

15 signs you're experiencing a spiritual emergency

You've gone through a tremendous spiritual awakening. Your life perspective has changed drastically. You're no longer the same person you once were a few years ago.

But something has gone horribly wrong.

While others on the spiritual path are reveling in their deep insights, you feel suffocated under the weight of an [existential crisis](#).

While others are busy reconnecting with their [meaning of life](#), you can barely function in a job or even get out of bed to shower.

While others feel a deeper sense of peace and alignment, you feel like you're on the verge of going crazy or being sucked into the black hole of depression forever.

What on earth has happened?

Is it something you did wrong? Is it because you're not worthy? Is it because you're not strong enough?

Answer: NO, not at all. What you are experiencing has nothing to do with your strengths or capabilities.

What you're experiencing is something called a spiritual emergency. And as we'll see throughout the rest of this article, it's a normal process that many people experience during their spiritual paths, and it's not your fault.

What is a Spiritual Emergency?

The spiritual emergency is a severe crisis an individual may experience after going through a [spiritual awakening](#). Essentially, **a spiritual emergency occurs when the spiritual awakening process speeds up so much that it becomes terrifying and destabilizing to the body and mind.**

“Spiritual emergency” as a word was first coined Czech psychiatrists Stanislav and Christina Grof and was expanded in the 1989 book *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis*. Since then it has increased in popularity, although is still relatively unheard of within mainstream spiritual communities. (I want to change that.)

Spiritual emergencies can happen to anyone at any point in life. Those who are not particularly ‘spiritual’ can experience it just as often as those who are actively engaged on the

spiritual path. The common uniting factor is usually that a person undergoes a shock (in the form of illness, family death, major life change, etc.) that triggers the spiritual crisis.

The spiritual emergency can last anywhere from a few days to a number of years. The process is very much dependant on what kind of environment you live in and how supportive vs. unsupportive it is.

15 Signs You're Experiencing a Spiritual Emergency

Cosmic love is absolutely ruthless and highly indifferent; it teaches its lessons whether you like/dislike them or not. – John Lilly

If you're going through a spiritual emergency, you have my love and support. This is probably one of the most painful, disorienting, and scary experiences you will ever go through – but please know that it does end, and it is worth going through. (I'll explore why later.)

Below, you'll find fifteen signs commonly experienced during spiritual emergencies:

1. **You find it impossible to cope with everyday tasks** (like going shopping, showering, cooking, keeping up with the bills, etc.)
2. **You can't hold down a job due to your intense sensitivity**
3. **It feels like your whole world is crumbling** around you
4. **You struggle to sleep properly** and may experience night terrors
5. **Your inner and outer world blur confusingly**
6. **You experience a rollercoaster of emotions**
7. **You may experience strange hallucinations** (e.g., images, sounds, physical impressions)
8. **Your grasp on the real and logical is weak** (resulting in psychotic-like symptoms)
9. **You may believe, at some point, that you're the reincarnation of enlightened figures** like Jesus, Buddha, Mary, etc. (this is called ego-inflation and is a result of Universal Consciousness overlapping with your own personal consciousness)
10. **You may experience vivid past-life flashbacks**
11. **You feel strange sensations in your body** (e.g., vibrations, shivers, heat, burning)
12. **You've developed a medically unexplainable illness**
13. **You experience more [synchronicity](#)** or meaningful coincidences
14. **You feel like you're being sucked into a different dimension** or black hole
15. **You feel like you're going crazy**

Of course, this list is not exhaustive. I'm sure there are many other symptoms out there I've forgotten to include, so please share below if you think I've missed any.

Also, those who work in the mental health field may have a thing or two to say about the above list of symptoms. Yes, it's true that many of the above symptoms overlap with 'bipolar disorder,'

‘manic-depression,’ ‘schizophrenia,’ etc. We’ll explore this important overlap a little later – and what it means for you.

Why Do Spiritual Emergencies Happen?

Honestly, there is no single known reason why spiritual emergencies happen. The cause, I suspect, is unique for everyone.

But here are some explanations:

1. **It’s your destiny** – by experiencing an accelerated [spiritual awakening process](#), you are about to learn some profound lessons, work through a tremendous amount of karma, and transform into the most illuminated version of yourself possible in this lifetime.
2. **Your conditioning was particularly strong** – conditioning meaning the beliefs, ideas, habits, and patterns adopted from your parents and society. To break through these forms of conditioning and dissolve them (so you can experience a conscious ‘upgrade’), you had to undergo a particularly intense spiritual awakening.
3. **You’re a gifted [shaman](#), [priestess](#), [healer](#), or “walker between worlds”** – part of your spiritual awakening process involves connecting you with the forces of the unconscious mind or “spirit realm” which you have not yet learned to navigate (hence why you’re experiencing a spiritual emergency).
4. **You’re dealing with past karma** – in some belief systems it’s believed that we deal with unresolved trauma from our past lives in this lifetime – and that may take the shape of a spiritual emergency to help you purge ancient patterns and develop a ‘clean slate.’
5. **You’re more sensitive** – we all have various levels of sensitivity, and those who undergo a spiritual emergency may be more [sensitive](#) and [empathic](#) than others. This may explain why the would-be spiritual awakening turns into a spiritual emergency; it’s simply too overwhelming for those already sensitive to life. Again, there is no way of proving this, but it is one theory that you might like to ruminate on.

So which theory are you more inclined to believe? Perhaps you’d like to combine a few of these explanations and discard the rest.

Regardless of what you choose, it’s vital here to stress that **it’s important to give your spiritual emergency a purpose**. As Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, “He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.”

Are You Experiencing a Spiritual Emergency or Mental Illness?

Breakdowns precede breakthroughs. – Lee Lozowick

You might be curious to know whether the spiritual emergency is actually just a fancy name for a psychotic break, manic-depressive episode, or other severe mental illness?

This is a tough question to answer as there's no black or white "yes" or "no."

Those who undergo spiritual emergencies are often committed to mental health wards – either forcibly or voluntarily. As author Catherine G. Lucas, founder of the UK Spiritual Crisis Network writes:

There are literally thousands of people who have been through the mental health system who have not had the spiritual aspect of their experience honoured. The spiritual dimension has been completely overshadowed by the interpretation given to their experience by the medical model.

These unfortunate individuals have been forcibly injected with high doses of medication, held against their will, shunned by their families, rejected by society, and labeled by the system as pathologically mentally ill.

Although it can be argued that the mental health system (which is a fundamentally flawed institution) is only doing what it knows best, a psychiatric unit isn't the safest place for a person who is undergoing a spiritual emergency.

Those who don't end up committed usually buy into the pathologizing perspective of the mental health system – there simply aren't many other alternatives. They may be diagnosed with a mental illness, instructed to take medication every day to keep their symptoms under check, and shooed away like a herd animal until their prescription expires – and the cycle continues.

While I'm not trying to imply that it's a good idea to get off your medication if you suspect you've undergone a spiritual emergency, it is good to be educated and have more options. Sometimes a small amount of medication is necessary to help prevent complete system shutdown – and that is a blessing the medical world offers us. But it's not the only solution.

Being 'Diagnosed' or Hospitalized During the Spiritual Emergency ...

As Lucas writes in her [book](#), **the process of being tossed through the medical system can be severely traumatizing** and actually prevent us from fulfilling the natural cycle of the spiritual emergency – and reaping its rewards:

Overall, perhaps the greatest danger of ending up in a hospital, and certainly the saddest aspect, is that the opportunity for healing and growth, for living a fuller, richer, more awakened life, can be irretrievably lost. The natural process of renewal, as the psychiatrist John Weir Perry called it, can be totally thwarted. Both the trauma of hospitalisation and the over-use of medication can have this effect. And once the process has been stopped in its tracks it can be difficult, if not impossible, to retrieve.

Furthermore, having our [mystical experiences](#) dismissed as being purely ‘psychotic,’ ‘borderline,’ or ‘schizophrenic’ not only denies the **spiritual validity** of what we’re going through but also adds an unnecessary element of fear and terror to the experience. This fear and terror can be profoundly crippling and can make the whole experience much more difficult than it really needs to be.

Thankfully, there are some in the medical field (typically Jungian and transpersonal therapists who focus on [spiritual psychology](#)) who understand the spiritual significance of symptoms that would otherwise be dismissed as “ramblings of a crazy mind.” I encourage you to seek these sorts of professionals out and ask them if they are familiar with the spiritual emergency. You can also visit the [spiritual emergence network](#) if you need to find someone close to you.

Roger Walsh, an Australian professor of psychiatry, philosophy, and anthropology, is one such figure in the medical field who [validates](#) the spiritual emergency. He calls it the “developmental crisis”:

Developmental crises are periods of psychological stress that accompany turning points in our lives. They may be marked by considerable psychological turmoil, sometimes even of life-threatening proportions. These transitions can occur spontaneously, as in adolescent and [midlife crises](#), or can be induced by growth accelerating techniques such as psychotherapy and meditation. These crises occur because psychological growth rarely proceeds smoothly. Rather, growth is usually marked by periods of confusion and questioning or, in extreme cases, disorganization and despair.

So is it a spiritual emergency or a psychosis?

We need to understand that sometimes experiences can be both/and not either/or. In this situation, you may be experiencing both a spiritual emergency and some form of psychosis – but they shouldn’t be seen as two distinct things.

As Lucas writes, “... I am not interested in trying to distinguish between so-called psychosis and spiritual emergency. I take the view that **it is all the psyche’s attempt to heal and move towards wholeness**, that each experience is potentially spiritually transformative.”

What you’re going through is valid and you need to seek out those who help you see your spiritual emergency through a positive lens, not a negative one.

Types of Spiritual Emergency

There are two main types of spiritual emergency. They can be classified as:

1. **Mystical Psychosis** (hallucinations, mania, etc.)
2. [The Dark Night of the Soul](#) (depression)

Historically, we can see Mystical Psychosis play out in figures such as St. Teresa of Avila, Vincent Van Gogh, Nietzsche, and Carl Jung. The Dark Night of the Soul, on the other hand, can be seen in figures such as St. John of the Cross, Eckhart Tolle, and Mother Teresa.

The main difference between these two types of spiritual emergency seems to be the direction in which energy flows.

With Mystical Psychosis, the energy seems to flow upward and beyond into higher realms of Spirit or Consciousness.

On the other hand, with the Dark Night of the Soul, the energy seems to flow downwards and in – or into the realms of the Collective Unconscious and [Soul](#).

It is possible to have a little bit of Mystical Psychosis paired with the Dark Night of the Soul (and vice versa). It's even possible to have both equally. But most people tend to experience only one type of spiritual emergency.

How to Cope With the Spiritual Emergency

There is a crack, a crack in everything that's how the light gets in. – Leonard Cohen

I write “cope” instead of “cure” because the spiritual emergency has a mind of its own. **What we're dealing with here is a force of nature**, a Divine movement of energy that cannot be tampered with without adverse effects (such as those stuck in the mental health system carousel).

There is no six-steps-to-happiness process here. I wish there was. I would so love to provide that for you. But that would be disingenuous and disrespectful to the process you're going through. Perhaps what is most important to take away from this article is that **your suffering has a purpose and your experiences are spiritually valid**. If there's anything you remember from this article, I hope it's this.

While there is no formula for healing, as every journey is different, there are some practices you can try which have helped those on a similar path before you.

Please take these forms of advice very slowly and stop at any time if you feel worse:

1. Stop meditation, practice mindfulness instead

Many people who undergo spiritual emergencies simply cannot tolerate meditation. Why? **Meditation can be very dissociating if you're not grounded strongly in your body**. (And those undergoing Mystical Psychosis or the Dark Night struggle to keep their grip on this plane of existence!) Meditation can also open up doorways within the mind and encourage the influx of unconscious material. For a person already being bombarded with images and visions from the deep mind, this can be profoundly destabilizing.

During this difficult time, it's better to practice [mindfulness exercises](#). Mindfulness means consciously paying attention to the present moment. When we are mindful, we are fully engaged with our body and senses. Tuning into your sense of taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing can help to bring you back down to earth and your body.

Try to practice mindfulness a little bit every day. Wash the dishes mindfully and feel the cold water against your hands. Hang up the clothes mindfully, and listen to the birds chirping outside. Eat mindfully and notice the different textures and flavors filling your mouth. You get the picture!

2. Seek out earth energy

Try to bring the energy of the earth into your daily life. As you may already know, the earth's energy is deeply grounding and nourishing. If you need help anchoring yourself into this realm, go outside and dig in the soil. Get your arms elbow-deep in the dirt. Plant some seedlings in your backyard. Take care of a pot plant indoors. Sit underneath a tree and feel the ground underneath your feet. If need be, bring a heavy stone to bed so you can literally become grounded. [Ecotherapy](#) is a good avenue to explore.

3. Temporarily stop your spiritual practice

To some, this may sound drastic, but the spiritual emergency isn't something to be trifled with. It's important to understand that **some types of spiritual practice can intensify Mystical Psychosis and the Dark Night of the Soul**. In the interest of your sanity, it might be best to put your practice aside for a while and focus on mundane tasks. If you absolutely cannot do without some form of spiritual nourishment, try earth-centered approaches to spirituality, like spending time in nature. Ultimately, whether you follow this advice or not is up to you and your situation. But definitely consider the possibility that your spiritual practice might be detrimental to your wellbeing right now.

4. Eat hearty food

During the spiritual emergency, it's tempting to ignore what we eat (simply because we're too preoccupied or have no energy). But please, try your utmost to eat at least one hearty meal a day. When I say hearty, I mean the food needs to be grounded. Focus on root vegetables like sweet potatoes and beetroots, and organic free-range meat. If you're vegetarian or vegan, you might consider temporarily changing your diet to include meat – desperate times call for desperate measures!

5. Find the purpose in your suffering

Examine again the five potential reasons why spiritual emergencies happen (see the beginning of the article). Why do you think you're experiencing a spiritual emergency? Listen to your heart and let the answer emerge. You'll know you've found the truth when you feel full-body shivers, a sense of peace and clarity, or a sudden "aha!" lightbulb moment. If you can't find any satisfactory explanations mentioned in this article you may like to pray to the

Universe/God/whatever to help you find the meaning. This [prayer](#) doesn't have to be religious, it can be spiritual or secular. Simply communicate your intention, and notice any signs that arise in the next week.

6. Exercise (even just for a few minutes)

Depending on your situation, you may like a full-body catharsis (like high interval training) or a gentle activity like walking. Pay attention to your needs. Exercise is vital for mental health and general physical wellbeing. It also connects you with your body and the surrounding world, which is important during the spiritual emergency.

7. Avoid stressful situations and reduce your responsibilities

Stress exacerbates any form of spiritual emergency – this is pretty obvious. Furthermore, holding onto many responsibilities tends to produce stress. If you have many projects or people needing your energy, it might be best to drop the vast majority of them. The spiritual emergency demands your energy and attention, and getting lost in workaholicism is a recipe for disaster. So try to simplify what you can and give yourself some breathing space.

8. Seek support

Yes, in the midst of psychosis it might be necessary to be medicated and hospitalized (low doses of medication are generally better than high doses during spiritual emergencies – but I am not a medical professional, so please listen to your own common sense). But generally, if your experience doesn't require 24/7 observation, it's best to seek out a therapist or spiritual counselor who is familiar with the notion of spiritual emergencies.

Above I recommended transpersonal, depth, and Jungian therapists (but please do your research and ask them if they know about spiritual emergencies). This is a great option, and you can visit the Spiritual Emergence Network to see if any are near you or just do a google search and include the name of your city. If worse comes to worst and you can't find any within a reasonable distance, you can always try a religious chaplain, community mental health center, or online Skype sessions. You can also check out our [Dark Night of the Soul Journal](#) for gentle guidance.

Why am I not recommending the support of friends or family members? The reasons why is because usually those close to us have no understanding of the spiritual emergency and tend to be negatively conditioned by medical institutions. In other words, it's much more likely that they'll get spooked by your experience (as they're comparing it to the "old" you) and actually invalidate the experience rather than validate it. This is not a hard and fast rule, and some friends or family members are mature and may have gone through similar experiences. So try to use your [gut instinct](#) when making a decision, and above all, put your wellbeing first.

Most importantly, do not let anyone try to convince you that what you're going through is purely a product of mental illness or that your visions/insights are "irrelevant." Denying the spiritual element of what you're going through is monumentally short-sighted and detrimental to your

wellbeing. You have the right to honor your experience and find meaning in it, as indeed it is meaningful.

Helpful Organizations

These people and organizations are trained to help you get through the scary and overwhelming experience that is the spiritual emergency.

The Spiritual Emergency is a Sacred Process

When all is said and done, this spiritual emergency may be terrifyingly life-altering, but it is a sacred process of clearing out the old and welcoming in the new.

While the medical world may pathologize you and the mundane world may reject you, **you are not crazy. You are not alone. And your experiences do have profound spiritual meaning.**

Take care of yourself, dear soul. You are doing the best that you can, and you are so courageous for walking this path. Thank you for your unfathomable bravery.

For the rest of this article please go to source link below.

By Aletheia Luna

Aletheia Luna is an influential spiritual writer whose work has changed the lives of thousands of people worldwide. After escaping the religious sect she was raised in, Luna experienced a profound existential crisis that led to her spiritual awakening. As a psychospiritual counselor, tarot reader, and professional writer, Luna's mission is to help others become conscious of their entrapment and find joy, empowerment, and liberation in any circumstance.

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