



Permission

What really changes in an unusual experience.

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“If you are not willing to risk the unusual, you will have to settle for the ordinary.”
— **Jim Rohn**

As a therapist and psychonaut, I observe that while psychedelics permit you, they do not enable you. They open doors, but they don't build the stairs. The stairs are experiences your mind, body, and spirit

are ready to undertake. Psychedelics give you access to perceptions, insights, and memories, but your ability to see and understand depends on what you're ready to know.

On the one hand this sounds obvious; on the other hand it's a mystery. How do you learn to understand now, something that you could not understand before? How do you now appreciate an idea that was previously beyond your understanding?

To some extent, you may see a new logic, but this is not what we generally associate with a psychedelic experience. We expect a revelation. We expect to see something we never saw before, or conceive of things we never before imagined. We're looking for something like revelation.



Experience

I recall an experience during a ceremony with ayahuasca in which I was mentally exploring a richly decorated cave. As the cavern grew larger, its textures grew more detailed and more layered.

At some point, I went past the limits of what I could previously see or feel. I had the impression of grasping countless layers of detail. Unlike normal vision in which we shift our focus from one point to another, I was seeing all points at once. I experienced a kind of infinity of detail and extent.

I could not describe the experience then or now. I could not maintain a sense of separate identity while, at the same time, feeling a direct perception of infinite depth and structure. All I could say to myself that made any sense at the time, and would have meaning later, was "I will remember."

Now, years later, I remember having seen or felt something that I could not describe. I recall a kind of postcard vision of what I saw, but I cannot remember what I experienced. I experienced something outside the limits of what we've learned is possible, and I have nothing I can compare it with.



Revelation

It is the history of saints and seers that revelation does not come unbidden. Revelation involves some degree of release from what you know, and a breaking open into novelty. It does not come from nowhere.

Revelation usually comes as the result of concentration, hard work, struggle, and hardship. A pill may reveal new knowledge to you, but, if you're going to bring that back into your "normal" life, you'll need a context in which to place it.

The novelty may sound attractive; abandoning of your limits is the important step. If a psychedelic experience is going to offer you a new truth, then are you ready to abandon what you know in order to accept it? What are you ready for?

I remember climbing sheer mountains alone and unroped. I remember jumping out of an airplane. I remember scuba diving experiences that required getting a better grip. These were dramatic encounters that required changes of mind to enter and execute.

The physical nature of these situations made their unusual demands easier to see. Extreme situations can bring clarity. But there are situations in everyday life that require extreme changes of mind but which do not make their requirements clear. Self-love comes to mind.

Without self-love you cannot find or sustain love for others, and this is a hard and fast rule. Yet, it is difficult to recognize the lack of self-love or find a path to it. It's easier to comprehend the ascent of a mountain than to see the creation of a new relationship that requires a skill you don't have. The mountain will tell you much of what you need to know if you pay attention to it. How can you make your struggles and frustrations do the same?

Presentation

Consider a psychedelic experience like a volcano. The day is bright, and the sky is blue. You take the chemical and the earth begins to shake. Above you, atop the hill on which you've lived all your life, blooms a roiling, black, and rapidly expanding cloud of flying rocks and lightning. You have five minutes to gather in your arms all that's dear to you and flee. All that's left behind will be destroyed. Are you ready for this? And if you are ready for this, then why does it take a volcano to get you started?

Perhaps I'm being over dramatic. Most of my psychedelic experiences have been inclusive and positive. The dark and difficult journeys I've had happened without drugs. These psychological explorations were precipitated by brute force, isolation, deprivation, and meditation. You certainly do not need a chemical to venture into the unknown.

Such self-induced experiences are definitely possible, and they are life changing. The experience of trauma and sickness are the most common. We usually don't see these as opportunities, but we should. Trauma is like a bad trip, but "bad" is relative. Things happen for a reason.

As a therapist, most of my clients are struggling to some extent. Their lives have become a "bad trip," yet it is their experience is providing guidance. This is not what anyone is looking for, nor would I prescribe it. Nevertheless, how you respond to what you experience will largely depend on what you're ready for. It will determine what you find.

Transformations involve the same components regardless of their origin. They consist of the components of your mind, and they offer the opportunity to rebuild, rearrange, or reinvent yourself. Whatever their origin, transformations are disruptive.



Disruption

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. There are techniques for approaching transformation that encourages these. But, if transformation is your goal, then fulfilling your plan is not your main objective. Your objective will be to test your goals, not complete them.

The psychedelic experience can enlarge you. It can add new forces, and bring forward new voices from inside you. Make room for a larger experience. Make these new energies welcome. Stabilize yourself so that you are not upset by their appearance. You want to become a larger person so that you can incorporate new energies in yourself when the experience is over.

Judgement is a matter of intention, it is your commitment to engage. Judgement is not change, it is an obstacle to it. Judgement is your decision not to take the challenge or follow the unfamiliar path.

Good judgement is wise and safe, and foolish judgement is dangerous. We believe this to be true. The psychedelic experience often turns that around. The psychedelic experience permits us to see the wisdom in the risky path.

Can you understand that the wise choice might be dangerous, and that the foolish choice might be ultimately safer? Time and again, I have the feeling that those who fail to engage lack courage.

This begs the question of empathy and kindness. Are we supposed to feel deep things from another's point of view and support them, or are we called upon to contradict their deep feelings? We often need to do the same for ourselves. We choose the attractive path that calls to us and, repeatedly, it is the wrong one.

Here is what psychedelics can do that you won't do: they can force you to encounter something you would otherwise resist. This does not have to be a "bad trip," but there's a good chance it will be at some point, or that it may be in some respect. How will you respond? How do you respond in normal consciousness when you're forced to do what you don't want to do?



The Crucible

I've accepted the role of victim in many situations in my life. In these situations I accepted what I didn't want in order to explore what I did. Many otherwise successful people who are stalled in their development seem unable to do this. We say they are not sufficiently humble. I say they are not sufficiently courageous, but it's a strange sort of courage. It's not the kind of courage that you can puff up your chest and walk into.

My first reaction is to look back on these situations with regret. The deeper question is whether something new can be made from these experiences. This is the challenge: can you act against your better judgement and then, at some point, change what you see in order to discover something new? More than acquiring something new this requires letting something go.

Here is the enigma of tough love. Before you can have tough love you must first have love. Before you can lovingly be tough on yourself you have to love yourself. Before you can have a positive, transformative, psychedelic experience you must have guidance through conflict.

Guidance

Guidance is different from commitment, though you must have that too. Guidance is a germ of wisdom, and thread of experience. It is a link to something that you trust or believe. Something that will give you the courage and commitment to enter an experience that your normal judgement does not endorse.

I know many people who ascribe guidance to gods, saints, or saviors. If this guidance is taught to them, then it is false. The guidance of others will not carry you through the turnstile of commitment. These are tools of spiritual bypassing. All of the evil people I know are pious.

Real guidance speaks softly, so softly you will have trouble hearing it. It does not direct you, it supports you. Guidance does not direct you to climb a mountain or jump out of an airplane, it provides support for what you need to do. Real guidance suggests to you that commitment may be the door to your transformation, but it does not command you to take it.

The invitation will most likely appear uncomfortable, perhaps horrible. The transition will most likely be a crucible. I would like to tell you otherwise and, to some extent, I sell my services as a therapist on the basis that I will make the transition more comfortable. However, even in this therapeutic context, my role is to convince you to commit to the transformative experience.

The transition will be uncomfortable, perhaps extremely uncomfortable. Courage, then, is the ability to experience the uncomfortable without discomfort. To be in that world without being of it. This is possible. It is part of commitment. I have done it in some situations. It can be done safely. That's the goal.

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