that ultimately won an academy award for best picture in 2015. Although the longstanding and chronic problem of sexual abuse of children by Catholic clerics had been well known since at least the 1980s"*<sup>46</sup>

The dead conscience of catholic put the whole religion into a question. Same thing Atheists for example Sam Harris <sup>47</sup>has mentioned and criticized all other religions explaining and defending the narrative of SBNRs. SBNRs mostly fall in the category of nihilism, atheism, agnostics, secular, humanistic follow SBNRS have several types to defend their own self satisfactory and created narrative. They need only their own self-endeavor so there are many of their types. So, there are reasons to be an SBNR, as discussed below.

**Reasons to be an SBNR**

There should be several reasons in the light of research done by Linda<sup>48</sup>, and the Pew research center <sup>49</sup>recent report <sup>50</sup>as explained below:

**Moral victims:**

The very first type explained earlier are some victimized or morally injured who drifted or left the religion by some of the causes. As their compelling reasons are so strong that they refrain the religion and get annoyed by religious bodies and to free will. But they have got the motivation to be spiritual but not religious, this can be the very first or the main reason.

**Depressed by religion:**

Religious personalities can be depressing for some people. The duality of the characters perplexed them, and they became irritated by the religion and the followers' actions. Many questions troubled them, and they lacked actual



specialists, so they became disheartened by religion before drifting and finding satisfaction in spirituality to alleviate their anguish.

**Bothered by religious practices:**

Some people became irritated by the religious practices they used to follow. They abandoned their daily supplications or activities, drifting away from religion and experiencing spiritual loneliness. As a result, they were drawn to SBNR and felt liberated from all of the constraints imposed by daily obligations. This free will captivated their thoughts, and they became followers of the moral standards that they must uphold.

**Left religion:**

Some people left their religion just because they are not satisfied by their religion or any other reason the religion does not suit them.

**Psychical affairs:**

Some people are bothered by some psychological affairs and need some meditation by any psychological healer spiritual healer.

**Cannot separate self and illusion:**

Some people cannot separate what is the self and what the illusion is they got some psychological issues which bother them, and they become illusionists some people got into some trauma and in some things that need treatment by psychiatrists. There is a debate on self and illusion in this regard in Harris's waking up.

**Needed some spiritual healers (Seeking spiritual refuge):**

Some people who follow free will and pursue free thinking tend towards a spiritual healer and practices these practices also like exercises that change people mind and give them a break from all the hectic routine work that bothers mind and body.

**Curious about spiritual things:**

Some people are curious about spiritual things connection of Mind, body and spirit. They go towards those related things to get original spirituality that purify the soul and heart. They want to connect to something beyond transcendence. They are curious about mystery and the heritage of mysticism; curiousness leads them towards SBNRs.

**Temptation of spiritual meditation:**

Some religious people who are religious or non-religious are tempted towards meditation the type of exercises like yoga, some Buddha practices, Qigong, Tie chi, Reiki and traditional meditation or postures that is there in kung Fu. These practices made people active and healthy. Health and fitness is also a main concern of everybody.

**Trend followers:**

Some people are trend followers that follow the trend going on. Then they move on towards what is happening and in trend they refrain the need of any religion in their lives that have not been practice for long time. There is no one who guides them towards what is wrong and right even their parents give them permission to choose whatever they want.

**Modern conscience:**

Modern conscience of Atheists is to negate the religion and to criticize the contextual things practices and the philosophy. It also made the religion doubtful and presented the flaws and backlashes.

**Critic on Christianity:**

There is a critic on Christianity especially on Catholic Church and catholic religions, on what the religious bodies have done as talked about this earlier.

All these things promoted SBNRs, and they flourished with their modern conscience.

**How does it work (meditation)?**

Spiritual healing is the most updated thing that works with inner energy. There are several ways to get spiritually healed. There are generic types of healing methods. There is two main things spiritual practice and spiritual meditation like with salt water, hand movements and body, and some sort of exercises and postures, chanting, breathing techniques etc.

**Yoga and mindfulness meditation**

That is a well-known and well-practiced meditation exercise. That helps to connect the mind, body and spirit. That also helps in physical fitness and wellbeing.

Historically it came from ancient India almost 5000 years ago “The first mention of the word “yoga” appears in Rig Veda, a collection of ancient texts. Yoga comes from the Sanskrit word “yuj,” which means “union” or “to join.” Indian monks spread their knowledge of yoga in the West during the late 1890s. Modern yoga teachings became widely popular in Western countries by the 1970s.”<sup>51</sup>

There are six or seven types of Yoga that have different set of practices.so there are exercises which count day, timings and the season and instructions of masters.

The whole discussion of SBNRs related with religion as the reverse phenomenon or the alternative of the religions to get attached with. The purpose is to get calmness by this type of pseudo spirituality. They get healed by different types of meditation. Here Sam Harris suggests another type of Meditation with spirituality.

**Sam Harris (the theorizer of NRS or SNBRs):**

Samuel Benjamin Harris (born April 9, 1967) is an American national. He is an Atheist, Neuroscientist, philosopher, Writer, critic of religions specially Islam, a podcast Host.

**Writings:**

End of the faith, waking up, Islam and the Future of Tolerance: A Dialogue in 2015(with British writer Majid Nawaz), The moral landscape, long term essay 'lying', free will', A letter to the Christian nation.

**Waking up by Sam Harris**

The book waking according to him is a “Guide to spirituality without religion”. The book is published from a pushing house by Simon and Schuster from New York in 2014. The book is translated in 20 different languages. The book consists of 5 chapters. Basically, the Title denotes the word “waking up” from a deep sleep as the author considers it.

**Chapter 1** talks about spirituality, it is a search of happiness. He talked about and criticized the eastern and western religions about dogmatism and compared Abrahamic religion with Buddha teachings and found those the best ones having no extremism just peaceful apprehend. He also given the theory of mindfulness and meditation steps Inspired by Buddha teachings. The truth of suffering and enlightenment, is the goal of meditation, as he quoted the monk’s Qoute “a deep sense of flourishing that arises from an exceptionally healthy mind.” The purpose of meditation is to recognize that you already have such a mind.”<sup>52</sup>

In **Chapter 2** it Comprises the mystery of consciousness, divided mind, its structure and function, our mind already split into two Conscious and unconscious processing in the brain. The discussion is scientific, and the process of sleep and dream is discussed to describe the person’s experience to the world. The theory of mind is presented by the author. After all he concluded on moral dimensions and ethical considerations. Criticizing the god existence and Moses according to his atheist mind, he said,

“Consciousness is the substance of any experience we can have or hope for, now or in the future. If God spoke to Moses out of a burning bush, the bush would have been a visual percept (whether veridical or not) of which Moses was consciously aware. It should be clear that if a person begins to suffer from intractable pain or depression, if he experiences a continuous ringing in his ears or the consequences of having acquired a bad reputation among his colleagues, these developments are matters of consciousness and its contents, whatever the nature of the unconscious processes that give rise to them.”<sup>53</sup>

**Chapter three** describes the riddle of the self, As he said, “what are we calling I is for illusion, Consciousness without self, Thought the challenge of studying self,

Penetrating the illusion". At the start of the chapter, he criticized religion and denied all the religious experiences that were in Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism, and tried to convince that conventional <sup>54</sup>sense of self is an illusion.

**Chapter four** consists of theory Gradual verse sudden realization, Dzogchen: taking the goal as a path, having no head, the paradox of acceptance presented. He presented some of the riddles in which he also presented some of the personal experiences.

**Chapter five** tell us about the Mind at the brink of death, the spiritual uses of pharmacology, he showed us some near-death experiencing and the pharmacology.

**Analysis of basic concepts/theories of the book:**

After a brief overview of the book, we can easily find the main themes and motives of the writer and the alternative he has given. He had explained the philosophy and concepts of the given concepts according to his personal experience and thought. The main themes and motives in this book are as follows:

**1. Spirituality and Dogmatism**

He is talking about spirituality, its philosophy and how to get spirituality at start. Spiritually, he could not get by solitude and MDMA drug he took with him. He described his personal experience to get it first he and his friend took medicine and then after a while he felt love for his friend and he wanted to see him happy, and the envy vanished by this practice. The experience showed him eventually the result of universality of love which he overlooked in all his life thus he realized that religion is merely a text, monument to the ignorance and superstition of our ancestors.<sup>55</sup>

*"but I know that Jesus, the Buddha, Lao-tzu and the other saints and sages of history had not all been epileptics, schizophrenics or frauds. Still considered the world's religions to be mere intellectual ruins, maintained at enormous psychological truths could be found under the rubble"*<sup>56</sup>

He also explained his purpose of the writing of the book is to focus on human subjectivity and classical spiritual phenomenon, concepts and practices, he has been vocal critic of religion so as we advance over this new terrain, the nature of experience itself.

By explaining his narrated version above, I want to show a piece of literature he put forth with his biased thoughts that can be observed throughout. In his book he strongly advocated self-experience by explaining his own. He also criticized spiritual religiosity and forced to adopt meditation if anybody wants to be spiritual. So overall we can see clearly a biased viewpoint about religion and understanding about religious believes especially Abrahamic religions.

Spirituality is main target of the author, he wants his theory to be adopted as natural, empirical and without any question. His thought and the things he represented, putting forth the theory of mindfulness. He also enforced self-inquiry and consciousness. He had given scientific reasons to give subjective experience of science. Harris challenges the notion that spirituality is inherently tied to religious dogma. He advocates for a secular approach to spirituality, emphasizing that one can explore transcendent experiences without subscribing to any particular faith. The book encourages readers to seek personal awakening and inner transformation through practices like meditation, mindfulness, and self-inquiry.

## **2. Meditation and Mindfulness,**

Human mind tends to wander and engaging this is called “stimulus independent thought”. It is also known as experience sampling in psychologists and neuroscientists. Wandering mind is an unhappy mind and human as per authors.

The concept of meditation and mindfulness is not new. It is present in many eastern religions like in Buddha, Hindu, Sikh, etc. It's a religious thing that represents eastern religiosity. But Sam Harris presented it as a different thing. He presented a blended type of a concept of Mindfulness which is also taken from religious meditation. Because yoga and such meditations from Bodh has the part of spirituality that is achieved till death. so explaining a new concept to make it easier and giving a new concept without spirituality. The book encourages readers to seek personal awakening and inner transformation through practices like meditation, mindfulness, and self-inquiry. That is the main concept of the book. He also had mentioned the history of Buddhism and the personal experience of Helena Petrovna Balatskvy <sup>57</sup> and opinion of Koestler very evidently. He criticized wisdom of east afterwards with his Hindu friend's experience, highlighting his obsession with Indian spirituality and believing unknown deity. He also mentioned commonalities in Buddhism and eastern wisdom that focus on primacy of mind. Finally, he focused on “sense of self” as a wage phrase after comparing spiritual traditions, his wordings as follows:

*“An honest comparison of spiritual traditions, Eastern and Western, proves equally invidious. As manuals for contemplative understanding, the Bible and the Koran are worse than useless. Whatever wisdom can be found in their pages is never best found there, and it is subverted, time and again, by ancient savagery and superstition. Again, one must deploy the necessary caveats: I am not saying that most Buddhists or Hindus have been sophisticated contemplatives. Their traditions have spawned many of the same pathologies we see elsewhere among the faithful: dogmatism, anti-*

*Spiritual but not religious (SBNRS): A critical analysis of Sam  
Harris's waking up*

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*intellectualism, tribalism, other worldliness. However, the empirical difference between the central teachings of Buddhism and A.dvaita and those of Western monotheism is difficult to overstate.”<sup>58</sup>*

Mindfulness is the connection between mind and body that is aligned in a way that keeps yourself calm. He has said that the connection can be built up by without connecting to a supernatural divine power. He has explained the history of meditation with the Buddhist background with the reference of the book Sati patthana Sutta. He described four foundations of mindfulness as Buddha has described “the direct path for the purification of beings for surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief for the attainment of the true way, for realization of Nibbana (nirwana)”<sup>59</sup>. The four stages are as follows

- 1-The body (changes in body postures, breathing, activities)
- 2-Feelings (The senses of pleasantness, unpleasantness, neutrality)
- 3-The mind (its mood and attitudes)
- 4-The objects of mind (which include five senses, mental states, tranquility, rapture, equanimity and even mindfulness itself)

According to him there is nothing about mindfulness, a meditator is instructed to pay attention, ardently, fully aware and free from covetousness and grief for the world.

All this main theory of mindfulness is described with detailed method in the foundations of Buddhism, the book of Nirwana. In this religion nirwan is everything you got in your life without it you are wasted. So main thing is to get out of dukha (grieves). He compares un-satisfactoriness, difficulties in life with happiness, love and satisfaction. The discussion of goal of meditation he started with the saying of Buddha “the state of full enlightenment is generally described as omniscient”<sup>60</sup> by calling it absurd. To the conclusion that Buddha and his all followers did not possess such abilities by spiritual practice. He believed that this religious dogmatism was not a rational approach. “True more profound goal of meditation is to arrive at the state of wellbeing that is imperturbable or if perturb easily regained”<sup>61</sup>

Meditation serves as a central theme. Harris discusses various meditation techniques, their benefits, and the role they play in expanding consciousness. He emphasizes the importance of direct experience over blind belief. Mindfulness practices are presented as tools for cultivating present-moment awareness, reducing suffering, and gaining insights into the nature of existence. So he took the basic idea of meditation from his favorite religion although Harris does not follow it but he propagates it. It is very strange as he is an Atheist. Whenever the

discussion revolves around the “omniscient” he has no solid argument seems that he is confused in this regard.

### **3. Consciousness, Riddle of self (philosophy)**

The next theme is about self or a conscious. Harris challenges the conventional idea of a fixed, unchanging self. He draws from Buddhist philosophy and neuroscience to argue that the self is an illusion; a construct arising from the interplay of thoughts, emotions, and sensory experiences. This theme invites readers to question their own sense of identity and consider the impermanence of selfhood. If we compare it with Islamic thought which he strongly opposes, we see that it promotes self-consciousness and awareness demonstrating that self is not illusion. The Islamic core believes that the self is special. Every being is valuable in the eyes of their creator. The creator made him with a specific goal in mind: to find himself. Whoever obtains the solution is the survivor in this planet. The perfect answer is Iqbal’s philosophy of self.<sup>62</sup>

### **4. Secular Spirituality and Ethics:**

Harris explores ethical behavior without relying on religious commandments. He argues that morality can be grounded in reason, empathy, and a deep understanding of the consequences of our actions. The book encourages readers to cultivate compassion, kindness, and ethical conduct as part of their spiritual journey.

### **5. Transcendence and Mystical Experiences**

While advocating for a rational approach, Harris acknowledges the existence of profound, transcendent moments. He discusses mystical experiences, altered states of consciousness, and the ineffable. The theme of seeking something beyond the ordinary--whether through meditation, psychedelics, or contemplation--is woven throughout the book.

### **6. Critique of Organized Religion**

Although not the primary focus, Harris critiques organized religion for its dogmas, tribalism, and historical conflicts. He argues that spirituality need not be bound by religious institutions. By separating spirituality from religious baggage, he invites readers to explore their inner lives independently.

### **7. Concept of death and gurus**

His concept of death is not as ordinary. He has described near death experiences in the last part of the book followed by a critique on dogmas and doctrines. Gurus and rituals in front of him not more than jugglers. He criticized religious concepts about death and hereafter. He has personally tried to feel ecstasy.

### **Critical Analysis of Sam Harris’s “waking up”:**

The book starts with the comparison of spirituality and dogmatism. He has rejected the old school of thought of dogmatism and presented the new way of

*Spiritual but not religious (SBNRS): A critical analysis of Sam  
Harris's waking up*

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getting spirituality by self-experience. So, he has presented the theory of 'spiritual but not religious' SBNR, this book as a guide to be spiritual as prescribed by him. The book's plot is based on various neuroscientific, psychological, and spiritual principles derived from Buddhist teachings, and Sam Harris is inspired by the forefathers of these gurus. As a neuroscientist, the book is filled with factual data regarding the brain as well as psychological material. The debates about brain functions, conscious and unconscious, and mind activities are supported by real data and scientific evidence. He commented on these using his personal experience. His theories on mind, self, near death experiences, and certain suggested encounters are the result of his own in-depth thinking. He expresses his opinions and suggests meditation based on old Bodhi criteria and Hindu teachings.

He expresses his thoughts and suggested meditation by taking help from ancient parameters of Bodhi and Hindu teachings. He criticized Islam and Christianity with the controversial personalities. There are always flaws and errors in human personality. No one is perfect but he should also realize that he is also human. Because he is an Atheist and he doesn't believe in God, so all his theories stand on his own personal views, experiences and thoughts are revolving around the specific thinking.

Psychologically and mentally every person has their own thoughts and way of thinking we can change it by personal inclination. The book title 'waking up' has been given to the book because he thinks that we are living a life after waking up like 'Buddha' woken up from the dream.<sup>63</sup> He seems fully inspired by the Buddhist teachings and comparing them with moral and spiritual values better relationships honesty compassion. He talked about self-transcendence which everyone has an equal concept.<sup>64</sup> He has considered Illusion of the self, a riddle that cannot be solved. The life a Buddhist live is "the spiritual life consists in overcoming the illusion of the self by paying close attention to our experience in the present moment." That illusion is dissolved by practices and those practices are the treatment of the mind and body, Enlightenment after treatment is the goal of practices and that enlightenment brings mindfulness and calmness. That is the outcome of the whole discussion of the book.

There is also another purpose of the book that is to target religion specially Christianity and Islam that depicts his atheist mind and the goal. The concept is presented biasedly to give the world a new solution alternating to religion. He played very scientifically and psychologically to bring a substitute by giving his own experience. He spotted the things he found not according to thought and up to his mark deliberately.

According to him,



“An honest comparison of spiritual traditions, Eastern and Western, proves equally invidious. As manuals for contemplative understanding, the Bible and the Koran are worse than useless. Whatever wisdom can be found in their pages is never best found there, and it is subverted, time and again, by ancient savagery and superstition.”<sup>65</sup>

He said further in his book

“I am often asked what will replace organized religion. The answer, I believe, is nothing and everything. Nothing need replace its ludicrous and divisive doctrines—such as the idea that Jesus will return to earth and hurl unbelievers into a lake of fire, or that death in defense of Islam is the highest good. These are terrifying and debasing fiction. But what about love, compassion, moral goodness, and self-transcendence? Many people still imagine that religion is the true repository of these virtues. To change this, we must talk about the full range of human experience in a way that is as free of dogma as the best science already is.”<sup>66</sup>

He preferred Buddha teachings comparing other religions. Seems like he is inspired by Buddha teachings, as per his quotation,

“Unlike the doctrines of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the teachings of Buddhism are not considered by their adherents to be the product of infallible revelation.... In fact, the teachings of Buddhism emphasize a connection between ethical and spiritual life”<sup>67</sup>

Meditation suggested by “Sam Harris”:

There are some exercises and experiences he suggested as meditation, according to him,

“1. Find a horizontal cable that can support your weight. 2. Stand on one end. 3. Step forward by placing one foot directly in front of the other. 4. Repeat. 5. Don’t fall.”<sup>68</sup>

These meditations are not that practical that anyone can perform easily. Being a spiritual healer and practitioner. He should be aware of the thing that anyone cannot climb or walk on the rope.

The alternate of religion he presented as non-religious spirituality so humans can flourish. The message given in the book is that the experiences and practices that must be for bodily and spiritual wellbeing that can be enough to live a life. We have to live for peace there nothing that kind of GOD and Apostles that exist. The Metaphysics and transcendence even self and concept about death is not real.

At the end of the book, he showed what effort he

"Gravity might be the Gods way of dragging people to the hell, where they burn in fire and you burn there forever if you doubt that God exists." There is no

*Spiritual but not religious (SBNRS): A critical analysis of Sam  
Harris's waking up*

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compelling reason or moral equalness less than a child abuse.... What is the meaning of life and what the purpose are false question of religion?"<sup>69</sup>

The things we thrive for in this world are just self-satisfaction that we can achieve by spiritual healing, what he had suggested. That means we are born useless we are just here for ourselves then what and why should we need relations and moral values...what why we are born and if death is the door to another world where we are going?

All gone false by this narration we are here in this world for a purposeless life and life just for self-satisfaction and inner peace. That's why they need meditation because after enlightenment and the goal achieved what they need to do...? Why do they need to be spiritual is it just for exercise or purification? And if purification for what purpose? I think it is all baseless. Just to lead people away from religion purposely.

As in his one interview he said that

"We are sleepwalking, and when you learn how to meditate, you recognize that there is another possibility, which is to be vividly aware of your experience in each moment in a way that frees you from routine misery. Meditation is simply the practice of learning to break the spell and wake up."<sup>70</sup>

In summary, "Waking Up" invites readers to embark on a journey of self-discovery, mindfulness, and spiritual exploration. It challenges preconceptions, encourages critical thinking, and offers a fresh perspective on the intersection of science and spirituality.

Yes, we can free ourselves from routine misery, break the spell and wake up by all these suggested meditations but where is the logic and justification of getting rid of religion. We can do all these by following a religion as well.

**Waking up app:**

The theory Sam Harris given in his book about "mindfulness", he created an app where you can seek spiritual meditation and daily lessons. A person can discover the true purpose of spiritual meditation. Anyone can experience and understand the true meaning of mindfulness and get meditation to "stoicism, effective altruism, sleep and psychedelics research" on his fingertips.<sup>71</sup>

*"The app's design is refreshingly simple, providing a "daily meditation" (generally no longer than 10 minutes) and a continually expanding collection of "lessons" on topics related to meditation, such as "Working with Pain," "What is Real?", and "Drugs and the Meaning of Life." It also provides longer guided meditations (up to an hour) for those days where you really need it and have the time."*<sup>72</sup>

**Conclusion:**

In this article I addressed the term that is a vast impact on religious narration. The false narration that exposed the pseudo spirituality. That is negation of God and the existing truths. The mocking stock for apostles, prophets, doctrines and all the Metaphysical things that have some value. I must say the meditation that is acquired and suggested by Sam Harris or SBNRS was steered by the other religions, also the idea had been stolen by Hinduism and Buddhism. By condemning all the religions, he should negate all the process of meditation that he had presented in a very clumsy manner. The experiences he shared and the life he is living is the gift of the creator, for what he is negating. It's not just an experience. It's the power that God has given to think and to write, he has been denying. He wants to replace the religion by a false spiritual practice that also been created or derived from religions. Like yoga, like some of the exercises and practices that have been suggested to get spirituality. Actually, he is negating spirituality by his near-death experiences because he did not believe God exists<sup>73</sup> and denial is only the way to get out of it.

If there is God, then there should be a connection with soul or spirit and thus we need a spiritual meditation to get better by spiritual healing. He proved wrong here that God does not exist.



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