

# BPD or Spiritual Crisis?

by Larry Culliford

Dr Larry Culliford was present in Chelmsford at the Essex 'Mind and Spirit' conference on 5th February 2007 when Christine McDonald gave her fascinating talk on, "Me, My BPD and God". Her courageous performance was both lively and captivating; however, I soon began to wonder about an alternative or additional diagnosis based on the paper Christine delivered.

When I spoke to Christine afterwards about the possibility of her having gone through a spiritual crisis, she wanted to know more.

To put it briefly, spirituality is where the deeply personal meets the universal.

The Spirituality and Psychiatry special interest group (SIG) of The Royal College of Psychiatrists, founded in 1999, now has almost 1,500 members. It is increasingly expected of psychiatrists that they will routinely take spiritual histories. In mental health care, spirituality is identified with experiencing a deep-seated sense of meaning and purpose in life, together with a sense of belonging.

In a leaflet published by The Royal College (2006), prepared by members of the SIG, it says, "Making a spiritual assessment is as important as all other aspects of medical history taking and examination. When making a diagnosis, a psychiatrist should be competent in distinguishing between a spiritual crisis and mental illness, and be able to explore areas of overlap and difference between the two".

According to the website of the Spiritual Crisis Network, "A spiritual crisis can be described as a turbulent period of spiritual opening and transformation. Spiritual crisis is also referred to as

spiritual emergency, where a process of spiritual emergence or awakening becomes unmanageable for the individual. A person may experience psychological or mental health difficulties. Hence the term psycho-spiritual crisis is also used sometimes".

It is no surprise then that Christine wants to give something back to the sacred universe: by speaking at conferences, by her involvement in the Mind and Spirit Forum, by writing about her story, and in other ways. It is obvious that she also wants to alert people to the powerful inner resources that come with spiritual awareness and depend on a personal sense of universal connection. This is normal when you have experienced what she has. Her self-evident courage is undoubtedly based on faith, and she deserves our trust and support. That way, new-found inner strengths and virtues get backed up by the external support of like-minded people.

Our materialist culture can easily isolate and alienate us from each other, but here is an excellent antidote. A group forms and becomes a genuine community in

which people share highs and lows, good times and bad. At the heart of it is a sharing of both spiritual values and practical ideas. The key ingredient for success is selfless love. It is not so much about meeting God sitting on a cloud, as about discovering divine inspiration within yourself and others too.

I send Christine, and those who join her, the very best of my wishes.



Lisa Solheim