

Reviews

In Case of Spiritual Emergency: Moving Successfully Through Your Awakening

Catherine G. Lucas

Findhorn Press, 2011, £9.99, pb, 192 pp.

ISBN: 9781844095469

In this book, Catherine Lucas writes about how to support someone through a mental/spiritual health crisis. I agree that some people have unusual experiences, which can be brought on by intense spiritual practices. When people are in crisis they need care, protection and emotional support; in this situation, psychotropic drugs should be used carefully and sparingly. Good outcomes are optimised by support and encouragement to integrate the experiences and in this way emotional damage can be avoided.

The author seeks to differentiate between psychosis and spiritual emergence. I am not clear about this distinction – in my view, there is one type of experience, the outcome depending on how the person is supported. I found this book difficult, not intellectually but in terms of differing world views. The author's transpersonal perspective is a New Age blend of Eastern philosophies with science: spiritual emergencies are caused by, for example, excess universal energy, communication with spirit guides, or past life memories. Here we part company. When the author blames her current gynaecological problems on past life experiences (p. 65), I find it difficult to comprehend. That South American natives could not perceive Western explorers' advancing ships because they did not fit known categories seems unbelievable (p. 72).

There is an implication that members of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group agree with the author's views (p. 73). It is true that some members of the group do hold these views but others would be profoundly uncomfortable with past life regression and 'channeling'. Just because the special interest group had a day conference including a speaker on spirit release therapy does not signify validation. Several of the members of the group follow Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, Islam – and each have their own mystic traditions, and teach that spiritual experience is not to be sought for its own sake, and not without risk; there are unhealthy, negative spiritual forces as well as healthy ones.

This book is an interesting introduction to the transpersonal perspective and is useful for understanding this world view. However, this is not an approach I personally

find internally consistent, helpful or believable, and I cannot recommend this book without serious reservations. It reaches conclusions which I can neither endorse nor recommend to others.

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doi: 10.1192/pb.bp.111.038042

Expert Psychiatric Evidence

Keith Rix

RCPsych Publications, 2011, £40.00, 320 pp.

ISBN: 9781908020321

Medico-legal work is fascinating, intellectually stimulating and professionally rewarding, and psychiatrists will be required to provide professional reports and most will provide expert evidence. This book explains how reports should be adapted to the requirements of different courts. It advises what needs to be included and what is better left out. There are helpful lists of key points to consider in preparing a report tailored to a specific situation, and the legal and cultural background as to how current issues have evolved is explained.

Although the book is written with a didactic perspective, it contains a wealth of personal experience and anecdotes. It explains how laws and principles have changed in recent times, for example the principles of the Wolf Report and 'hot-tubbing', and how the Disability Discrimination Act has been replaced by the Equal Opportunities Act. It gives advice how to conduct ourselves in court and the tricks that barristers may use to try to unsettle the psychiatric expert. Rix covers thorny issues, such as fees, how to address a judge and, of course, provides templates for different types of report writing. *Expert Psychiatric Evidence* can be used as a reference book to look at various specific issues to address when providing, for example, an opinion on testamentary capacity or fitness to plead. It is written in an easy, entertaining and humorous style. As with all professional activity, its benefits lie not only in providing new information, but also in reinforcing what the reader thought he already knew. The greatest recommendation is that the book has had a tendency to disappear repeatedly from my desk in the brief time that I have had a review copy, as many colleagues have borrowed it for a few hours to look up particular points of interest.

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doi: 10.1192/pb.bp.111.038190