

# Drug-Induced Mysticism Revisited<sup>1</sup>

*Charles Upton*

Charles Upton (b. 1948), poet, author, activist, and veteran of the counter-culture has voyaged and experienced firsthand the many facets of the New Age *cul-de-sac*, including its pitfalls which are all too often ignored. Since the 1960s, psychedelics<sup>2</sup> or hallucinogens, now termed entheogens,<sup>3</sup> have played a pivotal role in the modern and postmodern seeker's quest to circumvent the trappings of the empirical ego and attain self-realization. After a hiatus of nearly thirty years, psychedelic research has now made a revival, which should provoke much inquiry as to what underlies this phenomenon. It is interesting to note that the New Age Movement, the Human Potential Movement, Humanistic Psychology, and Transpersonal Psychology all emerged in a common setting; they do not only share many similarities but have also assisted in each other's development. For example, the English writer Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) could be said to be a single figure connecting all of the above movements via his popularizing of the perennial philosophy and his writings on psychedelics, both of which are acknowledged by the above movements and or disciplines. Huxley not only helped shape each of the above but provided an integrative theory in which they could take root. That said, while he popularized the perennial philosophy he is not considered to be a traditionalist or perennialist.

Where Charles Upton parts ways with his New Age and counter-culture comrades is that since his introduction to the works of the traditionalist or perennialist school—most significantly René Guénon (1886-1951), Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), and Ananda Coomaraswamy (1887-1947)—he has affiliated himself with this orientation. Upton has written numerous books and articles on traditional metaphysics and the perennial philosophy, the most noteworthy of which are *The System of Antichrist: Truth and Falsehood in Postmodernism and the New Age* (2001), including its sequel, *Vectors of the Counter-Initiation: The Shape and Destiny of Inverted Spirituality* (2012). Although he has abandoned the practices of his early search in the New Age and counter-culture movements, he acquired an abundant knowledge and understanding of these pseudo-spiritualities and is in a position to inform and also caution contemporary seekers. The following interview offers a unique look at psychedelics in the light of the perennial philosophy by way of perennialist theory and also personal accounts of the author.

<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: This interview was conducted electronically with Charles Upton between March and May of 2011. The footnotes were compiled by the editor.

<sup>2</sup> British psychiatrist Humphry Fortescue Osmond (1917-2004) coined the term “psychedelic” or “mind-manifesting” via his correspondence with Aldous Huxley. In responding to a letter that Dr. Osmond received from Huxley written on 30 March, 1956 he wrote in poetic reflection: “To fathom Hell or soar angelic, / Just take a pinch of psychedelic,” thus giving birth to the term “psychedelic”; yet it was not known to the public at large or the scientific community until 1957 (Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer (eds.), *Moksha: Aldous Huxley's Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience* [Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 1999], p. 107). It is also relevant to point out that it was Dr. Osmond who in May of 1953 first introduced Huxley to a synthesized form of mescaline, the psychoactive compound in peyote (among other psychedelic cacti) that in turn produced his work *The Doors of Perception* in 1954, which according to some launched the psychedelic revolution.

<sup>3</sup> “‘Entheogen’ means simply ‘God generated within you!’” (Robert Forte, “A Conversation with R. Gordon Wasson,” in *Entheogens and the Future of Religion*, ed. Robert Forte [San Francisco, CA: Council on Spiritual Practices, 1997], p. 69).

**Samuel Bendeck Sotillos:** Perhaps we could begin with the central perennialist critique with regards to what has been termed “consciousness expansion,” “altered states of consciousness,” “non-ordinary states of consciousness”—which distinguishes the psychic from the spiritual;<sup>4</sup> it is this critique that many readers outside the perennialist or traditionalist circles will not be familiar with, and yet it has created the greatest amount of confusion for contemporary seekers. Would you mind elaborating on this fundamental distinction which has profound implications with regard to recognizing authentic spirituality versus pseudo-spirituality or New Age spirituality?

**Charles Upton:** The psychic or intermediary plane is the world of subjectivity; the spiritual plane is objectivity itself. As the psychic world is higher than the material world and encompasses it, so the Spirit is higher than both psyche and matter, and encompasses them. The psychic world is made up of beliefs, perceptions, impressions, experiences; the spiritual world is composed of certainties—of things that are true even if we are not certain of them. When Beat Generation poet Lew Welch said, “I seek union with what goes on whether I look at it or not,” he was positing the level of Spirit. The psychic plane is *relatively* objective in that it is not enclosed within the individual psyche; as Jung demonstrated, it also has a collective aspect. This collectivity is not limited to a mass human subjectivity or “collective unconscious,” however; it is host as well to many classes of non-human beings, including those the Greeks called the *daimones*, the Northern Europeans the fairies, and the Arabs the *jinn*. It carries nothing less than the impressions of the experiences of all sentient beings.

The psychic plane is the (relatively) objective environment of the human psyche, just as the earth is the (relatively) objective environment of the human body. Our apparently individual subjectivity is co-extensive with innumerable other subjectivities, both human and non-human; as Huston Smith said, “the brain breathes thoughts like the lungs breathe air.”

<sup>4</sup> For an interesting discussion on the distinctions between the subtle and nondual states of consciousness see the following two part video with Ken Wilber (b. 1949), a pioneer within transpersonal psychology, speaking about the uses of *Ayahuasca* or *Yajé* and psychedelics in general, highlighting the obstacles and dangers of their use to authentic spiritual growth: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0HPQgKbxIjk>. After viewing the two video clips by Wilber, Charles Upton stated the following: “People do take psychedelics hoping for spiritual transformation, and a simple ‘just say no to drugs’ will not influence many of them; in view of this, Wilber did a good job of putting psychedelics in an insightful context when he said that their best use is to teach you that the most impressive visionary states and realized insights are not Absolute Reality since they all pass away; only the Atman, the Witness that witnesses them, is Absolute. This is something like the Sufi doctrine that spiritual states happen in relation to specific ego-attachments in order to burn out those attachments, after which the states in question do not return; the realized Sufi is beyond states. One difference between states based on drugs and states sent by God, however, is that drug-induced states can be psychologically habit-forming—largely because it is possible to pop the ‘same’ pill again and again, imagining you can repeat an earlier state—but it is not possible to induce God to send the same state again, seeing that ‘Every day doth some new work employ Him’ (Qur’an 55:29). A massive expansion of psychic experience is in no way an unmitigated good, since it can either wear away one’s attachment to experience in favor of the Witness or veil the Witness by inflaming one’s desire for more and more experience.” With this said, Wilber should not be considered a “friend” of the perennial philosophy or the spiritual traditions themselves, nor a representative of the traditionalist or perennialist school for he has methodically undermined and attacked the integral metaphysics of the perennial philosophy, first as an insider by aligning himself with this universal orientation and then by attempting to usurp the traditions within the fold of his ever inclusive evolutionary and syncretic AQAL Model—all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, and all types.

But it remains essentially subjective for all that; it is the realm of experiences, not realities. An experience is an *impression* of an objective reality, either material or spiritual, as received by a limited subject, an impression that is edited by the inherent or acquired limitations of the subject experiencing it. It is *phenomenon*, not *noumenon*. Whatever relatively objective data can be accessed through psychic means (clairvoyance, precognition, etc.) always pertains to contingent entities immersed in one form or another of space and time, linear or multidimensional; eternal realities cannot be intuited by psychic means.

The spiritual plane, on the other hand, is purely objective. It is not composed of our impressions, but of things we have impressions *of*—of *noumena* that transcend sense experience and do not depend for their existence upon our awareness of them, just as—on the level of sense experience—the mountain outside our window is really there, whether or not we happen to be looking at it. The spiritual plane is the realm of the first intelligible manifestations or “names” of God—of metaphysical principles that are not simply abstract ideas, but living realities that have the power, under the proper conditions, to dominate, guide, purify, and conform our psyches to them—to “save our souls.”

So spiritual realities transcend subjective experience. But if we never *experienced* them, they would not be effective to enlighten us and save us. Spiritual experiences, then—what the Sufis call the *ahwal* or spiritual states (which are necessary elements of the spiritual path) are psychic experiences grounded not in the psychic subjectivity of the one experiencing them but in objective realities that transcend the realm of sense—in the Names of God. To be subject to a spiritual state is to have a direct intellective intuition of an objective spiritual reality that transcends the state in question, one that the subjective state by which it is intuited will always both veil and reveal; and if spiritual realities partially transcend our subjective experience of them, God transcends our experience of Him absolutely. To experience God is to be called to immediately transcend that necessarily limited experience of Him, and come into naked existential contact with Him as He is in Himself, beyond all experience; as the Sufis put it, “the human being does not know God in His Absolute Essence; it is God who knows Himself within the human form.” The Sufi practice of contemplating God in this manner is known as *fikr*, which might be defined as “the ongoing sacrifice of every conception of the Absolute, generated by the Absolute, in the face of the Absolute.”

So we can say that spiritual realities are objective, and that God, the Source of all such realities, is the Absolute Object. But “object” here does not mean “whatever is perceived by a limited subject as other than itself”; taken in this sense, “object” is relative to that limited subject and so partakes of its subjectivity. God as Absolute Object is equally the indwelling Divine Subject, the Absolute Witness, what the Hindus name the *Atman*, what Frithjof Schuon calls “the absolute Subject of our contingent subjectivities.” The Absolute Witness stands “behind” all psychic experience, impassively witnessing them, not identifying with them; here is the precise difference between the psyche and the Spirit.

We cannot reach God through the psyche, through experience; the essence of the spiritual path is to place ourselves in the presence of God, and let *Him* reach *us*. He may do this through experiences, through events, or through a secret action within the soul that we aren’t even aware of. The function of spiritual experiences or states is not to “enrich the soul” with fascinating impressions of the Divine, but to *burn out* specific aspects of the ego, specific attachments and identifications; this is why the realized Sufi, the one who has transcended himself, died to himself, become objective to himself—or rather to the Absolute Witness within him—is beyond spiritual states entirely.

**SBS:** Following up with this point, what can you say about the assumption that the pursuit of expanding consciousness or achieving an altered state of consciousness is an end unto itself, as if it was a desirable human norm which contradicts perennial principles—“The goal is not altered states but altered traits.”<sup>5</sup> This perilous approach often involves an *ad hoc* mixture of spiritual techniques rather than a persistent adherence to one orthodox spiritual form.<sup>6</sup> Could you please speak to this puzzling development?

**CU:** This is all a kind of council of desperation, as well as an indication that the breakdown of the traditional revealed religions, leading to a One-World Religion made up out of the resulting fragments—a development that will culminate in the regime of Antichrist—is proceeding right on schedule.<sup>7</sup>

As religion degenerates, the felt sense of the reality of God is progressively replaced by an obsession with morality for its own sake, and with religious fervor considered as an end in itself, both taken out of their own proper context. No longer is moral purity felt to be something we naturally owe to God in view of His love for us and of the fact that He created us, something that prevents us from falling into the ingratitude of worshipping the passions as idols in His place; now morality has become an idol in itself. By the same token, fervor has lost sight of the God who supposedly inspires it; it has become a substitute for His felt presence rather than a response to it. In a lot of contemporary Protestant hymns, for example—or rather contemporary “Christian pop” songs—the singer sings primarily about his or her own feelings, not about God. Likewise various “consciousness studies” programs now available in academia tend to concentrate on subjective states of consciousness, as well as the belief-systems that support them and the techniques by which they can sometimes be produced, rather than understanding spiritual states as reflections of an objective metaphysical order, and thus as instances of *knowledge* rather than simply experience. According to Sufi doctrine, spiritual states are not acquisitions but gifts of God. He sends them in order to “burn out” specific passions, attachments, and ego-knots; after the attachment in question is dissolved, that particular state does not return. For example, a habit of neurotic fear, burnt out by a state (*hal*) of ecstatic love, is transformed into a *station* (*maqam*) of courage and equanimity; a temporary “state” has resulted in an established “trait.” And the fully-realized Sufi is said to be beyond both states and stations, since he no longer maintains any separative ego which could be the subject of them; he has attained objective metaphysical realization.

When traditional faith is strong, it is a source of security and certainty for the faithful; they feel that they are in the presence of sacred mysteries, mysteries that they can rely upon but need not pry into. But when traditional religions weaken, then certain people who would have

<sup>5</sup> Huston Smith, “Encountering God,” in *The Way Things Are: Conversations with Huston Smith on the Spiritual Life*, ed. Phil Cousineau (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003), p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> We recall the unequivocal words of Frithjof Schuon: “there is no possible spiritual way outside the great orthodox traditional ways. A meditation or concentration practiced at random and outside of tradition will be inoperative, and even dangerous in more than one respect; the illusion of progress in the absence of real criteria is certainly not the least of these dangers” (Quoted in Whitall N. Perry, “Drug-Induced Mysticism: The Mescaline Hypothesis,” in *Challenges to a Secular Society* [Oakton, VA: The Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1996], pp. 15-16).

<sup>7</sup> See Lee Penn, *False Dawn: The United Religions Initiative, Globalism, and the Quest for a One-World Religion* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004).

otherwise been spiritually satisfied simply to live within a sacred tradition and ambience, and who would have saved their souls thereby, conceive the desire for a direct mystical relationship with God so as to make up for what has been lost—a relationship that may not in fact be proper to them. They imagine that such a relationship could only result from some extravagant spiritual tour-de-force—and psychedelic drugs immediately appear as a plausible way of taking that tour. But the psychedelics, as well as various spiritual techniques such as secularized non-traditional yoga, are often approached on the basis of the very false and limiting context that people are seeking them in order to free themselves from: of the spiritual life as an exercise in self-will (as in the case of compulsive morality), and of God conceived as an experience rather than a Reality (as in the case of self-referential fervor; the New Age movement for example, which deifies experience, can be described as a kind of “non-Christian Pentecostalism”). In the absence of a felt sense of the Grace of God based upon *faith*, which St. Paul calls “the presence of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” nothing is possible in the spiritual life aside from the Promethean attempt to take heaven by storm and spiritual narcissism—two pathologies which are intimately related to each other and never appear apart. The will to cut off from the spiritual Intellect (which is always virtually in force wherever Faith and Grace are present) produces Prometheanism; the alienation of the affections from the Intellect produces narcissism.

It is highly interesting that psychedelic drugs burst upon the scene at precisely the same moment that the Second Vatican Council was abolishing traditional Roman Catholicism and deconstructing the sacramental order. It's as if the grace of the Roman Catholic sacraments, while they were still intact, overflowed their specifically Catholic context and maintained a certain level of elevation in the “collective unconscious” of the western world, an elevation which was rapidly lost when that grace was cut off. Faced with a sudden unconscious or half-conscious sense of spiritual loss, and the stifling sensation that always results when the psyche is cut off from the plane of the Spirit, the western collectivity became susceptible to the temptation of psychedelics, which at the very least can provide (though not without extremely negative consequences) a horizontal *psychic* expansiveness which appears to compensate for, and sometimes actually counterfeits, the loss of a vertical spiritual elevation, while at the same time concealing the fact that such a loss ever occurred. Psychedelics, in other words, were a kind of Luciferian “booby prize” offered as compensation for the fall of western Christendom.

**SBS:** Psychedelic advocates and researchers make the case that because psychoactive properties are naturally occurring in a number of plants (and are even endogenous to the human body)<sup>8</sup> that they have been used in sacred rituals throughout the world since time immemorial.<sup>9</sup> They suggest that

<sup>8</sup> “In 1965 a research team from Germany published a paper in the flagship British science journal *Nature* announcing that they had isolated DMT from human blood. In 1972 Nobel-prize winning scientist Julius Axelrod of the U.S. National Institutes of Health reported finding it in human brain tissue. Additional research showed that DMT could also be found in the human urine and the cerebrospinal fluid bathing the brain. It was not long before scientists discovered the pathways, similar to those in lower animals, by which the human body made DMT. DMT thus became the first *endogenous* human psychedelic” (Rick Strassman, “What DMT Is,” in *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* [Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2001], p. 48.

<sup>9</sup> These include *Soma*, thought to be the Fly Agaric mushroom (*Amanita muscaria*), *Teonanácatl*—Náhuatl, language of the Aztecs: “God’s flesh” or “flesh of the gods” (*Psilocybe mexicana*), Peyote cactus (*Lophophora wil-*

they could be the precursors to the foundation of religion itself.<sup>10</sup> These mind-altering plants have been suggested as the central components of the *Soma* of the Rig Veda or *Hoama* of the Avesta, identified as none other than the mushroom *Amanita muscaria*,<sup>11</sup> and the principal rite of the Eleusinian Mysteries (Plato, Aristotle, and Epictetus were said to have been initiates), utilizing *Kykeon*, purported to be the fungus ergot, which contains psychoactive alkaloids such as LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide);<sup>12</sup> it has also been asserted that that *Manna* of the Hebrew Bible was a psychedelic.<sup>13</sup> The use of psychoactive mushrooms have also been ascribed to the cult of Mithras,<sup>14</sup> and said to be used in ancient Egypt;<sup>15</sup> even the origins of Christianity and Christ himself are hypothesized to be the mushroom *Amanita muscaria*.<sup>16</sup> Could psychedelic drugs be the actual origin of any particular revealed religion? What are your thoughts on this important discussion?

*liamsii*), San Pedro cactus (*Trichocereus pachanoi*), *Ololiuqui* (*Turbina corymbosa*) and *Tlilitzin* (*Ipomoea violacea*) seeds of a Morning Glory, Ibogaine or Iboga (*Tabernanthe iboga*), *Ayauasca* or *Yajé* (*Banisteriopsis caapi*), *Kykeon* made with Ergot (*Claviceps paspali* and *Claviceps purpurea*), Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), Belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*), *Mandrake* (*Mandragora officinarum*), *Datura*, *Brugmansia*, *Ska Pastora* (*Salvia divinorum*), *Pituri* (*Duboisia hopwoodii*), etc. The following provides a Traditionalist perspective regarding this point: “If drugs could change and transform consciousness, it is certain that this knowledge would have been incorporated into spiritual teachings from time immemorial. On the other hand, intoxicants and drugs have served universally as supports adjacent to ritual practices, even where the use is purely symbolic” (Whitall N. Perry, “Drug-Induced Mysticism: The Mescaline Hypothesis,” in *Challenges to a Secular Society* [Oakton, VA: The Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1996], p. 15).

<sup>10</sup> “[Question:] So your view is that hallucinogens were involved in the origin of some religious traditions but not necessarily all?” “[Peter T. Furst:] No, I think that’s also going too far. The use of the so-called ‘hallucinogens’ is a *function* of religion, not its origin” (Peter T. Furst, “Ancient Altered States,” in Roger Walsh and Charles S. Grob (eds.) *Higher Wisdom: Eminent Elders Explore the Continuing Impact of Psychedelics* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005], p. 156).

<sup>11</sup> See R. Gordon Wasson, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969). The Wasson hypothesis has been critiqued from within psychedelic circles: this from one of its most prominent voices, Terence McKenna: “The problem with this hypothesis is that *A. muscaria* is not a reliable visionary hallucinogen. It has proven difficult to obtain a consistently ecstatic intoxication from *Amanita muscaria*. . . . Wasson was on the right track, correctly recognizing the potential of *Amanita muscaria* to induce religious feeling and ecstasy, but he did not take into account the imagination and linguistic stimulation imparted by the input of African psilocybin-containing mushrooms into the evolution of Old World mycolatry” (Terence McKenna, “Mushrooms and Evolution,” in *The Archaic Revival: Speculations on Psychedelic Mushrooms, the Amazon, Virtual Reality, UFOs, Evolution, Shamanism, the Rebirth of the Goddess, and the End of History* [New York: HarperCollins, 1991], p. 150).

<sup>12</sup> See R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann and Carl A.P. Ruck (eds.), *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Los Angeles, CA: Hermes Press, 1998). Some researchers assert that both *Kykeon* and psychedelic mushrooms (*Amanita muscaria* and psilocybin) were used interchangeably in the rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries. See Carl A.P. Ruck, *Sacred Mushrooms of the Goddess: Secrets of Eleusis* (Oakland, CA: Ronin Publishing, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> See Dan Merkur, “Manna, the Showbread, and the Eucharist: Psychoactive Sacraments in the Bible,” in *Psychoactive Sacramentals: Essays on Entheogens and Religion*, ed. Thomas B. Roberts (San Francisco, CA: Council on Spiritual Practices, 2001), pp. 139-144.

<sup>14</sup> See Carl A.P. Ruck, Mark Alwin Hoffman and José Alfredo González Celdrán, *Mushrooms, Myth and Mithras: The Drug Cult that Civilized Europe* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Andrija Puharich, *The Sacred Mushroom: Key to the Door of Eternity* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959).

<sup>16</sup> See John Marco Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity Within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Near East* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971).

CU: Since religions are founded by Divine action through prophets and avatars (Buddhism possibly excepted, yet Gautama Buddha is also considered to be the ninth avatar of Lord Vishnu within the Hindu tradition), to say that they have been initiated by psychedelics is to deny that God can act on His own initiative, and it is consequently to deny God. It is to make “religion” an entirely human affair, and thus to posit something that does not fit the definition of that word. No religious tradition claims to have been founded on the basis of psychedelic experience; such claims emanate from users of psychedelics who like to project their fantasies upon traditions they in no way intend to follow. Anyone who thinks that Moses met God on Sinai or Jesus became “Christ” after eating some mushroom, because how else could they have done it, has no sense of the sacred whatsoever. Within certain contexts and in certain *yugas* it *might* have been spiritually possible to open initiates to the graces of an already established spiritual way through the use of psychedelics, but such things are certainly not possible to us in our own time, except at great cost—and with what coin could we pay that cost, poor as we are? In any case it is certain that the establishment of a legitimate spiritual way through the use of psychedelics has never been either possible or necessary.

SBS: While the perennial philosophy acknowledges the Shamanic traditions of the First Peoples, a central challenge to the notion that entheogens or psychedelics have been used since the earliest times is that the “beginning of time” or “pre-history” which some suggest to be around 5,000 BC,<sup>17</sup> when contextualized within cyclical time, is likely to be the *Kali-Yuga* or the Iron Age, the culmination of this temporal cycle or at best the *Dvapara Yuga* or Bronze Age, the phase preceding the final age.<sup>18</sup> Thus the use of sacred plants that have psychoactive properties occurred late in the cosmic cycle (*manvantara*) and not at its inception, the *Krita-Yuga* or *Satya-Yuga*, known as the Golden Age in Western cosmology. This would support prominent historian of religion, Mircea Eliade’s (1907-1986) astute observation that “the use of intoxicants . . . is a recent innovation and points to a decadence in shamanic technique.”<sup>19</sup> Could you please elaborate on the perennialist perspective with regards to this point?

<sup>17</sup> Peter T. Furst, “Ancient Altered States,” in Roger Walsh and Charles S. Grob (eds.), *Higher Wisdom: Eminent Elders Explore the Continuing Impact of Psychedelics* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), p. 153. Some psychedelic researchers regard the rock art found in the mountain range of Tassili n’Ajjjer, in southeast Algeria, to be the most ancient verification of psychedelic use.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Upton, *Legends of the End: Prophecies of the End Times, Antichrist, Apocalypse, and Messiah from Eight Religious Traditions* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 401. Anthropologist Peter Furst has claimed that Eliade shifted his position with regards to psychedelics at the end of his life: “[Entheogens] forced him to change his mind on this issue, and . . . to accept that there was no essential difference between ecstasy achieved by plant hallucinogens and that obtained by other archaic techniques” (Paul Devereux, *The Long Trip: A Prehistory of Psychedelia* [New York: Penguin Books, 1997], p. 108). We would still argue that his initial assessment makes an important point in light of cyclical time which all traditional societies throughout the world adhered to and still do to this day recognize. “In fact, there is reason to believe that much, not all, but much of this [psychedelic using] culture constitutes more of a degeneracy when compared with the possibility of what one will call golden age spirituality where a man was his own priest and carried Heaven’s Law directly and naturally within himself and had access, through his intellect, to divine and earthly wisdom. Immanence of divine wisdom is the human norm” (Mark Perry, “The Forbidden Door,” in *Every Branch in Me: Essays on the Meaning of Man*, ed. Barry McDonald [Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2002], p. 271).

CU: I agree with Eliade's initial view of psychedelics; when a spiritual tradition degenerates there is no telling what people will try in order to regain what is felt to be lost. Perhaps, God willing, something can be partially regained through psychedelics under certain cosmic conditions—conditions we certainly do not enjoy today—but the very attempt to regain a former spiritual exaltation is evidence of a degeneration. The *Krita-yuga* was characterized by a “mass theophanic consciousness” in which psychedelics were not needed; in the words of Genesis, mankind “walked with God in the cool of the evening.” In my view (and I am open to correction), shamanism came in with the *Treta-yuga* or Silver Age, when the cosmic environment was subject to imbalances due to demonic incursions that the shamans—as they themselves maintain, according to Eliade—were sent by God to correct. And as the shamans of our own time have asserted, also according to Eliade, their ancestors were immensely more powerful than they, and didn't need psychedelics; so the use of the psychedelic “crutch” undoubtedly came in later than the shamanic dispensation itself. Also of great interest is the fact that the Christian visionary and stigmatist Anne Catherine Emmerich [1774-1824], in her book *The Life of Christ and Biblical Revelations* [1979], based on her visions, mentions an early non-Biblical patriarch called *Hom*, who was either named after, or provided a name for, a particular plant he considered to be sacred. This plant, in my opinion, is the *Haoma* plant of the ancient Persians, equivalent to the Vedic *Soma*. According to Emmerich, the lineage that sprang from *Hom*, which included one Dsemschid (undoubtedly the legendary Persian king Jamshid), became polluted with satanic fantasies, though she apparently did not recognize the plant in question as an intoxicant. It is highly unlikely that Emmerich, a nearly illiterate Westphalian peasant, would have known anything about Persian history or Zoroastrian lore, much less about the effects of exotic psychedelics. So it may well be true that the use of such plants, at least beyond the cosmic era that might have allowed their use under certain conditions, represents a truly ancient deviation in humanity's relationship with God. (It must not be forgotten, however, that according to René Guénon and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Soma* and *Haoma*, in their higher symbolic sense, are not psychoactive plants but the source of the “Draught of Immortality” which effects the return of the human form to its *fitra*, its primordial Edenic state before the Fall. In other words, they symbolize a particular stage of spiritual realization.)

As for Eliade's later notion that psychedelic ecstasy is identical to ecstasy produced by other means, I speculate that he said this only because he experienced psychedelics himself and had nothing else to compare them to. He was an incomparable scholar of religion, but he had no religious faith; he characterized religions, myths, and metaphysical beliefs as “artistic creations” referring to no objective reality; he placed them on the psychic plane, not the spiritual.

SBS: There is the notion that the use of peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) via the syncretistic Native American Church (NAC) is compatible with other traditional shamanic rites which did not originally utilize this plant medicine. For example, there are some who suggest that the Sun Dance Religion is compatible with peyote use (some have even introduced *Ayauasca* or *Yajé* into this sacred ritual).<sup>20</sup> Yet traditional spiritual authorities within these communities, such as

<sup>20</sup> In this context we might also mention the controversial figure Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh or Osho (1931-1990), known as the “sex guru,” a prototypical representative of all that constitutes “New Age” spirituality, who practiced a syncretism of everything under the sun. It is seldom mentioned that Rajneesh was said to be addicted to a certain mind-altering substance known as “laughing gas” or nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O). He is reported to have dic-



medicine man and Sun Dance chief, Thomas Yellowtail (1903-1993), suggest quite the opposite, that they are not compatible and that such syncretism or mixing of foreign elements such as peyote are in fact dangerous and could be spiritually harmful,<sup>21</sup> not to mention that they do not do justice to either spiritual way and end up watering each tradition down, ultimately leading to the demise of both. Do you have any thoughts on this?

CU: Yellowtail was right.

SBS: In conjunction with the amalgamation of the Native American Church (NAC) there is also the phenomenon of the psychoactive brew *Ayahuasca* or *Yajé* from South America, which has been widely exported throughout the world made extensively available through the syncretic churches of Santo Daime, founded by Mestre Irineu or Raimundo Irineu Serra (1892-1971)<sup>22</sup> and União do Vegetal (Centro Espirita Beneficente União do Vegetal or UDV), founded by Mestre Gabriel or José Gabriel da Costa (1922-1971), combining Catholicism, Spiritism of Allan Kardec (1804-1869), African and South American shamanism.<sup>23</sup> In conjunction with this, we need to mention that the search for mystical experiences has also brought about the phenomenon of “spiritual tourism”<sup>24</sup> to remote parts of the Amazon basin that has its damaging effects on the traditional societies living in these areas, extending itself to all sapi-

tated three books—*Glimpses of a Golden Childhood* (1985), *Notes of a Madman* (1985), and *Books I have Loved* (1985)—under the influence of his very own dentist’s chair; however there is one title that has not yet seen the light of day for obvious reasons: *Bhagwan: The First Buddha in the Dental Chair*:-

<sup>21</sup> Michael Oren Fitzgerald, “Rainbow” and “Notes,” in *Yellowtail, Crow Medicine Man and Sun Dance Chief: An Autobiography* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), pp. 56-57, 221; see also Fred W. Voget, *The Shoshoni-Crow Sun Dance* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), p. 169. Frank Fools Crow (1890-1989), a Lakota (Sioux) spiritual leader, *yuwipi* medicine man, and the nephew of Black Elk or Hehaka Sapa (1863-1950), the Lakota Sioux sage, made the following declaration regarding the use of peyote: “I have not . . . used peyote like they do in the Native American Church. *Wakan-Tanka* can take me higher than any drug ever could” (Thomas E. Mails, “Little Hollow Bones,” in *Fools Crow: Wisdom and Power* [San Francisco, CA: Council Oak Books, 2001], p. 40). Lame Deer (1903-1976), a Sioux medicine man, underscores the incompatibility of peyote use with the sacred rites of the Oglala Sioux: “I have my hands full just clinging to our old Sioux ways—singing the ancient songs correctly, conducting a sweat-lodge ceremony as it should be, making our old beliefs as pure, as clear and true as I possibly can, making them stay alive, saving them from extinction. This is a big enough task for an old man. So I cannot be a *yuwipi*, a true Lakota medicine man, and take peyote at the same time” (John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, “Don’t Hurt the Trees,” in *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994], p. 228).

<sup>22</sup> With regards to Santo Daime, we need to mention another central figure, Sebastião Mota de Melo, better known as Padrinho Sebastião (1920-1990), one of the direct disciples of Mestre Irineu, who founded The Eclectic Center of the Fluent Universal Light of Raimundo Irineu Serra (CEFLURIS), the two communities Colônia Cinco Mil (Colony Five Thousand) and Céu do Mapiá; the second is considered to be the church’s headquarters, yet both are located in Brazil. See Alex Polari de Alverga, *Forest of Visions: Ayahuasca, Amazonian Spirituality, and the Santo Dime Tradition*, trans. Rosana Workman, ed. Stephen Larsen (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 1999).-

<sup>23</sup> See Beatriz Caiuby Labate and Henrik Jungaberle (eds.), *The Internationalization of Ayahuasca* (Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2011); Beatriz Caiuby Labate, Isabel Santana de Rose and Rafael Guimaraes dos Santos, *Ayahuasca Religions: A Comprehensive Bibliography & Critical Essays*, trans. Matthew Meyer (Ben Lomond, CA: Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Marlene Dobkin de Rios, “Drug Tourism in the Amazon,” *Anthropology of Consciousness*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1994), pp. 16-19.

ential traditions. Could you speak to these interesting phenomena, which are unquestionably a hallmark of New Age thought?

CU: To syncretize different forms of the sacred, assuming that they were originally true spiritual ways, not simply psychic “technologies,” is to relativize and subjectivize them and thus drive everything down to the psychic level while sealing off access to the Spirit; and this is tantamount to demonic invocation. And even if the practices in question are fundamentally psychic to begin with, mixing them can only generate further chaos. Spiritual Unity is higher than psychic multiplicity and encompasses it, but once the Unity of the Spirit is veiled, the idea becomes: “You mean you only have *one* god? You are spiritually deprived! We have hundreds”—the “reign of quantity” with a vengeance! The problem with this approach is that no one of these many gods can be the Absolute Reality, or even a psychic symbol for it—given that, by definition, you can’t have more than one Absolute. And the psychic chaos created by mixing African and South American shamanism with Catholicism and European spiritualism can only be compared to playing the music of Bach, the Moody Blues, Charlie Parker, and Inti Illimani all at the same time—a practice that could only destroy all presence of mind and unity of soul in the listener. Of course some people like that kind of thing; instead of transcending their individuality through spiritual ascent, they simply want to shatter it, and consequently sink below it, into the infra-psychic. It’s called “postmodernism.”

And spiritual tourism in places like the Amazon damages not only the indigenous cultures but the tourists too. (I recently saw a news item where one village prohibited such tourism; a villager characterized the North American strangers who’d visited them and immediately asked to be told all about the local sacred rituals and beliefs as, in effect, “creepy.”) When well-heeled “Norteamericanos” and Europeans enter dirt-poor villages in the Amazon and elsewhere looking to satisfy their spiritual hunger, a hunger based on their abandonment and betrayal of their own spiritual tradition (usually Christianity), they tempt the village elders to what traditional Catholics call the sin of *simony*: selling sacred things for money. Spiritual tourists are by and large not pilgrims but thieves, vampires. In most cases they aren’t looking for a spiritual path to dedicate their lives to, but simply picking up here and there whatever sacred art objects, or psychedelic experiences, or sacred rituals degraded to the level of mere spectacle, might suite their fancy—if, that is, they aren’t actually sorcerers in search of “personal power.” Very often their basic set is psychic rather than spiritual; like most tourists, they are looking for “experiences,” not principles to live by. They leave behind them the destructive influences of their own profane postmodern attitudes, and return home polluted with the toxic psychic residues of the forms of the sacred they have plundered, so as to release them to do their damage within their own cultures.

SBS: Another important point to discuss is that while there are traditional shamanic societies who today still utilize psychoactive plants in their sacred rites—i.e. the Huichol, Tarahumara, Cora, Mazatec, Bwiti, Kayapó, Fang, Mitsogo, Jivaro, Yanomami, Koryak, etc.—this does not necessarily mean that those outside these racial and ethnic groups will also have the same spiritual and beneficial response with the use of these plants.<sup>25</sup> It is as if the different indigenous

<sup>25</sup> “If the Indians can consume peyote without harmful results, the question of their own heritage—psychic and

peoples were given different plant medicines particular to their human makeup and ecological context. Could you please speak to this sensitive theme as it is perhaps “politically incorrect”?

CU: This is undoubtedly true in many cases. If the invocation of the divine name *Allah* should not be expected to be spiritually fruitful for a Buddhist, then by the same token the use of certain psychoactive plants outside of their traditional cultural and ritual context is not likely to have the same effect as it would within those contexts, and will most likely have a much more negative one. Such psychic and cultural bleed-throughs may be accurately compared to the breakdown of discrete and self-contained ecosystems. Asian carp are fine in Asia; in the Great Lakes they are a disaster. And those who hope to benefit from the sacred worldviews of the Huichols, the Tarahumara, or the Native American Church should be willing to live under the same conditions of deprivation and oppression and social marginalization as the Huichols and the Tarahumara and the Native American Church. If you want the spirituality of the Reservation, accept the suffering of the Reservation.

Shamanism, even relatively degenerate shamanism,<sup>26</sup> has a certain practical justification under truly primitive conditions, since it represents a large portion of the *technological* heritage of the tribe. The shaman heals disease, finds and attracts game, carries on criminal investigations, influences the weather, protects the tribe in war, and guards it against psychological imbalances and/or demonic incursions. But under modern conditions, when at least some of these functions can be fulfilled by other means, shamanism loses a certain amount of its *raison d'être*. French poet and cinematographer Jean Cocteau [1889-1963] recounts the story of an anthropologist who was studying native folkways in Haiti, where trees are (or were) used for long-distance communication; when a woman's husband was away at market, she might send a message to him by speaking to a tree, and receive his answer by the same means. When the anthropologist asked the natives why they spoke to trees, their answer was: “Because we are poor. If we were rich we should have the telephone.”

In my opinion, those persons of the postmodern West whose psychophysical nature is not already fully integrated into the Spirit, or at least fully submissive to It—a condition extremely rare in our time—should never touch the shamanism of the primal cultures, since westerners lack the protection provided by the basic spiritual set and character-formation of those cultures. The rare and exceptional case is that of the person who, by the grace of God, has found and been accepted not simply by a working traditional shaman or medicine man, but a true holy man of one of the primal spiritual ways—though how he or she could recognize such a holy man in the first place is hard to imagine.

spiritual, and the concomitant ritual conditions are essential factors to be considered” (Whitall N. Perry, “Drug-Induced Mysticism: The Mescaline Hypothesis,” p. 15). “One might counter that there are cultures, the Amazonian Indian tribes notably, in which ritualized drug use is a normal mode of communion with the divine. However, this fact calls for two comments that should apply to similar cultures. First, because of destiny, the psychic homogeneity of such peoples combined with the consistency of their shamanic cosmology, cannot be compared with the porous psychic heterogeneity of Westerners. Thus, if under the guidance of a shaman, an Amazonian Indian can enter into communion in a predictably consistent manner with a spirit animal which will act as a teacher and a guide, the same result cannot be necessarily expected for a Westerner intent on duplicating the experience. Secondly, the prevalence of such ritualized psychism . . . does not constitute a superiority per se” (Mark Perry, “The Forbidden Door,” pp. 270-271).

<sup>26</sup> René Guénon, “Shamanism and Sorcery,” in *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 177-184.

SBS: You have undertaken an in-depth study of UFO phenomenon in light of traditional metaphysics in your book *Cracks in the Great Wall* (2005).<sup>27</sup> There are numerous writers and researchers within the psychedelic world who claim that there is a connection between the psychedelic experience and UFO sightings and/or abductions, especially for those who use the substance DMT (dimethyltryptamine).<sup>28</sup> To many this might be the siren call or the advent of the New Age, but to the exponents of the perennial philosophy this has the characteristics of the *Kali-Yuga* written all over it. Could you please speak to this?

CU: As I see it, the UFO “aliens” are denizens of the intermediary or psychic plane, what Muslims call the *jinn*. So it is not surprising that the use of psychedelics could make one more vulnerable to incursions from that world. René Guénon, in *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* [1945], spoke of “fissures” appearing in the “Great Wall” separating the material plane from the intermediary plane, fissures that open our world to “infra-psychic” forces; to me the UFO phenomenon is a perfect example of this process. These fissures appear due to cyclical degeneration and the approaching dissolution of our world, but they are further widened and exploited by human activity, sometimes unconscious, sometimes deliberate. I believe that such things as the spread of the electronic media, including the internet, the liberation of nuclear energy, the use of psychedelics, and the general fascination with psychic powers and the paranormal continue to widen the cracks in the Great Wall, which, since it acts as the border between the material and the psychic worlds, can be affected by both material and psychic means; the very fact that such powerful psychic experiences can be produced by a material substance like LSD undoubtedly furthers this process. And it is interesting in this context that, according to Timothy Leary [1920-1996], LSD was not “activated” as a psychedelic until the first atomic bomb was detonated in New Mexico. (On the material side, this border apparently has something to do with the electromagnetic spectrum, which is why automobile engines will often die and electronic equipment malfunction in close proximity to a UFO.) Furthermore, those people Guénon called “agents of the Counter-Initiation”<sup>29</sup> are working to widen the cracks in the Great Wall consciously and deliberately.

The case of pioneer rocket scientist Jack Parsons [1914-1952] comes immediately to mind. Parsons was a follower of black magician Aleister Crowley [1875-1947] and an associate of L. Ron Hubbard [1911-1986], another follower of Crowley, who founded the Church of Scientology and who also (according to my correspondence with Beat Generation writer William Burroughs [1914-1997] in the late 1960s, when Burroughs was in the process of breaking with Scientology) had a background in Naval Intelligence, something confirmed by Peter Levenda in his trilogy *Sinister Forces: A Grimoire of American Political Witchcraft*. Parsons, according to UFOologist Jacques Vallée [b. 1939] in his book *Messengers of Deception* [1979], claimed to have

<sup>27</sup> Charles Upton, *Cracks in the Great Wall: The UFO Phenomenon and Traditional Metaphysics* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> See Terence McKenna, *The Archaic Revival: Speculations on Psychedelic Mushrooms, the Amazon, Virtual Reality, UFOs, Evolution, Shamanism, the Rebirth of the Goddess, and the End of History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); Rick Strassman, *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2001); Rick Strassman, Slawer Wojtowicz, Luis Eduardo Luna and Ede Frecska, *Inner Paths to Outer Space: Journeys to Alien Worlds through Psychedelics and Other Spiritual Technologies* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> See René Guénon, “Pseudo-Initiation,” in *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, pp. 241-251.

met a “Venusian” in the Mojave Desert; according to Levenda he performed pagan rituals at his launchings. He went on to co-found both the Aerojet Corporation and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory; a crater was named after him on the dark side of the Moon. Parsons openly stated that he was working to open a “door” into another dimension; it was shortly after his Mojave Desert rituals that the first major post-WWII civilian sightings of UFOs occurred in North America, though of course there is no way of knowing if the two are related. (In the careers of Crowley, Parsons, and Hubbard we can see clear indications of the action of the Counter-Initiation.)<sup>30</sup> So conscious or unconscious “invocations” of the *jinn* appear to be a major factor in the breakdown of the energy-wall between the material and the intermediary plane; such invocations are undoubtedly inspired by the *jinn* themselves, specifically the *kafir* or unbelieving ones (the demons, that is; the Qur’an teaches that some of the *jinn* are unbelievers and some are Muslims). In other words, the *kafir jinn* are working to break down the Great Wall from their side as well. When the Wall finally crashes, our world will end.<sup>31</sup>

**SBS:** As you are a veteran of the counter-culture movement, I am wondering if you would not mind speaking about your own personal experiences with psychedelics. In doing so could you please describe the psychological and the environmental factors known in psychedelic circles as “set and setting,” including what substance and quantity you ingested during any “positive” psychedelic experiences?

**CU:** My “set” was always: “I seek the Clear Light; I wish to open to higher consciousness; I hope to see God.” And my setting was almost invariably a place of beauty in the natural world. Leaving aside my many more or less positive mescaline and peyote trips (though one was quite painful and rigorous—deliberately so), my two rather unpleasant experiences with psilocybin mushrooms, and my one extremely powerful trip on morning glory seeds (whose active ingredient is “organic acid,” lysergic acid amide), the settings for my three LSD trip were 1) the valley below Alpine Dam on Mt. Tamalpias, Marin County, California; 2) the Rocky Mountains of British Columbia; 3) Joshua Tree National Monument in the deserts of Southern California. As for dosage, we who bought our acid “on the street” never really knew. Various microgram

<sup>30</sup> On a side note, we might mention here that Hubbard was a disciple of Crowley, and the fact that Hubbard influenced the field of transpersonal psychology, known in modern psychology as the “fourth force.” This brings to light its unfortunate inclusion of New Age thought, which has not yet been sufficiently explored. “The crystallization and consolidation of the originally isolated tendencies into a new movement, or fourth force, in psychology was primarily the work of two men—Anthony Sutich and Abraham Maslow—both of whom had earlier played an important role in the history of humanistic psychology. Although transpersonal psychology was not established as a distinct discipline until the late 1960s, transpersonal trends in psychology had preceded it by several decades. The most important representatives of this orientation have been Carl Gustav Jung, Roberto Assagioli, and Abraham Maslow. Also the most interesting and controversial systems of dianetics and scientology developed by [L.] Ron Hubbard (1950) outside of the professional circles should be mentioned in this context” (Stanislav Grof, “Psychotherapies with Transpersonal Orientation,” in *Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death, and Transcendence in Psychotherapy* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985], p. 187). It should also be noted that Timothy Leary was also an Aleister Crowley enthusiast and that Aldous Huxley is reported to have dined with Crowley in Berlin in the Fall of 1930. Some even suggest that it was Aleister Crowley rather than Humphry Osmond who introduced Huxley to mescaline.

<sup>31</sup> For a further discussion of this topic see, “UFOs, Mass Mind-Control, and the *Awliya al-Shaytan*” available online at: <http://www.sophia-perennis.com/uncategorized/ufos-mass-mind-control-and-the-awliya-al-shaytan-by-charles-upton-an-update-of-cracks-in-the-great-wall-ufos-and-traditional-metaphysics-sophia-perennis-2005>.

numbers were given or not given by our sources; many times we were just told “this is one hit” or “5 hits,” or someone who had already ingested some of the batch in question might suggest how much we should take. The first trip came out of a blue pill, the second out of a “windowpane,” and the third out of a “blotter.” A windowpane was a tiny square of clear solid gelatin of the kind used for gelatin capsules; a blotter was a square of blotter-paper. Acid was sold in the latter two forms to demonstrate that it was most likely not adulterated, since you never knew what might be in a pill or capsule besides acid, or instead of acid.

**SBS:** Could you please describe in detail what transpired both inwardly and outwardly during this psychedelic session?

**CU:** *Session One:* essentially a “Second Bardo” trip, “the Bardo of Experiencing Reality” (or rather, as I would now say, “existence”) according to the system developed by Timothy Leary and based on the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.<sup>32</sup> Time slowed down immensely and became “specialized”; the landscape was transfigured into a scene of *unearthly* earthly beauty; matter was transformed into, or clearly recognized as, a coagulation of energy—if I squeezed a stone it would vibrate and sizzle in my hand; the celestial light of Heaven almost came down, or started to; wings almost sprouted on my shoulders; I looked at an acorn cap and thought I was seeing a newly-hatched baby snake still coiled up as he had been in his shell (later in Vancouver, British Columbia, after reading a poem based on that experience at a café, I was told by another of the performers, a traditional London “busker,” that in that vision I had come upon a piece of Druid lore), etc. At one point a short, gnarled figure appeared whom I thought of as a “pirate”; he was disgruntled, irritated, as if to say “Hey you kids! Get off my property!” (I was tripping with a friend.) Later I realized that he was in fact a gnome, a spirit of the Earth element in the system of Paracelsus; I further realized that by dropping acid in that forested canyon by that clear stream of water we had done the equivalent of breaking into his house uninvited or even walking through his wall; no wonder he was angry! Here’s the poem I wrote about that trip:

### The Lightning’s Kiss

#### I

the storm is directly above us:  
boiling fog,  
surf crashing on the shoreline  
of the hills—  
mingling elements  
flashing white, blue  
moil in a turbulence—  
luminous webs  
vapors streaming

<sup>32</sup> See Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (New York: Citadel Press, 1990).

and blotting the Sun  
and revealing him again  
in his course—

our external destinies  
rush to crazy oblivion  
in the sky above—

here below,  
the Quiet:

grey, green, dark & almost white,  
the tree trunks boil up to Heaven!  
silver-muscl'd branches  
light up like bleeding arteries;  
slender arms and sinews of branches,  
sparkling hieroglyphs of leaves,  
architectural script of rock,  
the gnarled old face of the vegetable Druid  
frowning thunderous from the roots,  
his countenance beating  
like a human heart—

and the creek is filled  
with men's voices  
the single-minded, the inexorable  
in one motion through time—  
rare fluencies of speech,  
sparkling emerald syntax  
in the masculine sunlight,  
illuminating the brilliance  
of contention and declamation—

sounds of crickets, secrets,  
goblets of Egyptian sound,  
moving downstream—

the linked syllables of Karma  
talking forever  
in the direction of the  
listening Sea—

and behind me, over my shoulder  
the Tyger growls—  
chewing the bones of his prey to splinters  
in a keening, crying Wind.

II

and the wind in the leaves  
is the voices of women  
wailing in love  
or lamentation—  
coiling whispers around the tree trunks—  
drawing long shimmering cadences  
through the five-fingered strings of branches,  
and making an anguish of visible pleasure  
that moves through the forest  
like the cries of living violins  
as the bow draws over the nipples  
releasing a wind of singing  
that shivers in the branches  
and through the branches of my flesh  
like ripples through a  
shaft of smoke.

---

(exotic poisons:  
vitalities coursing  
through rock & wood:  
the war outside  
by bomb, or dollar,  
is ground through  
wheels of Nature –  
or Nature herself,  
moaning  
like this,  
makes war outside  
this canyon:  
(the question  
should be: not  
Which is Origin, Man  
or what he sees,  
but:  
Where can I work—  
in these cool and  
harpstringed elements,  
or in the gut  
of the machine  
made of human hands  
these elements see  
in their Mirror?



If anyone thinks it is a “good” poem, this simply demonstrates the great gulf that exists between the aesthetic dimension and the spiritual dimension, though spiritual truth can certainly express itself by way of aesthetic beauty. The Qur’an calls the *jinn*-inspired poets of pre-Islamic Arabia those who *say that which they do not*, and Rumi, the greatest poet of Islam, had the following to say about his art:

My disposition is such that I don’t want anyone to suffer on my account. . . . I am loved by those who come to see me, and so I compose poetry to entertain them lest they grow weary. Otherwise, why on earth would I be spouting poetry? I am vexed by poetry. I don’t think there is anything worse. It is like having to put one’s hands into tripe to wash it for one’s guests because they have an appetite for it. That is why I must do it.<sup>33</sup>

*Session Two:* a First Bardo trip, the Bardo of “the Clear Light of the Void,” the “set” for which I had posited by reading the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Heart Sutra* right before ingestion: No hallucinations, no visual or auditory distortions, simply the obvious fact that experience could go along quite happily with no *experiencer* there at all; as the Beatles put it, “Life goes on within you and without you.” And since “I” was empty of self-nature, essentially snuffed out, the world I saw—immense, beautiful, snow-capped mountains, viewed in pristine clarity—was equally empty. Nothing really there. This self-and-world annihilation only persisted, however, when I was alone; as soon as I approached another human being—a girl in this case—“I” began to come back into existence; from this I learned that relatedness, or polarity, is the principle of all manifestation—a truth that the Buddhists call “Indra’s Net.” As the *Heart Sutra* puts it: “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” Precisely.

*Session Three:* probably a Third Bardo trip, “the Bardo of Seeking Rebirth,” a condition in which ego-transcendence is blocked, and consequently the tripper (or the consciousness-principle after physical death) is experiencing the pain and suffering of chaos, leading him to attempt to escape from this chaos into some kind of stable form that isn’t exploding in a million directions all the time. My “set” here may not have been as pure as that of Session Two, since I had already begun to read the books of “sorcerer” Carlos Castaneda [1925-1998],<sup>34</sup> whom I met on one occasion. I had a brief experience of the higher reaches of the Second Bardo when the world appeared as a “tree” whose fruit was a constellation of Buddha or Bodhisattva images as in a Tibetan *thangka* (sacred painting), but it didn’t last; for the rest of the time I was just waiting to come down. When I closed my eyes the cactuses and thorny chaparral bushes of the desert around me were reproduced as writhing, thorn-studded whips or cables, like the ocotillo plant. I stared at my Toyota Land Cruiser and just couldn’t make out *what it was*: it looked like an ever-shifting 17-dimensional arrangement of wheels, pulleys, and intersecting planes, like an M.C. Escher print. In this trip, like my two psilocybin trips, I was mostly just “doing time.”

<sup>33</sup> Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Signs of the Unseen: The Discourses of Jelaluddin Rumi*, trans. W.M. Thackston, Jr. (Putney, VT: Threshold Books, 1994), p. 77.

<sup>34</sup> See Charles Upton, “The Postmodern Traveler: Don Carlos Castaneda,” in *The System of Antichrist: Truth and Falsehood in Postmodernism and the New Age* (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 201-221; Richard de Mille, *Castaneda’s Journey: The Power and the Allegory* (Santa Barbara, CA: Capra Press, 1976); Amy Wallace, *Sorcerer’s Apprentice: My Life with Carlos Castaneda* (Berkeley, CA: Frog, 2003).

**SBS:** From your own point of view, how would you consider these psychedelic experiences—“good trips” or “bad trips”—and what criteria could be used to assess this?

**CU:** To answer this question I need to define what “good trip” and “bad trip” usually meant to the hippies: a good trip was one that felt good, a bad trip, one that felt bad. Moral or intellectual or spiritual criteria were rarely applied; the most common standard of judgment was hedonistic—though some trippers were capable of realizing that the pain of certain psychedelic experiences might teach one something or work as a psychic catharsis. From that point of view, my first trip was mostly “good,” my second trip “good,” and my third trip mostly “bad”—though nowhere near as bad as a *real* bad trip, filled with paranoia and panic.

From the standpoint of spiritual insight, the second session was the only *real* “trip”—and it was the only one in which I wasn’t going anywhere. It showed me the possibility and reality of ego-transcendence (though not how to attain it on any stable basis), and taught me, as I said above, that existence is fundamentally relational. The first session showed me the existence of another “world,” specifically the “etheric plane,” the layer of the intermediate or psychic plane where the elementals reside; that started me on a long series of excursions into the elf-world, probably because, without my knowing it, LSD had permanently breached the natural energy-barrier or “etheric wall” between my material and subtle (*not* spiritual) levels of consciousness—the microcosmic analogue of the “Great Wall” that René Guénon speaks of in *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*. This left me with a lifelong over-sensitivity to psychic forces that has produced many experiences of great pain over the years, made it hard for me to meditate (too much psychic “static”), and caused me to be vulnerable to demonic attack. If any good came of this condition it was limited to an ability to “listen in,” as it were, to the councils of the demons, and find out something about what they are up to on a collective level, so that I can avoid certain of their influences and warn others.

The third session was just sad; all I learned from that one was, “no more LSD.”

**SBS:** Do you have any further reflections on these experiences in light of your present-day outlook on psychedelics? Did your use of psychedelics prompt you to enter a more sustaining spiritual path? And do you still use psychedelics in conjunction with your spiritual practice?

**CU:** Yes: the conclusion that, from the spiritual perspective, *no* trip is good—especially if one is actually able to access higher consciousness or “see God” by means of it (assuming, of course, that these experiences are not delusions, or so mixed with delusionary elements that the way to the valid experiences and insights they counterfeit is not in fact blocked forever). If you drop acid, see horrible hallucinations, and experience excruciating feelings of loneliness, degradation, and fear, you may actually be luckier than if you experience “ecstasy” and “profound insight” and “consciousness of God,” if not (momentary) “liberation from the wheel of becoming.” If you break your way into the Inner Chamber on your own initiative, you have committed sacrilege—how can you ever become obedient to and annihilated in God’s will if you think you have the right to break into His house any time the fancy suits you? I am not saying that the higher consciousness that can on certain occasions be experienced through psychedelics may not sometimes have a positive effect on one’s life and outlook—but at what cost?

Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh [1926-2008], my first Sufi shaykh, strictly prohibited the use of all drugs, including psychedelics. My 20 years under his guidance were mostly spent laboriously

recollecting and healing the psyche I had blown to the four winds through the use of psychedelics, and also undoubtedly through the abuse of *kundalini yoga* practiced without benefit of a teacher and a tradition. If I had never entered the Sufi path, however, I might never have seen just how damaged I was; I might have tripped on from one psychic state to another and never realized that I was headed for destruction, if not in this world then certainly in the next. In the words of the Noble Qur'an, "God guides aright whom He will and leads astray whom He will. . . . God is the best of plotters." And as for whether or not psychedelics in some way prompted me to enter the Sufi path, that is hard to answer. I entered that path because God called me. Whether He called me through certain valid insights or salutary warnings provided by psychedelics is by and large irrelevant. If you find God after being disappointed in love or wounded in war, does this mean you can recommend such experiences to other people as a way of finding God? All these trappings of personal destiny are at best irrelevant, and at worst a case of idolatry. If you worship the occasion you will never find the Essence; if you worship the means you will never reach the End. It may be that psychedelics were part of the occasion for my entry into the spiritual path, but the occasion is not the cause. And I haven't used any psychedelic substance, including marijuana, for over 20 years.

**SBS:** In response to your comments about the implicit dangers of having a "good" trip versus a "bad" trip due to the nature of the experience, could not such an experience be a "door opener" to an authentic spiritual path, provided the attachment is dropped—"When you get the message, hang up the phone."<sup>35</sup> All the more so in light of the many seekers that have had psychedelic experiences and have nonetheless formally affiliated themselves within a revealed tradition, most notably Huston Smith (b. 1919)?

**CU:** It could be; clearly it has been for some people. But its function as a door-opener is often overshadowed by the fact that psychedelic experience is so intense that all later spiritual experience and practice tend to pale by comparison; you keep judging them, consciously or unconsciously, as to whether they "measure up" to LSD. Huston Smith once complained to me that even after years of spiritual practice in a variety of traditions, notably Sufism, he was never able to "regain" the level of opening and insight provided by acid. That's the problem in a nutshell: to attempt to bring back the former glory of one's psychedelic days is to reject, often in total unconsciousness, what God is offering you *now*. God's will for you is always in the present, whereas, in the words of William Blake [1757-1827], "Memory is Eternal Death". In the Sufi view, the spiritual path is not the quest for higher consciousness but the purification of the soul from anything that would block the influx of higher consciousness. In light of this conception, experiences of rigor and abasement and contraction (*qabd*) are as important as experiences of spiritual expansion (*bast*); Ibn Ata'allah [d. 1309] even says that there is much more danger of violating spiritual courtesy (*adab*) with God in a state of *bast* than in a state of *qabd*—and to beg or demand that God bring back a past state as you remember it is certainly the height of discourtesy, besides being impossible. Furthermore, after LSD, it is very hard to overcome the illusion that God is an *experience*.

<sup>35</sup> Alan Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness* (New York: Vintage, 1965), p. 26. (This quote is not found in the original 1962 edition.)

**SBS:** The socio-historical context in which psychedelics first emerged onto the public domain is very interesting and there are probably many who even partook in the psychedelic experience without knowing the nefarious context in which their mass dissemination to the American public took place. Many individuals might be alarmed to know that the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) reported in 2007 that approximately 34.2 million Americans aged 12 and older (or 13.8% of the population) reported trying hallucinogens at least one time; some might argue that these numbers are quite low and underestimate the widespread use.

**CU:** And we also need not just to remember, but to grasp the full import of, the fact that LSD was first distributed in the United States by the CIA, partly in the context of the infamous MK-ULTRA mind-control program, which included experiments practiced upon unsuspecting American citizens that were worthy to stand beside those conducted in the Nazi death-camps (see the research of David McGowan, Henry Makow and Peter Levenda).<sup>36</sup> Timothy Leary was assigned to feed acid to the intelligentsia, Ken Kesey [1935-2001] to everybody else; the idea was to compare how it acted under “controlled conditions” with its effects in a totally free-wheeling, “party” atmosphere. And the hippies actually knew about this! They said, “SURE we were a CIA experiment, man—an experiment that GOT OUT OF CONTROL!”<sup>37</sup> But the

<sup>36</sup> Interestingly enough, James Fadiman (b. 1939), a pioneer within both humanistic and transpersonal psychology and cofounder of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (ITP), worked at the VA hospital in Palo Alto, California in a program that was administering psychedelics and researching their behavioral effects on veterans. In 1965 Fadiman completed his doctoral dissertation at Stanford University on this research, which was entitled: “Behavioral Change Following (LSD) Psychedelic Therapy.” “In the shadows, the CIA had tried to use these [psychedelic] substances to confuse and terrify people. Through front organizations, the CIA also sponsored small conferences and publications where therapists and researchers shared their findings” (James Fadiman, “Therapeutic Effectiveness of Single Guided Sessions,” in *The Psychedelic Explorer’s Guide: Safe, Therapeutic, and Sacred Journeys* [Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2011], p. 104). In response to the above citation, Charles Upton notes: “The idea that the CIA wanted to use psychedelics to ‘confuse and terrify’ people is true as far as it goes, but they also apparently hoped that these substances could help their own agents gain magic powers: telepathy, remote viewing, etc. And they were entirely willing to confuse and *delight* people if that would serve their ends. The hippy myth that the CIA were a bunch of uptight straight people who ‘couldn’t hold their acid’ and saw it only as a crazy-making pill needs to be permanently debunked. The Bohemian/magician/secret agent is a well-known type; both occultist John Dee (1527-1608/1609) (the original 007) and satanist Aleister Crowley worked for British Intelligence. The ultimate goal of the powers-that-be in terms of psychedelic research may be to create a type of ‘spirituality’ where even mystical experiences that are valid on a certain level will serve to establish their control. They want to own *everything*—even mysticism, even spiritual aspiration, even God.”

<sup>37</sup> It is useful to recall that Adi Da or Franklin Albert Jones (1939-2008)—who Ken Wilber regarded as “the greatest living Realizer” (this being only one of a host of other extraordinary endorsements offered by Wilber in his praise)—considered himself to be the first and last seventh stage Adept above all other saints and sages of the perennial philosophy; interestingly enough, he was a scientologist before becoming the “first American Avatar.” It is widely known that Adi Da has had a tremendous influence upon Wilber’s work and that of quite a few others within the general humanistic and transpersonal orientation, many of whom prefer to be anonymous disciples from afar in order to escape the numerous controversies and criticism surrounding Adi Da. In light of this, it would be interesting to inquire into how many ideas Wilber has contributed to both humanistic and transpersonal psychology which are borrowed from Adi Da; one might even wonder if Wilber’s Integral Movement itself is more or less a product of Adi Da’s teaching. The following excerpt, taken from Adi Da’s spiritual biography, which has subsequently gone through numerous revisions, provides much food for thought on the government’s role in engineering elements of not only the counter-culture at large but New Age spirituality as well: “I voluntarily submitted to drug trials at the Veterans Administration hospital in Palo Alto, California. . . . At the VA hospital, I

fact is that LSD initiated a sort of “bardo” or revelatory decay of American culture; all the latent tendencies, good and bad, the dominant belief-systems, conscious or otherwise, were called up in a very short time, laid out for all to see—and much of the social and cultural potential of America and the Western world rapidly exhausted in the process. The family was largely destroyed (not by LSD alone of course); Christian morality (including the concept of human dignity) was undermined; political responsibility was seriously eroded. And the social engineers simply sat back and took notes. They noted the main trends, the major “cultural archetypes” operating in the “collective unconscious” of society, and devised various ways to appropriate, pervert, and control every one of them; in so doing they initiated the world we live in today. The hippies naively equated social control with a simplistic authoritarian repression; they rarely awoke to the fact that *real* control is based on co-optation, on the covert implantation of engineered beliefs and attitudes in the mass mind. The powers-that-be do not want heroes who courageously oppose them and die as martyrs; they would much rather find, or create, dupes who will obey their every command in the firm belief that they are following their own desires, their own creative expressions and “spiritual” intuitions, all in perfect freedom.

One other deleterious effect of psychedelics, which has clearly operated on the mass level (though not in every individual case), is that they broke down people’s protection against the surrounding psychic environment; first you “open up” too much, and then compensate by “closing down” so as to protect yourself from the painful influences emanating from your surroundings, including other people. Excess empathy ends in paranoia; the artificial breaking down of what psychologist Wilhelm Reich [1897-1957] called “character armor” often results in a worse case of such armor later on. (Perennialist Titus Burckhardt [1908-1984], in his book *Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul* [1960], speaks of the close relationship between psycho-physical dissolution and psycho-physical petrification.) As Jesus put it, the demon we have exorcized wanders in waterless places until, returning to the soul from which he has been expelled and finding it swept and adorned, he brings with him seven demons more evil than himself. We probably could never have produced a society where millions spend hours a day alone before computer screens—while imagining that, via Twitter or whatever, they actually have thousands of “friends”!—if LSD hadn’t softened us up first; the isolation and excess introversion produced in part by psychedelics has effectively broken down the kind of social solidarity we need if we are to maintain our political freedoms and human rights; we are all too happy in our cubicles, or at least afraid to leave them. A friend of mine once said to me, back in the 60s: “Acid would be great if you could have all that incredible imagery without those *feelings*.” Bill Gates must have heard his plea; cyberspace reproduces in many ways the hallucinatory content of psychedelics without the accompanying insights.

And now government-sponsored psychedelic research is making a comeback. Anyone tempted to become involved with it should first do some in-depth research on exactly which

was given a dose of drugs one day per week. . . . I was told that I would be given mescaline, LSD, or psilocybin at three separate sessions, and, during a fourth session, some combination of these. . . . There were also various bizarre experiences and periods of anxiety. . . . I suffered mild anxiety attacks and occasional nervousness for perhaps of a year beyond the actual tests. . . . I had become conscious of the formal structure of the living human being, associated with . . . the ‘chakra body.’ The Kundalini Shakti was spontaneously aroused in me” (Adi Da Samraj, *The Knee of Listening: The Divine Ordeal of the Avataric Incarnation of Conscious Light* [Middletown, CA: The Dawn Horse Press, 2004], pp. 81-83).

individuals and institutions are sponsoring, publicizing, and funding such a move, as well as their background and connections (what is the Internet for, after all?). Looking back over the cultural and spiritual “scorched earth” of the psychedelic revolution in the years since the 60s, I shudder to think what they may have in store for us now. We should never forget that the CIA likely sponsored the *mass* dissemination of LSD as part of their MK-ULTRA mind control program. According to Peter Levenda, William Mellon Hitchcock, who was associated with CIA front organizations Castle Bank and Trust and Resorts International, as well as being Timothy Leary’s landlord for his “psychedelic manor house” at Millbrook, paid a chemist by the name of Nicholas Sand [b. 1941] to produce *millions* of doses of acid.<sup>38</sup> Another figure from the psychedelic underground that should be mentioned along with Sand, is his collaborator chemist Robert “Tim” Scully [b. 1944]: together they produced enormous quantities of LSD known in these circles as “Orange Sunshine.”

**SBS:** While you have elaborated on the psychic and spiritual dangers of using psychedelics, there are many individuals and researchers that affirm the healing potential of such substances.<sup>39</sup> After a three decade hiatus there is now renewed interest in psychedelic research and they are increasingly being studied as possible adjuncts to psychotherapy for various psycho-physical ailments: treatment-resistant anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), pain associated with terminal and end-stage cancer, cluster headaches, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), alcohol,<sup>40</sup> cocaine and heroin dependency to name a few.<sup>41</sup> Could you please comment on this matter?

**CU:** The use of toxic pharmaceuticals and traumatic interventions is common and sometimes necessary in the practice of medicine, but these things have little or nothing to do with the spiritual path per se. Psychedelics—whose toxicity is by and large psychic, not physical—may have a therapeutic effect in cases of alcoholism, heroin addiction etc., but this doesn’t mean

<sup>38</sup> Peter Levenda, *Sinister Forces—A Grimoire of American Political Witchcraft: A Warm Gun* (Waterville, OR: TrineDay, 2006), p. 317.-

<sup>39</sup> For some examples, see John C. Lilly, *The Scientist: A Novel Autobiography* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1978); Aleister Crowley, *Diary of a Drug Fiend* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1997); Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968); Wade Davis, “The Red Hotel,” in *One River: Explorations and Discoveries in the Amazon Rain Forest* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), pp. 151-152; Terence McKenna, *True Hallucinations: Being an Account of the Author’s Extraordinary Adventures in the Devil’s Paradise* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994); Terence McKenna and Dennis McKenna, “Psychological Reflections on La Chorrera,” in *The Invisible Landscape: Mind, Hallucinogens, and the I Ching* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 109-117; Laurent Weichberger (ed.), *A Mirage Will Never Quench Your Thirst: A Source of Wisdom About Drugs* (North Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Foundation, 2003); Charles Hayes (ed.), *Tripping: An Anthology of True-Life Psychedelic Adventures* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> William Griffith Wilson, more commonly known as Bill Wilson (1895-1971), the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) was convinced of the therapeutic potential of psychedelics, especially LSD with alcoholism. It is reported that in 1956 Gerald Heard (1889-1971), close friend and colleague of Aldous Huxley, guided Bill Wilson on an LSD session, which had a lasting impact on his life. It is interesting to note that, like Huxley, it was Dr. Osmond who first drew Wilson’s attention to psychedelics. See also “Pass It On”: *The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1984).

<sup>41</sup> Harris Friedman, “The Renewal of Psychedelic Research: Implications for Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology,” *The Humanistic Psychologist*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2006), pp. 39-58.

that they create no problems of their own; it's a question of the lesser of two evils. And what may be a lesser evil in psychophysical terms may or may not be a lesser one in spiritual terms. Our post-Christian secular society obviously does not have the final end and eternal good of the human soul on its radar screen, nor does it hold a very clear idea of human dignity or the intrinsic value of the person; abortion, for example, is not even seen by many people as the taking of human life. Our society has no concept of suffering as spiritual purgation (by which I certainly don't mean to imply that all suffering is purifying simply because it hurts); its highest good seems to be *production*, consequently it tends to define healing in terms of making us "productive members of society." There are even muted but increasingly audible suggestions that non-productive citizens ought to be euthanized; Bill Gates recently stated that a certain degree of medical care ought to be denied the elderly and diverted to the maintenance of productive workers. And now, under the "war on terror," torture has become acceptable to us for the first time since the passage of the Bill of Rights. How can a society capable of such barbaric actions and sentiments be relied upon to accurately evaluate the effects of psychedelic drugs in either moral or spiritual terms?

### Afterword

CU: Some time after granting this interview, I talked with a physician acquaintance of mine who had participated in the second round of psilocybin experiments within academia in the 1990s; I hadn't realized they had started up again that early. He investigated the source of the funding for the experiment he'd been part of at the University of New Mexico, and discovered that the money for the DMT research that led up to the experiments he had been involved in had been provided by the Scottish Rite Foundation for Schizophrenia Research—the Freemasons!<sup>42</sup> In view of the fact that many traditional Catholics see the Second Vatican Council as a kind of Masonic coup within the Catholic Church, the apparent "coincidence" that psychedelic drugs became available to the masses at exactly the same time that traditional Roman Catholicism was being destroyed may in fact be much more than that; as René Guénon pointed out, though cyclical conditions may make the growth of the Counter-Initiation possible, the concrete manifestations of this counterfeit, Luciferian spirituality can only be brought about by actual human groups. Dr. Rama P. Coomaraswamy [1929-2006] in his essay "The Problem of Obedience," unpublished in hardcopy but available on the web, recounts the following:

<sup>42</sup> "A grant from a branch of the Masons, the Scottish Rite Foundation for Schizophrenia Research, helped establish the merit of my study a year before I actually began it. Why the Masons had an interest in schizophrenia in general, and DMT in particular, I do not know, but I believe that garnering such support enhanced the esteem of my study in the eyes of the relevant regulatory and funding agencies" (Rick Strassman, "DMT: The Brain's Own Psychedelic," in Rick Strassman, Slawer Wojtowicz, Luis Eduardo Luna and Ede Frecska, *Inner Paths to Outer Space: Journeys to Alien Worlds through Psychedelics and Other Spiritual Technologies* [Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2008], p. 48). "Curiously, another MKULTRA faction consisted of representatives of the Scottish Rite of Masonry, which had sponsored research into eugenics, psychiatry, and mind control since at least the 1930s. MKULTRA doctor Robert Hanna Felix (1904-1990) was director of psychiatric research for the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, and the director of the National Institute of Mental Health. Felix was the immediate senior of Dr. Harris Isbell, already noted in relation to MKULTRA. Another prominent Freemason involved in MKULTRA was Dr. Paul Hoch (1902-1964), financed by the Army Chemical Center" (Jim Keith, "The CIA and Control," in *Mass Control: Engineering Human Consciousness* [Kempton, IL: Adventures Unlimited Press, 2003], p. 65).

A leading Freemason, Yves Marsoudon (State Master, Supreme Council of France, Scottish Rite) tells us: “The sense of universalism that is rampant in Rome these days is very close to our purpose of existence. . . . With all our hearts we support the ‘Revolution of John XXIII’. . .”. Not satisfied with this, Yves Marsoudon dedicated his book *Ecumenism as Seen by a Traditionalist Freemason* to the Pope in the following words: “To the Memory of Angelo Roncalli, Priest, Archbishop of Messembria, Apostolic Nuncio in Paris, Cardinal of the Roman Church, Patriarch of Venice, POPE under the name of John XXIII, WHO HAS DEIGNED TO GIVE US HIS BENEDICTION, HIS UNDERSTANDING AND HIS PROTECTION.”<sup>43</sup>

And then, shortly after that conversation, I had a dream—a dream filled with flaming apocalyptic imagery which represented *the glory of God*. When I woke up, I realized that I was in fact being purified of the psychic residues of LSD, which I last ingested over 35 years ago. In light of this dream I began to understand in a much different light the tendency of all other spiritual states or practices to pale in comparison with the LSD experience. We may sincerely say, and believe, something on the order of: “I took LSD several times; later I practiced a Sufi *dhikr* for several years. Looking back on these experiences, I can now truthfully report that the LSD provided a more intense spiritual state and a greater depth of insight than did the *dhikr*.” In making this judgment we assume of course that we are objectively comparing two experiences from a standpoint of detachment, that the scales we are using to weigh these experiences against each other are fundamentally sound. What almost never occurs to us is that LSD may have *imprinted* or *conditioned* a deeply-buried layer of our psyche such that all subsequent experiences of any psychic or spiritual depth are *filtered* through this conditioning, resulting in a biased evaluation. If it is possible to have LSD “flashbacks” years after the original experience, who is to say that a subtle “hangover,” physically undetectable, or perhaps indicated by a potentially measurable “re-programming” of the brain due to the extreme intensity of psychedelic experience, may also remain in the deep psyche?

The fact that Richard Alpert, aka Ram Dass [b. 1931], was told by his Hindu yoga instructors, “You have a *kundalini*-blockage in your *vishuddha-chakra* [throat center] due to your past use of psychedelics,” supports this hypothesis. It’s as if LSD can act to breach the natural barrier between *Nous/Intellectus*, associated with the *ajña-chakra* or “third eye,” and *dianoia/ratio*, associated with the *vishuddha-chakra*, thus flooding the lower rational mind with material from the higher Intellectual mind; the lower mind becomes overloaded with this higher material, now expressed on a lower level, and ends by counterfeiting the quality of the *Nous/Intellectus* and thus blocking access to it. Consequently, if spiritual methods practiced and spiritual states experienced after LSD seem in some sense to lie in the shadow of acid, this may simply mean that acid is still there, casting that shadow. The import of my dream was that the *glory of God* had arrived in order to burn out the residual psychic *glamor* left behind by psychedelics, and purify my soul of their ongoing influence; I attribute this event to the spiritual effect of my entry into my second Sufi order. It may in fact be the case that the use of LSD has the power to subtly damage the highest reflections of *Nous/Intellectus*, the “eye of the heart” [*‘ayn al-qalb*],

<sup>43</sup> See Rama Coomaraswamy, “Catholic Writings” at the following website: [www.the-pope.com/coomcawr.html](http://www.the-pope.com/coomcawr.html).



in the individual psyche, just as the physical eye may be damaged by staring into the sun; the reason we almost never become aware of this damage is that it lies at a psycho-spiritual depth so great that we are rarely able to consciously return to it *without once more ingesting LSD*, thus compounding the damage. The use of powerful psychedelics may also produce in us a taste, or need, for deep spiritual experiences that we otherwise would never have sought out, and that may not really be proper to us, while at the same time preventing such experiences from translating us to the final station, where (in Sufi terminology) *fana*—spiritual annihilation—gives way to *baqa*—subsistence in God. Like Moses, we may be left standing on the mountain, looking down to where the Children of Israel are crossing over into the Promised Land, but eternally denied entrance into that land ourselves as punishment for the sin, while searching for water, of striking the rock twice instead of only once as our Lord commanded—in terms of spiritual realization, the sin of trying to force the hand of God. Furthermore, those who are brought so near to the *mysterium tremendum* while being denied the final consummation may be subject to Luciferian temptations that the rest of us will probably never encounter, chief among them being the temptation to embrace a Luciferian consummation in a counterfeit Absolute designed in the infernal regions. Anyone who succumbs to such a temptation (which will most likely be presented to him or her in the deep unconscious regions of the soul), or is even confronted with it—assuming that the victim is not able to allow God to heal the psycho-spiritual damage that makes him or her susceptible to it—may effectively be denied Union with Absolute Reality for the remainder of this life, and possibly also the next.