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# Introduction to the Special Topic Section: Spiritual Emergency and Spiritual Emergence

Ted Esser

*Sofia University, Palo Alto, CA, USA*

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## Introduction to the Special Topic Section: Spiritual Emergency and Spiritual Emergence

In 1913, at the age of thirty-eight, Carl Gustav Jung began to experience what many transpersonal psychologists would today label a *spiritual emergency*. Spiritual emergence refers to the healthy, life-enhancing aspect of human psychospiritual development that spontaneously seeks meaning and connection beyond one's personal identity, a process that may lead to a greater capacity for wisdom, compassion, and respect for all life, as well as fostering inner security and peace. Sometimes, this growth can be challenging or tumultuous, taking on the form of spiritual emergency.

As a result of working through his spiritual crisis, combined with his observations from working with patients and his extensive research, Jung (1976) wrote about his archetypal discoveries and methods of healing the psyche, as found within his *Collected Works*, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Roberto Assagioli (e.g., 1965) contributed ideas related to the concept of spiritual emergency from the 1950s through the 1970s. In the 1960s Abraham Maslow (1964) argued that peak mystical experiences should not be seen as symptoms of mental illness; properly integrated, these might be conducive to self-actualization and self-realization. R. D. Laing (1990) described novel approaches to psychoses in his work focusing on alternative psychiatry, as did John Weir Perry (1974) whose work in the 1950s to 1980s signaled a fundamental movement forward for the field. Perry (e.g., 1974) detailed the archetypal aspects of many manifestations of transpersonal emergencies, creating a therapeutic approach based on observations in his private practice and from his Diabasis Center work in San Francisco in the 1970s that specialized in caring for those in spiritual crisis. In the 1970s and 80s Ken Wilber (e.g., 1977/1993; 1995) contributed to the emerging transpersonal psychological field with his ideas of pre-egoic and trans-egoic states and how they related to what he called the spectrum consciousness and the spectrum of psychopathology.

In 1986 Christina and Stanislav Grof wrote "The Understanding and Treatment of Transpersonal Crises," first published in *ReVISION* in 1986 and republished in this issue, representing a consolidation of transpersonal theory and typology on the subject; they followed this with two extensive books on the topic (Grof & Grof, 1989, 1992). Emma Bragdon's (1993) related work emerged from her years of work with the Spiritual Emergence Network (SEN), founded by Christina Grof in 1980 in order to help

people in spiritual emergence and crisis find support from transpersonally-trained mental health professionals, and to help those professionals enhance their areas of expertise.

Positive therapeutic outcomes, discerning theoretical frameworks, and research evidence—many of which came from SEN psychotherapists—created the momentum necessary for the creation of a V-code in the Fourth Edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-IV) that did not designate such emergencies as signs of pathology (Lukoff, 1998). Around this time, Scotton (1996) identified what is likely the most common reason individuals reach out to transpersonal mental health professionals via SEN: issues related to kundalini experiences (cf. Esser, 2008; Lukoff, 1988). Other contributors to an understanding of kundalini-related spiritual emergencies include Lee Sannella (1977), Bonnie Greenwell (1995), and Stuart Sovatsky (1998, 2009). Further contributions that laid the groundwork for better diagnostics and research have been made by Monika Goretzki, Michael A. Thalbourne, and Lance Storm (2009; 2013). This journal has also published articles over the years regarding spiritual emergency (e.g., Mehl-Madrona, Jul, & Mainguy, 2014; Taylor, 2013; Viggiano & Krippner, 2010).

Evidence for expanding interest in spiritual emergency can be seen in the creation of the International Spiritual Emergence Network (ISEN) in 2016, in response to the appearance of several independent Spiritual Emergence Networks worldwide, and the prospect of several more. This may signal a new era in a vital area of psychology that has been 116 years in the making from the time William James (1902/1999) wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*; his radical empiricism inspired pioneers in the transpersonal field to examine the farther reaches of human nature, which may one day alter the very ground of how mainstream professionals conceive and treat mental illness more broadly.

This Special Topic Section features three articles on spiritual emergency. The first paper, "Spiritual Emergency: The Understanding and Treatment of Transpersonal Crises," by Christina and Stanislav Grof, was first published in *ReVISION* in 1986. In the next paper, "Psychosis or Spiritual Emergency?" by Kevin St. Arnaud and Damien Cormier, spiritual emergency is discussed within the context of a holistic, developmental understanding of psychological disorders and wellbeing, which may aid clinicians in differentiating psychotic experiences from spiritual emergencies. The

third paper, “Self-Transformation through the Experience and Resolution of Mental Health Crises” by Guy Albert, is a phenomenological study that investigates the spiritually positive self-transformation resulting from the experience and resolution of a mental health crisis. Results highlight the importance of acknowledging that such phenomena occur and that they deserve greater consideration in the mental health field because of the positive spiritual nature of these experiences.

**Ted Esser, Special Topic Editor**  
**Sofia University, Palo Alto, CA, USA**

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### About the Author

**Ted Esser, PhD**, was the operations manager of the Spiritual Emergence Network for over ten years. He holds an MA in Philosophy & Religion and a PhD in East-West Psychology from the California Institute of Integral Studies. A summary of his doctoral research, *Lucid Dreaming, Kundalini, the Divine, and Nonduality: A Transpersonal Narrative Study* appears in the book *Lucid Dreaming: New Perspectives to Consciousness in Sleep* (2014) published by Praeger. He is Associate Chair of the Transpersonal Psychology department at Sofia University and has a spiritual counseling practice in Marin County, California.