



Psychedelic-assisted Coaching, Part III

Guarding a doorway carries more responsibility than just keeping watch.

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“There are things known and there are things unknown,
and in between are the doors of perception.”

— **Aldous Huxley**

In part I of this series, I distinguished therapy from coaching. In part II I considered the different views of change seen from the point of view of therapy or coaching.

I had meant to focus this installment on the application of psychedelics, but instead I will explore psychedelics' cautions and promise. There is a lack of understanding of safety in what is being said in the press.

The critical difference between psychedelics and pharmaceuticals is that the effect of psychedelics is unpredictable. That's because psychedelics act primarily on the mind and not the metabolism, and that will always be the case.

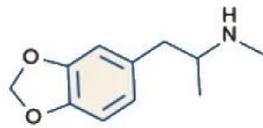
People interested in psychedelics must understand how they are affected by them, more so than is the case with pharmaceuticals. They have a greater responsibility in educating themselves. Whether or not using psychedelics is right for you should be a personal decision, not the decision of a doctor or therapist.

Cautions

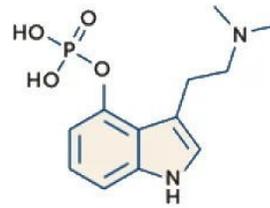
In the current legal environment, psychedelics remain illegal. It may be unsafe to buy, possess, or gift psychedelics despite their availability. It may be unsafe to consume psychedelics for chemical reasons as they may affect you in an unusual way, or they may contain additives that are toxic in general or toxic to you in particular. For example, eating uncooked mushrooms is not advised even if they're considered edible.

It may be unsafe for you to consume psychedelics because of psychological reasons, issues outside your control and of which you're unaware. Psychedelics may make you psychologically vulnerable to stressful elements in your environment which you normally ignore.

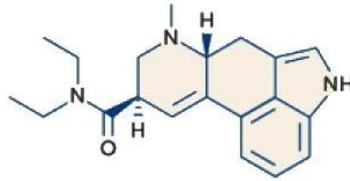
Research the laws in your area. Know your chemicals, and carefully gain first-hand experience. Use multiple sources of information from the psychedelic underground. Check your sources. Educate yourself.



MDMA



Psilocybin



LSD



Ketamine

What Psychedelics Do

Different psychedelics have different effects, and different people react differently to the same substances. There are empathogens, dissociatives, hallucinogens, and entheogens. They have primary and side effects that affect people differently, that depend on dosage, how you administer them, or your particular condition. These differences can occur at different times in the drug experience.

Negative aspects can either be attributed to the chemistry of the drug, their interaction with other drugs, or to the sensitivity of the person experiencing them. Psychedelics differ in their anesthetic or euphoric qualities.

Even substances we consider purely sedative, such as alcohol, can be and are used to enhance or induce ceremonial altered states of mind. My rule in the use of sacraments that I have not prepared myself is to take a smaller dose first, wait an hour, and if I feel good about the effect I'll proceed to a full dose. If there is any pressure to follow other instructions, abandon the ceremony entirely.

If you're interested in the herbology of psychedelics, as I am, be aware that many herbs are toxic. I have learned firsthand, some rather common plants such as grasses can be toxic at different phases of their development. When dealing with raw plants, it's important to not only know the species but also the conditions under which they are collected. Because this isn't possible with many store-bought ingredients, be attentive to the varied effects of the same recipe from ingredients collected under different conditions or from different sources.

The foods you eat and other drugs you take can distort or endanger your health or your experience. I tried adding caffeine to ayahuasca in an effort to counter its soporific effect. The result was painful and I would not do that again. I've found that a day or two of light fasting offers good mental and physical preparation for my psychedelic experiences.

It's claimed that serotonin agonists, which increase the amount of serotonin in your system, can interact with fermented foods with toxic results. In particular, the long-lasting monoamine oxidase (MAO)

inhibition effect of drugs considered efficacious antidepressants can interfere with the effects of DMT, the active chemical in ayahuasca. Just as we're unsure of the metabolic effects of neurotransmitters, we're uncertain of the effects of neurotransmitters on metabolism.

When it comes to the effect of psychedelics, much is being said about the importance of "set and setting." The notion of set and setting was emphasized by Timothy Leary in the 1960s. This was a time when there was little concern with responsible control or therapeutic effect. Set and setting are again considered paramount now, even though they have never been defined as anything more than what makes you feel good.

Psychedelics weaken the protective role of the ego. Under their effect, you will have less control over your perceptions, weaker powers of judgment, and less resistance to new ideas. This can offer great advantages. However, you will also be more susceptible to anxiety, panic, dysregulation, and arousal. Establishing a positive set and setting may point you in a good direction, but it does not guarantee the nature of your experience.

It is not true that creating positive intentions and establishing a supportive environment will assure a positive experience. I've found that my intentions play little role in determining where my mind goes once it's unleashed. Intentions and physical setting are the domain of your conscious mind; unrecognized issues and forgotten territory are the domain of psychedelic experiences.

Practicing dreamwork is good preparation for many reasons. Dreamwork is more subtle than psychedelic work and it takes more intention, discipline, and attention. When doing dreamwork you will notice that your intentions have little effect on your dreams. They have some, and the manner in which they do is similar to the effect of one's intentions when using psychedelics. Refer to my book [**Becoming Lucid, Self-Awareness in Sleeping & Waking Life: Hypnotic Practice in Lucidity & Dreams**](#) for more details.

Before taking any psychedelic for the first time, be aware that there is a good chance you will not react typically. Your best guide is your own previous experience. It is common that no two experiences will be the same regardless of identical drugs, set, and setting. This supports the idea that it's your state of mind that plays the largest role, and most peoples' state of mind varies. This is more important when taking higher doses.

The worst thing about legalizing psychedelics and certifying therapists to endorse the use of psychedelics is that it will make people believe that psychedelics can be treated like medicine, that their effects are regular, supportive, and predictable.

Therapists are not being adequately taught in the use of psychedelics. Most programs that certify therapists in the use of psychedelics don't even require the therapist to have any experience with the substances or any experience working with their own or other people's altered realities.

The effects of psychedelics are not regular, supportive, or predictable. That is the source of their great value. They destabilize and rearrange your mind, potentially doing what a person needs in a given situation. In doing that, they offer great potential but their effect cannot be guaranteed.



Four Types

Consider four major properties of psychedelics. Empathogens enhance emotional connection, emotional attention, and sensitivity. They could have positive effects on people who are disconnected from other people or from their own emotions.

Dissociatives create insensitivity to sensation, separation from your identity, loss of memory, or a combination of all three. Your mind does not operate well in a vacuum; states of emptiness create anxiety. What arises in place of one's normal mind can be divine or hellacious. Dissociatives can have the strongest of mental effects.

Hallucinogens distort perceptions. There is the mistaken idea that all psychedelics are hallucinogens and their effects are visionary, but this is not the case. At a basic level, hallucinatory effects can be sensory, cognitive, or emotional. Psychedelic art is primarily visual but the psychedelic experience is not. You can make a correspondence with art whose effect on you depends on how you understand it. Temporary distortions alone don't have lasting value.

Entheogenic is a term that was coined to mean "to create a divine experience," and some psychedelics have a reputation for doing this. Taken in the right dose, setting, and through the right means the effects of mescaline, psilocybin, and dimethyltryptamine (DMT) have entheogenic effects.

There is an unclear line between heaven and purgatory that seems to be as inscrutable as the experience itself. Positive experiences are not limited to positive people under positive circumstances. Chris Bache, an ostensibly positive religious scholar, carefully orchestrated over 70 high-dose LSD experiences that repeatedly took him to hell. He writes about these experiences in his 2019 book, "[LSD and the Mind of the Universe: Diamonds from Heaven](#)," which he discusses in this [YouTube interview](#).

Therapists and clinicians are trying to learn how to mitigate negative side effects by creating safe and supportive environments, screening for vulnerable mental conditions, and providing medical support. We know little of the interaction of psychedelics with other systems in the body because psychedelics act directly on the brain and indirectly on the body's metabolism.

We're not sure what psychedelics are doing chemically and we're completely ignorant of the mechanisms by which they affect the mind. We know more about how hormones affect the mind. I've heard from people who have taken massive doses of LSD to no effect, and other people who have psychedelic experiences from placing a drop of DMT-containing ayahuasca on their skin.

Once you have become familiar with a psychedelically altered state of mind, it's possible to return to that state with little help. This is not only true for psychedelics, it's true for therapy and meditation as well. It's also true that training your brain to be more electrically flexible will make you more sensitive to pharmacological effects. Psychedelics take us into the irreducible realm of body-mind interaction.

If you're seriously interested in psychedelic work, then you will gain useful insight and control by developing your facility in controlling your mind in other extenuating circumstances. I have explored meditation, dreamwork, ceremony, therapy, brain training, and physical endurance. All of these lead to altered states of mind and opportunities to control, learn from, and explore the mind.

You don't need to go to extremes, anything you do can offer deep opportunities for exploring your subconscious. In particular, art, music, science, family, and relationships can all take you to and beyond the limits of your conscious territory. All of these separately and in combination can potentiate the psychedelic experience.

Our Minds' Work

Rumination seems to be a human trait. The attention of most animals seems to drifts from one environmental trigger to another with an underlying obsession for food, sex, sleep, anxiety, or aggression. Humans would behave more animal-like if our environments were less controlled, but as it is, our environments are controlled and we are obsessive thinkers. I don't mean to say we're deep thinkers but that we think all the time. Most of the time we're shallow thinkers, but even thinking trivial thoughts is no small matter.

When a problem arises, it draws our attention at many levels and it does this without us having to think about it. We will naturally apply pattern matching to identify the problem and recognize its elements. We'll do this even if the problem is largely irrelevant. Just as our visual cognition intuitively tries to identify whatever seems to be the active agent in our field of vision, our intellect tries to understand what we're seeing, and our emotions try to evaluate for us each scene's personal import.

Where a dog might see something and wonder what it smells like and if it's edible, when we see something a slew of mental processes begin. The more importance we assign to what we see, the more connections we make and the longer the experience stays in our mind.

Long after the dog has moved to the next lamppost, we may still be thinking about something that caught our attention. Let our obsessions with food, sex, sleep, anxiety, and aggression remind us that our free will is limited and we still operate instinctively.



What is Your Problem?

The reason there are so many models for therapy is because none of them amount to much. The most effective therapists use their intuition and no method at all. The reason for so many therapeutic methods is the large number of therapists who don't have any intuition and the large number of people looking for help.

A person does learn to use their intuition with experience, but we cannot teach it. Different therapies are like different card games, all of which ultimately rely on memory. Unfortunately, methods become ingrained and most therapists believe they know something special. They take credit according to their method instead of giving credit to the client who figured something out.

A clue to how we fix things is hidden in the multiple angles from which we approach a problem. We fix things by putting ideas together; it's the person, their ideas, and their thoughts that arrive at a solution. All that a therapist, coach, counselor, or consultant does is enlarge, amplify, and encourage this process. Doing this isn't obvious and it's not encapsulated by any method, it's an intuitive process.

Problems are like puzzles; they require figuring out. Personal problems are hidden puzzles that result from failing to understand or recognize a need. Personal problems usually arise from failing to recognize and, consequently, approaching the wrong problem. Brute force or complex arrangements

solve some problems, but the best solutions are hardly solutions at all. They are new understandings in which the problem does not arise.

Most of our problems result from our attempts to recreate problematic situations. Problems are distilled opportunities in a way that's similar to the way games are exercises in thinking. It's often in those areas where we're weak that problems arise, and the problems that arise reflect what we need to learn.

Enter the therapist, counselor, or coach. They may have a method or they may not, it doesn't matter much. The most these people have to offer is another way of thinking. It might involve a template of rearranged thoughts, a rebuilding of your impacted emotions, or a reflection of your own confusion. They provide an echo chamber and it's what you hear, not what they say, that has value.

An Opportunity

Here is where psychedelics work and where I'll begin the next installment. The psychedelic is a different kind of echo chamber, an echo chamber that's inside your mind. The counselor's method plays little role because social talk and interpersonal behavior take place in the outside world. Little of what's said makes it into your head, and especially little of any formula that's part of a method.

Skilled counselors don't talk to you or at you, they talk inside you and they do that because they resonate with your being. I believe a person can learn to be a counselor if you leave the social world of pretense and protocol. Ulysses did this on his voyage through the Mediterranean, it took him ten years. I did this in my brushes with death, explorations in foreign cultures, and altered states of mind, and it's taken me fifty years.

No person ever "does" anything to another. You can be a doorkeeper and you can offer your insight. This is the way Virgil helped Dante explore the underworld. That being said, babysitting another person's psychedelic experience without having insight into it does not fulfill the doorkeepers' role.

In my next installment of this series, I'll talk about what a doorkeeper can do to play an active role.

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