

# Navigating the Intersection of Trauma and Spiritual Emergence

Understanding the path to healing and  
Integration from a place of spiritual crisis

**Dr Tracy King,**

**Chartered Clinical Psychologist**

**Spiritual Emergence Coach®**

**Email: [tck@drtracyking.co.uk](mailto:tck@drtracyking.co.uk)**

**with the**

**Integrative Mental Health University [IMHU], Vermont USA**



# Tracking Trauma

Trauma is a response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms our ability to cope, causing feelings of helplessness, diminishing our sense of self and our ability to feel a full range of emotions and experiences.



# Types of Events

Personal experiences such as physical or sexual abuse, accidents, or natural disasters.

Collective experiences such as war, community violence, or large-scale natural catastrophes.



# Impact of Trauma

- Anxiety and fear
- Sadness or depression
- Anger, irritability, and mood swings
- Guilt, shame, and self-blame
- Feeling disconnected or numb
- Insomnia or nightmares
- Fatigue
- Being startled easily
- Difficulty concentrating



- Muscle tension
- Avoidance of certain places or activities
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of interest in activities
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Impaired ability to function
- Difficulty maintaining close relationships
- Persistent feelings of insecurity
- Helplessness



# Defining Spiritual Emergence

Spiritual emergence is the process through which an individual experiences an expansion of consciousness, often resulting in significant personal transformation and a deeper understanding of their spiritual and existential place in the world. It is an awakening that can result in enlightenment, peace, and connectedness. but may also cause disorientation and overwhelm.



# Characteristics of Spiritual Emergence

- Heightened perception or sensitivity.
- Profound sense of connection with others and the universe.
- Experiences of profound peace or enlightenment.
- Encounters with mystical or spiritual visions.
- Enhanced creativity, renewed life purpose, increased compassion and empathy.



# Challenges of Spiritual Emergence

- Overwhelming Emotions
- Psychological Disorientation:
- Altered States of Consciousness hard to integrate
- Experiences mimic psychiatric conditions complicating understanding
- Existential Anxiety and stress
- Social Isolation & loneliness
  - Energy surges
  - Appetite & sleep changes
  - Risk of spiritual bypassing
  - Lack of guidance





# When Emergence Unearths Trauma

- Resurfacing of Buried Memories and Emotions
  - Triggering of Trauma Symptoms
    - Spiritual Crisis
  - Heightened Emotional Sensitivity
- Opportunity for Healing and Integration





# When Trauma is the Wall to Emergence

- Emotional Overwhelm and Instability
- Dissociation and Disconnection
- Distraction from Spiritual Goals
- Fear and Mistrust
- Existential Crisis
- Physical and Mental Exhaustion



# When Emergence is the Trauma

When spiritual emergence itself becomes a source of trauma, it can create a unique and complex challenge for the individual experiencing it. This phenomenon, often referred to as a 'spiritual crisis' or 'spiritual emergency,' occurs when the rapid expansion of consciousness and sudden spiritual insights overwhelm a person's ability to integrate these experiences smoothly. Here's what typically happens:



- **Disorientation and Loss of Grounding**
  - Identity Crisis
  - Physical Symptoms
  - Social Isolation

# Feeling Nervous?

The common denominator in both trauma and expanding consciousness can be found when we map the impact upon our nervous system.

The Autonomic nervous system regulates emotional responses.

Three states [Polyvagal Theory]:

Ventral Vagal: Safety and connection.

Sympathetic: Fight or flight.

Dorsal Vagal: Shutdown or freeze.





# The Inside Story - Trauma

When we experience trauma, specific neurological changes occur.



Amygdala - our brain's emotional centre becomes hyperactive, heightening our sense of threat.



Prefrontal cortex, responsible for decision-making and rational thought, shows decreased activity. where we may shut down entirely.



The body also releases stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, which keep us on high alert and can further dysregulate the nervous system.



# The Inside Story - Spiritual Emergence

During experiences of expanded consciousness, such as those encountered in spiritual emergence, this is what happens:

- ↑ The prefrontal cortex becomes more active, enhancing our capacity for higher-order thinking, self-awareness, and introspection.
  - ↑ The default mode network—a brain network involved in self-referential thoughts and daydreaming—also becomes engaged, allowing us to explore deeper aspects of self and existence.
- frameworks of expanded consciousness.



Instead of stress hormones, the body releases serotonin and oxytocin, which are associated with feelings of well-being, connection, and peace.

# A System Glitch

When someone is stuck in a sympathetic, fight-or-flight state or a shutdown, due to unresolved trauma [prior to emergence, since emergence or due to emergence] their brain is focused on survival.

This makes it nearly impossible to engage with or understand the new frameworks of expanded consciousness.

The brain is simply not in a place where it can process complex spiritual insights or develop new narratives that require calmness and open-mindedness.





# When Shutdown is A Creative Bridge

## Exploring Near-Death Experiences [NDEs]

- **Defining Near-Death Experiences**

Explores sensations of leaving the body.

- **Common Sensations**

Includes feelings of peace and memory revisitation.

- **Transformative Impact**

NDEs can alter personality and spiritual beliefs.

- **Neurological Insights**

Surge in brain signals during NDEs.

- **Role of Neurotransmitters**

Serotonin enhances vivid perceptions and experiences.

- **Spiritual Emergence Connection**

NDEs trigger profound awakenings and identity re-evaluation.

- **Importance of Integration**

Integrating NDEs is crucial for personal transformation.



# The Transformative Power of NDEs

Unlocking New Perspectives Through  
Profound Experiences

NDEs catalyse spiritual awakenings, reshaping identity and worldview through moments of detachment that drive personal growth and deeper understanding.



# Case Study: Journey Through Trauma, Coma, and Spiritual Awakening

- **Background:** Jane, a pedestrian, was run over by a vehicle, leading to severe injuries and a year-long coma.
- **Near-Death Experience:** Jane reported seeing bright lights and having intense memories like a life review before being placed in a medically induced coma. She also felt she saw herself in the coma.
- **Coma State:** After the coma Jane demonstrated the ability to recall new song lyrics [released whilst in the coma] suggesting heightened awareness.
- **Communication Beyond the Physical:** In one session, Jane shared information that only my deceased grandmother knew, suggesting a connection to non-physical realms.





# The Importance of Integration: A Journey Back to the Self

- **Understanding Integration**

Integration is the process of making sense of and incorporating sudden changes in consciousness into everyday life, reconnecting with our true self.

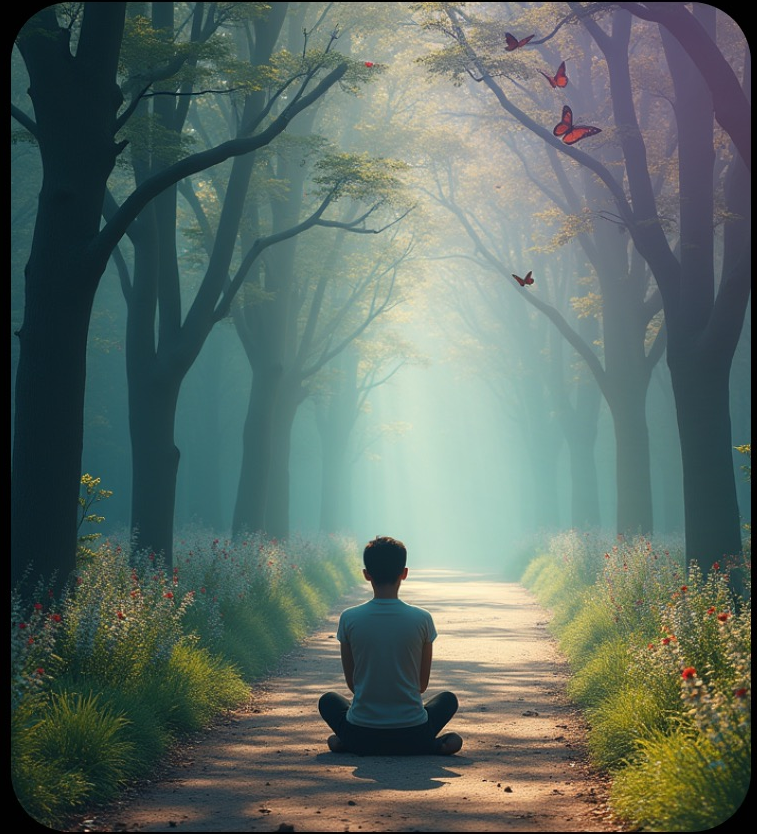
- **Why Integration Matters**

Provides coherence and meaning to the experience.

Helps prevent feelings of confusion, isolation, or fear.

Supports emotional and psychological stability.

Fosters personal and spiritual growth, reconnecting to a deeper sense of self.



# Safety Before Integration

- Before any integration of sudden changes in consciousness, such as those from trauma, near-death experiences, or other awakenings, it is crucial to establish a sense of safety. Safety provides the emotional and psychological stability necessary to explore and make sense of profound experiences.
- Without a foundation of safety, attempts at integration can lead to re-traumatisation, as individuals may become overwhelmed by the intensity of their memories and emotions. Feeling safe helps reduce anxiety and fear, making it easier for people to open up, process their experiences, and connect with their true selves.
- Polyvagal theory, the brain is focused on survival, making it difficult to engage in integration processes. Therefore, creating a sense of safety is essential to shift from a survival state to a state of safety and openness.



# Vagal Toning as a Foundation

## What is Vagal Toning?

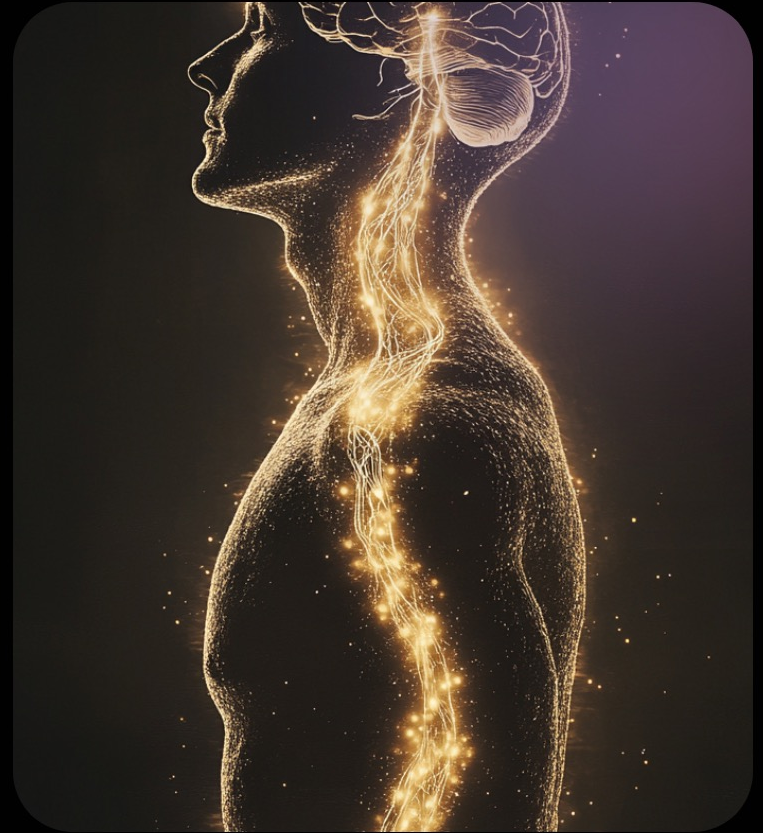
- Enhancing the function of the vagus nerve to promote a state of calm and safety
- Essential for transitioning from survival mode to a state of relaxation and openness

## Importance of Vagal Toning for Integration

- Supports emotional regulation
- Facilitates higher cognitive functions
- Provides a stable foundation for processing and integrating new states of consciousness

## Strategies for Vagal Toning:

- Somatic Approaches
- Gentle Breathwork
- Cold Exposure
- Mindful Movement



Caution with Breathwork: Can trigger altered states of consciousness and overwhelm the nervous system



# Key Takeaway Message

Trauma, including near-death experiences [NDEs], and spiritual emergence can trigger profound shifts in consciousness which impact the nervous system and can lead to a spiritual crisis. Effective integration of these experiences first requires vagal toning to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, creating a space of safety and allowing a person to operate from a ventral vagal state, widening their window of tolerance to their current state of uncertainty. This state of calm and connection is essential for forming a new narrative of a transformed reality and reconnecting with a more authentic self, that still contains all iterations of the prior self.

## Q&A

Share your thoughts and experiences – collective wisdom fosters deeper understanding and connection in our shared journey of self-awareness and healing.

