



Preparing for a Psychedelic Experience: Grounding

The first steps in understanding yourself and learning to control your intentions and resilience.

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“The greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to oneself.”
— **Michel de Montaigne**

Significant Change

Inspiration is the motivation for significant change. Significant change is change you do not otherwise know how to make unless inspired. You need to be inspired in order to make significant change.

Not all circumstances require significant change, and even for those that do a small change can be the right kind of change to start with. These days, I’m thinking along the lines of disruption. Significant changes are disruptive. Psychonauts are ready for disruptive change. Insignificant change is not disruptive. Most people in business or family circumstances are searching for nondisruptive change.

Significant change involves unknowns. You may see it first as attractive or unattractive depending on what's motivating you. Usually greater attractions or repulsions arise in the process of considering this kind of change, or when you get closer to it. One expects disruptive change to require an investment and some risk.

Most people expect non-disruptive change to be inexpensive and low risk. To the extent you are risk averse you will be disruption averse and, as a consequence, less likely to engage, attract, accept, or involve yourself with significant change.

A group can't be inspired and a group can't be inspiring. Groups provide motivation and direction. I hope that those in this group can find the inspiration they need, but they may not need inspiration, they may only need motivation. Think change as a two-step process: first you find motivation, then you find inspiration.



The Psychedelic Experience

There are psychedelic chemicals and there are psychedelic experiences. Ingesting the chemicals triggers the experiences, but you can have the experiences without the chemicals.

Chemicals induce generally similar kinds of experiences in different people, but each person's experience is unique. As with a ride in an amusement park, the scope, range, and duration of your experience will be set by the chemical, though each person's sensitivity will differ.

The psychedelic experience you manifest yourself, without the use of chemicals, is a matter of skill and practice, but such experiences are definitely possible and they can be just as extreme and life changing. There are many ways to generate your own psychedelic experiences and different kinds of psychedelic experiences. One part of the skill is knowing how to generate them, and another part of the skill lies in learning how to integrate them.

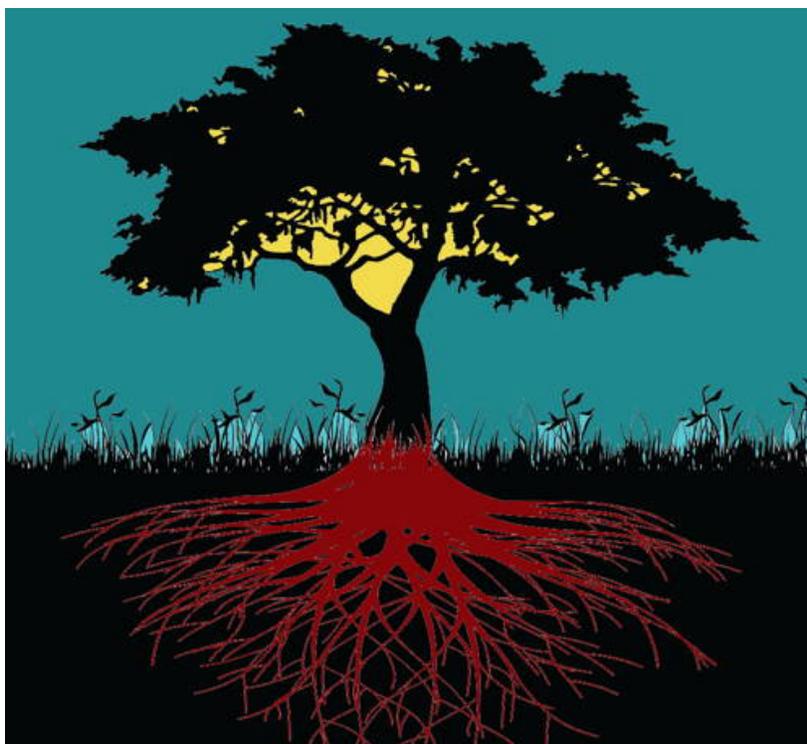
Regardless of their origin, psychedelic experiences involve the same components and the same opportunities. They consist of the components of your mind, and they offer the opportunity to rebuild, rearrange, or reinvent yourself. Whatever their origin, they are disruptive.

Preparing for a psychedelic experience is preparing for disruption. This is quite different from how one prepares to execute a plan, engage in a project, or achieve a goal. You can have a plan, project, or goal, and one of the techniques encourages this, but achieving them cannot be your main objective. If you do have goals, then your objective will be to test them not complete them.

Whether you do or do not have a plan or goal the psychedelic experience will enlarge you, add new forces, and bring forward new voices from inside you. Your goal is to make room for a larger experience. To make these new energies welcome and to stabilize yourself so that you are not upset by their appearance. You want to find in yourself the kind of flexibility that will enable you to become a larger person who is able to incorporate in yourself some of these energies when the experience is over.

If you imagine yourself as a boat and the psychedelic experience as a storm, then preparing for the experience involves carefully going throughout your boat and making sure everything is secure and prepared. If you have a goal, then you'll want to clarify that goal but your overriding goal will always be preservation.

Unlike a storm at sea, the psychedelic experience will bring novelty. It may bring gifts and it may bring things that you don't want. The only object in surviving a storm is to come out of it the same as you went into it. In contrast, surviving a psychedelic experience is to expect transformation. You don't want to come out the same, you want to come out better.



Five Points for Change

The game is finding the lines along which the problem separates. You want parts that are independent enough to think about separately. Being reductive means separating things that are not really separate in order to better understand how each part works. You can also work to improve each part separately.

At any point, you can reconnect the parts to work with the whole, or take them apart again. It's just like meditation: separate your thoughts, explore your thoughts, put them back together again.

It is usually the case that your initial attempts at breaking the problem down fail because you haven't separated things right. You find yourself working with thoughts and feelings that are too interconnected to have any independence, and when this is the case, you quickly sense conflicts and complexities.

You can break things down in ways that are specific to your life and we naturally do this. Here, I want a general way to break things down that will apply to everyone. Because this system is more general it is less familiar. It's not the way you naturally think of yourself. It's like an old map that describes the psychological terrain of your life before you subdivided your life into issues, peoples, and personalities.

There are several ways to break these five points into two groups, either according to mind and body, or active and passive, or conscious and unconscious. First consider the five groups; then we'll consider them from different perspectives.

Conscious Mind

The conscious mind is your identity, volition, and thoughts. This is often verbal and reasonable though it also experiences fear and emotion. It feels like your conscious mind has free will even though you don't know where this free will is coming from.

Unconscious Mind

The unconscious mind consists of your habits, preconceptions, and reflex actions. Your unconscious is reactive and these reactions are built into you. You can change the actions of your unconscious mind if you work on them ahead of time, but, in the moment, you are subject to them and react according to their direction.

Subconscious Mind

The subconscious is the machinery that exists below your conscious mind. It consists of your memories and associations, your genetic predisposition, your heritage, and your lower and higher powers such as they are. Some people channel their subconscious through nonverbal expression. Others dissociate from their subconscious so that direction from their subconscious emerges to take them over through attitudes, actions, and moods they can't control. And still others—perhaps most of us most of the time — are unaware of their subconscious and behave as if it didn't exist.

Assertive body

Your assertive body is your active, physical body and its actions represent the things it needs and does: all the organs, the joints and muscles, and the skills you've built into them. This would include your ability to perform in art, music, or athletics, or, more modestly, how you do or don't exercise.

Your mind is not separate from your body. In considering it separately, we accept that there are connections between the two. Your assertive body is your need for movement, action, food, and comfort and there are mental aspects to these physical needs.

For the purpose of finding stability, we're thinking of the active body as system that has certain needs and responds to certain forces. Accommodating the active body means improving the tone and comfort of these systems. It means being attentive to your physical needs and maintaining a mental connection with the pains and pleasures of your body.

Receptive body

The receptive body is the important and elusive middle ground between the cerebral and the physical. It is your resting state of focus, attention, frequency, and resonance. It is the currents in your body and the pulse in each of your systems. I think our receptive body is our most pervasive, ever present, subtle, accessible, and overlooked aspect of ourselves.

Just as the atom is mostly empty space and our body is 60% water, similarly, most of our consciousness resides in our receptive body. It is the tension that holds every aspect of you together. It is your ready and relaxed awareness, the ground on which your consciousness is built.



Grounding

Grounding sounds simple because it involves doing very little, but it is a difficult goal because everything it requires must be in place before you attempt it. Being grounded is like running a well tuned machine. If the machine is well tuned, then there's nothing required except to run it. If the machine is not well tuned, then every out of tune component must be adjusted and, in a highly interconnected system such as us, that could mean all the systems.

The purpose of the five points for change is the proposal that each of these five points must be grounded and ready for change. Any goal or objective that you have must involve each of these five systems. They all must be prepared and you must have some awareness of each of them.

This is not to say that you must be a master of all aspects of yourself, rather that you must have a connection to all aspects of yourself. And most likely, whatever aspect to which you are poorly connected will make its presence known in a psychedelic experience.

Because we have begun with a verbal approach, the first step is to verbally understand the five points for change. Each of these points has some story in the context of each of the others. That is, there is a conscious story that can be told about each point, and we have started that. Each point has its own integrity and one can view oneself from each of the five points.

For example, if the five points represent your whole self, then there is a view of your whole self that will emerge from your subconscious. You will meet this in your dreams. There is a view of your whole

self that exists in your body. You will meet this in intense physical activity that overwhelms your other senses. This is called being “in the zone” and it happens in situations of extreme activity and concentration.

Your conscious mind is designed to be the coordinator. It isn’t especially insightful or well-connected to these other four points, but it is connected to each and it is the most connected with your environment. It is the most effective of the five in predicting the near-term future and, as such, it offers you the greatest protection in a threatening world.

Your conscious mind is not the best coordinator of change. Its primary task is stability and protection both of which are contrary to change. The kind of grounding that you need for change will not be what your conscious mind prefers, and this is why you need to develop a greater connection to the other points of change.

We are effectively doing a form of yoga that is designed for, or can be seen from each of these points. Consider these five “yogas” as separate practices, each designed to increase flexibility, strength, and balance.

Mindfulness is balancing and attuning your conscious mind,

Regression is reviewing situations that led to your unconscious programming,

Dreaming is exploring and inviting your subconscious to participate,

Exercise enables you to increase your physical body’s flexibility and endurance,

Neural training enables you to improve, balance, and tune your passive body.

Grounding yourself for a psychedelic experience involves preparing each of these five aspects for change. That means improving each and improving the connections between them. The psychedelic experience is, in its essence, a release of your conscious control and a direct and democratic encounter with all of these systems simultaneously.

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