

# Spiritual Crisis, Emergence, and Mental Health

Presentation by Harriet Cooke MD, MPH for Rethinking  
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# Overview of presentation

- \* 1. Definitions and dilemmas with definitions
- \* 2. Variety of spiritual Emergency phenomena
- \* 3. Crises that often precede spiritual awakening
- \* 4. crises caused by spiritual awakening
- \* 5. phases of the process of spiritual awakening
- \* 6. perils and pitfalls
- \* 7. How to support the process and integrate spiritual awakening & mysticism into our lives

# Overview of presentation (2)

8. The Importance of Spiritual experience in these times for personal and global health

- \* 9. Fundamental needed social systems change
- \* 10. Pearls from the journey

Small group discussion: Where I'm at. Additions. Pearls

- \* 11. Resources and References

# Definitions

- \* 1. Spiritual Awakening, Spiritual Emergence, or Mystical, or Religious Experience
- \* 2.” Mental Illness” mental health challenges and “Sanity”
- \* 3. Bipolar, Psychosis, and Schizophrenia
- \* 4. Lack of differentiation in traditional psychiatry between MI and mysticism. Lack of understanding of difficult extreme states as potentially transformative processes. Tendency to treat all challenging nonordinary states of consciousness as illness with suppressive medication. System issue and lack of supportive services, and cultural issue of valuable psychol. experience.
- \* 5. “Danger of spiritualizing and glorifying pathologic states and overlooking organic pathology.”

# Which Experiences Promote Growth , Which are Pathological?

- \* Distinction is mostly related to:
  - \* Context in which they occur
  - \* Manner in which they are approached
  - \* Ability to integrate them into everyday life (eventually)
- \* Not just the person, but the attitudes and behavior of those close to them that determine whether or not the conditions exist for anomalous experiences to promote growth (Ron Unger)

# Varieties of Spiritual Emergence Phenomena

- \* Unitive consciousness
- \* Kundalini awakening ( often with physical pain)
- \* Themes of death and world destruction/ “return to center”
- \* Visionary experiences and psychic opening including attacks by demons, channeling, communication with Spirit guides.
- \* Unidentified illness often of prolonged duration (years) with profound weakness, mental health challenges, etc.
- \* Near death experience
- \* Past life experiences
- \* UFO experience
- \* “Transitory” psychosis
- \* Possession states

# Crises that Often Precede Spiritual Awakening/Emergence

- \* Trauma- brain, body, psychological
- \* Life-threatening illness
- \* Loss of loved one, particularly traumatic loss
- \* Growing sense of something missing, of a deep dissatisfaction or disconnection
- \* Existential depression and loss of meaningfulness of life
- \* Moral crisis and awakening sense of guilt
- \* Profound inner conflicts

# Crises Caused by Spiritual Awakening

- \* Overwhelming experiences that → traumatizing
- \* Misunderstanding by culture and dominant MH system → misdiagnosis, invalidation and trauma, harmful medicalization.
- \* Understanding, but no place for these experiences to unfold in our dominant culture- still need to work and take care of the kids (often experiences occur at times when responsibilities allow us to handle them more gracefully).
- \* Feeding and inflating the personal ego- loss of distinction between self and Self
- \* Lack of discrimination of “revelations.”
- \* Lack of integration and disconnection from shared reality and life



# Phases of the process of S.E.

- \* Dissatisfaction, inner restlessness, loss of interest in life
- \* Spiritual experience with elation!- Temporary Self-realization with some permanent changes, some temporary changes, some recognition of obstacles to be overcome
- \* Return to normal consciousness: Pain of losing higher state  
Doubt, criticism, appreciation, guidance  
Divine homesickness that can → psychotic depression
- \* The work of transmutation of personality guided by superconscious energies → increased inner strength, joy, security, passion to help in the world
- \* Gradual appreciation of life infused with meaning and purpose

# Perils and Pitfalls

- \* 1. Assagioli: attributing qualities of the higher Self to the self; rebound severe depression; social withdrawal for unbalanced inner work, forceful inhibition or repression of sexuality or hyper sexuality
- \* 2. Ram Dass: Getting trapped in expectations and identifying with heightened states. Spiritual materialism- getting stuck in trance states. Grief at losing who we thought we were.
- \* 3. Abraham Maslow: experiential unbalanced by organizational and rational. Becoming so inwardly searching → selfish and loss of patience and compassion for other. Pursuing triggers with disregard for consequences.
- \* Mistaking voices and revelations for truth. Loss of discernment.
- \* Regular use of alcohol and sedatives to slow down the process that can lead to addiction (prescription or self-medication)

# Optimal Approaches to Spiritual Awakening

- \* Rule out organic etiology
- \* Open to awareness of renewal and transformational process
- \* Offer safe supportive retreat. A therapeutic environment where individual can process experiences, integrate healing and inner growth opportunities
- \* Guidance and support by knowledgeable individuals- professionals and peers- who can truly empathize with warmth and vitality. Give people going through crisis a positive context and sufficient info about the process they are going through. (Grof)
- \* Essential to own all the experiences and not project blame onto others or the world. (Grof)
- \* At the same time, deeply empathic individuals can feel the pain of others and the challenging situations in the world. Need to learn simple tools to claim healthy boundaries and reclaim personal energies.

# Optimal Approaches to Spiritual Awakening (cont.)

- \* “In the high arousal state. Archetypal consciousness activated, the psyche autonomously does its own work in its own fashion.” (Perry)
- \* Know when to slow down process. Stop or reduce meditation and increase grounding activities, judicious use of meds etc. Switch to grounding mindfulness meditation.
- \* Continued therapeutic support through the longer journey of self-transmutation. R.A
- \* Networks of support groups similar to AA: Spiritual Emergence Networks. Community transformation model. How to help support each other through the process.

# How to Support the Process

- \* Direct energies purposefully and constructively towards work of inner regeneration, creative expression, and fruitful service (1): ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy)
- \* Get sufficient and regular sleep! Nutrition, exercise, community
- \* Slow the process down when overwhelming or “impractical.” Grounding: exercise, eat heavier foods( meat/dairy, grains), do physical work ( gardening, cleaning), use dance or other movement to release excess energy.
- \* Acupuncture, energy medicine, and massage/body work: trauma clearing, positive attachment, and energy strengthening with strong boundary development.

# How to Support the Process (cont.)

- \* When working with decreased memory, organizational capacity, and overwhelm: SIMPLIFY. Identify priority values and commit to these things. Make life smaller and find ways to help stay on track with priority commitments. Notes. Daytimer. Move into larger visions one step at a time allowing them to unfold with others.
- \* Work with guide/therapist appropriate to experiences. Guiding to the path of opening and letting go, taking full inner responsibility.
- \* Intermittent use of supplements and medications as needed, lowest dose ongoing when needed.

# Importance of Spiritual Awakening/ Emergence for Personal Health

- \* Catalyst for psychological and spiritual evolution and healing. Still takes time but can speed up the process
  - \* Know the direction/ “goal”, even when we don’t feel it: inner peace, deep calm, joy, deep faith. Awareness we are never alone. Connection to spirit guides.
  - \* Personal development from motivations of power and control to motivation of “radiant” love.
  - \* Connect to more authentic, deeply inspired and courageous self
  - \* Identify and decrease personal “mishugas/” neurosis
  - \* Awaken inner healing capacities

# Spiritual Emergence for Global Health

- \* Econvergence: crisis of ecology, economics, and empire
- \* State of the world today: overutilization of earth's resources, species decline, climate change, pollution, widening income disparities. We need people who aren't afraid to wake up and step up.
- \* Assagioli- all spiritual states of awareness that have as their common denominator a possession of values *higher* than average- ethical, moral, aesthetic, humanitarian, and altruistic. I.e. Deeply caring. Derive from higher levels of consciousness and => transformative experiences have potential to raise consciousness to higher states of caring and responsibility



# Need for Systems Change

- \* Need to change ‘the’ medical’ model’ and disregard by dominant psych. paradigm of alternative realities and value of non-ordinary states of consciousness.
- \* To create safe places for working through intense transformative experiences
- \* Campaign against prejudice and discrimination on ‘mental health’ grounds
- \* Need acknowledged by many psychiatrists, psychologists and community. Identify and work with allies.

# Need for Systems Change (cont.)

- \* To minimize the unnecessary life trauma that is associated with the more debilitating Spiritual Emergency and creation of more gentle Spiritual Emergence opportunities.
- \* Prevention: safer society, decreased disparities, reduced discrimination and oppression, reducing harmful drug use and its causes
- \* Increased allocation of resources for creating more stable and equitable social structures

# Pearls From the Journey

- \* Why we are willing to explore “losing our minds” for a period of time at this time. Desire and need for humanity to reach more expanded states of consciousness and capacities for caring
- \* Need to ground self in daily activities
- \* **Bringing spiritual practice into everyday living.** Identifying creative opportunities aligned with evolving values and commit to projects, work, or other meaningful activities.
- \* **Patience** and non-judgmental acceptance while working to grow → positive self identity and comfort in our own skin.

# Pearls From the Journey (cont.)

- \* Mindfulness: develop non-judgmental witness → increase ability to respond vs. dissociate or react
- \* Evolve from “normal” materialistic rational only thought, to an understanding and practice of the power of thought and the value of non-rational intuitive mind supported by rational mind
- \* Study and identify the vision we want to participate in developing. Gandhi, **“Be the Change You Wish To See In The World.”**

# Small Group Discussions

- \* Where I am at on my journey
- \* Pearls from my experience
- \* Most helpful teaching from presentation or additions to contribute

# Pearls (cont.)

- \* If we don't face and move through our fears we'll never reach a place of happiness.
- \* Treasure each day. This life on earth is a short period of time. Make the most of it. Make each day sacred.
- \* Nothing new in the spirit world? only growing into it more deeply and integrating it into the ever changing context of human existence and circumstances.
- \* Love is a verb. Love is a practice. Don't wait, Participate!
- \* Gratitude, Gratitude, Gratitude

# References and resources

- \* Books:

- \* Spiritual Emergency... S. Grof and C. Grof
- \* Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences, A.H. Maslow
- \* Are You Getting Enlightened or Losing Your Mind, D. Gersten
- \* Navigating the Space Between Brilliance and Madness, Icarus Project
- \* In Case of Spiritual Emergency, C. Lucas
- \* Unstuck, James Gordon MD
- \* Varieties of Religious experience, W. James
- \* Understanding Psychosis and Schizophrenia, A. Cooke
- \* A Common Faith. J. Dewey
- \* Am I Bipolar or Waking Up? , Sean Blackwell

# Resources (cont.)

- \* Local networks:
  - \* Icarus Project [IcarusProjectPDX@gmail.com](mailto:IcarusProjectPDX@gmail.com)
  - \* Light of Madness Wed. 5:30-7 pm 503-490-5856
    - \* 1600 SW 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. 4<sup>th</sup> floor. [lightofmadness@outlook.com](mailto:lightofmadness@outlook.com)
  - \* No Longer Alone/ Shambala Meditation Center of Port.
    - \* Peer run social support group 3<sup>rd</sup> Sun every month  
[not-alone-leaders@portland.shambhala.org](mailto:not-alone-leaders@portland.shambhala.org)
  - \* Portland Hearing Voices
    - \* Fridays 6-7:30pm. Outside IN/ 1132 SW 13<sup>th</sup> Ave, Portland  
[PortlandHearingVoices@gmail.com](mailto:PortlandHearingVoices@gmail.com) 413-210-2803
  - \* Recovery International [robwinike@live.com](mailto:robwinike@live.com) 503-810-2789
    - \* Peer to peer self-help meetings throughout the week. Devel. by Dr. Abraham. Low



# Resources (cont.)

- \* Websites and blogs
  - \* [Recoveryfromschizophrenia.org/](http://Recoveryfromschizophrenia.org/) Blog by Ron Unger LCSW
  - \* [www.youtube.com/user/bipolarorwakingup](http://www.youtube.com/user/bipolarorwakingup)
  - \* [https://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/user-files/Division%20of%20Clinical%20Psychology/public/understanding\\_psychosis\\_-\\_final\\_19th\\_nov\\_2014.pdf](https://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/user-files/Division%20of%20Clinical%20Psychology/public/understanding_psychosis_-_final_19th_nov_2014.pdf)
  - \* [www.bipolaradvantage.com](http://www.bipolaradvantage.com)
  - \* Madness Radio: Dinah Tyler and Elenor Longdon
  - \* J.Phelps MD website, [PsychEducation.org](http://PsychEducation.org)
- \* Organizations: ISPS [www.isps-us.org](http://www.isps-us.org)