

Catherine Lucas, *In Case Of Spiritual Emergency: Moving Successfully Through Your Awakening*, Forres, Findhorn Press, 2011, pp. 206. ISBN 978-1-84409-546-9 (Paperback). £9.99.¹

Catherine Lucas is the founder of the U.K. Spiritual Crisis Network (SCN). The SCN promotes ‘understanding and support for those going through profound personal transformation’ (www.spiritualcrisisnetwork.org.uk). The SCN is the counterpart of the American Spiritual Emergence Network (www.spiritualemergence.info). Lucas also runs courses on mindfulness training and her website can be found at www.catherine-g-lucas.com

The premise of this book is that there is a category of spiritual experience, ‘spiritual emergency’, that is surprisingly common, somewhat overlooked, and requires a special kind of support. Part One asks ‘What is Spiritual Emergency?’ Lucas defines spiritual emergency as ‘an intensifying of the process of spiritual awakening, a speeding up of the process that becomes unmanageable and often terrifying’. This can result in a confusion of the inner and outer worlds and makes daily tasks difficult to perform. Spiritual emergency can entail extreme mystical or ecstatic states, on the one hand, and depression on the other. Lucas refers to these two polar opposites as ‘mystical psychosis’ and ‘dark night of the soul’ respectively. She admits that, when considering spiritual emergency, mysticism and psychosis can overlap. However, although medication can sometimes be beneficial, it is not necessarily helpful to try to distinguish between the two. The dangers inherent in this process include the risk of physical and mental damage, hospitalization, a feeling of isolation, inability to work, and a misdiagnosis if the process is pathologized. Whilst spiritual emergency is usually an unpleasant and potentially terrifying experience, if managed appropriately, it can lead to profound personal transformation. It can lead to healing, greater wholeness, and help us to fulfil our potential. Lucas lists the key features of spiritual emergency: the experience is very intense, people can have difficulty coping, inner and outer worlds can become confused, there can be pain and problems sleeping, powerful emotions, a sense of loss or ego-death, ego inflation, confused thinking, a sensitivity towards symbolism and myth, meaningful coincidences, seeing visions of flashbacks or spirits, and feeling strong energies. Spiritual emergency can be triggered by intense spiritual practice, such as yoga, meditation, pilgrimage, or sex. Alternatively, it can be triggered by life events, for example, bereavement or loss, falling in love, drug use, or particular life stages or changes.

Lucas goes on to discuss the history of ideas about spiritual emergency. She starts with Richard Bucke’s *Cosmic Consciousness* (1969) and William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), then moves on to Roberto Assagioli’s *Psychosynthesis* (1965), Carl Jung’s concept of archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, and Stanislav Grof’s work on psychedelics and Holotropic Breathwork. Grof (1989) suggested four categories of spiritual emergency: Kundalini awakening, Near Death-Experiences, past-life memories, and possession or obsession states. Lucas points out that the mainstream mental health services have not yet considered the importance of spirituality. She suggests that the two most important factors in aiding recovery are the individual’s own frame of reference and whether or not the experience is validated or pathologized. Part Two covers ‘Spiritual Emergency Through the Ages’ and gives

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summaries of historical and modern figures who have undergone spiritual emergency. The list includes mystics, such as St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross; creatives, like Hildegard of Bingen, Vincent van Gogh, and Carl Jung; and modern contemporaries, for example, Eckhart Tolle.

In Part Three Lucas describes the three-phase process of spiritual emergency: coping with the crisis, making sense of the crisis, and finally going back out into the world. She provides a number of techniques that can be used by sufferers or their carers including: grounding, relaxation, non-judgemental support, physical exercise, diet, and creative expression. A helpful framework for the process of spiritual emergency is also provided in the form of The Hero's Journey. This is based on Joseph Campbell's ideas from his study of world mythology in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Lucas suggests using this twelve stage process as a journaling technique to explore the experient's own psychospiritual journey. However, the main technique that Lucas promotes is mindfulness, the meditative skill of being in the present moment or 'in the here-and-now'.

The book is illustrated throughout by extracts from accounts written by people who have undergone spiritual emergency. There is also an excellent resources section at the end, which lists books, articles, DVDs, websites, and places to stay if recovering from spiritual emergency.

One question that remains unanswered is whether or not those who have undergone spiritual emergency, or those who support them, necessarily need to subscribe to metaphysical beliefs. For example, when reviewing the characteristics of 'spiritual emergency' the difference between *spiritual* and *psychological* isn't particularly clear. What makes this experience or process 'spiritual'? Or is it simply the context within which it occurs? Many experiences *could* be classed as spiritual, but we should be careful not to spiritualise *every* experience. At times Lucas seems to uncritically accept certain ideas without question, for example that religious texts can be read as reliable historical accounts of religious figures like Jesus or the Buddha.

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the purpose of this book is therapeutic not investigative. *In Case of Spiritual Emergency* sits comfortably alongside other books, such as SCN co-founder Isabel Clarke's *Madness, Mystery, and the Survival of God* (2008), and *Psychosis and Spirituality* (2010), and provides another valuable perspective on the phenomenon of spiritual crisis. In summary, this book is highly recommended for anyone with an interest in the relationships between spirituality, personal transformation, and mental health.

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