

Spirituality & Mental Health

Understanding Extreme Spiritual States
& How to Care for Them



**Emergence or emergency?
Safe or at risk?**



Spiritual Companions Trust



Overview

Reassurance and Safety

The purpose of this booklet is to help the reader better understand extreme spiritual states. It is written for people experiencing those states and also for their companions and carers. Our goal is to reassure, create safety and enable positive outcomes.

This booklet is published by the Spiritual Companions Trust. We are very familiar with extreme spiritual states and spiritual crises. This comes from supporting others and from navigating our own challenges. In the context of spiritual development we accept these extreme states as normal.

Although these states are normal, we know that they can also be distressing. They can be distressing for the individual experiencing them and for those around them. Our hope is that everyone will benefit from a better understanding.

Inclusivity

This can also be a very sensitive topic. There is a history of spiritual states being misdiagnosed as mental illness. There are also cultural challenges. What is normal behaviour in one culture can be abnormal in another. Bliss, ecstasy, despair, shaking, quaking, visions, retreat, asceticism, talking with spirits, gift of tongues, hearing voices. All these may be acceptable in someone's home cultures, but frightening or risky in another.

This booklet asserts that to understand and interpret extreme or unusual spiritual states, it is necessary to be culturally inclusive. It is also necessary to appreciate both the psychological and the spiritual dynamics. If we look up a definition of the word 'psyche' we will find: *soul, mind, spirit*. Both spirituality and psychology explore who we are.

This is a complex and tender subject. To be helpful and accessible we know that we have risked over-simplification. We apologise for that and hope that our approach is supportive and useful.

William Bloom

Director, Spiritual Companions Trust
Glastonbury 2020

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The PDF of this booklet can be downloaded from our website. Printed copies can also be purchased.

Our Definition of Spirituality

In the Spiritual Companions Trust we encourage people to develop their own definition of spirituality. We have however developed one for ourselves, which seems to work well in many different circles.

Spirituality is everyone's natural connection with the wonder and energy of life — and the instinct to explore its meaning.

Spiritual development is about the growth of compassion, connection and consciousness.



Six Significant Dynamics

In order to understand how these intense and unusual states develop it is helpful, we suggest, to identify three significant spiritual dynamics and three significant psychological dynamics.

Let us name these dynamics and then go on to describe them in detail.

Spiritual Dynamics

1. *Presence & Energy* The felt/sensed spiritual experience.
2. *Spirits* Communicating with angels, souls and other invisible beings.
3. *The Path* Life is a spiritual journey

Psychological Dynamics

1. *Meaning* The need to understand
2. *Belonging* The herd instinct
3. *Identity* The sense of self

When these dynamics are brought into play too fast or too intensely, the individual may experience an extreme spiritual state. In this extreme state the individual may be perfectly safe or at risk.

Problematically these spiritual states can look like mental illness.

Be aware too that there is also a debate about whether these mental illness labels are useful or accurate.

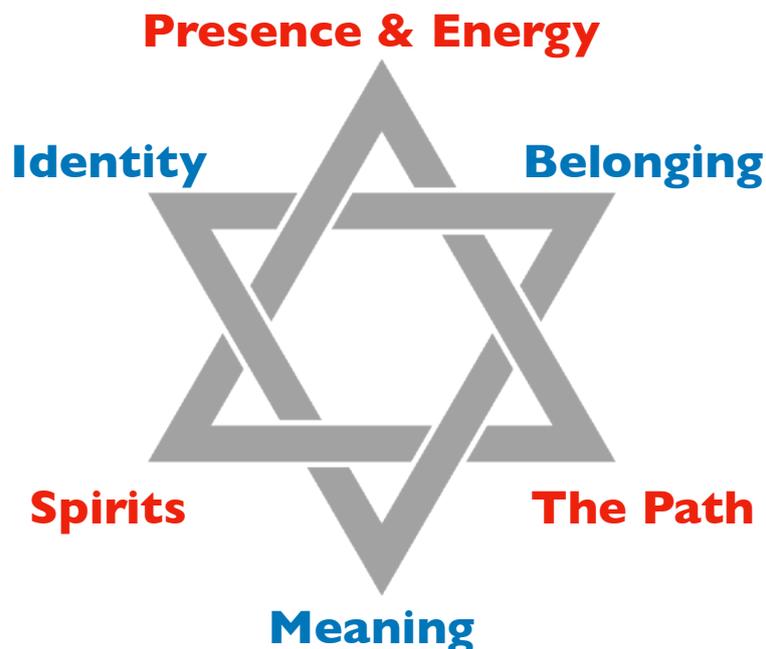
Spiritual State	<i>can look like</i>	Mental Health Crisis
Spiritual awakening/conversion	↔	Identity crisis/nervous breakdown
Ecstasy/bliss/rapture	↔	Mania/hyper
Talks to spirits, hears voices	↔	Psychosis
Self-identifies as a saint/guru	↔	Schizophrenia
Dark night of the soul	↔	Depression
Tempted/threatened by evil	↔	Paranoid delusion
Fundamentalism, pomposity	↔	Personality disorder

But here are crucial questions:

Are these extreme states just the surfacing of old trauma and repressed wounds?

Are they temporary and just require peace, safety and respectful support?

Are they, in fact, culturally normal?



Presence & Energy

Spiritual Dynamic I

It is important to appreciate that spiritual experiences are not philosophical or intellectual concepts. They are sensed and felt *experiences*. People feel something tangible, a presence. In modern language perhaps 'energy' is an appropriate word. In all the world's spiritual traditions this presence or energy is a universal concept:

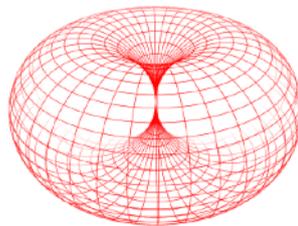
Aether (Latin)	Inua (Inuit)	Prana (Hindu)
Akasha (Hindu)	Ka (Egyptian)	Presence (generic)
Asha (Iranian)	Loong (Tibetan)	Qi (chi) (Taoist)
Astral light (Theosophy)	Maban (Australian Aboriginal)	Sakina (Islam)
Awen (Welsh).	Mana (Polynesian)	Seid (Norse)
Bliss fields (generic).	Manitou (Anishinabe)	Shekinah (Jewish)
Elan vital (vitalism)	Numen (Latin)	Teotl (Aztec)
Holy Spirit (Christian)	Orenda (Iroquois)	Väki (Finnish)
Ichor (Greek)		

Energetic Experience

This idea that we live in a cosmic energy field is normal. We know that the cosmos is permeated with magnetism, electricity and stuff that science does not understand. In our earliest years at school we learn that the Earth has a magnetic field.

When people have a spiritual experience they may open up and have a direct impression of this energy field or supernatural presence. This is experienced by the nervous system and brain in a way that is similar to connecting with and grounding a strong electro-magnetic field.

Opening up and encountering this spiritual energy comes in varying intensities and durations. As described in the title of William James' classic book there are 'The Varieties of Religious Experience.'



Sometimes these experiences are described as being like a gentle whisper. From childhood, for example, some people have a quiet sense of a wonder and benevolence that permeates the universe.

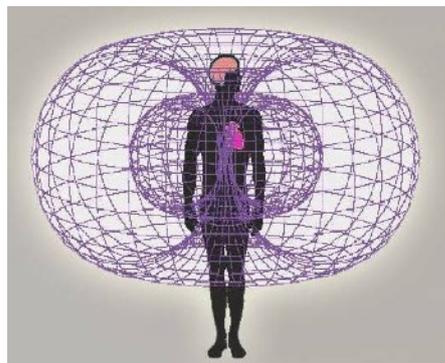
Other times the experience is ecstatic and people can feel as if their nervous systems are being flooded with energy or electricity. Meditators may refer to this flooding as a white light experience or like being engulfed by cosmic fire.

These experiences can be positive and life-enhancing. They can also be sudden, intense, disorienting and overwhelming.

They often provide too an opportunity for old trauma and repressed memories to surface. So the energetic experience is coloured by the surfacing of old wounds. This may be temporarily distressing but actually part of a healing process.

Holistic Therapies

In Ayurvedic (Indian) and Taoist (Chinese) medicine, it is explicitly taught that we all live in an ocean of energy (*prana, qi*.) This is a normal part of yoga and martial arts. Good health then comes from being harmoniously connected to and in flow with this energy. They also recognise that when people open up to this energy, they may experience unusual physical sensations. The most well-known of these is a



fiery sensation moving up the spine, known as a *kundalini* awakening.

Others may experience temperature changes or trembling. In holistic and spiritual medical traditions, there are practices for soothing these flows of energy.

Spirits

Spiritual Dynamic 2

Real or Imagined

When someone says they are communicating with spirits and invisible beings it is understandable to wonder whether this is imaginary or real. Science has little understanding of this domain.

But if we are culturally inclusive then it is appropriate to accept the reality of this invisible realm. For the individual who experiences these beings, they are very real. These subtle entities exist in a metaphysical spiritual world. Or perhaps they exist in a dimension of the collective human unconscious. To be certain, these beings are affirmed in every spiritual culture across the world and throughout history.

A Normal Part of Spiritual Ecology

Spirits are a normal part of spiritual ecology.

- Saints, archangels, angels, cherubim
- Good spirits, evil spirits
- Saviours and avatars such as Jesus, Mary, Krishna, Guanyin, Buddha
- Spirits of nature, plants, animals, earth, water, air, fire, planets and stars
- Goddesses and gods

When someone is in a spiritually extreme state, communicating with these beings is frequently part of their experience.

Historically, the reality of these beings was not questioned. Hearing voices and communicating with a parallel dimension was not considered a psychiatric problem but a gift. The crucial question was always whether they were an influence for good or bad.

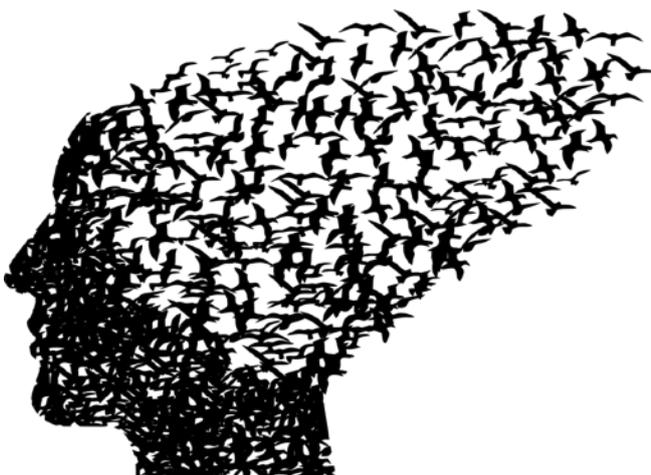
Aspects of the Individual's Own Psyche

There is another psychological perspective which can be helpful. It suggests that these beings may also be an aspect of the individual's own psyche.

This approach suggests that when people experience trauma, they may also experience a fragmentation of their psyche. An aspect of their own psyche may dissociate or detach. It then behaves as if it were a separate being or personality, not belonging to its person.

This dissociated aspect may then clothe itself in a spiritual identity. This identity is a metaphor of the person's state. It provides a symbolic interpretation.

Good practice in holistic psychotherapy respects the trauma that triggered this state. It then enables a dialogue with this dissociated aspect, moving towards harmonisation and healing. Paralleling this approach, in shamanic cultures there is a practice called 'soul retrieval' that calls back in this dissociated aspect.



Jacob wrestling with an angel - Gustave Doré

The Path

Spiritual Dynamic 3

A Journey

The third dynamic that is a hugely influential is the idea that life is a spiritual journey of learning and development — the Path.

We are all on a journey to a better state.

Every moment is an opportunity to move forward or backward on the Path.

There are rules and if they are not followed there will be consequences.

Usually the Path is away from the bad and corrupt, towards the pure and good.

The Path often suggests that people can achieve an improved spiritual state, even become saints and gurus.

In most traditions the Path leads beyond death. People's actions determine where they go — heaven and paradise; purgatory and hell; reincarnation; resurrection at Judgement Day.

Positives and Negatives

At its best, the idea that life is a spiritual journey is a great motivation for moral behaviour and positive personal development. It encourages more love, compassion and wisdom.

But it has its negative aspects too.

Depression or failure may be interpreted as divine punishment or bad karma. Accidents and illnesses may be seen as deserved. This sometimes creates an indifferent attitude to suffering because 'it is all a lesson.' It can also create a sense of elitism or of being 'chosen' — of being an initiate, a saint, or of a higher caste, that one is further along the Path than others.

Extreme State

When people are in an extreme spiritual state, they may dissociate from reality and become obsessed with the idea that everything is a symbolic message about their journey along the path.



Lessons

Karma

Heaven

Hell

Punishment

Grace



Egyptian Book of the Dead 'Weighing the Soul against a Feather.' Good deeds lighten the soul. Bad deeds weigh it down. This determines the next stage of the soul's journey.

Meaning

Psychological Dynamic I

Unknowing and Anxiety

The first psychological dynamic we will name is the drive for meaning. The evolutionary purpose of the brain is to ensure survival. It does this through interpreting information and triggering whatever ensures survival. It is hardwired to make sense of the information it receives.

If the brain receives information it cannot interpret, it experiences anxiety. This triggers sensations of panic in the nervous system and the endocrine system — adrenalin and cortisol, plus an acidic gut. The brain will fabricate a story in order to avoid the panic of incomprehension.

Interpretation

If the brain does not know what is happening, it will make up a story. For example:

Strange noise → *Ghost, intruder*

Someone smiles → *They fancy you*

Family member travelling abroad does not contact you → *They are in danger*

These made-up explanations may not be true. They may be distressing. But they create a meaningful interpretation that soothes the neural anxiety of unknowing.

Even while we sleep the brain works endlessly and compulsively. We see this in dreams, which are the brain's way of processing events from the past. Traumatic experiences are relived in dreams. In dreams we can see the brain's extraordinary ability to manufacture metaphors and strange narratives.

The brain continues this creative interpretive work right up until the end of life. Someone approaching their end may seem delirious when they say that they are in a bus station waiting for a bus. In fact, their brain has created a perfect metaphor for their state of transition.

Extreme Spiritual State

In extreme spiritual states the brain also seeks to create a meaningful story to interpret the experience. The individual may be experiencing strange sensations or dissociation. How is the brain to interpret the experience? The story may sound fantastical, but it is always a metaphor and interpretation of the person's experience.

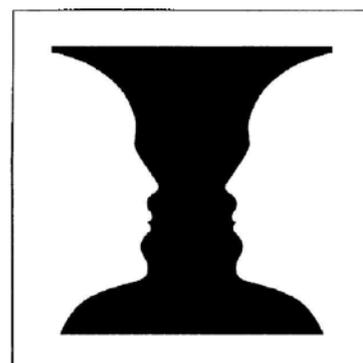
**Without a sense of meaning the human psyche fragments.
Any story is better than no story.**



Beauty or crone?



Duck or hare?



Vase or two faces?

These famous pictures illustrate how the mind/brain confabulates the unknown and completes the picture.

Belonging

Psychological Dynamic 2

Community or Herd

Never underestimate the instinct to belong to a community. More rudely called the herd instinct.

Belonging to a group fulfils an existential need for physical and psychological safety. Outside the security of a group people are existentially vulnerable. Infants die. Life is uncertain. This is straightforward evolutionary biology.

Community provides primal safety. So people have a fundamental and powerful unconscious drive to be in a family, group or community.

At their best, communities are caring, nurturing and supportive. At their worst they can get carried away by herd instincts into panic, aggression and sometimes sociopathic cruelty. People may be prepared to die and kill for their community.

Attaching to your group is the crucial glue for primal safety.

Extreme Spiritual State

In extreme spiritual states, particularly following an awakening or conversion, people can lose their everyday sense of psychological safety. They then instinctively seek safety. They are therefore driven by an unconscious primal instinct to join a group. This safety can be found immediately through 'attaching' to the group that hosted their awakening. This community fits their experience. During a conversion experience, people may attach to their new group like a hatched gosling attaching to the first thing that moves.

This attachment can be extreme. It is one of the prime forces in fundamentalism and the naïve adoration of religious leaders. In healthy spiritual development this attachment loosens up and people move on to a more expansive approach.

Belonging

Community

Tribe

Gang

Safe

Herd

Crusade



Primal biology. After hatching from their eggs, goslings attach and latch on to the first thing that moves. People may do the same thing after their spiritual awakening or conversion experience.

Identity

Psychological Dynamic 3

Ups and Downs

The primal drive for a sense of self is as powerful as the need for belonging. People are sometimes prepared to die rather than surrender or transform their sense of self.

Ego

To function in daily life, people need a sense of who they are, a coherent sense of identity. This usually includes one's sense of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, politics and so on. Once embedded, these characteristics are usually quite fixed and inflexible. People also want to be in communities that match and enhance their identity.

Self

Identity

People are driven by the identity instinct to defend, bolster and enhance their sense of self. There can be tragic results when someone's sense of identity is dismantled or threatened. We can see this in the suicides of men and women when they fail or lose status. The power of the identity dynamic also fuels suicide bombers. For them, their identity is more important than life itself.

Insecure

Fanatic

On the other hand when someone's sense of self is enhanced and supported, people feel stronger, happier, even exhilarated.

Extreme Spiritual State

Without a stable sense of self, people experience fragmentation and disorientation. When circumstances dramatically change — such as a spiritual awakening or conversion — their sense of identity can fragment. Adaptation and transformation are needed.

If this happens too fast, people may seek psychological safety through a delusional interpretation. Their mind-brain may tell them that they are a significant spiritual person. This delusional identity is a metaphor that interprets their felt experience. They may also over-compensate and become pompous and proselytising.



Narcissus worships his reflection. The exhilaration and swift transformation of a spiritual awakening can trigger a period of narcissistic delusion.

The Unconscious

Icebergs and Volcanoes

And then there is the immense mystery of the human unconscious. We are like icebergs. What we can easily discern is only a fraction of what really motivates us. There are unseen, unconscious psychological forces that influence and fuel behaviour, emotions, attitudes and thoughts.

How does the unconscious work? What is its structure? This is the great enquiry of psychology and there are many answers, including those who deny its existence.

Major dynamics of the unconscious include:

- Primal mammalian instincts
- Genetic inheritance, DNA traits
- Trauma from parents, birth, early years and beyond
- Conditioning from family, school, community, etc
- Archetypal collective unconscious
- Past lives, karma
- Ancestral and tribal traits

What is certain is that when people are in crisis, unconscious forces can surface. Previously hidden emotions, behaviours and instincts emerge. Unexpected feelings and thoughts arise. People may suddenly do and say extreme and irrational things.

All of this plays into extreme spiritual states. Time and safe spaces are needed to integrate and heal.

Rumbling

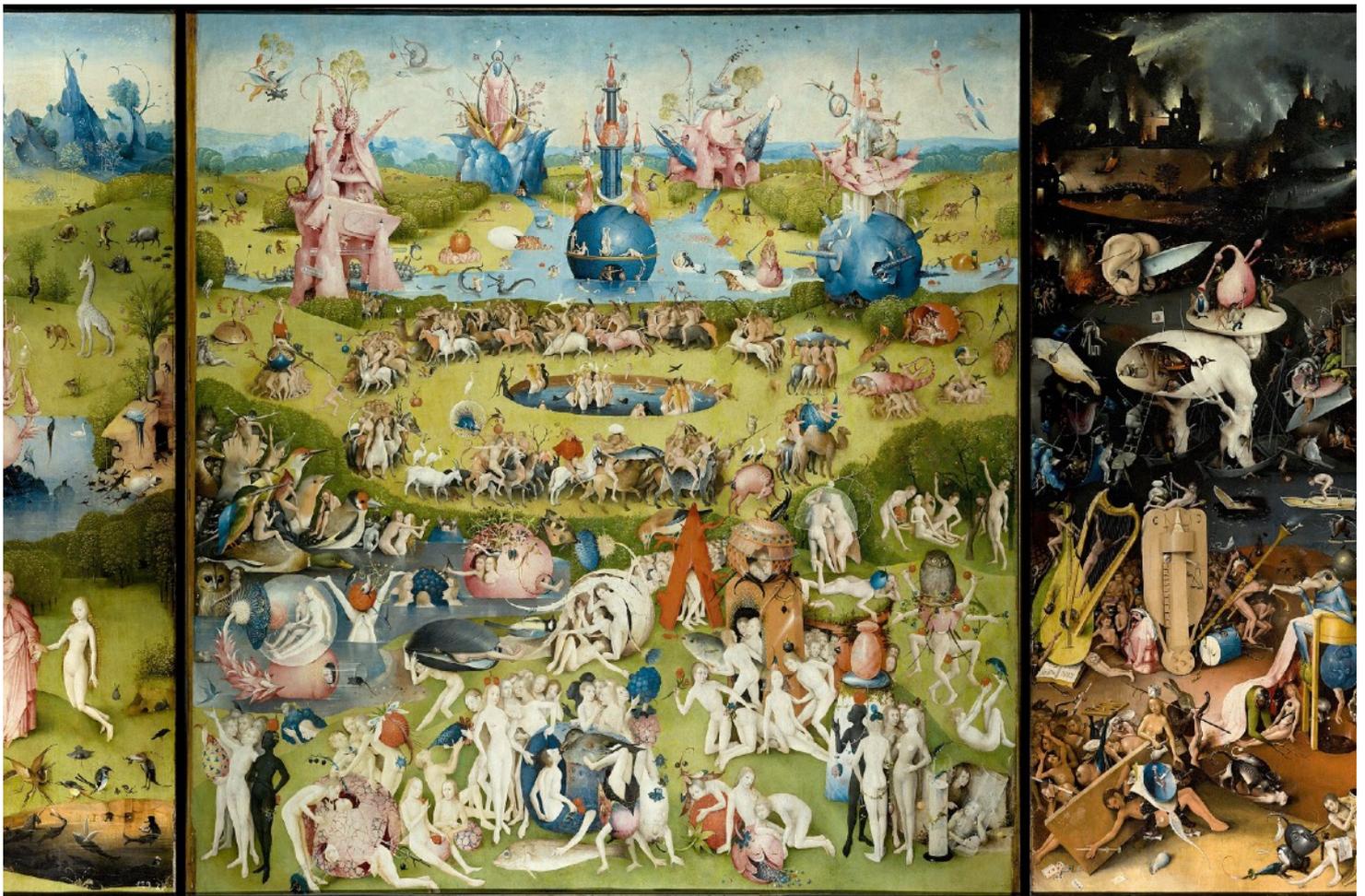
Primal

Evolutionary

Repressed

Hidden

Power



Hieronymus Bosch - The Garden of Earthly Delights. One representation of the scope of the human unconscious.

Extreme Spiritual Behaviours

Normal or Abnormal

In this section we are going to list extreme spiritual behaviours. One by one they can be accepted as normal in their home culture, but abnormal in a foreign territory. Their intensity may also be the result of historical trauma being released in a spiritual context.

1 Compensatory Behaviours

When people go through intense personal changes, the instincts for meaning, for belonging and for identity all become more intense. People may then adopt compensatory attitudes and behaviours, which create social and relationship challenges.

- Blind attachment to group and beliefs
- Denial about any problems in their belief system or community
- Dogmatic, defensive, aggressive, unable to listen to challenges and discuss
- Proselytising, bulldozing, 'my way or the highway'
- Intolerant, judgemental, punitive
- Pompous, earnest, sanctimonious

2 Spiritual Exhaustion — Nervous Breakdown

Sometimes the spiritual experience and the personal fragmentation are so strong that the nervous system and adrenal glands become exhausted. People experience:

- Enervation, exhaustion
- Loss of appetite
- Insomnia
- Disorientation, sense of unreality
- Fragile sense of self
- Alienation, inability to relate to family and friends
- Hyper-sensitive
- Anxiety, panic attacks
- Dark night of the soul
- Inability to tolerate social life or work place

3 Energy Overload — Unusual Sensations, Hyperactivity

People may report strange physical sensations as they open up to spiritual presence/energy. These sensations can be disorienting and frightening; though some people say they enjoy them.

These sensations can present themselves anywhere in the body and include:

- Temperature changes
- Sensations of energy, electricity and fire
- Trembling
- Increased libido
- Hyper-reactive
- Brain overloaded with electricity, 'fried'
- Hyper-sensitive
- Cycles of elation and melancholy



4 Delusion — Fantasy, Imagination

With all this unusual activity, the brain may move into overdrive to interpret the experience. It must create some meaning out of it all. If the context for the experience is spiritual, or if the individual has a spiritual background, then the brain will use spiritual concepts — Supernatural Presence, Spirits, the Path — to clothe and create meaning.

Often these interpretations will not match consensus reality and appear to be delusional. This is when there is a presentation of what can look like psychosis or schizophrenia.

These interpretations of and communications about the spiritual state can include:

- Revelations
- Prophecy
- Communication with invisible beings
- Past life memories
- Possession by entities
- Psychic awareness
- Superhuman wisdom
- Belief that one is a saviour/guru

Emergence or Emergency

Triggers for Temporary Intense States

When enquiring into extreme spiritual states, it is always useful to explore whether it was preceded by special circumstances. What looks like a mental health crisis may be a spiritual awakening, birth or emergence.

There are certain circumstances which can tip people into extreme spiritual states that are temporary and definitely not a mental illness. People emerge from these experiences with a sense of having benefited from valuable spiritual development. They are compassionate and conscious, more aware of the spiritual beauty and wonder of life. There has been both spiritual development and the release/catharsis/healing of old trauma.

We suggest that these states may be temporary. If the process is relatively graceful they will last between a few weeks and a few months; but sometimes they may continue for a few years.

The circumstances that can trigger these extreme states include:

- Conversion to a new faith
- Dramatic life changes
- Energy healing
- Failure
- Fasting, detoxification, dramatic change of diet
- Emigration/immigration
- Grief
- Intense meditation
- Near-death experiences
- Peak spiritual experience
- Pilgrimages
- Psychedelic drugs
- Psychic development exercises
- Residential retreats
- Severe or terminal illness
- Spiritual development classes
- Surgery/anaesthetic
- Trauma

Assessing Whether it is a Temporary State

It is obviously helpful to be able discern whether the extreme spiritual behaviour is temporary or a more long-term problem. Christina Groff, Stanislav Groff and David Lukoff have suggested that there are several indicators which can show that the crisis may be a positive and manageable spiritual awakening and emergence.

- The individual functioned healthily before the episode.
- There is no previous history of psychiatric care.
- Intense symptoms last around three months.
- There is a clearly definable trigger to the crisis.
- The individual can have moments of knowing that the process is positive and developmental.
- The individual's communications are filled with spiritual language and metaphors.

Cassandra Vietin and Shelley Scammell have also suggested some guidelines.

- Could medical issues explain the client's symptoms?
- Is the client functioning well physically, socially, and emotionally?
- Is the client finding meaning in their experience?
- Is the client coherent in their presentation?
- Can the client reflect on their experience or demonstrate insight into it?
- Did the onset occur after an event or was it spontaneous?
- Is the experience acute or has it been chronic?
- Does the client have language, context or knowledge about their experience?

(Temporary and positive spiritual crisis was included in the 1994 edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-4) used worldwide by psychiatrists, but was then removed from DSM-5 (2013) because of the complexity of diagnosis and because symptoms could be subsumed under other diagnoses.)

Care and Intervention

Risk or No Risk

Is care or intervention needed for an extreme spiritual state? This is a sensitive issue for the person who is experiencing it and for the carers who are witnessing it.

If you are accustomed to these states and their underlying reasons, your default approach will always be to create a safe, quiet, patient and respectful space.

But if you have never before encountered or experienced an extreme spiritual state, you may understandably feel anxious. You may feel there is risk. But be careful because anxiety blocks clear thinking and is contagious. Anxiety always makes a situation worse. Just because the behaviour disturbs you does not mean that there is a problem.

Equally if the behaviour is socially unacceptable or one is unable to conduct one's usual daily life, then there may be genuine risk — risk to self and risk to others. This obviously requires intervention and referral.

It will always depend on the specific situation and circumstances.

Kindness and Patience First

Our core approach must always be compassion. Quiet kindness. Respect for someone's space.

As carer or companion our first task is *not* to assess whether the behaviour and beliefs are rational or irrational, truthful or deluded. Our first task is to be a supportive and non-intrusive presence. Then we can assess whether our companion is at risk of harming themselves or others.

If we are the person experiencing an extreme state, we also have several tasks. As best we can, we too must practise patient and respectful self-care. We must ensure that we are safe. We must eat, rest and sleep. We must trust that the process is positive and that any distress will end. Also as best we can, we should reassure our carers and companions.

Clinical Interventions

The honest reality is that clinical interventions and psychiatric care can vary hugely in their usefulness when it comes to spiritually extreme states. At their worst clinical interventions — therapy, medication, hospitalisation — can be harmful. At their best, mental health professionals practise great compassion, patience and informed care. (There is also a very real issue here, which is that of funding. It requires money to fund more staff, more time and good care.)

Spiritual carers, healers and pastoral workers too are also usually strong on compassion, patience and care, but may be unaware of the mental health risks.

As always in healthcare and therapy, we need to be careful in whom we put our trust.

Family and Friends

We need carefully to champion ourselves, but this is difficult when we ourselves are in crisis. That is when we need others to be our champions. These are usually family and friends. To those carers who may fear the responsibilities of their role, we would advise you to take on an attitude of being on a learning journey. Be realistic and acknowledge that even the most experienced of doctors will treat each patient and their circumstances as unique.

Time and Safety Are the Healers

Reassurance Respect Space Compassion
Patience Trust Food Rest Sleep

Intervention and Care Guidelines

Understand the Circumstances

- Patience — be calm, patient and listen carefully
- Comforting presence — do not argue with or challenge their reality or communications
- Check for any mental health history that may be relevant (It may be a recurring issue)
- Check whether anyone else in their family has experienced similar crises (It may be inherited)
- Check whether there were particular triggering circumstances

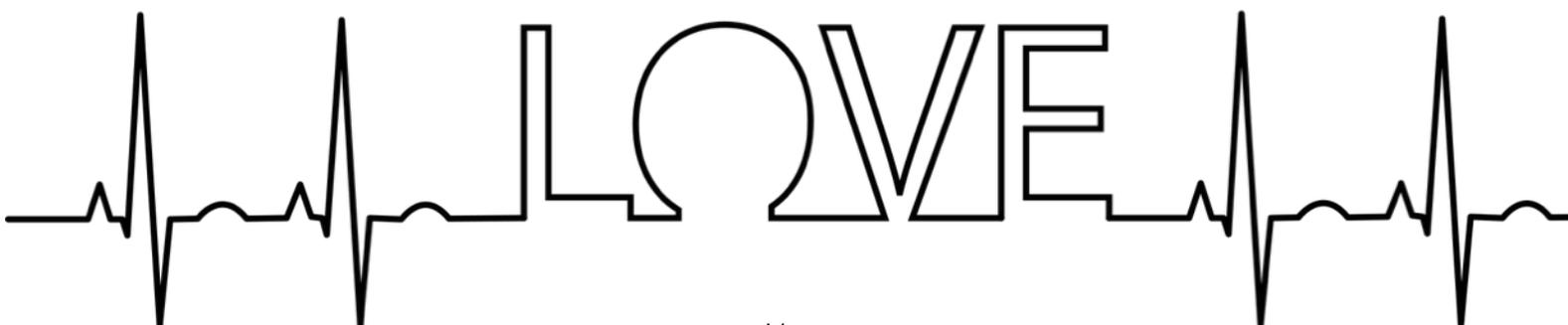
First Aid

- Respect — acceptance of their spiritual language, story and metaphors
- Calm listening, no advice
- Encouragement that it is a creative and positive process; and the distress will pass
- Food
- Rest and sleep
- Exercise may help — enquire carefully what they might like
- Touch, including that of animals and trees — enquire carefully
- Withdraw from social interaction — safe solitude
- Withdraw from meditation, psychic exercises and spiritual healing (These can over-stimulate)

Referral

If you think that the person for whom you are caring is at risk of harming themselves or another, you must immediately contact a medical doctor, preferably their general practitioner. When in doubt contact one of the organisations in the resources list.

**When someone is going through
a storm, your silent presence is
more powerful than a million
empty words. Anon**



Resources

Support

Spiritual Experiences

American Centre for the Integration of Spiritual Transformative Experiences — aciste.org
Emerging Proud — emergingproud.com
IANDS Sharing Groups Online — isgo.iands.org
ISEN — spiritualemergencenetwork.org
Spiritual Crisis Network — spiritualcrisisnetwork.uk
Spiritual Competency — spiritualcompetency.com
Spiritual Emergence Anonymous — spiritualemergenceanonymous.org
Elefriends — elefriends.org.uk

Mental Health

HealthyPlace — healthyplace.com
HearingVoices Network — hearing-voices.org
Inner Compass Initiative — theinnercompass.org
Mind — mind.org.uk
Rethink Mental Illness — rethink.org
Safely Held Spaces — safelyheldspaces.org
Samaritans — samaritans.org
Working to Recovery — workingtorecovery.co.uk
Young Minds — youngminds.org.uk

Further Reading

Breaking Down Is Waking Up, Russell Razzaque
First Contacts: with People in Crisis and Spiritual Emergencies, Courtenay Young
Healing the Split – Integrating Spirit into Our Understanding of the Mentally Ill, John E. Nelson
Helping With Spiritual Emergencies, Robert Nelson
In Case of Spiritual Emergency, Catherine G Lucas
Mend The Gap: A transformative journey from deep despair to spiritual awakening, Katie Mottram
Muses, Madmen and Prophets – Hearing Voices and the Borders of Sanity, Daniel B. Smith
The Power of Modern Spirituality, William Bloom
The Power of NOTEs (non-ordinary transcendent experiences), Nicole Gruel
Psychosis and Spirituality, Isabel Clarke (Ed)
Religious and Spiritual Issues in Psychiatric Diagnosis: A Research Agenda for DSM-V, John R Peteet et al
Religious or Spiritual Problem: A Culturally Sensitive Diagnostic Category in DSM-IV David Lukoff et al, *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease* 183(7):435-44, August 1995
Rethinking Madness, Paris Williams
Spiritual and Religious Competencies in Clinical Practice, Cassandra Vietin et al
Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes A Crisis, Stanislav & Christina Grof (Eds)
Taming the Beast Within: Shredding the Stereotypes of Personality Disorder, Peter Tyrer
The Call of Spiritual Emergency: From Personal Crisis to Personal Transformation, Emma Bragdon
The Varieties of Religious Experience, William James
Trials of the Visionary Mind: Spiritual Emergency and the Renewal Process, John Weir Perry

Spirituality emphasises the healing of the person, not just the disease. It views life as a journey, where good and bad experiences can help you to learn, develop and mature.

Royal College of Psychiatrists, London

**Spiritual dynamics
are normal,
real and important**

•

**Psychological dynamics are normal,
real and important**

•

**But they may combine in a way that is
too fast and intense**

•

**When that happens, the individual may lose
their usual stability and experience an
intense spiritual state**

•

**In that intense state they may experience
unusual sensations and perceptions**

•

**Their mind-brains will then create an
interpretation appropriate to their
psyche and culture**

•

**Their experience, behaviour and
interpretation may be perceived by others as
inappropriate or even as illness**

•

**In fact it may be profound and
positive personal and
spiritual growth**