



Spiritual Emergency

By Margo Ross Sears

Have you noticed the upward shift in the spiritual awareness of society? Have you heard of the more personal phrase, spiritual emergency? Psychotherapist, Christina Grof and Dr. Stanislav Grof, award-winning psychiatry researchers for over 50 years at John Hopkins University and the California Institute, coined the term spiritual emergency. They defined it as crises when the process of [personal] growth and change becomes chaotic and overwhelming. Individuals experiencing such episodes may feel that their sense of identity is breaking down, that their old values no longer hold true, and that the very ground beneath their personal realities is radically shifting. In many cases, new realms of mystical and spiritual experience enter their lives suddenly and dramatically, resulting in fear and confusion. They may feel tremendous anxiety, have difficulty coping with their daily lives, jobs, and relationships, and may even fear for their own sanity. Episodes of this kind are described in sacred literature from all [historical] ages&as signposts of the mystical/spiritual path. A distinguishing characteristic of spiritual emergencies is that despite the distress, they can have very beneficial transformative effects on individuals who experience them.(1989)

For more than 15 years, I was a teacher, transpersonal mentor, minister, life coach and business coach. More than half of my clientel were 40-55 years of age baby boomers from all religious paths. Each came to me shyly at first, but with an inner sense of urgency. Because of my reputation for a non-judgmental, analytical, but compassionate approach, in session they confided their strange and profound life experiences. Most feared the onset of mental illness but they were otherwise very focused, stable, productive people. While no two paths were identical, many had similarities which the Grofs mentioned.

These clients said traumas were the initial onset of this ineffable weirdness. They named injuries or diseases, death or near-death experiences, careers ending, divorce and uncharacteristic infidelity, childbirth (and grandchild birth), mystical experiences, unsettling childhood memories, or mind-bending books and movies. I heard stories of dreams about flying or floating through the cosmos alone or with others. In those dreams, they sometimes got information from lovely angels or other spirit guides, deceased loved ones. Those messages were ones of love, advice, or sometimes profound or disturbing revelations.

Many folks noticed daytime phenomena like excessively repeated appearances of symbolism such as crosses, kokopelli, Jesus faces, grandmas favorite song, and more. They noticed the same animal (or its image) appearing repeatedly even away from its habitat such as turtles, butterflies, bears, or birds. Some noted specific scents arising at odd times such as cookies, lavender, roses, unfamiliar body odor, or wooden smells.

Some of these worried folk reported strong, new physical reactions to formerly ordinary things like rocks, trees, weather, books, music, colors, being with a sick friend or in church or outdoors. Typical reactions were intense heat, cold, or vibrations in the hands, a bodily welling up of peace or anxiety, sensing a non-existent hole or pressure point on the body, and more. They also told of miraculously improved or worsened health, seemingly random urges to weep or laugh, out-of-body experiences, hidden talents emerging, or their five senses acutely heightened, especially smell.

Then, clients told me about remarkable occurrences around them, too. I heard examples of odd but meaningful comments from children or strangers, urges to eat and live healthy, of being fired or divorced suddenly (but secretly feeling relieved), computers and electronics failing but working fine for others, the failure of old relationships, and of supernatural events.

At this point, clients felt safe enough to confide very unusual, profound and bizarre matters. They saw various apparitions: some recognizable, some more like angels. Others spoke of having unexplainable knowing, visions, and telepathy or premonition abilities (often re-emerging from childhood). Some confess feeling centuries older and startling flashbacks to previous lives. Scenes like drowning or deadly fires, of



different cultures, of lost love, or being another gender were described. We speculated that those past events may have been the cause of chronic habits, repetitious life lessons, uncanny familiarity with strangers or new places and current fears. For example, folks afraid to swim usually recalled being held underwater until drowned in a past life.

Researchers Dr. and Mrs. Grof wrote that these unusual life events have very beneficial results. For example, these spiritual sojourners often found stronger, deeper ties to their faiths and religions. Interestingly, all of them shared a pervasive awareness of God in all this. Some concluded that one important purpose was to re-connect with their Highest Power to improve their daily thinking, feeling and living (both personally and globally). Whats more, most sought out their own lifes purpose. Still others followed persistent longings for global improvements like better education and environmental protection.

If some of this sparked memories of conversations or events, then consider these pointers. Let it out&confide in someone safe who does not judge you or hold things said against you. Sharing brings a lot of reality to bizarre things. Also, take notes on unusual occurrences and look for meaningful patterns&share it with your safe person. Moreover, be open to possibilities that you did not think of before. Get physically healthy. Is this stuff stressful? Then, learn to meditate daily on positive things, which is the same as praying from within. There are dozens of good workshops, books, or videos on how to do simple ones. However, sports, gardening, artwork, and dancing are also meditations and may bring you inner peace. Lastly, share your energy outward. Volunteer in little and big ways, support your place of worship, recycle trash, protect the environment and learn the philosophy of just for day. These tips are time-proven to give clarity of mind and restore inner peace. Such practices benefit our whole society, too, as evidence of this shift continues globally.