

Generalized Spiritual Emergence / Spiritual Emergency Indications and Differentiations¹

"Spiritual emergence is the process of personal awakening into a level of perceiving and functioning, which is beyond normal ego functioning. At its peak, spiritual emergence is the experience of the ultimate unity of all things, a mystical experience, a merging with the Divine which transcends verbal description. Among the positive effects of this process are increased creativity, feelings of peace and an expanded sense of compassion." (Bragdon, 1988, p.10)

"Spiritual emergency can be defined as critical and experientially difficult stages of a profound psychological transformation that involves one's entire being. [Spiritual Emergencies] take the form of non-ordinary states of consciousness [enhanced states of awareness] and involve intense emotions, visions and other sensory changes, and unusual thoughts, as well as various physical manifestations. These episodes often revolve around spiritual themes; they include sequences of psychological death and rebirth, [experiences that transcend spatial/temporal boundaries], feelings of oneness with the universe, encounters with various mythological beings and other similar motifs." (Grof & Grof, 1989, 1990)

Spiritual Emergence

Inner experiences are fluid, mild, and easy to integrate

New spiritual insights are welcome, desirable, and expansive

Gradual infusion of ideas and insights into life

Energy experiences are contained and easily manageable

Able to differentiate between internal and external experiences and transition from one to another

Spiritual Emergency

Inner experiences are dynamic, jarring, and difficult to integrate

New spiritual insights may be philosophically challenging and threatening

Overwhelming, uncontrollable influx of experiences and insights

Experiences of jolting tremors, shaking, and energy disruptive to daily life

Difficult at times to distinguish between internal and external experiences, or simultaneous occurrence of both

Able to incorporate non-ordinary states of consciousness into daily life

Slow, gradual change in awareness of self and the world

Excitement about inner experiences as they arise, and a willingness and ability to cooperate with them

A receptive attitude toward the changes occurring

Willingness, even if afraid, to give up control

Understanding and willingness to trust in the process

Difficult experiences are treated as opportunities for change

Positive experiences are accepted as gifts

Infrequent need to discuss inner experiences

Discrimination used when communicating about inner experiences (when, how, with whom)

Inner experiences interrupt and disturb daily life

Abrupt, rapid shift in perception of self and the world

Ambivalence toward inner experiences, but willingness and ability to cooperate with them using guidance

Overwhelmed by the changes occurring; resistance, reactivity and fear

Need to be in control of a situation that is uncontrollable

Dislike and/or mistrust in the process . . . or of support or help from others

Difficult experiences are overwhelming and feel unexplainable

Positive experiences are difficult to accept, painful, or may feel mysterious or undeserved

Frequent urgent need to discuss inner experiences

Indiscriminate communicating about process and inner experience (when, how, with whom)

ⁱ Adapted from Stormy Search for the Self, Christina and Stanislav Grof (1990), pg. 37