

Spiritual Emergence Anonymous (SEA) Common Problems

(short version) Problems for emergers usually revolve around (1) longing, even addicted to, returning to the blissful state we experienced during a spiritually transforming experience with accompanying discomfort fitting in to our former life identity, and (2) egotistical delusions of self-grandeur thinking that we are more advanced conscious beings than most other humans.

(academic version) Common problems for people undergoing spiritual emergence and in various states of spiritual emergency fall into the following two different categories, which are not mutually exclusive.

1. The challenges emergers are most aware of involve changes that are difficult to manage and can wear away at self-confidence. These include possible hypersensitivity to other people's feelings, to environmental situations (noise, light, etc.), to electromagnetic fields, to toxic chemicals, and sometimes newly acquired senses of telepathy, clairvoyance, and awareness of non-corporeal beings. This may be accompanied by extreme sleep deprivation, manic episodes, debilitating fatigue, mental confusion, or paranoia. Another common challenge is a relatively sudden increase in ethical and moral awareness in which compassion, sensitivity to suffering, tenderness and vulnerability become more magnified, often motivating a person to change work situations, living situations, relationships, etc. Divorce and quitting jobs are common during and following a spiritual emergency. A strong desire to "return" to mystical states of consciousness drive some people to withdraw from society, jump into dangerous spiritual cults, take drugs, or even to commit suicide to "return to the other realm." One survey showed that 30% of emergers contemplated suicide for this reason, and 7.5% attempted it (ACISTE, 2011). It is not uncommon for emergers to have symptoms such as energetic or mood swings; seeing, hearing, or sensing non-corporeal beings; and extreme inner psychic confusion. These symptoms may be diagnosed as pathological (bi-polar, psychosis and schizophrenia, for example) and treated with psychiatric medications that often exacerbate the problems.

2. A challenge an emerger is less likely to be aware of is a phenomenon or phase known as "spiritual bypass." This occurs sometimes when spiritual emergence seems to catapult an emerger so quickly into advanced intellectual spiritual understandings or mood euphoria that the emerger bypasses their own emotional issues and blames their problems on other people or the culture's misunderstanding of their seemingly advanced state of consciousness. Spiritual bypass can sometimes cause inflated self-confidence associated with charismatic power to sway others. Spiritual bypass may lead to increased strength of psychological denial and ego defensiveness. Rather than the gradual decrease of ego defenses that occur with true spiritual growth, emergers may "bypass" the difficult inner growth that comes from self-examination and humility, thus closing themselves off from inner growth as their egotism expands and their pride feeds off of other people's admiration.

A new category in the American Psychiatric Association's fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (DSM-IV) entitled "Religious and Spiritual Problems" was introduced by Dr. David Lukoff in 1994, inspired by his concern of mis-diagnosis of people in spiritual emergency within psychiatric medicine (Lukoff, 2011).

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