



The Preparation for and Integration of the Psychedelic Experience

A good recipe only gets you started. You need to take it from there.

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“After some time, with my eyes closed, I began to enjoy this wonderful play of colors and forms, which it really was a pleasure to observe.”

— **Albert Hoffman**

Experience

I’m presenting myself as an expert on the psychedelic experience. You have to claim expertise if you’re going to attract attention. This is in spite of the general truth that no seriously interested, experienced person considers themselves to be an expert. As Bertrand Russell said, fools are quick to make proclamations while those with knowledge are often silent.

I prefer novice-hood as I'm more interested in what I don't know than what I do. In spite of this, what I know is valuable to those who know less, and the general state of foolishness isn't going to change unless people speak up. No one listens unless you claim yourself to be an expert—even though no one really is.

I know two kinds of role models, people who've done exactly what you're trying to do, and people who've done unique things who you'd like to emulate. Athletes fall in the first group: you want to follow their accomplishments and, if you do exactly what they've done, you hope you can. These people might teach you the dance steps, but even then, there may be skills that will be hard to copy.

The second group accomplishes unique things that are hard to duplicate. Artistry and exploration are not paths that can be repeated, and equating the tools with the results is laughable. It is for this reason that most schools are a joke. You do not learn to write by being taught how to hold a pencil. The standard argument is that one comes before the other isn't true; it's the universal mistake of correlation with causation. It's the confusion of the what with the how.

I know many people more experienced with psychedelics than I, but I can claim some insight. First, I've always been focused on my personal growth not entertainment, and while my progress has been slow, I've been careful. I've been at it for over 50 years.

Second, I'm now a therapist and I make it my business to enable and explain the process of transformation. I might say I was always a therapist except that I was my only client. I can now see the psychedelic experience in everyday life in the form of manufactured reality and disordered thinking. On that basis, I'm qualified to describe psychedelics as a normal part of life.



Medicine

In spite of decades of use, people generally don't know what to do with psychedelics. They are like medicines, but they've hardly been used as medicines. They are like catalysts, but catalysts require your participation. This is true of most medicines: a good medicine only gets you started. You need to take it from there.

The Western approach to medicine is pretty screwed up, in general. Instead of being viewed as catalysts for change, most medicines are viewed as necessary supplements to counter dysfunction. Even things as obviously unnatural as antibiotics are seen as a necessary first defense.

This is “the dysfunctional human” approach embedded in much of Western medicine—in much of the Western lifestyle, in fact. It would be more accurate to view most medicines as poisons—more like paint thinner that removes something than as a supplement that adds what's missing. Lacking a model for how to use substances collaboratively, hardly anyone knows what psychedelics are good for.

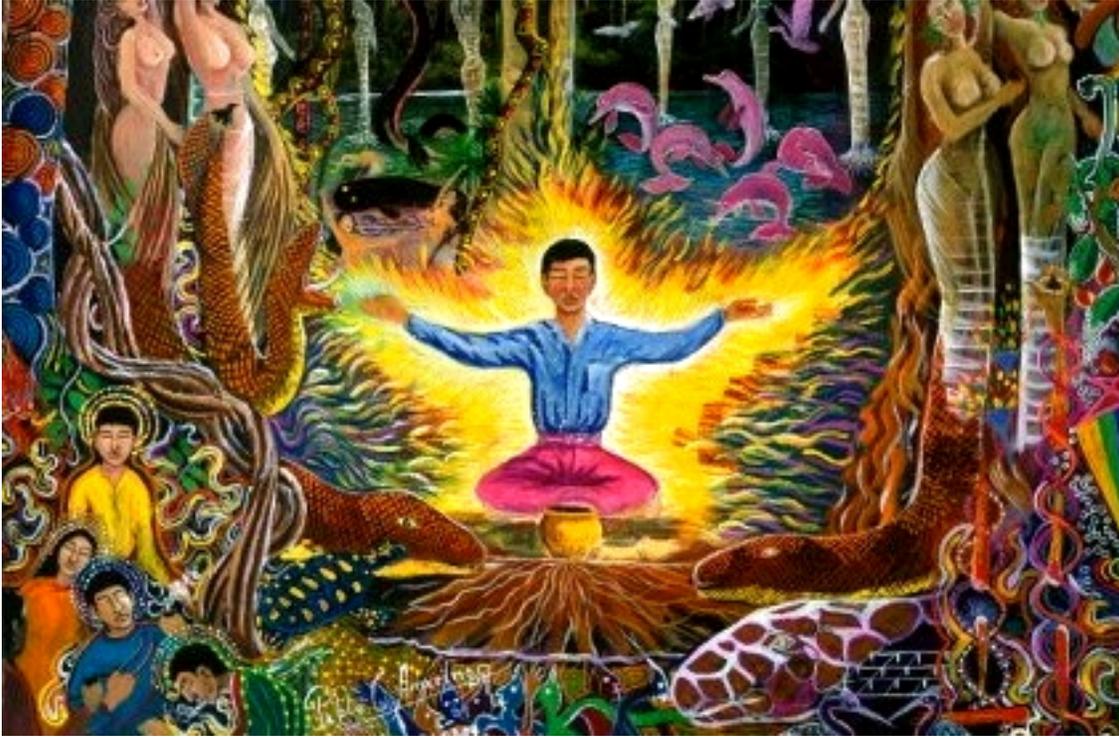


Disease

There is a groundswell of interest in the use of psychedelics for psychotherapy, and I really object to this. These are transformative medicines that are abused when their use is limited to psychology's main goal of returning people to normal. I have this problem with psychologists in general: they are not trained and they are not selected to support change but rather to restrain it.

One of psychedelic's main purposes is to teach people that medicines are not necessary. In this, I take a very Buddhist stance: changes of mind are best achieved through mind alone. Psychedelics expand the mind, but they do so as a can opener. They can bust open a stuck lock, but the world that's revealed is the real world, not a hallucination. To rely on a medicine to maintain health is to become a drug addict, which, in the case of psychedelics, is worse than having taken no medicine at all.

Consider love and harmony. The process of learning these seems to involve strife and war. Strife and war certainly have the potential to be transformative learning experiences, but how many people learn? The Western approach follows the lines of "onward Christian soldiers," the Eastern approach advises a retreat to contemplation. In our struggle for inner love and harmony, how are we to use psychedelics?



Love and Harmony

If you don't know what you're looking for, you're not going to find it. Here is the crucial point that applies to psychedelics: you only learn what's within reach and, most of the time, only you can be the judge of what that means. This is the essence of having a path; a path is the steps that lead forward.

There is a benefit to understanding the terrain, but terrain is not your destination. The terrain stands between you and where you want to go. The trouble is, there is a lot more terrain than there are correct paths through it. We do need to explore the terrain, but not to focus on it.

Most people spend their whole lives stuck in the terrain. They not only don't make their way through it, but they lose their way in trying, if they ever did. They are lost in the terrain, and this is just what Dante was saying in *The Divine Comedy*: people are stuck in purgatory.

How do you know if you're stuck in purgatory, and how do you know if you know enough of the territory to charge off looking for your own direction? These are questions about not knowing, not questions about knowing, and they're answered by looking at the questions they foster, not the answers provided to you.

The surest way to finding answers is to spend time focusing on questions. Searching for answers does not reveal them, but exploring questions does. If there is an exact path to where you want to go, then follow it. It gets you there in only the simplest cases, like learning to drive a car or cook a hamburger. These are important skills, but they're not indicative of what we spend our lives looking for.

Get rich quick--or get enlightened quick--schemes offer wealth and happiness with a prescription that's like cooking a hamburger. These are invariably schemes in which you are what's eaten, not the

eater. I'm reminded of *Twilight Zone* episode 89, "How To Serve Man," in which visitors from another planet carried a book advertised as the directions for redeeming humanity. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a cookbook.



Serve Yourself

Much of what we accept as wisdom has been taken from this cookbook: money, medicines, corporate democracy, and patriotism just to name a few. What about psychedelics?

The answer to that lies more in the questions you ask than the answers you're looking for. If you think psychedelics are going to serve you, then it's more likely that you're on the menu. If you think they're the silver bullet in making an end-run around your problems, then you're shooting yourself in the foot.

Psychedelics can be a light in the dark territory, but home is not right around the corner. They offer direction for training, not a trophy of success. There is real work to do, and psychedelics can be a road sign out of purgatory. You still need to do the walking and the thinking.

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