

NeuroGnostics: Gathering Knowledge From The Heart of The World

Joshua Paquette — March 2017

The tigers of wrath are
wiser than the horses of instruction.

— William Blake



In a distant land a king and queen bore three daughters, the most beautiful of which was Psyche. Everyone adored her, so much so that Aphrodite, the goddess of love, began to notice. “That bitch! Everyone is so enamored with her they are forgetting to worship *me!*” (*an interesting side of love, huh?*) Resentment grew inside Aphrodite until one day she ordered her son Eros (Amor) to find Psyche and shoot an arrow at her that would force her to fall in love with a vile man. Eros reluctantly traveled and searched and finally found Psyche among her two sisters, and setting his eyes on her he fell immediately into a deep, infatuated love. Deciding that he could not obey his mother, Aphrodite, he shot an arrow at Psyche that cast her under a spell of love for he himself, Eros.

For years, Psyche lived in a dreamy state of delusion. Each day she spent adrift in soft melancholy, waiting for her lover to visit under the light of the moon. Each night, Eros would arrive and make passionate love with her. There was only one agreement: Psyche could never — under any circumstance — see her lover’s face.

Sooner or later, Psyche’s sisters began to call bullshit.

“Who *is* this man you say you are in love with!?”

“You’ve never seen his face!”

Psyche countered, “It doesn’t matter! He’s such a good lover!”

Unsatisfied with that answer, Psyche’s sisters urged her — just once while he is fast asleep — to light a lamp and catch a glimpse.

“And be ready with a knife in case that bastard is a monster!”

Pondering and apprehensive, Psyche considered her sisters’ advice, “*Maybe they’re right. Who is this man whom I adore? If he really loved me, why would he hide his face?*” The following night, she resolved, “*I will discover who he is.*”

Under the darkness of the nascent moon, Psyche awoke. Carefully lighting a lamp and ready with a knife, she gazed upon her somnolent lover. Distracted with what she saw, a small drop of oil fell from the lamp, burning his shoulder.

Wings stirring and startled, Eros opened his eyes and at once was horrified. “You broke the agreement! Aphrodite will be pissed! It’s all over, you’re done for now!” He tore out the window. The sinking spell that was cast upon Psyche lifted as she realized what had transpired and what she had done.



What is consciousness? Who has it?

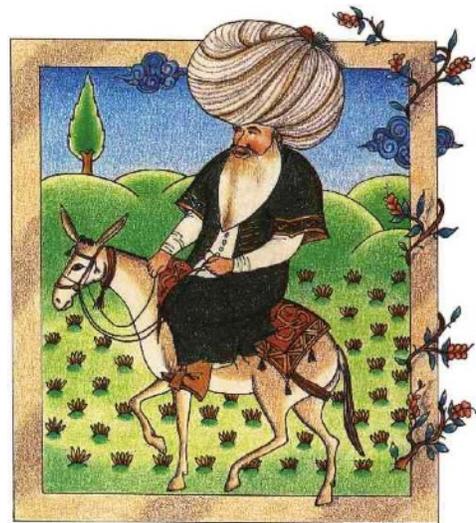
The word *conscious* stems from the Latinized form of Greek, *skhizo-*, which meant "to split, cleave, part, separate."¹ In consciousness we have *con*, with + *scio*, cutting. The words *science*, *schism*, *incise* and *decide* all share the same radix. To be conscious is to separate, deduce, pick apart, understand — different from the spiritual notions of “oneness” and “nirvana” where the individual is lost in a unified sky without separation, different from the divine light experience or the end of duality.

¹ Online Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=schizo-&allowed_in_frame=0, accessed March 2017

To the ancient Greeks, becoming fully human meant growing downward. The Spirit wants to fly upward and merge with the peak of the mountain; the Soul desires to sink into the fecund valley and separate into the myriad forms of matter. To grow downward means to inhabit the body, to incarnate, to resist the constant urge of Icarus with his wax wings flying too close to the sun.

We all have an urge to understand. *Know thyself* was the ancient proclamation at the Oracle of Delphi in the 8th century BC. To attain this knowledge is the most difficult of all, for to know ourselves means also to know our shadows; when walking towards the sun they remain behind us. We are all unconscious. The unconscious is not a place or a state, it is a constant reality. *I am unconscious*. The unknown radiates outwards from the edge of our awareness. As the lake of knowledge accumulates, so does the shoreline of ignorance.

The great Sufi master Mullah Nasruddin was on his hands and knees searching for something under a streetlamp. A man saw him and asked, "What are you looking for?" "My house key," Nasruddin replied. "I lost it." The man joined him in looking for the key, and after a period of fruitless searching, the man asked, "Are you sure you lost it around here?" Nasruddin replied, "Oh, I didn't lose it around here. I lost it over there, by my house." "Then why," the man asked, "are you looking for it over here?" "Because," Nasruddin said, "This is where the light is."



It is precisely at this threshold — between the conscious and the unconscious — where we become, where we are born anew to each moment, where the divine tapestry is woven and unwoven. To become fully human means to inhabit a body, and to inhabit a body requires that we become conscious of our unconsciousness.



Psyche is trapped precisely by the spell of her unconsciousness. There is something dreamy about it, comfortable. She teaches that it is important to sit in the unknown, sometimes for years, and that it's okay to *not know*. Not-knowing is a form of brooding — sitting on an egg. Patience increases the heat. The slow gestation of a problem or an idea simmers and distills its essence. Those moments of clarity that come after a bout of ambiguity, then, will have lasting impact for they've been cooked long enough. They will display subtlety and refinement and will be exact like the tip of a knife. And it's *Psyche's* knife that cuts away the dross. In this instance we see that discernment brings an awareness of quality. Not whether a thing is well-made or not, but an aesthetic attunement to character or disposition. The word *character* meant “an engraved mark or etching,” including that of initiation scars, and also a “symbol or imprint on the soul.”² It's in our ability to cut that gives us our character. Or it's how we've been cut, the quality of the cutting, and from what part of the cloth and how sharp the knife. The image gets stronger when we find that *psyche* to the Greeks also meant “soul” or “animating spirit” and “butterfly,” the latter suggesting an association with chrysalises.³ The Tibetans have an image for this type of power in the idea of the *vajra sword*, which can be described loosely as “cutting cleanly.” The more *vajra* energy one can embody the more spiritual power one can contain. Kali Ma and Baba Yaga are two figures from mythology that manifest this power as does the witch in fairy tales, and all three are carriers of birth and death. The *pharmakon*, the remedy, is both poison and cure. *Psyche's* knife is a symbol for the urge to understand, the urge to corrupt the naïve white of youth into the full-moon lunar reflectivity of the alchemist's albedo; to make the unconscious conscious through cutting.

Along with the ability to discern comes the ability to see. Here, the quality of light matters — the brighter the light the darker the darkness. *Psyche's* lamp isn't a blinding, thousand-lumen LED torch with rechargeable lithium-ion batteries, it's an oil lamp with a flickering, soft flame. Its nature is closer to moonlight. The shadows it casts are muted and the color is yellowish-white. Flame embodies transience and tending: the wick needs to be trimmed and maintained, it needs to be kept away from drafts, the oil needs occasional refilling and careful attention not to be spilled; the lamp may even need to be lit from the hearth fire (no lighters or matches) — it's alive.

² Online Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=character, accessed March 2017

³ Online Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=psyche, accessed March 2017

To venture into the unknown and become acquainted with it, Psyche suggests that it is best to go into the darkness without much, as Wendell Berry offers in his short poem “To Know the Dark.”⁴

To go into the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

The seeing found in darkness is a type of reflective knowing of outward things. Sunlight blinds the view. Why do words mean more when read at night?⁵ Why does a room become more intimate when lit with candles? And why, after, when the wax remains of that light linger, is there a different feeling in the room than when turning off the florescent buzz overhead or the obnoxious flashing of the television or smart phone screen? Obscurity offers a vessel to expand in and encourages the threshold of unknowing to waver outward. It allows consciousness to grow into the unconscious. With the darkness, the lamp, and the knife, there is a dance of limbo and insight, a playful movement of malleable edges. Spirit and Soul, oneness and individuality, brightness and shadows come folded together — a spiraling *rotātiō*.



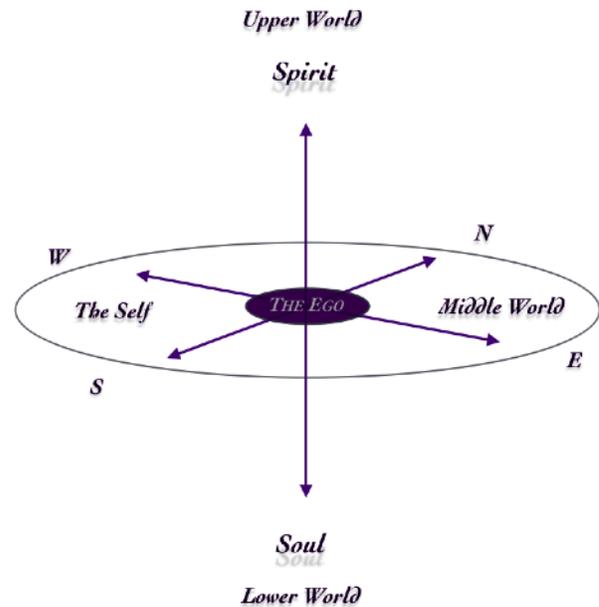
Robert Bly once noted that after World War II we in the west began to lose our sense of aesthetic unity — *eros* and *ethos* — the love and care inherent in things. Buildings gradually displayed less character and charm, up went increasingly the sky scrapers and tall glass sentinels of our modern cities. Schools, libraries and public buildings went from creaking hardwood floors, mysterious nooks and cathedral ceilings to clean lines, rubber baseboard, and central heating. Modern and post-modern architecture might display abrupt angles and tidiness, but it lacks soul. Or its soul is machine-like, cold, and sterile.

It can be said the the state of a culture’s outer world reflects its inner, and so the loss of soul, love, and care in the things of the world suggests an inner lack of substance. *Anima mundi* to

⁴ Wendell Berry, “To Know the Dark” in *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry* (Counterpoint, 1999).

⁵ Gregory Alan Isakov, “Words” in *The Empty Northern Hemisphere* (2009).

the ancient Greeks meant the “soul of the world,” or the “animation of mundane things” — and suggested that the world itself was alive and so all of the things in it. The individual soul was a microcosm of the world soul; as above, so below. In this way, outward attunement to the aesthetic qualities of things lends inner awareness and nuance to our emotions, states, psychic patterns, habitual ruts, and to the whims and movements of our inner lives.



Anima mundi implies verticality. For the past hundred years or so we’ve been seeking a type of horizontal fortitude that has begotten a sibling society,⁶ where we rarely look upwards to our elders, teachers, ancestors, or to Spirit, and even more rarely look downwards into Soul, to the personal muse, innate genius, or instinctive darkness. We now primarily look sideways, to peers. Lacking verticality means also that youth are lacking initiation. A law enforcement officer in Baltimore speaking of troubled teens once said, “Our gang youth is made up of boys who not only don’t have an adult male to look up to, they’ve never met one.” The trouble is, peer groups cannot initiate each other. Initiation requires elders; it seeks guidance in verticality. The startling lack of elders in our modern culture means our youth lack safe containers or outlets for their burgeoning life force. As such, hormone-driven escapades can explode into violence or turn inwards into self-destruction and suicide. According to the Center for Disease Control, in 2013 in the United States, suicide was the third leading cause of death among persons aged 10-14, and second among those aged 15-34.⁷

A mentor for many, Paul Bergner taught nutrition at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado for a number of years. Naropa is a Buddhist university founded by the controversial renegade Trungpa Rinpoche in 1974 and remains in operation today. Trungpa was known for his “crazy wisdom” antics, unconventionality, and his alcohol and drug use.⁸ Many students that attend

⁶ Robert Bly, *The Sibling Society* (Penguin Books Ltd; New Ed edition, 1997).

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [Online]. (2013, 2011) National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC (producer). Available from <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>.

⁸ Geoffrey D. Faulk, *Stripping the Gurus: Sex, Violence, Abuse and Enlightenment* (Million Monkey Press, Toronto, Ontario, 2009).

Naropa come with or develop interests in psychedelics, meditation, yoga and the arts. Paul's experience at Naropa and also from more than thirty years of teaching elsewhere exposed him to the phenomenon that many people lack the ability to observe critically the world around them. One day he asked his students, who were herbalists interested in plants, "You arrive here each day passing underneath a tree with pinnate, compound leaves and winged fruits. What tree is this?" No one could say. He continued, "Each day many of you eat your lunch at a bench outside near two flowering shrubs. Which shrubs are they?" No one could answer. He went on, "How do you expect to take in the heights of the upper worlds or the depths of lower worlds when you cannot grasp with attentiveness the things of *this* world?"

Without *ground state*⁹ calibration we are useless to discover what strong medicines might be doing to us, for us, or against us. Dale Pendell wisely suggests that the mark of a plant ally's conquest is its ability to masquerade its influence as sobriety. The fact that billions of people on earth rise to the sun with the help of xanthene alkaloids is not to be belittled. Caffeine is a strong drug, as anyone who isn't habituated can attest. We take coffee to "sober up" after a night of drinking; we equate alertness, hyper-vigilance and productivity with "health." The short-sighted myopia of our times is encouraged by the effect of stimulants. A friend of mine in her forties jested, "I starting drinking coffee when I was eighteen and haven't missed a day since!" The fact that there are numerous beneficial compounds attributed to caffeine beverages should not distract us from the truth that they are powerful drugs, under the influence of which is not sobriety.

Those cultures we look to for advice on how to initiate our youth were well-imbedded in the world around them. Those peoples that used psychedelic plants, animals, or fungi should not be separated from the deep dreaming love affair they had with the landscapes that sustained them, not only with food and shelter but also with gifts of wisdom and significance. To aboriginal¹⁰ peoples, the natural world literally was the source of their language, rituals, medicine, and sense of mysticism or spirituality. Many vocal tones in jungle cultures are borrowed directly from the feathered language of birds.¹¹ Unequivocally, these cultures believed that the things of the world were alive, animated, infused with numinous and multifarious personified forces, as did the Greeks with their concept of *anima mundi*.¹¹ To these cultures, life was polytheistic and polyphonic, imbued with power.

⁹ Dale Pendell, "Ground State Calibration" in *Pharmako/poia: Plant Powers, Poisons and Herbcraft* (Mercury House, 1995) p.25

¹⁰ "aboriginal" in the broadest sense, not specifically indigenous Australian peoples

¹¹ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (Vintage; 1st Vintage Books Ed edition, February 25, 1997)

Monotheism emerged in the deserts of the Middle East thousands of years ago and it has been argued extensively that the singular and sparse landscape of its birth was the source of its revelation.^{12 13} Was the sun its inspiration? Robert Helweg-Larson suggests:

1. A Forest has abundant resources; a resource dispute can be solved by one party moving away. But the limited resources of a Desert will favor the party that uses violence to control the resources, and the need for violence will favor male power and stratified decision-making. A society dominated by a single powerful male will be more receptive to the idea of the Universe being under the control of a single powerful God.

2. In a Forest, nature has many aspects: trees, rivers, delicious fruits, poisonous fruits, animals you can eat, animals that will eat you, patches of sun, frequent rain, and so on. Nature is diverse, and its gods are diverse. In a Desert, nature is dominated by the sun – omnipresent, all-seeing, harsh, unforgiving, and an easy symbol for the domination of life by a single God.

To blindly negate the merits of monotheism is not the aim. More valuable is to ask, “*What does a monotheistic fantasy of the world do?*” Fantasy is used intentionally, as in images made visible by the imagination, since every concept is but a way of seeing, a lens, a particular means of framing phenomena (in German, “concept” is *begriff*, to grab, grasp, hold, or handle). Even scientific atheism or the economic bottom line are fantasies. Fantasy is not to be equated with falseness.

Monotheism implies a center to the psyche. The singular, male god creator above becomes the consolidated, centralized inner self below. In telling that inner self not to lie, it will obey. In telling that inner self not to masturbate, it will obey — like hell. It was Carl Jung who once wrote, “Every part of yourself that you do not love, regresses and becomes hostile to you.” We must be very careful not to slander the animalic parts of our selves. If we do, sooner or later the Puritans come and begin burning witches. Imagine the neglected inner witch of Puritan priests: repression of the inner feminine may have been forty years in the making for them, and instead of looking within and finding a healing being, a raging Kali figure reared its head, threatening destruction. Indeed, a force to contend with; much easier to burn living women.

¹² Robert Helweg-Larson, *The Gospel According to the Romans* (CreateSpace publishing, 2001).

¹³ Steven Dutch, “Forest People, Desert People”, Natural and Applied Sciences, University of Wisconsin, Greenbay — <http://www.uwgb.edu/dutchs/PSEUDOSC/ForestDesert.htm> — accessed March 2017

“There is a Hitler inside all of us,” Stephen Buhner reminds us, and that inner figure is hoping you pay him little notice. That’s how the savage parts of us gain power, through avoidance. New Age “love and light” spiritualism is a penny glued to a table top, unable to be tossed. Life becomes Fate unless we flip Fortuna’s coin; shadows become stagnant, festering, lurking, uncontrollable. What neurotic hyper-vigilance it takes to keep white clothing stark! — *Alas!* — dirt still clings to it’s edges, bring out the bleach.

The black and white enantiodromia of Puritanism stems from the inability to accept that there is a platoon, a pantheon of beings *out there*, and thus, *in here*. To the ancient Greeks, each person had a number of male and female deities inside them, plus an entire bricolage of demi-gods and goddesses and Virtues to embody, to incarnate into, to question and learn from and engage *with*. Polytheism suggests we are not to embrace one thing — God the Father — rather that we are faceted gems gleaming-enigmatic, crow-bitten, coyote-howling, brimming with innate magic. We *need* the antlered tongue of elk’s bugle stilling our inner ear; we *ache* to be found by moose’s nose sifting through the lily pads. We are part and parcel of this world; *of* it and carried *by* it — *both-and*, not *either/or*.

In the body of the world, they say, there is a soul,
and you are that.

But we have ways within each other
that will never be said by anyone.

— Rumi¹⁴

What if in looking inside our twisted selves we find not a private revelation of God, but a self *among*, in community.¹⁵ Polytheism’s *grand begriff* is just this: *anima mundi*, the world’s soul, is not just inside you, *you* are inside the world’s soul, and as Rilke posits, “inside human beings is where god learns.”¹⁶ As hives and flocks and schools display emergent properties greater than the sum of their parts, we too act as individual sense organs of a greater whole — the many heads of Hydra — peering and particular, multiplying when cut down. Dan Flores in his book

¹⁴ Coleman Barks, *The Essential Rumi* (HarperOne; Reprint edition, 2004).

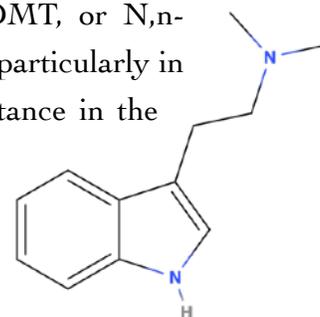
¹⁵ James Hillman and Michael Ventura, *We’ve Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy — And the World is Getting Worse* (HarperOne; Reprint edition, May 14, 1993).

¹⁶ Rainier Maria Rilke, “Just As the Winged Energy of Delight” in *Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke* (Harper Perennial; New edition edition, April 22, 1981).

*Coyote America*¹⁷ describes a peculiar phenomenon: It's dark, moonless, you're by the fire telling stories and laughing. Abruptly you are grabbed by the rising tide of bone-chilling howl and yipping bark; the prairie trickster raps on your ear drums. Fixing and devilish as it may sound, it is not to portend but rather to roll call. "Who's with me? How many of us are here?" If few answer the initiators cry, the mature females in the area shift into estrous and have more pups. The act of killing these animals multiplies them. We would do well to take note.



Psychotropic chemicals are ubiquitous in our environment. DMT, or N,n-dimethyltryptamine, is an alkaloid widely distributed in plants, though particularly in the grass and pea families.¹⁸ DMT is the principal psychoactive substance in the admixture brew known as *ayahuasca*. It is also present as an endogenous ligand in the human body, being made by the pine cone-shaped pineal gland in the center of the brain, but also found in cerebrospinal fluid and other tissues.¹⁹ Though little is known about DMT's endogenous production and pharmacodynamics in humans, it is thought to be active during REM sleep (where it made aid in the complex visuals of the dream-state)²⁰ and potentially during child birth, deep orgasm, and death.²¹



N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT)

¹⁷ Dan Flores, *Coyote America* (Basic Books; 1 edition, June 7, 2016).

¹⁸ Dale Pendell, *Pharmako/gnosis: Plant Teachers and the Poison Path* (North Atlantic Books; 1 Updated edition, September 28, 2010).

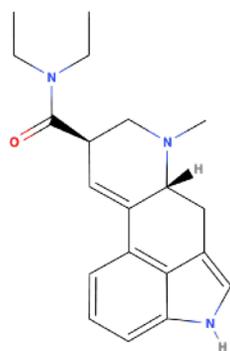
¹⁹ Christian S.T.; Harrison R.; Quayle E.; Pagel J.; Monti J. (October 1977). "The in vitro identification of dimethyltryptamine (DMT) in mammalian brain and its characterization as a possible endogenous neuroregulatory agent". *Biochemical Medicine*. **18** (2): 164–83. doi:10.1016/0006-2944(77)90088-6. PMID 20877.

²⁰ Callay, JC, *A proposed mechanism of the visions of dream sleep*, School of Pharmacy, University of California, San Francisco, California 94143 USA; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/3412201> Accessed April 2nd, 2017

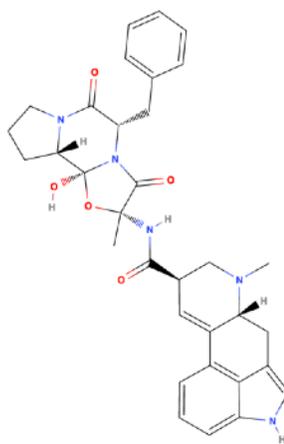
²¹ Rick Strassman, *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* (Park Street Press, January 2001).

Variations on the DMT molecule are many. Two of such, bufotenin and 5-MeO-DMT are found concentrated in the parotoid glands of *Bufo* toads, most notably the Colorado River toad (*Bufo alvarius*).²² The *Psilocybe* genus of fungi concentrates a unique phosphorylated compound, psilocybin, the active form of which (psilocin) is also remarkably similar to DMT.

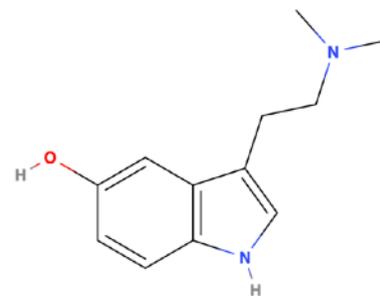
The Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann was thrust into history when he discovered the incredible strength of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD-25). On November 16th, 1938, Hofmann synthesized a number of lysergic acid variations, (including LSD-25) using as base material the ergotamine and ergoline derivatives found naturally occurring in the ergot fungus (*Claviceps purpurea*) growing on rye.²³ Hofmann and his team at Sandoz Laboratories in Basel, Switzerland were looking for novel respiratory and circulatory stimulants that did not effect the uterus, using as a chemical model niketheamide (which is a diethylamide), by introducing this functional group to lysergic acid. LSD-25 was produced, tested on rats, then shelved for the next five years until April 16th, 1943, when on instinct Hofmann decided to revisit the compound.^{24 25}



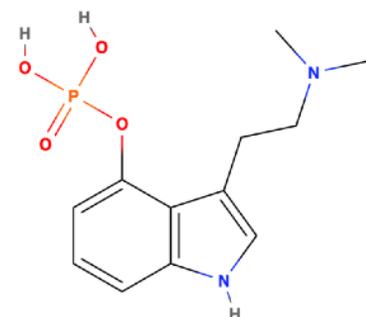
lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD-25)



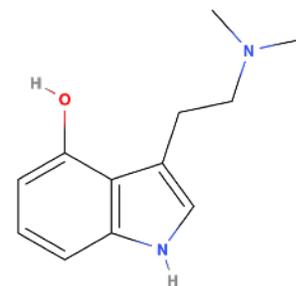
ergotamine



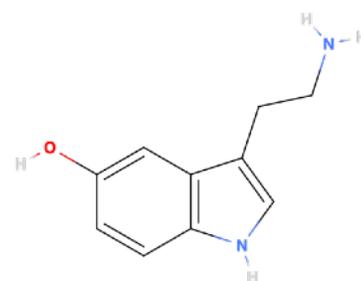
N,N-dimethylserotonin (bufotenin)



O-phosphoryl-4-hydroxy-*N,N*-dimethyltryptamine (psilocybin)



4-hydroxy-dimethyltryptamine (psilocyn)



5-hydroxytryptamine (serotonin)

²² CID 10257. *PubChem*. Accessed on April, 2nd, 2017.

²³ Dr. Albert Hofmann; translated from the original German (LSD Ganz Persönlich) by J. Ott. *MAPS-Volume 6 Number 69 Summer 1969* Accessed April 2nd, 2017

²⁴ Albert Hofmann, "*LSD, My Problem Child*", *psychedelic-library.org*. Accessed April 2nd, 2017

²⁵ "Albert Hofmann" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Hofmann#cite_note-flashback.se-7 Accessed April 2nd, 2017

While re-synthesizing LSD-25, the chemist accidentally absorbed some through his finger tips, began to feel strange, and took absence from work:

“At home I lay down and sank into a not unpleasant intoxicated-like condition, characterized by an extremely stimulated imagination. In a dreamlike state, with eyes closed (I found the daylight to be unpleasantly glaring), I perceived an uninterrupted stream of fantastic pictures, extraordinary shapes with intense, kaleidoscopic play of colors. After some two hours this condition faded away.”²⁶

His experience was the first ever LSD trip. Hofmann continued to take LSD in small doses throughout his life, and despite the problematic history and controversy surrounding the substance, during a speech on his 100th birthday, he spoke:

“It gave me an inner joy, an open mindedness, a gratefulness, open eyes and an internal sensitivity for the miracles of creation. [...] I think that in human evolution it has never been as necessary to have this substance LSD. It is just a tool to turn us into what we are supposed to be.”²⁷

All of these chemicals resemble our endogenous neurotransmitter serotonin and fit into its receptor sites, namely the 5-HT_{2A} receptor. Binding at these sites effects perception, opening sensory gating channels and allowing for a richer flow of sensory information.²⁸ Synæsthesia is a common experience under psychedelic influence, which occurs as the blending of multiple types of sensory information: colors having sounds, sounds having colors, speech having textures, touch having smells. Creativity and problem solving ability is often enhanced due to increased awareness, brain connectivity and sensory input. Psychedelics tend to promote thinking patterns that are outside habitual modes of behavior. As Albert Einstein suggested, “Problems cannot be solved with the same level of consciousness that created them.” A recent and novel brain-imaging study in Holland conducted on human subjects under the influence of LSD found increased global connectivity of the brain, yoking the two hemispheres to a greater degree.²⁹ All of these effects have led Stephen Harrod Buhner to suggest an

²⁶ Albert Hofmann, “*LSD, My Problem Child*”, psychedelic-library.org. Accessed April 2nd, 2017

²⁷ Albert Hofmann, as quoted by Ann Harrison in “*LSD: The Geek’s Wonder Drug?*” 16 January 2006. <https://archive.wired.com/science/discoveries/news/2006/01/70015?currentPage=2> Accessed April 2nd, 2017

²⁸ Stephen Harrod Buhner, *Plant Intelligence and the Imaginal Realm* (Bear and Company, Rochester, VT, 2014).

²⁹ Tagliazucchi et al., *Increased Global Functional Connectivity Correlates with LSD-Induced Ego Dissolution* Current Biology 26, 1–8 April 25, 2016, Elsevier Ltd All rights reserved <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2016.02.010>

alternative name for these materials, *neurognostics*. “*Neuro*, indicating the neural system + *gnosis*, meaning knowledge of the metaphysical background of the world, i.e., substances that affect the neural system and, in consequence, generate deeper knowledge of the metaphysical background of the world and the self’s relation to it.”³⁰



The stages of initiation in many cultures are often as follows: *Separation*, *Ordeal* and *Return*. In *The Genius Myth*,³¹ Micheal Meade examines the roles these stages play in human development. *Separation* from the community and old ways of behaving is a prerequisite for movement into the new. Consciousness is acquired by cutting. Separation can be intentionally created inside ritualized or “sacred” space (such as a sweat lodge or a circle of stones used in a Native American vision quest), *or* brought on abruptly through a car accident, an illness, a divorce, or in the death of a loved one. *Ordeal* is the challenge one faces once separated, and involves the reordering and restructuring of old ways of being into more complex organization. The effect of an ordeal is to make a person bigger or smaller; one rises to the challenge or shrinks in the face of it. One is reminded that coyote multiplies with the pressure of predation.

The *Return* is often overlooked and likely the most important. Once undergoing an ordeal and overcoming it, the next task is to bring back the knowledge gained — deep knowledge, *gnosis* — to return from the forest to the village as herald. Gabor Maté offers that “trauma” is actually the *disconnection* one feels after undergoing some kind of ordeal or challenging event. The trauma is not necessarily the event itself, but the separation it causes — separation from one's true self, emotions, healing, and human connection to others around them.³² Lacking the Return and suppressing the trauma to cope, we often *repress*. The trouble being, as Alice Miller bodes, “One cannot repress specifically without also repressing generally.” Ordeal without Return often makes us smaller people. Without the Return, we are bound to repeat the Separation and Ordeal steps (whether that be the patterns of addiction, toxic emotions, or

³⁰ Stephen Harrod Buhner, *Plant Intelligence and the Imaginal Realm* (Bear and Company, Rochester, VT, 2014) p. 193

³¹ Michael Meade, *The Genius Myth* (Greenfire Press, May 18, 2016).

³² Gabor Maté, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction* (North Atlantic Books; 1 edition, January 5, 2010).

stagnancy) because we are lacking the reward of community acknowledgment. In the Grimm Brother's story of Iron John, when the knights come back from battle, they are thrown golden apples by the women of the villages.³³ This act is to say, "We honor you for your service (separation from home, the ordeal of war) and we welcome you back into village life." That the apples are golden and it's women who are throwing them advises grace, humility, softness, and community. The golden apples act as a threshold for the return to civilized life. Without the apples we are missing the recognition: "I see you in all your pain, and I honor you, brother or sister, welcome home."



Rather than the heroic, ego dissolving megadoses of Terrance Makenna (and even though they have their time and place), the vogue use of small or "micro" doses of neurognostic substances is showing merit. For LSD, material doses are typically in the range of 100-300 micrograms, the effects strong and lasting for 6-12 hours. Large material doses can be shattering; they don't come without risks. They are best used inside the safer container of ritual and ceremony. In contrast, a micro-dose is somewhere between 3-20 micrograms, the effects and duration subtle and mild (one microgram is a *millionth of a gram*; LSD is powerful stuff). A friend remarking on the use of micro-doses of LSD wrote:

"Micro-dosing has been really good. I enjoy how it melds 'sacred time' and 'mundane-at-work time' in a way that is much harder with material doses or meditation. I had a big issue at work with some coworkers one day and was able to talk through it and get back to a clear, loving (for work) place with them quickly without the usual politicking and petty power trips that happen way too often. I'm beginning to see how doing daily life while working with L can, in some ways, be way more powerful than ceremony. Because it's not sitting, it's doing — next time I do those activities (sex, relationships, exercise, eating, work) I remember the mind set I could be in. Brain muscle memory."

It may be that as a culture we are too obsessed with the great leaps and bounds of inspiration and enlightenment, the *aha!* moments, and throwing away the tedium. Growth may not happen that way for most of us. As the old saying goes, "The soul isn't convinced by much." If it normally takes an ordeal (a car accident, a divorce, or an illness) for the soul to pay

³³ Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1990).

attention, then the important question is, as the storyteller Martin Shaw ponders, “How do I stay in touch with the soul without setting fire to my own life?”

It may go something like this: Find a daily practice. It could be anything: yoga, tai chi, painting, cooking, writing, ritual, ceremony, playing with children or spending time with a loved one. It doesn't matter as long as there is *eros* and *ethos* in it, love and care, and beauty. Creation. And do it, over and over and over. That's called, “building a garden.”

At first, visit the garden as often as possible—the walled off, sacred and special retreat where the sun rises inside you and the birds sing. Then, separately, engage the daily grind: errands, college, the job, children, the mortgage, the endless, endless emails... you can't wait to get back to the garden! Though, funny thing, after a while that garden starts to imprint itself into your bones, it shows your cells a new way to hum — a more unified humming. Ever so slowly the water color runs off the page and into your life. Bit by bit, it becomes your actions, the way you say hello, the things you think and feel, how you clean the dishes, your smile.

No big epiphanies or all-of-a-sudden enlightenment, just the slow and messy business of creating soul.

I have not a clue whether we humans will live for another 100 or 10,000 years. We can't be sure. What matters to me is the fact we have fallen out of a very ancient love affair — a kind of dream tangle, with the earth itself. If, through our own mess, that relationship is about to end, then we need to scatter as much beauty around us as we possibly can, to send a voice, to attempt some kind of repair. I think of it as a kind of courting — a very old idea. This isn't about statistical hysteria, it's about personal style. Any other response is just not cool.

— Martin Shaw ³⁴

³⁴ Martin Shaw, “Small Gods” in *Dark Mountain* (Issue number seven, The Dark Mountain Project, 2016).