

# Waking Up: Are Spiritual Experiences Becoming More Common?

By [Steve Taylor, Ph.D.](#), Guest writer for [Wake Up World](#), May 25th, 2019

<https://wakeup-world.com/2019/05/25/waking-up-are-spiritual-experiences-becoming-more-common/>

What are spiritual experiences? I don't think of them in [religious](#)



terms. I see them as moments in which our awareness becomes more intense and more expansive than normal, so that the world around us becomes more real and alive, and we feel a strong sense of connection to nature and other human beings. We might feel a sense of joy or inner stillness, and feel that somehow the world around us is “in harmony” or has a

meaning that we find difficult to express.

If a person from a religious background has such an experience, they may well interpret it in religious terms. They might see it as a gift from God, and believe that the aliveness and harmony they perceive is a glimpse of the divine, or of heaven. But if you're not religious, there's no reason to think in these terms. The experience is just a psychological one. It suggests that our normal vision of the world is limited and in some ways even aberrational. In awakening experiences, there is a strong sense of 'seeing more,' of expanding beyond limits and perceiving a more authentic reality. **(THAT is closer to what I have repeatedly experienced, as highlighted at ) Light-Path-Resources/Personal Experiences Along the Way/ Top 50 Peak Spiritual/Mystical Experiences OR**

[www.light-path-resources.org/light-path-resources-blog/personal-growth-spirituality/peak-experiences/](http://www.light-path-resources.org/light-path-resources-blog/personal-growth-spirituality/peak-experiences/) ~ Don Chapin)

My research shows that awakening experiences are connected to certain activities and situations. They are associated with contact with nature, spiritual practices such as meditation or prayer, sporting activities (such as running and swimming), and sex. They are also strongly associated with states of intense psychological turmoil. That is, paradoxically, they often occur in the midst of stress and depression, or in relation to traumatic life events such as illness, divorce or bereavement. (**NONE of which applies in my cases.** ~ Don Chapin )

However, one of the most interesting things about these experiences is that they are apparently becoming more common. In a 1962 Gallup poll, just 22 percent of Americans reported that they had “ever had a religious or mystical experience.” In 1994, 33 percent of people answered yes to the same question, while by 2009, the figure had risen to 49 percent. Research by the Pew Research Center in the U.S. has shown a similar trend. In 2007, 52 percent of Americans reported that they regularly felt a “deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being.” In 2014, the figure stood at 59 percent. In 2007, 39 percent of Americans said that they regularly felt a “deep sense of wonder about the universe”—a figure which had increased to 46 percent in 2014. Perhaps significantly, these increases coincided closely with a decrease in interest in organized religion.

In the U.K., the surveys of the Spiritual Experience Research Centre have had similar findings. In a 1969 survey, the question “Have you ever experienced a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?” was answered affirmatively by 29 percent of people. In 1978, the figure had risen to 36 percent, and then to 48 percent in 1987. In 2000, there was a further steep rise to 75 percent—a 27 percent increase in 13 years (which was, coincidentally or not, exactly the same figure by which church attendance declined over the same period). (1)

### **A Collective Movement?**

Why should spiritual experiences be more common now than they were a few decades ago? (*i.e., during Henry James’, then Abraham Maslow’s investigations ?* ~ Don Chapin :-)

simply be that people are simply getting better at recognizing them, or are more open about discussing them. Now that there is more general awareness of [spirituality](#) in our culture, and concepts such as “spiritual peace and well-being” are a more common part of discourse, it could simply be that more people are describing their experiences in this way, when they might have described them in other terms in earlier decades.

Or perhaps it's right to take the research at its face value. Perhaps spiritual experiences actually are becoming more common. (***I hope so, because THAT is why I posted my documented 50 occurrences... to get people to understand they are not “going crazy” ~ Don Chapin***) This is the approach I take in my new book *The Leap: The Psychology of Spiritual Awakening*. I suggest that spiritual experiences are glimpses of a new state of being that is slowly becoming more normal to human beings. This is a higher-functioning state that I call “wakefulness,” in which a person feels an enhanced sense of well-being, clarity, and connection. They have a more intense awareness of the world around them, a greater sense of appreciation of nature, a broad global outlook, and an all-embracing sense of [empathy](#) with the whole human race. In many ways, it is a permanent, ongoing variant of the ‘awakening experience.’

I have found many examples of people who shift into this higher-functioning state in the midst of intense psychological turmoil – for example, bereavement, serious illness, or [alcoholism](#)—I describe some of these examples in *The Leap*. This shift is quite common, and can be seen as a variation of “post-traumatic growth”—I sometimes refer to it as “post-traumatic transformation.” There are also hundreds of millions of people around the world who are gradually cultivating wakefulness by following spiritual practices such as meditation and service, or spiritual paths such as Buddhism, Yoga, or the Kabbalah. A constantly increasing interest in self-development, spiritual practices, and traditions is one of the most significant cultural trends of our time.

It seems to me that there is a collective moment towards awakening, which is manifesting itself in a variety of ways—one of which may be the increasing frequency of spiritual experiences.

(1) I am [grateful](#) to my fellow author Jules Evans for bringing my [attention](#) to this research.

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### About the author:

Steve Taylor is a senior lecturer in Psychology at Leeds Beckett University, UK. His latest books in the US are [\*The Calm Center\*](#) and [\*Back to Sanity: Healing the Madness of the Human Mind\*](#). He is also the author of [\*The Fall\*](#), [\*Waking From Sleep\*](#), and [\*Out Of The Darkness\*](#). His books have been published in 19 languages. His research has appeared in *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, *The Journal of Consciousness Studies*, *The Transpersonal Psychology Review*, *The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, as well as the popular media in the UK, including on BBC World TV, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent*.

As the author of [\*Out Of The Darkness\*](#), one of Steve's research interests is "awakening experiences" — moments when our normal awareness intensifies and we feel a sense of connection and meaning. What causes these experiences? Is it possible to control them? Steve's work also examines the sources of psychological suffering — Why is it that human beings find it so difficult to be contented? His research also shows that many awakening

experiences are triggered by intense psychological turmoil, such as depression and loss.

Connect with Steve at [StevenMTaylor.com](http://StevenMTaylor.com).

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**5-25-19 Msg to Steve through <https://www.stevenmtaylor.com/contact/>:**

**Sporting two aero engineering degrees and a PhD in sociology Interjected comments WRT "Waking Up: Are Spiritual Experiences Becoming More Common?" posted at <https://wakeup-world.com/2019/05/25/waking-up-are-spiritual-experiences-becoming-more-common/>:**

**"... a strong sense of 'seeing more,' of expanding beyond limits and perceiving a more authentic reality. " (THAT is closer to what I have repeatedly experienced, as highlighted at ) [Light-Path-Resources/Personal Experiences Along the Way/ Top 50 Peak Spiritual/Mystical Experiences](https://www.light-path-resources.org/light-path-resources-blog/personal-growth-spirituality/peak-experiences/) OR <https://www.light-path-resources.org/light-path-resources-blog/personal-growth-spirituality/peak-experiences/>**

**"... in relation to traumatic life events such as illness, divorce or bereavement." (NONE of which applies in my cases.)**

**"Why should spiritual experiences be more common now than they were a few decades ago?" (i.e., during Henry James', then Abraham Maslow's investigations ? :-)**

**"Perhaps spiritual experiences actually are becoming more common." (I hope so, because THAT is why I posted my documented 50 occurrences... to get people to understand they are not 'going crazy')**

**KEEP UP THIS WORK... PEOPLE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THIS IS ONLY PART OF BEING HUMAN!!!**

**Rev. Don Chapin, PhD**

I make every effort to reply to as many mails as I possibly can – rest assured that each one is read and appreciated!