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AWAKENING TO SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN TIMES OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE:

REFLECTIONS ON CULTURE AND TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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They do not flee their condition, be they caliph
or water bearer; sometimes it is their condition
which flees them. Their retreat is the crowd,
their desert is the public square. Conformity is
their asceticism, the ordinary is their miracle...”

(Chodkiewicz, 1995, p.1.)

Setting the Scene

In spiritual awakening, the knowledge of one's true self begins with the awareness of impasse. Before awakening, the spiritual substance of life is veiled, and the vast Being-ness at its core is obscure to itself. Then, the Light of awareness breaks through the veils, shows through the cracks in personality, and illumines and sheds the fallacies of the false self. One by one, it brings to congruence exterior expressions and interior meanings in a solid masterpiece of a particular personhood. Hidden and esoteric becomes available to reason, “irrational” reveals its impeccable interior logics, and transcendental shows as an intrinsic fabric of everyday life. If only we pay attention...

Over the last 10 years, spirituality became a subject of many polemics in psychology, philosophy and theology. Transpersonal psychology discovered the phenomena of spiritual emergence/emergence, a.k.a. spiritual transformation. This central concept initially created a revolution in the attitudes towards non-ordinary human experience. However, down the road it absorbed much of a common prejudice against spirituality, turning spiritual awakening into one more myth of modernity. This new mythology treats spiritual awakening as something outstanding, non-ordinary, controversial and infrequent. Spirituality then resonates with super-humanness, otherworldliness, message of unalloyed happiness or promise of the full freedom. When spirituality and science come together in true enquiry, a different picture of spiritual awakening emerges. In this kind of enquiry, researcher comes very close to the subject

of research. The reason discovers its own limitations, sifts through the web of unexamined assumptions, and gets illumined by the direct intuition. Critical thinking and phenomenological method replace the highly romanticized and misleading, idealistic image of spiritual awakening by the knowledge of spiritual awakening itself, how it *de facto* happens in people's lives.

In the lives of saints, spiritual advancement may be concealed both within a brilliant destiny, as well as an obscure life. For example, in the life of the holy 'Amir abd-al Kader, spiritual awakening happened in a context of a life of a swordsman. Amir practiced the lofty gifts of non-dual wisdom being a military commander of Ottoman Empire, later betrayed and imprisoned by the French as a political captive. Like his spiritual predecessor Ibn-al-Arabi, the spiritual Master *par excellence*, Amir had to carry on his spiritual transformation in the milieu of Islamic fundamentalism (Chodkiewics, 1995).

Hindu saint Valmiki, Christian saint Sergii of Radonesj, great Indian visionary Sri Aurobindo, and many others have agreed that awakening to spiritual consciousness changes one's moral choices in life. Spiritual awakening transforms the lower ego, and neutralizes the animalistic tendencies such as drive to tyrannical power, greed, and cruelty. In the life of abd-al Kader, his pure and modest lifestyle, his fairness to inferiors and enemies, and his equanimity with superiors, the absence of cruelty in warfare and care of his associates make him different from the traditional image of the military commander in service to the fundamentalist Islamic monarchy.

Marguerite Porete, the French Beguine saint of the 12th century, reveals the same non-ordinariness of character. Her book *The Mirror of the Simple Souls* contains no traditional in medieval times apology for being a woman while trespassing male terrain of writing about highest things. One of the few writers, who explicitly described the stages of the soul in the process of spiritual awakening, Marguerite accepted the sentence to be burned at stake as a victim to political struggles with uncommon placidity. She was acknowledged by historians and philosophers as a person of a "great heart" and "noble courage". Marguerite Porete called the awakened soul a "phoenix" – a definition which could be easily applied to Porete herself (Lerner, 1993, pp. 1-3).

According to oral teachings of Malamatia Sufism, spiritual transformation serves to balance the expressions of inter-cultural violence and injustice in “hot” places of the planet (Shaikh Yasin of the Malamatia Sufi order, San Francisco, 1999, personal communication). Spiritual concepts of “enlightened rulership”, and “enlightened craftsmanship” imply that spiritual awakening brings out the characterological changes positively affecting the performance of our social roles. The concept of “collective salvation”, found in some forms of Christianity and Islam, implies that the spiritual consciousness in a community brings out the harmonious collective life. The concept of Buddhist “engaged spirituality” directs the practice of spiritual values into everyday life. The concept of “chivalry” in Islam and Christianity, or “sacred warrior-ship” in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, assumes the spiritually infused conduct in the battle, and dignified moral choices in life. In Islam, personal changes in the overall process of spiritual unfolding result in a “noble character”. Contra to the popular view of spiritual awakening as process transcending personality and culture, the real life spiritual awakening causes profound changes in the person, and affects all spheres of one’s life in the context of a particular cultural environment.

Spiritual Awakening and the Cultural Self

For the author of this article, attention to culture-specific ways of spiritual awakening grew out of the personal experience of cross-cultural teaching of spirituality. What worked in Russia, didn’t work in Estonia, Moldova or America. While the meditation skills advanced in a similar way, the changes of personality in Russians, Americans or Turks in spiritual awakening were radically different. Methodological cul-de-sacs begged for the creative alliance of transpersonal and cultural psychology.

Indeed, culture and mind, and more specifically, culture and self, mutually constitute one another. The web of rituals, myths, cultural practices such as sex, childbearing, family life, dying, socializing, worshipping etc. happen via the medium of human self. The mutual making of culture and self causes cross-culturally diverse patterns in cognition, emotion, motivation, moral reasoning, psychopathology, and altered states of consciousness. People embody and practice their ethnic identities, which affects the

embodied aspects of consciousness and energy such as chakra system (Louchakova & Warner, 2003). So, it is in this continuum of the self-body-culture that the spiritual awakening happens. Internal and subjective processes of spiritual awakening at a certain critical mass have a potential to transform the cultural systems (Louchakova, 2004, June).

Migrations associated with spiritual search and the cross-fertilization of spiritual traditions change the western eurocentricity. When the Hindu saint Sri Ranjit Maharaj holds his international spiritual dialogue (*Satsang*, Sanskrit) in the Ketwadi slums in Mumbai, is this just a caprice of destiny, or is something meaningful and purposeful going on? As a scientist with 20 years of research and teaching of spiritual awakening, the author is inclined to think that the satsang somehow helps to balance the hellish environment of Ketwadi. Those coming to satsang will bring this consciousness to other parts of the world. Here is the other, different globalization going on: spiritual consciousness transcends the frames of one culture and becomes the agent of a positive global change.

Some cultural theorists, applying the principles of critical theory to cultural power dynamics, consider that polarization, opposition and conflicts are inherent to culture as such (Cushman, 1995). We live in a divided world of antagonistic forces: mind versus body, the war on terrorism, the war against Iraq, the war of genders, the conflicts of “majorities” and “minorities”...In the mind, the “inner child” fights against the “inner parent”. Inside the “inner parent”, the “bad” parent tries to split off the “good” one... In order to be stable, the common psyche needs an enemy. It’s an attempt to gain internal stability by externalizing tensions in resistance to the external opponent. This is the world of religious fundamentalism, the antagonizing world of exclusion. On the contrary, spiritual awakening brings out the innate wholeness of the self . “Good [spirit, God, innate Goodness] unifies and holds together what has been separated, evil clearly divides and corrupts what has been unified, ”- says St. Maximos the Confessor), Christian mystic of the 6th century A.D. (1981). The wholeness of the human self reflects in the holistic attitude to the world, in a stability through the web of non-oppositional, dialogical connections.

When the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh teaches the silent walking meditation to state leaders Margaret Thatcher and Michael Gorbachev in San Francisco Presidio, this is not just a satisfaction of their personal stress-reduction pursuit. Something larger is going on, which may affect the lives of thousand people on the planet. Meditation brings awareness to subconscious, opens Kundalini energy, and over time changes the structure of personality. The antagonistic divisions, such as superego-ego-id tensions, give place to the more unified, wholesome psyche (Washburn, 1994). Consciousness changes from within, it becomes more stable, more inclined to search for dialogical, non-violent solutions.

Acknowledgment of the spiritual awakening in the world, where religious violence is becoming a common place, is neither a pacifist emotion based practice, nor a wish fulfilling kind New Age thought. These are, as current research shows (Louchakova & Warner, 2003; Wall & Louchakova, 2002), reflections on the natural events within the overall human development, and a mechanism by which consciousness balances its own violent or destructive extremes. We can posit a connection between spiritually awakened politicians and better politics, as well as a connection between spiritual awakened peace activists and better conflict resolution (Burdge, 2004). Likewise, there is a correlation between spirituality based ethics and better psychological climate in business (Yan, 2003). As scientists, we can research, evaluate and confirm the “real life” effects of spiritual experience, as manifestations of the most essential part of who we are (Wildman & Brothers, 1999; Louchakova, 2003, 2004 July-August, 2004 August) as individuals, nations, races or civilizations.

Spiritual and cultural realms within the psyche are very close. The call is for transpersonal psychology to become a more real life engaged enquiry into human consciousness that has the flexibility to contribute to better global psychological climate and more humane international politics.

Conundrum of the “Closet Spiritual Awakening”

Surveys show the increasing frequency of spiritual experience in contemporary westerners (Marty, 1993; Roof, 1999) (no data available for non-industrial countries). For example, in United States,

religiocity over the last 20 years changed from the quest for group identity and social location to the quest for an authentic inner life and personhood. Activated more at the inner level, Americans are asking questions such as, “Does religion relate to my life?” “How can I find spiritual meaning and depth?” and “What might faith mean for me?” While influence of religion in the public life declines, it is increasing in personal lives (Arnold-Magnum, 1994). Inner experience takes over a learned dogma. The leading factor in a religious experience is a change of perception (Louchakova, 2004, July- August). Many of those who have the experiences of expanded perception do not know how to conceptualize, share or relate to them (Palmer, 1999). When perception changes rapidly, people may think they are crazy. At the same time, there is an undeniable sense of sacred. Is sacred crazy? How did we get to think that our intrinsic, inborn capacity of spiritual perception is “crazy”?

The Western world is a secularized world (Cox, 1990). Our architecture, art, science, values, healing systems and daily rituals constitute a materialistic culture. The soteriological meanings are alienated from the life-making, and are segregated into the special reservations nicely called “spiritual retreats”. By the decree of behavioral psychology, the range of normality in everyday emotional life is limited to several (up to ten) basic emotions such as fear, anger, joy, sadness, disgust, surprise, shame, interest and the like (Ekman, Levenson, & Friesen, 1983), and the “allowed” cognitive schemas keep attention directed outward. Spiritual emotions as “true joy”, sacred weeping or devotion are classified as an emotional problem. Emptiness of the self is common (Cushman, 1995), the loss of meaning escalates, and the level of suicide skyrockets (McKenna, 2004). Spirituality experience is not “us”, it is a “thing” be acquired, in a manner one acquires a car, a partner, or a new job. With globalization, spirituality can be imported from India, China or Japan. There are different packages and deals, such as a weekend workshop, week-long seminar, a spiritual tour or a session in a spa. Rise of the inward perception, and the change of self-identity, inherent to spiritual awakening, challenge this artificial social consensus.

The well known teacher of non-duality Robert Adams experienced spiritual awakening in his tender teens in New York. After he reported his experiences to his parents, they took him to psychiatrist. Psychiatrist, by a lucky chance, was a follower of a great Indian saint Paramahansa Yogananda. Psychiatrist referred Robert Adams to Yogananda. Yogananda examined the boy and sent him to the other saint, Sri Ramana Maharshi. Robert stayed with Ramana, and then returned to the West to teach. This is a lucky case scenario. In less lucky cases, people get treated for the assumed “loss of self” which frequently gets misinterpreted as a psychiatric condition.

After centuries of denial of our inherent spiritual-ness, we know very little about it. Some of the fallacies are: 1) spiritual awakening is rare, 2) spiritual awakening is a separate event, not a life long process, 3) in order to be spiritually awakened, one needs to have a transmission of something from somebody else, 4) spiritual awakening is about spirituality, and has nothing to do with psychology, 5) spiritual awakening makes one to renounce the world, 6) spiritual awakening makes one weird, 7) spiritual awakening makes one happy, 8) spiritual awakening makes one miserable, 9) spiritual awakening doesn't exist, 10) spiritual awakening can not happen to me, etc. etc.

It is in this environment that the frequency of spontaneous spiritual experience increases (Louchakova 2004, July- August; Wall and Louchakova 2002). Author's research of more than 500 informants over the period of 15 years shows that spiritual experiences do not stand isolated. They are accompanied by necessary psychological, and even physical changes. They are a part and parcel of a special life-long developmental process, which does not correspond to the biological aging of the body. Templeton Foundation research links religious experiences to stages in gradual personal transformation throughout one's life-span (Wildman & Brothers, 1999). Fowler (1981) considers that religious conversion depends on the innate ontogenic structures that unfold invariably throughout life. Grof and Grof (1989) insisted that spiritual awakening is a long term process . In spite of this, the separate peak experience oriented view of spiritual emergency received predominant attention in transpersonal psychology.

We have to finally admit, that spiritual awakening is an ontological, inherently human process of maturation. It happens to people spontaneously, like ripening of a fruit, often uncalled for and unwarranted by any spiritual practice. The “glorious” or troublesome exceptional experiences are but a small part of the process. A complete picture consists of a slow, gradual, life-long process of psychospiritual transformation, involving stage-specific correlations of individuation, religious/spiritual experiences, modalities of embodied awareness, changes in perception, self-awareness, self-identification, values, attitudes and character structure. It is the overall life-long change in the self.

Growth of requests for spiritually competent therapy and counseling support the fact that this process is much more common in general population than we generally think. Need of crisis counseling is only a small part of these requests. The majority are in need of a longitudinal non-pathologizing growth oriented counseling, incorporating dimensions of spirituality. Something our “civilized” western culture is yet unable to provide.

A Life-Long Process of Spiritual Awakening

Relationships between spiritual experiences and human development acquire additional importance with accumulating evidence of spontaneous awakenings outside of traditional religious or spiritual frames. Social implications are many. In Russia, for example, underground spiritual awakening movement helped to overcome the Soviet regime (Kungurtsev & Luchakova, 1997). Spiritual elder and scientist Antonov used Kundalini Yoga exercises to enhance people’s spiritual awakening. His research shows that people in spiritual awakening process changed the strategies of conflict resolution from violent to dialogical and non-violent. Aggressiveness and fear decreased, and the capacity of strategic decision making increased, the rate of psychosomatic health problems went down, the use alcohol and drugs decreased. People report being happier, and their lives become more meaningful (Antonov & Vaver, 1989).

In 2002, Wall and Louchakova showed that the everyday consciousness of Americans right after September 11, 2001 catastrophe contained many elements of evolutionary and non-dual spiritual

experiences (Wall & Louchakova, 2002). It is important to notice that the research of spiritual awakening doesn't easily surrender to straightforward statistics based method, and requires complex, integral and imaginative methodologies typical for innovative qualitative research. Because of the complexity of the phenomenon of spiritual awakening it is impossible to say whether in case of "911" this is typical part of the post-traumatic response, or the evidence of the evolution of consciousness, -- but it is clear that elements of spiritual, and even non-dual consciousness are engrained in the fabric of our everyday life. That which is eternal and real shines through the gaps in impermanent and relative.

Our recent research shows that the life-span long spiritual awakening can be averagely "healthy", or be associated with psychological or health problems (Louchakova, 2004, July- August). In this context, spiritual experiences of a client may be interpreted by the therapist as indicators of particular developmental stages in spiritual awakening and overall development of the ego. The psyche, undergoing spiritual awakening, also changes as a result of spiritual experience. For example, the experiences of non-dual consciousness serve as developmental catalysts (Louchakova, in press). However, occasionally, the rapid spiritual openings can be traumatic and lead to the developmental arrests unless there is an additional work of integration (Louchakova, 2004, July- August). Our research also shows that overall character of the process of spiritual awakening differs in regard to the focus on self-actualization, self-knowledge, creative expression, sexuality and/or development of bodily awareness. Marker religious/spiritual experiences signify the overall changes in the self, and are associated with specific changes in self-awareness, self-identification, and motivation. In a non-problematic development spiritual experience leads to balanced character structure associated with the sense of wholeness and well-being. The overall psyche responds to the instances of non-dual consciousness by the enhancement of individuation (Louchakova, in press). Thus, spiritual experiences are the essential components of the healthy human "self," and are associated with particular psychological changes and subtle shifts of bodily awareness. Indian chakra model provides a map for the developmental changes of bodily awareness happening in spiritual awakening (Louchakova & Warner, 2003). Conventional ego development may switch to spiritual development as an advanced form of cognitive functioning early in life.

Stages of spiritual awakening may last for many years. Our clinical research of people in self-identified spiritual awakening over the period of more than 15 years shows that there are stages of spiritual awakening, clearly defined through the life span. Clinically important first stage includes paranormal experiences and the spontaneous actualization of the access to subconscious. Second stage is associated with the growth of self-awareness, spontaneous deconstruction of the “false” self and actualization of the true psychological self. Marker spiritual experience here include the a gestalt of oneself as pure consciousness, and other variants of spiritual experiences of the Self. Stage three involves the shift from in-depth psychological work to deeper existential issues, heightened discrimination and authenticity. Stage four is characterized by the spontaneous awareness of archetypes and deep characterological transformation. Marker spiritual experiences include “transcending the root of the ego”, “uncreated” light, and cosmic psyche (described in detail below). All informants report the increasing overtime sense of life satisfaction and well-being. This research indicates that life-stage psychology should account for at least two different developmental tracks (i.e., conventional and spiritual), one of them requiring the nontraditional counseling and psychotherapy.

Non-Dual Dialogue and Global Psyche – Means for Cultural Healing

Contrary to the popular opinion that the advanced spirituality makes one psychologically immune to the world and others, there are many examples when spiritual awakening over time brings out more engagement with life and relatedness. Here is the life story of a woman in her mid 40s. As many in spiritual awakening process, she shared it because her experience seemed significant enough to affect people’s lives. For several years, she was practicing Kundalini Yoga¹ under the guidance of the Indian master of the ancient and well respected lineage. Her latest practice was the repetition of Divine Names in the center of the subtle body, called the Spiritual Heart.² She followed the practice quite mildly, and the next came as a surprise. She experienced the strong anxiety and the aches in the left side of her body,

¹ Kundalini Yoga is a spiritual system which works with specific energy in the human body, so called Kundalini, intimately connected with spiritual awakening (Louchakova & Warner, 2003).

² You can read more on Spiritual Heart Center in...

predominantly the chest. It was during the night time, and she and her husband thought that she is having a heart attack. She thought though that the condition may be related to her spiritual practice, and decided to wait with calling the ambulance. The condition worsened, anxiety turned into a strong fear, pain increased, but something inside told her surrendered to her condition. Suddenly, after the several hours of turmoil, her state shifted to the consciousness of omniscience. She perceived with absolute clarity the experience of every living being there is. She was insects and animals, whales and angels, her children and her ancestors, saints and killers, extraterrestrials and beings yet to be born. These were delight, and pain, and insights, and terror, and love, perils and paradise, births and deaths, and everything imaginable. That continued for some time, and then subsided. Indeed, it would be very difficult for her to continue living in this condition of expanded awareness. If one's own life can be hard to cope with, - how much harder is to be present to the life experience of all beings! So she saw it, and remembered, and changed her life to work with people and tell them about the sentiency which lives in the heart of everyone and contains the whole universe.

Experiences like this one are not rare, but quite characteristic of a certain stage of spiritual awakening. The observations in the author's clinical practice here are supported by the evidence found in spiritual literature. They have enormous transformative impact. Spiritual awakening implies at least two types of transcendence – vertical and horizontal (author's unpublished research). Vertical transcendence takes one away from diversity, into pure awareness which is the substance of Being. Horizontal transcendence is of the kind described above – the cosmic form of all existences within one Being (Louchakova, in press). This is the Cosmic Christ, the Perfect Man of Sufism, the Cosmic Form of Krishna in Bhagavat Gita (Srimad Bhagavat Gita Bhasya of Sri Sankaracarya, 1983, p.347--383).

A precise phenomenological description of the experience of the cosmic psyche is in the famous hadith given through the prophet Mohammed “Heavens and earth contain Me not, but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me” (Chittick, 1989). This kind of experience stretches consciousness to embrace polarities in cultures, modes of life, and forms of humanness. The range of acceptance widens,

the tolerance and the inclusiveness grow. One intuitively directly the oneness and indivisibility of all existence, individual reactivity subsides, and aptitude towards dialogue versus confrontation increases.

When the enlightened mystics of different traditions agree on the nature of reality, does it mean that their experience of Reality is the same? Not necessarily. It rather means that they can deeply share the understanding. Spiritual advancement does not annihilate individual differences. Advanced spirituality understands, empathizes with and appreciates the other. Self-definition of a spiritually evolved person is by inclusion, not by exclusion. Spiritually developed character is antithetical to egotism and narcissism.. This kind of consciousness would allow for the culture which doesn't need to create enemies in order to be stable, and does not need to be on the top of power pyramid in order to feel safe.

Spiritual consciousness, inclusive of opposites, manifests in the most benign ways in the particular cultural forms of dialogical practices. These practices were historically used for finding political solutions other than the bloody ethnic conflicts. Talking practices also play important role in strengthening resilience to cultural stresses such as the ongoing threat of terrorism (Burdge, personal communication, September 21, 2004; Wall & Louchakova, 2002). *Sohbet*, sincere and egalitarian talking practice, was cultivated in Islam. *Sohbet* has to come from the place of "egolessness", receptivity, loving friendliness and the conformity with the sense of the whole called the *ethiquette*, "adab" (Arabic). Successful *sohbet* actualizes one's sense of self. It also can bring out the shared group experience of the universal Self. The co-experienced insight into the non-dual consciousness is the pinnacle of *sohbet*. In non-dual consciousness, the resolution of opposites happens to attain the new synthesis, and the group reaches satisfaction. Moods of depression, angst, concern or confusion shift to states of clarity, empathy, joy, delight, highly positive experience of the self and total connectedness.

A form of communal dialogue called *veche* (root base "vech" connects with speech, eternity and knowledge, Old Slavic) was used by ancient Slavs at the times of the military attack of Mongols in the 13th century. The turning point in *Veche* was the communal experience of the direct intuition of "Truth", searched for and valued as the means of resolving complexity.

Talking practice of Indian *satsang* also opens the access to non-dual consciousness and causes the assimilation of complicated meanings. *Satsang* (in Sanskrit, association with the Truth, or Being) is a flow of the questions and answers between seekers and teacher established in non-dual consciousness. Bhagavat Gita gives the famous example *satsang* between Arjuna's and Krishna resolving the existential conflict (ref). The psychological emphasis of *satsang* is on the internal conflict resolution and peace, resulting from the emergence of the non-dual consciousness.

Upwards and Onwards or Back to Wholeness?

The common understanding is that the awakening to spiritual consciousness is a “step up”, development towards the higher levels of consciousness. However, the nature of these spontaneous spiritual awakening may vary. Much depends on the timing and context.

The old Indian story tells about a cow of dharma, a metaphor for the order of things. In the first quarter of creation, cow of dharma has all four legs. In the young creation the elements are in harmony, human self is whole and complete, and everybody attains spiritual completion in the course of life. There is no “spiritual awakening”, because there is no prior spiritual “sleep”.

In the second quarter of creation the cow of dharma loses one of her legs. – there is a bit disharmony, a cruder, harsher life. Spiritual substance of life gets slightly obscured. The self is more opaque to itself, veiled to its own awareness. To attain the gestalt of one's nature, and spiritual completion, original transparency and wholeness of the self needs to come back. The practice of rituals becomes the means to balance the disorganized elements of creation. Human capacities of are less, obstacles to self-knowledge are more. Spiritual awakening however is yet common, and has a natural developmental character.

In the third quarter of creation the cow of dharma lost two of her legs – and in order to be whole and attain spiritual completion one has to practice yoga and meditate. Meditation and yoga integrate the disbalanced self, and spiritual awakening happens to those who managed to attain this integration. Spiritual awakening happens to some people, but not to others.

In the fourth quarter of creation three legs of the cow of dharma are gone, and things completely get out of sync. In the old body of creation elements are out of order, both in nature (such as earthquakes) and in human mind (such as violence, wars, and insanity). The human self deteriorates, personality disorders become the common problem. Self-alienation grows in the divided world. Then, even spiritual practice is not enough, – wholeness and completion have to happen from within, from the internal, sentient Ground of Being, from the realms beyond the egoic separateness of the individual mind. Since creation is cyclical, there is a need for the process by which it would return to its original, transparent condition. According to Indian metaphysical chronology, this is our historical period. Consequently, this is the context to our contemporary spiritual awakenings. Through the cracks in the self the energy from within “glues” together the fragmented pieces. Spiritual awakening is restorative of intrinsic humanness, of wholeness which allows to see who we really are. It is a return to the self.

In meeting and interviewing many people in spiritual awakening in many countries, it becomes clear that spiritual awakening is not necessarily an “enlightenment”. It may be serve a very specific life purpose, such as catalyze the decision to move, enroll in higher education, change profession, enter growth oriented therapy, get out of depression, emigrate etc. It helps to mourn the loss of the close one, to heal abuse issues, or to chose a right life partner. The applications are numerous. For some people, spiritual awakening can unveil non-duality, some fall in love with God, some become Gnostics. But there is a common ground shared by all alike: this is an open ended process, which transforms the person and deepens as long as the body lasts – and may be even after.

Cornel West, Professor of [Religion](#) and [African American Studies](#) at Princeton University, and one of America’s most gifted, provocative, and important public intellectuals once said: “We live to correctly position our awareness”. Spiritual awakening in times of religious violence helps us to correctly position our awareness. Then, it is a journey well traveled.

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