THE ROBE OF GLORY

PSYCHEDELIC THEURGY AND THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERIES

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For Rachel, Taz and Tam

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PART ONE

BETWEEN THE ONE AND THE MANY

Exultation is the going

Of an inland soul to sea,

Past the houses — past the headlands —

Into deep Eternity —

Bred as we, among the mountains,

Can the sailor understand

The divine intoxication

Of the first league out from land?

Emily Dickinson

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A Vision

In a vision I saw a sun in the heart of every human being covered with a thick black robe. Some people believed in this sun and some people didn't. Those who believed read about it in sacred sun scriptures, containing special teachings about the sun in the heart.

The teachings, like a set of coordinates, pointed to specific points on the black robe covering their hearts, and they dutifully marked the points on a large piece of parchment. As they progressed through the teachings, they mapped more and more points on the parchment and began to notice connections between them. A shape seemed to be emerging.

Some connections were logical but some were associative and poetic. From these, the more imaginative and intellectually ambitious among them built systems of theology and theosophy.

Other believers came along and looked at the maps and tried their best to follow them. They put their trust in the map-makers and hoped the maps would help them live good lives acceptable to God.

Still others receive the teachings as they were given without trying to systematise them. They felt each teaching as a point of pressure on the heart, even through the thick material. Occasionally, they would experience an epiphany,

a breakthrough, and a small hole would tear open in the black robe. Light would shine through like a star in the night sky.

First one star, then two, then eventually, as they continued to study and meditate, hundreds began to shine. Now instead of a two-dimensional map, they could see and feel the actual contours, the shape and size of the heart, not through reason or imagination, but with their own inner eye. A sun made of stars.

For a few, the holes in the robe were big enough and numerous enough that suddenly, with a psychedelic blast, the sun burst through and burned up the robe completely. These were called "suns of God".

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“I am this dark world's Light;
Look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy days be bright:”
I looked to Jesus, and I found
In him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk
Till travelling days are done.

Two Maps

Two useful maps to navigate the often bewildering psychedelic landscape are the Mystic Map and the Mycelium Map.

Christian Mysticism offers us a map with directions in five stages: Awakening, Purgation, Illumination, Dark Night of the Soul and Union. This is the classic Mystic Map of the West.

The networked nature of mycelium underground, on the other hand, is suggestive of a very different kind of map. It is not linear and has no single goal, but radiates out in an intricate web of connections.

Intention is important in spiritual work. We need a good aim. But apart from our own personal aims, like losing weight or improving our relationship with our children or partner, what is a good aim?

According to the Mystic Map, the aim is *awakening*, or *bodhichitta*, the "thought of enlightenment". This first step on the Mystic Way, which is a clarification of the aim of spiritual work, is usually the fruit of a mystical or psychedelic experience.

Once you've "seen the light", you can't unsee it. Now you want to awaken more, and stay awake longer. But it's not easy. A lifetime of wrong views and bad habits has filled

the soul with rubbish that need to be cleared away. As the Australian Aborigines would say, you need to clean your didgeridoo. This is the second stage, *purgatio*, a long and arduous process of penance and discipline.

For beginners, psychedelic experience is all about the excitement of awakening. For more seasoned travellers, it is about purgation and inner healing. For advanced practitioners, it is pure *illumination*: bring filled with light, and love.

The Mystic Map helps identify where you are on your spiritual journey. If you have yet to be humbled and humiliated like Job in "dust and ashes", for example, you may have reached the illumination stage, but still have the Dark Night to look forward to. Progress through the five stages is never strictly linear, however, but spirals back and forth.

The Mycelium Map is equally important. We need connection. Connection (and ultimately union) with God, yes, but also with the elements, the land, ancestors, tradition, culture, people, family, body, soul, emotions, dissociated inner actors, etc. etc. Mundane consciousness is characterised by spiritual sleep and disconnection. Psychedelics help us connect and wake up.

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl

of great price, the one field that had
the treasure in it. I realize now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once but is the eternity that awaits you.

R.S. Thomas

Religion and the Psychedelic Renaissance

The main focus of the so-called Psychedelic Renaissance is the therapeutic application of classic psychedelics such as psilocybin and empathogens such as MDMA. Research funding naturally depends on clearly defined objectives and positive outcomes. Everyone is writing about the mental health benefits of psychedelics, how they can help with depression, anxiety, addiction, PTSD, fear of death, etc. This is a very exciting development which offers hope to millions of suffering people.

But should the use of psychedelics be limited to people suffering from mental health problems? What about healthy people?

Outside the therapeutic context, there is recreational use, exploratory use and ceremonial use. Recreational use is really just about having fun. This is not necessarily as trivial as it sounds. Having fun with friends on psychedelics is a very intimate and bonding experience which strengthens and deepens relationships. A society of people who have fun together with this level of intimate intensity is a healthier and happier society than a society of atomised individuals.

Exploratory use is about solving problems. The pioneers of the internet famously took LSD to help them solve intractable technical and conceptual problems. Many psychologists and philosophers also take psychedelics in order to give them insights into their respective fields. William James is a famous example. According to Stanislav Grof, researching consciousness without using psychedelics is akin to exploring the cosmos without a telescope. Peter Sjostedt-Hughes, the panpsychist philosopher of mind and author of *Noumenautics*, would concur.

Ceremonial use is about spirituality. Since psychedelic sacraments are primarily used in the Americas (ayahuasca in the Amazon basin, peyote and magic mushrooms in Central and North America), ceremonial use is strongly associated with these indigenous traditions. But alternative ceremonial contexts are emerging all over the world as psychedelics spread through the population.

Mostly, in the West, these take the form of syncretic New Age groups, combining elements of traditional shamanism and contemporary transpersonal psychology and

philosophy. There are also attempts to introduce (or re-introduce) the use of psychedelics into established world religions such as Christianity and Judaism.

The therapeutic, recreational and exploratory uses of psychedelics are all valid and full of promise, but my main focus is on the ceremonial use. This is where I think that psychedelics can potentially do the most good. In my view, Western civilisation is going through a spiritual crisis, and the mental health crisis is a symptom of this deeper crisis. Beyond *treatment* in a medical context, I believe we need *practice* in a spiritual context.

Our culture has become so intellectualised, that people think that they are doing religion when they read books and listen to lectures and sermons and talk about religious ideas. There is value in this approach, of course, but it's not the whole story. Human beings need experience, not just knowledge.

In our post-Christian secular culture, there is a hunger for genuine spirituality, but traditional religion is still problematic. There is huge resistance to the idea of devotion. What the Hindus call *Bhakti Yoga* is easily overlooked, neglected and actively rejected in favour of other practices, typically, forms of *Jnana Yoga* (philosophy) and *Raja Yoga* (psychology). However, a "religion of the mind" and a "religion of the self" can easily degenerate into intellectualism and narcissism.

The ceremonial use of psychedelics can help us reconnect with the living soul of religious devotion powerfully and

directly. The “living flame of love” (St John of the Cross) is an embarrassment only to those who haven’t felt it.

Mushrooms Are Not Just For Christmas

If you have spent any time at all researching psychedelics, you will surely have come across the phrase "ego death" or "ego dissolution", usually as a prelude to some kind of spiritual rebirth. The death-rebirth motif can of course be found all over the ancient world, not least in the central story of the death and resurrection of Christ. For an Ancient Greek, ego death and rebirth will have brought to mind the myths of Persephone or Dionysus. For a Christian, it will naturally have made them think of Easter.

Although I have experienced this myself (on ayahuasca) it doesn't quite fit the bill with mushrooms. It's very unusual to lose all sense of self on mushrooms, even at higher doses (I can’t speak for outrageous doses). Generally speaking, instead of a death-rebirth experience, mushrooms feel more like a rebirth, or a reset, like being "born again", but without “dying” first.

Jesus tries to explain what this means to Nicodemus in John's gospel:

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

(John 3: 3-8)

William Law wrote about the need for *Regeneration* in the eighteenth century. He also insisted that the serious Christian had to be born of the spirit:

"When therefore the first spark of a desire after God arises in thy soul, cherish it with all thy care, give all thy heart into it, it is nothing less than a touch of the divine loadstone, that is to draw thee out of the vanity of time into the riches of eternity. Get up therefore and follow it as gladly, as the wise men of the east followed the star from heaven that appeared to them. It will do for thee as the star did for them, it will lead thee to the birth of Jesus, not in a stable at Bethlehem in Judea, but to the birth of Jesus in the dark centre of thy own fallen soul."

Mushroom regeneration is more like Christmas than Easter. It's like a spiritual reset, as well as an opportunity for life reviews and resolutions, a bit like Christmas and New Year rolled into one. For some people, once a year is enough. For others, once a month is about right. Either way, as Philip Larkin sang (on behalf of the trees), "begin afresh, afresh, afresh."

The Psychedelic Christ

“I am that bread of life.”

(John 6:48)

There is a hidden mystery within Christianity which is slowly coming out of the shadows in our time. This is the secret of the Psychedelic Christ. It has recently been explored in Brian Muraresku's 2020 book *The Immortality Key: The Secret History of the Religion with No Name*, but first entered public consciousness fifty years ago in John Allegro's 1970 book *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity Within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Near East*.

The claim is that Christ is a magic mushroom. Barely stated like this, it sounds preposterous. You can just see the village parson spluttering over his tea or the Vatican Curia over their cappuccinos. Let's temper and refine the claim a little to save their stoles. Firstly, Christ is not just a

mushroom, but a cactus, a vine, and indeed any psychoactive substance with entheogenic properties (*entheogen* means "God manifesting"). Secondly, Christ is not only an entheogen: this is just the *Psychedelic Christ*. The traditional God-man of the gospels is not affected thereby.

Allow me to quote further from chapter 6 of the gospel according to John:

"Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

(John 6: 54-58)

When it comes to the claims of eternal life, and living for ever, this is an *experience* as well as a thought. Many people have experienced it on high dose DMT and LSD (although it is impossible to convey to those who haven't).

I recently tripped out on some Aztec Gold mushrooms, which got me "thinking". I became acutely aware of the relationship between us: I was the "host" and the mushroom was my "guest". In a sense I had offered myself

as a channel for the mushroom "intelligence" to live through me.

At the peak of this strange symbiotic communion between the human and fungal, I experienced a certain level of ego dissolution, so you could say that I sacrificed myself for the sake of the "self" of the mushroom. But the mushroom, in being consumed by me, could also be said to have sacrificed itself for me.

As I reflected on the idea of the Psychedelic Christ, it was unclear who was the Christ in this situation. If I considered the mushroom itself as God, then I was somehow, as the "product" or “progeny” of its activity, the “son” of God. However, it wasn't really me, rather a kind of elevated consciousness within me, a "Christ Consciousness", so that it felt right to say with Saint Paul, "yet not I, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

I felt a lot of discomfort in my body, which I associated with the suffering on the cross; I felt myself undergo a kind of death and rebirth; I felt myself to be a holy sacrifice; I felt human and fallible yet divine and perfect. Also, I was a man and the mushroom was a mushroom, so on balance it seemed that I was the more Christ-like of the two.

With hindsight it seemed the height of presumption and spiritual arrogance to call *myself* the Psychedelic Christ, even though I kind of was. The boundaries between God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, me and the mushroom were blurred and confused and we all seemed to blend into each other.

In the cold light of (sober) logic: If "that bread which came down from heaven" refers to psychedelic food and drink ("flesh and blood") and is therefore "sent by God", and if Christ is directly associated with it ("I am that bread of life"), then clearly it is the mushroom that is the Son of God and the partaker of the psychedelic sacrament (the "Christian") merely participates in the life of the Son and through the Son with the Father that sent him.

“If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.” (John 14:7)

“At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me and I in you.” (John 14:20)

So that the mushroom, the "bread of life", is the *Psychedelic Christ* and the mushroom-eater, the "communicant", is the *Psychedelic Christian*.

All the Christian themes of communion, sacrifice, regeneration, death and rebirth, immortality, etc., plus the themes of Jesus's ministry, teaching, healing, forgiving sins and performing miracles, seem somehow to be contained in the sacred mushroom experience, not to mention the grand goal of the Christian life itself, *theosis*.

The DMT God and the Mushroom Christ

What's the difference between the DMT peak experience and the psilocybin peak experience? On DMT (or ayahuasca) you forget yourself and become God. You are the One Consciousness sustaining the entire universe. On magic mushrooms (psilocybin) you don't forget yourself but ascend to heaven and get as close to God as you can bear. God is experienced as an almost unbearable, alternately blissful and painful, source of infinite light and love.

On DMT you are God; on magic mushrooms you are the Son of God. DMT is Hinduism; psilocybin is Christianity. But if Bernardo Kastrup is right about the dissociative Cosmic Mind (our individual consciousness is just a dissociated aspect of universal consciousness) then which is closer to reality? DMT or mushrooms? If in reality all of reality is One Mind, then Hindu DMT is more real. But this unitive consciousness seems to be dissociated the other way: we remember the One but we forget the Many. If we grant ontological status to phenomena and the world of multiplicity, then Christian psilocybin is more real. As dissociated sparks of the One Mind, we can reconnect to the Source while maintaining our separate identities, like a child being reunited with a long-lost parent.

The relationship that is established on a breakthrough heroic dose of magic mushrooms is that between the Son of God and God the Father (to use the patriarchal Christian terms). This relationship affords the Son great power but

also great pain and suffering, since he (or she) is simultaneously identical to and different from God. The unbroken thread between the world of the Many and the One is experienced as one of enormous energy and enormous tension, like a high voltage wire. On the one hand, the Son is God ("I and the Father are one" John 10:30) but on the other, the Father is infinitely greater than the Son ("the Father is greater than I" John 14:28).

This is why there is so much emphasis on suffering in Christianity and so little in Hinduism. When you are dissociated, you don't feel pain (which is why we do it!) If you have completely transcended the world of multiplicity in perfect *moksha*, where is the pain? There is only One without a Second. Therefore there is no friction and no pain. Alternatively, if you have completely dissociated from God the other way, so that you are just a creature among creatures, your pain and suffering is limited to your relations with others, which is trivial compared to that arising from the friction between you and the immortal Source of all existence.

Buddhism is famously about the cessation of suffering; Christianity is about the harnessing of suffering. Self-realised yogis and enlightened Buddhists don't suffer very much (and neither do materialist atheists). Christians do (especially psychedelic Christians). This is the price you pay if you follow the Way, the Truth and the Life of the Son of God.

"But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be

baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able."

(Matthew 20:22)

How to Approach the Unapproachable

Imagine that you are on your deathbed and the moment has come where there is nothing for it but to die. You give up the ghost. You let go. You surrender. You let yourself be taken.

Do this on "magic mushrooms" (I prefer "sacred mushrooms") now, while you are still very much alive, and you will be transported to Heaven. What happens next will depend on the state of your soul. If it's not in good order, you will suffer. If you're in a particularly bad way, you will feel as though you've been plunged into the depths of Hell.

Hell is actually in Heaven. It is really just an intense form of Purgatory. Suffer it patiently if you don't want to make things worse for yourself. Learn the lessons you are given and accept the healing, however painful. Eventually, with repeated practice, and through many trials and tribulations, you will find that you have purified your sight sufficiently to see the Holy of Holies, the Eternal Light. But you will also find that you still cannot be admitted into the presence of God.

Only the Son of God is admitted. If you want to come before God the Father therefore, you must "put on Christ". You must train yourself to be Christ-like on earth, through the imitation of Christ, and to be Christ-like in heaven, through mystical communion. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

Like Jacob tricking his blind father Isaac by dressing up in the animal skins of Esau, you must trick God the Father by dressing up in the mind, body and spirit of Christ. Then He will give you your blessing.

Rudolf Otto describes precisely this need for clothing, veiling, covering or shielding oneself in order to approach God (the "numen") in his masterpiece *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational* :

"We meet the 'moment' of 'covering' in specially clear form in the religion of Yahweh, in its rites and the emotion they excite; but it is contained also, though more obscurely, in many other religions. It comprises, first, a manifestation of the numinous awe, viz. the feeling that the 'profane' creature cannot forthwith approach the numen, but has need of a covering or shield against the *όργή* [wrath] of the numen. Such a 'covering' is then a 'consecration', i.e. a procedure that renders the approacher himself 'numinous', frees him from his 'profane' being, and fits him for intercourse with the numen. The means of 'consecration', however - 'means of grace' in the proper sense - are derived from, or conferred and appointed by, the numen

itself, which bestows something of its own quality to make man capable of communion with it."

As the Gospel of Philip has it, "No one may visit the King without robes of light."

You could say that Christianity provides us with the kind of "cheat" familiar to gamers. Even though you are 'not worthy', even though you are 'profane', even though you are a 'sinner', you can still have an audience with God. How? Through the 'saving grace' of Christ, by imaginatively identifying with him and borrowing his numinosity. This is why he is said to "take away the sins of the world".

In reality, however, he only 'covers' our sin, in order that we may approach the Infinite Source of Life, and in so doing be cleansed, purified, healed, redeemed, remade and born again in the image of God, and made a child of God, and be given the keys to immortality.

So what does this communion with the numen yield? What is the blessing conferred by the Eternal Light, the enigmatic and unapproachable Ein Sof Aur? Seemingly, this mysterious thing called "eternal life":

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may

have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

(1 John 1: 1-5)

Shamanism is Intense

The difference between the recreational and ceremonial use of psychedelics is not just about set and setting. It's primarily about intensity. If you take magic mushrooms and go for a walk with friends, you will probably have quite a magical time. There will be wonder, surprise, surreal encounters, expansive feelings, profound conversations, fun and giggles.

These are valuable experiences in their own right, creative, exploratory and bonding, shared psychedelic adventures that make for good memories and great stories. They can go horribly wrong of course. Too high a dosage and not enough attention to set and setting can turn a multi-coloured dreamscape into a multi-coloured nightmare. Bad trips can sometimes spin out into full-blown psychosis and people can find themselves in dangerous and even life-threatening situations.

The clinical setting is much safer, though not as fun. Fun is not the point, of course, except indirectly. The point is treatment for conditions such as depression or anxiety

which take the fun out life. The therapeutic psychedelic journey is taken solo with minimal guidance and support from a psychiatrist or trained sitter. There may be some interaction, but the talking is mainly done afterwards. Depending on several factors, primarily the dosage, a clinical psychedelic experience will vary in intensity, although, in the interests of safety, this will be kept within certain bounds.

The clinical setting has obvious parallels with the ceremonial setting, but there are also striking differences, the most basic being the level of intensity. Where the clinician is careful not to let the experience get too intense and keeps things relatively cool, the shaman turns up the heat. Where the clinician is worried that you may get too high, the shaman is worried that you may not get high enough.

Ceremonies are meant to be intense. A *sesshin* is intense. A sweat lodge is intense. Even a regular church service should be intense. Otherwise it's just empty ritual or social convention. When it comes to psychedelics, this distinction is intuitively obvious. If a psychedelic ceremony isn't intense, it should really be classed as recreational rather than ceremonial. The same applies to more conventional religious ceremonies like baptisms, weddings and funerals. They can also feel merely "recreational".

It's all about the experience. Intuitively, we know that there is something valuable about intense experiences. And it's not just about the thrill factor, which might explain the allure of sky-diving and other extreme sports. So what is it?

Specifically, what's the spiritual value of intense experiences?

If you think about it, experience is always relational. Whether you are talking to someone or hugging someone, or talking to a tree or hugging a tree (even talking to yourself or hugging yourself) you are in a dynamic, dialogical relationship with someone or something else (even if that something else is a part of you). The more intense the relation, the closer and more entangled you become. Think of an intense conversation, for example. If you're on the same wavelength, if you're "vibing", there comes a point where the boundary between you begins to dissolve, just as with intense dancing or intense love-making.

Relational intensity is therefore associated with intimacy. And intimacy, in its most intense manifestations, resolves itself into unity (or "nonduality") where self and other, inside and outside, experiencer and experienced become one (or "not-two"). This is the essence of spiritual breakthrough: the leap from duality to nonduality. It requires a leap of faith, but it also requires a certain amount of intensity.

Shamanism is intense because shamanism is about spiritual breakthrough. It's not a walk in the park.

Intimacy

The teenage years are when we typically develop a taste for intimacy. This can take many forms. The most obvious is the burning desire to get laid, a common thread running through popular American teen movies, from John Hughes classics like Weird Science to American Pie.

Teens crave physical and sexual intimacy, but they also crave emotional and psychological intimacy. As a teenager, I wanted to get laid, and be intimate with a girl's body, but I also wanted to be intimate with her heart and her mind. A girlfriend wasn't just a "fuck buddy" but someone I could potentially get to know more deeply than anyone else, even deeper perhaps than social convention allowed for.

I was a hopeless romantic as a teenager. I read lots of poetry and novels. I wrote love letters. I listened to Billie Holiday. I felt that ordinary life was hollow and superficial and wanted to find something deeper and more meaningful. I was lonely. I craved intimacy. I felt special, set apart from the crowd, but really I was just a typical teenager.

Although I wasn't explicitly aware of it at the time, most of my emotional and intellectual energy revolved around the idea of intimacy. My best friend and my girlfriend were my male and female "intimacy buddies". We could explore deep feelings and ideas together. Marijuana was another

"intimacy buddy". It allowed me to be intimate with myself, with my senses and the inner workings of my mind.

Reading great writers and listening to great music afforded me a special intimacy with the great minds and souls of the past. Clubbing and raving on Ecstasy and LSD afforded me intimacy with strangers and a collective "hive mind". Meditation retreats and long country walks deepened my intimacy with nature and silence.

Very soon it became clear to me that the world is divided between those who are open to intimacy and those who are closed. One of the questions that has haunted me throughout my psychotherapy career is *why*? Some people suffer because they cannot satisfy their buried desire for intimacy, but others seem to get along just fine without it. Why? There is no simple answer. Perhaps we are just born that way.

People clearly vary when it comes to the degree of emotional and psychological intimacy they can bear, but they also vary when it comes to spiritual intimacy. Some people heed the Delphic inscription *Know Thyself* and make it their life's goal and mission. Some people burn with a holy desire to *Know God* and to be as intimate with Him who is "closer than your jugular vein" as Brother Lawrence and Thomas Traherne were. Some even smoke weed or drink ayahuasca to help them. Most people, however, are either indifferent or disapproving of this quixotic behaviour.

Socrates famously said, "the unexamined life is not worth living". He was talking about an intellectual intimacy with life, which he, as a member of the class of teens and adults who are open to intimacy, could not imagine a meaningful life without. For those of us who value intimacy on all levels, and not just on the intellectual, philosophical level, I say rather, "the distant life is not worth living".

Becoming God

Theosis, or deification, is the mysterious process whereby human beings become God, or at least participate as fully as is humanly possible in His divine nature. In the Christian tradition, this is made possible by the incarnation: "God became man that we might be gods".

So how do we become God? First, we must empty ourselves of our ego. This is called *kenosis*, or "self-emptying" in Christian mysticism. Easier said than done of course, but with practice it becomes second nature. You must abandon all memories, thoughts and feeling in a "cloud of forgetting" and enter a "cloud of unknowing". A Zen Buddhist will know what I mean. It is a state of *mu-shin*, or no-mind.

This state is one of stillness and quiet. However, it is not a complete nothingness, since nature abhors a vacuum.

Sooner or later, something will enter your field of awareness, whether that be a sensation, a thought or a feeling. The difference is that it will manifest itself with a certain pristine purity, with a mysterious force of truth and beauty, a revelation or epiphany out of the infinite blue. This is called *gnosis*, which is a direct apprehension of pure truth.

What do we do with this gift from beyond? Whether an intellectual insight or a physical rush of energy, where do we put it? We all receive these transcendental gifts all the time, though we rarely notice or value them enough to prevent them from evaporating as fast as they materialise. Easy come, easy go. However, in the attentive state of *kenosis* and *gnosis*, we can consciously absorb and integrate it so that it doesn't just disappear. We do this be adjusting our existing Umwelt, or worldview, to accommodate the new piece of information, either mentally or somatically. In other words we learn something.

This process of integration and synthesis is called *pistis*, usually translated as "faith". We don't perfectly model reality, but rather approximate it as far as possible by continuously refining our understanding. This proceeds along with a deepening faith that we are moving ever closer to the truth of Being itself. However, this is not a purely abstract or theoretical matter. It's not just a map of the territory. It involves countless cycles of *kenosis*, *gnosis* and *pistis*, of "purification", "perception" and "dalliance", and transforms us little by little and piece by piece, as

though we were alchemically changing the constitution of a lump of lead one atom at a time into gold.

Faith is the substance of what we are. It is the accumulated substance of our ultimate deification. When atheists ask for proof for the existence of God, what they don't understand is that faith is itself the proof. As we grow in faith to the point where *pistis*, *kenosis* and *gnosis* are one act of pure Being, Consciousness and Bliss, we find that we no longer need signs or wonders, or rational or empirical proof for the existence of God. As partakers of the divine nature, we are sanctified and deified, such that we are ourselves the proof.

Seven Breakthroughs

Kensho is the Japanese term for a spiritual breakthrough, a temporary, fleeting taste of enlightenment. On medium to high doses of DMT and other potent psychedelics such as LSD, mescaline or psilocybin, you can also experience breakthroughs to a radically altered state of consciousness, something that Jim Morrison and The Doors were famously keen to do (if you're too young to get that reference, never mind).

Breakthrough is never guaranteed. But it can be facilitated by creating the right conditions. And there are different

kinds of breakthrough. The Zen breakthrough to non-dual consciousness is not the same thing as a breakthrough to resolving psychological trauma, for example.

Zazen (sitting meditation) in a Buddhist monastery is geared towards spiritual breakthrough (*kensho*) and spiritual enlightenment (*satori*). But what about psychedelic trips? What are they geared towards?

It is common to set an intention before embarking on a psychedelic journey. This helps orient you towards a conscious goal, usually in the form of a request (*Santo daime*!) for guidance or healing. But breakthroughs are not always about solutions to personal problems. They can take other forms too.

The integrative psychedelic model I employ proceeds through seven discrete stages, with the potential for a completely different kind of breakthrough at each stage. These are as follows:

1. MYSTICAL BREAKTHROUGH: Through absorption in meditation, you enter a timeless and spaceless dimension of radical Emptiness or *Vacuum-Plenum*.

2. SHAMANIC BREAKTHROUGH: Through further absorption, you "enter the dragon" of your "energy body". You may also experience radical changes in your breathing, "ocean breath", "bamboo breath", "bated breath", "dancing breath" and may vocalise the breath, intoning, babbling, chanting or singing.

3. WARRIOR BREAKTHROUGH: Standing and stretching and adopting strong physical postures, your body flows into powerful sequences of learned and spontaneous warrior-like moves.

4. EMOTIONAL BREAKTHROUGH: Listening to beautiful music, you experience intensely cathartic heart-breaking and heart-melting emotions, usually accompanied by abundant tears.

5. PHILOSOPHICAL BREAKTHROUGH: Reflecting on personal and cosmic questions in a contemplative mood, you experience cascades of inspired insight, wisdom and understanding.

6. SOUL BREAKTHROUGH: Dancing to deep, conscious music (e.g. dub), you embody a state of poised integrity, nobility and inner stature, as if in the presence of "the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the conquering lion of Judah".

7. FRIENDSHIP BREAKTHROUGH: Sharing and socialising with others, you discover a profound sense of connection, communion, solidarity and friendship.

In any one trip, it is unlikely that you will experience a breakthrough at all seven stages of the journey. One is enough. And there is no reason to be disheartened if no breakthrough is forthcoming. It will come with practice, and whether or not you manage to "break on through to the other side" this time, there is always something of value to take away from the experience, and there is always next time.

Seven More Breakthroughs

There are many more ways of breaking through (I suppose).

Here are six I have personally experienced several times (not necessarily in order of preference):

1. THE PSYCHEDELIC PALACE. More often than not the onset is sudden: vivid colourful geometric imagery which flows and dances with the music. It is a familiar space, a happy place.
2. The BLACK HOLE. At some point in the proceedings you slip into a black hole and emerge some time later unsure where you've been exactly. You can't remember much and the music has passed unnoticed.
3. REGENERATION. This is an experience of intense energetic dissolution and regeneration. It feels like all the atoms in your body are simultaneously and individually zapped by an alien regeneration machine.
4. DEATH AND RESURRECTION. This takes the form of a physical descent into the underworld, either earth or sea or ice caves, followed by an ascent and

rebirth into the light. It usually includes a period of intense discomfort and claustrophobia and identification with the sufferings of humanity and/or all of life before the blissful release.

5. APOCALYPSE. Potentially very frightening, especially the first time. The world disappears, dissolves, evaporates, revealing an infinite plenum void of mysterious awesome Godhead. There is a dreadful feeling that this is in fact the end of the world. Eventually however, existence reconstitutes itself, one veil at a time.
6. EVERYTHING/NOTHING WHITEOUT. This is the classic ego dissolution experience of mystical union with God (for want of a better word). It can be experienced as strange or familiar, blissful or terrifying. There is a sense of timelessness and spaciousness. Sometimes there is the bare feeling "I Am" or even "I Am God". Although it can feel like an eternity, with hindsight it is possible to estimate the time as a matter of minutes. The pure state (without any thoughts at all) doesn't generally last very long.
7. THE ISHVARA. All individual human beings are different faces of One Person and *thou art that*. This can also be quite a confusing and mildly distressing experience. But also beautiful and inspiring. This one can also shade into a messiah complex where you believe that you are the Son of God.

If none of these breakthroughs bring you to a state of Dust and Ashes before the inconceivable *Mysterium Tremendum*, you're not quite getting it. If you take them literally, you're

also not quite getting it. All transcendental breakthrough experiences are riddled with paradox and the ability to navigate paradox is key to psychedelic sanity.

Purity, Faith and Experience

What does it take to be a Zen Christian Shaman?

Purity, faith and experience.

Also:

Resist the flattering voice of the devil with all the humility of a Mystic-Shaman; resist the lures of the flesh with the chastity of a Warrior-Monk; resist the temptations of the world with the purity of a Philosopher-King.

In other words, reject the world, the flesh and the devil.

Be humble, chaste and pure.

For a Zen Christian Shaman, the *way* is pure Zen - "a condition of complete simplicity (costing not less than everything)", - the *truth* is Christian humility - "the only wisdom we can hope to acquire / Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless", and the *life* is Shamanic transmuted

sexual energy - "Love is the unfamiliar name behind the hands that wove the intolerable shirt of flame." (T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets)

So:

Faith and experience are the bulwarks supporting purity.

And:

We need the humility to get over ourselves and put our faith in a Higher Power, and we need to be chaste if we are to experience our life force (Eros) non-sexually. The stronger the faith and the deeper the experience, the easier it is to maintain the pure awareness of *mu-shin* (no-mind) in everyday life.

'Buddha, according to a sutra, once said: "Stop, stop. Do not speak. The ultimate truth is not even to think."'

(Quoted in Zen Flesh, Zen Bones by Paul Reps)

The Non-Rational Way

The Way of the Holy Mushroom depends on three elements: *kenosis*, *gnosis* and *pistis*.

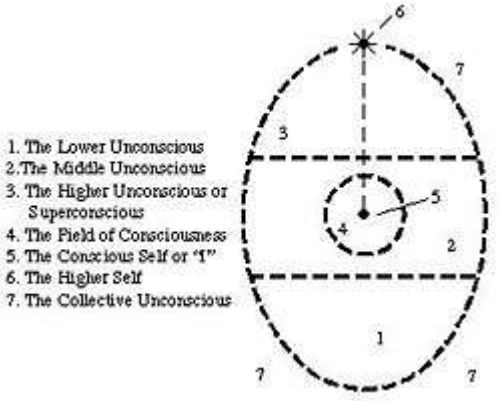
Kenosis is all about self-emptying and not-knowing. It is the recognition that the honest answer to the perennial questions, "who am I?", "what is the nature of reality?" and "what is God?" is *I don't know*. Kenosis is rooted in radical humility before the fathomless mystery of existence. Any glib answers to these questions, whether theistic or atheistic, are ultimately dishonest and worthless - the facile pretensions of an arrogant human mind. As Einstein put it, you cannot understand "that which the mind cannot grasp".

Gnosis is about being filled with the spirit (the mushroom spirit) and intimate knowing. However, gnostic knowing is not the same as ordinary, rational knowing. It is supra-mundane, super-natural, transcendental knowing. It is "out of this world". It carries profound conviction, known in the trade as "noetic quality", but is at the same time strangely intangible and "ineffable", impossible to communicate in ordinary language. This is why it is so difficult to "integrate", that is, to transfer it to the ordinary human world and human mind.

The mode of expression best suited to the translation of this supra-mundane gnosis into human understanding is not the rational, logical, propositional mode. It is the mythopoeic mode, which is not irrational or illogical, but non-rational. It blends truth with beauty and goodness, story-telling with poetry, architecture with music, art with artlessness, revelation with tradition, reason with faith. This is *pistis*, or religion. Without it, we are left with dry philosophy or moist emotivism.

When it comes to the ritual use of psychedelics, human reason has its place, but it is essential that it know its place. It must give way to these three other types of knowing: the not-knowing of kenosis, the psychedelic, super-natural knowing of gnosis and the religious knowing of pistis. However, because we are proud and lack humility, we cannot enter fully into kenosis, gnosis and pistis, and develop the *docta ignorantia* or "learned ignorance" necessary to progress in holiness, virtue and wisdom. Instead, we fall back on the conventional wisdom of the world, which is of course foolishness with God.

I Am the Egg Man



Roberto Assagioli's famous egg diagram is a very useful picture of the human psyche, especially when it comes to extra-ordinary states of consciousness.

Here is one way of understanding it, using Christ's famous assertion, "I am the way, the truth and the life":

I AM (Higher Self) THE WAY (Field of Consciousness), THE TRUTH (Middle Unconscious) and THE LIFE (Lower Unconscious and Higher Unconscious).

I AM is pure subjectivity, pure consciousness. When we are in this state, we are "One without a Second", that is, subject with no object. THE WAY is our immediate experience of the world without the filter or mediation of thoughts or feelings, that is, a state of no-mind (*mu-shin*) and flow (*wei-wu-wei*). We simply experience whatever comes to pass in our field of consciousness. THE TRUTH is the wisdom stored in the middle unconscious, which is not present to consciousness, and does not interfere with the pristine clarity of our field of awareness, but is available for conscious recall at any moment, just below the surface of consciousness. THE LIFE is the energy released through accessing the depths and heights of the lower and higher unconscious, on psychedelics for example (*Amun, Ra, Atum, Ka* in the lower and *Gaia, Jah* in the higher).

"Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." (Ephesians 4: 9-10)

Zen Christian Shamanism

Zen Christian Shamanism is Headlessness, Holiness, Wholeness.

Zen Christian Shamanism is Kenosis, Pistis, Gnosis.

Zen Christian Shamanism is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

There is a weak form and a strong form of Zen Christian Shamanism:

The weak form is a weak interaction between three common conceptions of Zen as calm mindful presence, Christianity as selfless love and Shamanism as psychedelic journeying.

The strong form is a strong interaction between Zen as satori, Christianity as theosis and Shamanism as ego death. The three things are ultimately one and the same. In the end all things point to Zen.

"What is Zen?

Try if you wish. But Zen comes of itself. True Zen shows in everyday living, CONSCIOUSNESS in action. More than any limited awareness, it opens every inner door to our infinite nature.

Instantly mind frees. How it frees! False Zen wracks brains as a fiction concocted by priests and salesmen to peddle their own wares.

Look at it this way, inside out and outside in: CONSCIOUSNESS everywhere, inclusive, through you. Then you can't help living humbly, in wonder."

(Paul Reps)

A Simple System

The system is actually very simple, appearances to the contrary.

It is summed up in three practices: the *Way*, the *Word* and the *Work*.

1. The *Way* = the headless way and mindfulness.
2. The *Word* = wisdom literature and mantras.
3. The *Work* = liturgy and theurgy.

The *Way* is a continuous practice, "every minute zen" or "one eon zen".

The *Word* comprises daily reading, meditation and prayer.

The *Work* consists of weekly (Sunday Mass) and monthly (Mushroom Ceremony) rituals.

(Incidentally, these three practices map onto the Buddhist "three treasures", *Buddha*, *Dharma*, *Sangha*.)

Practice means repetition: *Way, Word, Work, Repeat*. By doing this over and over again, we train the brain and balance the nervous system. We structure the Imaginal, form the Forms, embody the Archetypes, make the Word flesh.

Eventually, we discover a timeless place that becomes gradually and progressively more vividly real, paradoxically here and now, but somehow beyond time and space. Do we discover it or create it? Or both? In any case, we find ourselves entering the kingdom of God, again and again.

T.S. Eliot writes,

"But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint—"

This simple system is for those who would seek the kingdom of God and be sanctified thereby. Whether understood clearly and explicitly or obscurely and implicitly to begin with, it is in truth an occupation for the saint, for holy men and women with *bodhicitta*, the "idea of the holy" and the "thought of enlightenment".

Communion

Dogen Zenji said that, "to forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things". This is the *via negativa*. However, it is also true that, to commune with myriad things is to forget the self. This is the *via positiva*. The end result is the same: "your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of enlightenment remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly."

The *via negativa* is practised in "formless meditation" and dis-identification from all the various contents of the ego and discriminative mind (i.e. the left hemisphere).

The *via positiva* is practised in "form meditation" and communion with various objects of awareness and attention using the intuitive mind (i.e. the right hemisphere).

Both ways support each other. They are complementary, not contradictory.

If you are communing with Nature, you become immersed in your environment. The boundary between you and the world around you begins to soften. You may even reach the point of "no boundary" and feel completely at one with life. But this is only possible with an attitude of openness and non-judgmental acceptance. You are not trying to analyse, interrogate, categorize or understand Nature objectively or scientifically. You are simply there to commune with it.

The same is true of reading or listening to music. If you are straining to decode, deconstruct, critique or interpret a poem or sonata, you are setting yourself against it in the controlling mode of the left hemisphere. You are identified with your analytical mind and experience it through the filter of your ego.

On the other hand, if you read a poem with an attitude of *lectio divina*, and savour every word and phrase for its own sake, simply and trustfully, in good faith, you will find that the boundary between reader and read also begins to soften and dissolve. You find yourself communing with the text rather than merely studying it or analyzing it. You are reading with the right hemisphere. You are reading for pleasure.

To enjoy and appreciate art and Nature, we need to commune with art and Nature and we need to forget the controlling, thinking self. The same is true of religion and psychedelics. Religious experiences and psychedelic experiences are experiences of intimate and intense communion and ego dissolution.

So *The Way of the Holy Mushroom* is primarily a positive way of communion, although it necessarily also includes the negative way of dis-identification. We commune with the mushroom, commune with the mantra, commune with the music, commune with the silence, commune with friends, commune with Nature. And we let go of the ego.

Holy communion is communion that heals us and makes us whole. The word is made flesh, touched by and touching

"the peace that passeth all understanding" and "the love that moves the sun and the other stars". For we have the mind of Christ, and the body and the blood. Bone of my bone, marrow of my marrow, He is nearer to me than I am to myself.

The Snake on the Stick

Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, was a devotee of Asclepius, the Greek god of healing. His symbol was a snake on a stick, known as the Rod of Asclepius.



The Hebrew *Nehushtan* is a bronze image of a serpent on a pole. Moses prayed to God, who told Moses, "Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he seeth it, shall live." (Numbers 21: 4-9)



This story is taken up in the New Testament, where Jesus identifies himself with the fiery serpent, saying, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3: 14-15)

The image of a snake on a stick is dramatically realized in paintings and illustrations of the snake tempting Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, coiled around the trunk of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.



Plate 13 of the Great Canterbury Psalter, which dates from around 1200 AD, intriguingly depicts the tree as a giant mushroom (ninth panel).



So what does it all mean? Some snakes are extremely dangerous. Their venom is so strong it can kill an adult human with a single bite. The Australian Taipan is the world's deadliest snake, but many other species, such as King Cobras, Black Mambas, Death Adders, Pit Vipers, Rattlesnakes and Tiger Snakes are also lethal. (The snake that ravaged the Israelites in the wilderness may well have been the Egyptian Cobra).

Some mushrooms are also poisonous enough to kill you, such as the Death Cap, the three Destroying Angels and the Fool's Mushroom. There are others which are highly toxic but non lethal, such as the Amanita Muscaria, which have psychoactive properties.

One man's poison is another man's medicine. The close relationship between poison and medicine is found in conventional Western medicine, in the development of vaccines for example, as well as in TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) and alternative medicines such as homeopathy.

The snake on the stick image can be seen to symbolize the taming of poison and the production of medicine, hence its ubiquitous use in medical organisations around the world. This can be taken in a literal, material, molecular, chemical sense, with the development of new medicines in the lab, but it can also be taken in an esoteric, spiritual sense, in the controlled use of psychedelics in the astrolab of the soul.

A wild snake in the wilderness can kill you. A tame snake on a stick can heal you. If you can lift the fiery serpent kundalini up the energetic pole of the sushumna nadi

along the central nervous system, who knows, you may even "have eternal life".

The Holy Grail

The Holy Grail is a mythical cup which confers eternal youth to whoever drinks from it. The knights of the round table of Arthurian legend are sent out on a quest to find it, as it is the only thing that can heal the stricken king.

What is the Holy Grail?

It is a cup filled with the blood of Christ, which is the spirit of God (some might say, filled with an entheogenic elixir). In Kabbalah, this "saving cup" is the *Kli*, the spiritual vessel for the divine light. In Christianity, it is the body of Christ, the Word made flesh, containing the spirit of Christ, the eternal *Logos*.

If we can't stand the power of this spirit in the psychedelic experience, if we cannot "bear the beams of love", we will either close down, batten down the hatches and block the influx of psychic energy, or we will shatter into pieces: *Shevirat haKeilim*. And without a solid container, the life-giving spirit will be lost, as if we were to pour water into a cracked vase.

The "set and setting" provide a container for the psychedelic spirit. The mantra and the music in particular

act as vessels for the divine energies so that we can hold them and hold onto them, and channel them through our mortal frames without blocking or shattering. But so does our ability to endure, to stand firm and withstand "the slings and arrows" of the spirit world.

Taking our cue from Nassim Taleb's work, the vessel which receives the devastating power of the psychedelic *numen* must be "anti-fragile". Unlike a fragile wine glass that smashes as soon as it hits the hard floor, or a non-fragile plastic beaker that bounces back, it must be *anti*-fragile. Like our bones and muscles, which get stronger when put under stress, the soul of the shaman increases in resilience and power with each psychedelic onslaught.

The mystical elixir inside the cup fortifies and strengthens the cup itself. Although the ego may shatter, although the mind may shatter (the "shattering of the vessels"), the soul, which is the true cup, manifests ever more strongly. The golden chalice is not given to us, but must be found, must be alchemically *created*, out of the very golden elixir it holds.

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, but only if you have a good-enough container to start with. Strong psychedelic medicine is contra-indicated for emotionally unstable people with serious mental health problems, people with severe anxiety or depression, and people with a history of psychotic breakdown. (Psychedelic treatments can be enormously healing and beneficial for all sorts of conditions, but only within a supportive and carefully administered therapeutic context, with continuous

professional care and attention during the experience, and lengthy preparation and integration before and after).

Although the excitable advocates for the psychedelic renaissance like to portray psychedelics as a miraculous panacea for all our problems, there is no magic pill, there is no short cut, and there is no free lunch. It's bloody hard work. And it's not for everyone.

Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

Matthew 20:22

Mushroom Alchemy

The Way of the Holy Mushroom combines outer alchemy ("waidan") with inner alchemy ("neidan"). The psychoactive psilocybin brew is the "external elixir" which, in conjunction with special meditation techniques (mantras, breathwork, metanoia, etc.) produces the mysterious "golden elixir" that heals and rejuvenates body and mind.

The alchemy is effectuated through the skilful use of religious formulations ("holy magic") and the interplay of consciousness and energy ("Shiva" and "Shakti"). The

enormous amplification in the natural levels of bio-electricity in the body ("Qi" in Chinese) triggered by psychoactive compounds such as psilocybin can then be harnessed in the service of physical, emotional and mental well-being.

Recent scientific research on bio-electricity has shown it to have both restorative and regenerative properties. However, science has yet to catch up with the ancient arts of inner alchemy, and has no clear understanding of the relationship between consciousness and energy.

Hermetic discipline (quarantine from worldly distraction and rumination) for example, has long been advocated by spiritual masters as essential for the cultivation of Qi, as it is the only way to free up consciousness from the monopoly of the mind. Sustained attention or mindfulness is also essential. As an old Chinese adage has it, "you cannot cook golden rice in a leaky pot".

The Voice

Many years ago (how time flies!) I drank ayahuasca with some friends in south London. It was quite an eventful night, to put it mildly. At one particularly memorable point in the proceedings, I regressed to the consciousness of a unicellular organism and proceeded to recapitulate my phylogenetic evolution up to hominids and the historical

stages of the cultural evolution of humanity. Somewhat irritatingly, my friends intervened at the agrarian stage due to concerns about the neighbours, because they felt that I was shouting too loudly (how else could I herd the cattle?!)

The music we were listening to aided my evolution, culminating in the ethereal sounds of Palestrina, sung for me by a literal choir of angels. As I attempted to sing along, I found that my own voice was becoming more refined and controlled, especially compared to the cowboy hollering of a few eons earlier. I was myself (almost!) singing like an angel, and feeling like one too.

This experience contributed to my deepening appreciation of the importance and centrality of the human voice. One aspect of this understanding is psychological: we have to loosen the repressive shackles modern civilization imposes on us and "find our voice". Another is physiological: the sound vibrations of the voice reverberating in the chest and throughout the body clearly have transformative and healing power. By refining the quality of our voice, we can refine the quality of both our mental and physical energy. Both the unvoiced and voiced breath are crucial in bridging and integrating body and soul.

Fast forward a few years to the second ever Medicine Festival in West Berkshire. I am sitting listening to an act on the main stage, which turns out to be a young woman singing with an acoustic guitar. Having just smoked a joint, I relax and surrender to the music. And the voice enters me in waves of textured bliss. More powerfully than any showy set by The Rolling Stones or Rihanna. No need for a big

band, orchestra, backing singers, electronic beats, special effects, auto tune, light show etc. etc. Just a simple, beautiful voice singing simple, beautiful lyrics to a simple, beautiful melody.

And I remembered the sacred power of the human voice. Thank you and bless you Alexia Chellun.

How God Works

Beyond the horizon of the phenomenal world, beyond the horizon of *your* phenomenal world, is pure consciousness, one without a second. This pure consciousness is that which sustains your world, that which holds it in existence. Otherwise, an experienced world would be impossible.

On the other side of the dividing line between phenomena and noumena is pure, absolute consciousness, *Parashiva*. On this side of the line is subjective consciousness and its objective world, *Shiva* and *Shakti*.

Parashiva by definition cannot be in direct relation to the world, because as soon as there is an experienced world and an experiencer of the world, phenomena and consciousness, we are in the realm of subject and object, Shiva and Shakti, no longer the nondual "one without a second".

Is the background consciousness of our worlds an inert world-enabler, a kind of cosmic microwave background? Is "God" basically irrelevant to the actual functioning of the world? The Original Cause merely, an Unmoved Mover who retired for good on the seventh day of Creation as Deists thought?

If God as absolute consciousness were to have any influence on the physical, contingent world of things and history, it would have to be through the medium of relative consciousness, Shiva, since Shiva shares the essential nature of Parashiva (consciousness), but in relationship with the phenomenal world, Shakti.

This is why it is said that the Son is both fully God and fully man. If it were otherwise, there would be no point of contact. Redemption, which really means "being put right with God", is impossible without contact, without a bridge between God and the world.

This bridge is *Christ*, the Anointed One. The anointing consists of complete absorption of Shiva in Parashiva, of the Son in the Father. The transforming power of this immersion, this baptism in the waters of pure consciousness, is manifest on return to the world, now revealed as a pure land, or "kingdom of God", filled with the glory of the Holy Spirit. Shakti removes Her veil in a revealing *apokalypsis*.

Thus, through the agency of conscious human beings, God patiently works His magic on the world, one soul at a time.

Bombu Nature and Absolute Faith

According to Shin Buddhism, we humans have the capacity for *Buddha Nature*, but typically express *Bombu Nature*. The usual translation for Bombu is "a foolish being of wayward passion". Human beings, in their unregenerate state, are foolish beings of wayward passion.

What is "wayward passion"? Anger, hatred, jealousy, fear, lust, greed. In the Wheel of Babylon, derived from the Tibetan Wheel of Life, these emotional states are personified in three archetypal figures, namely, the Demon, the Victim and the Addict.

What is "foolish being"? Wilful ignorance, self-righteous delusion and conceited arrogance. These states are personified in the upper three archetypes of the Wheel of Babylon, that is, the Muggle, the Muppet and the Diva.

According to Shin Buddhism, the only way to overcome our ingrained Bombu Nature is by throwing ourselves on the mercy of the Cosmic Buddha, *Amida Butsu*, since nothing within the closed system of the Wheel of Life can liberate us from it. We cannot pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. Thus Shin is known as the Buddhism of Faith.

The Way of the Holy Mushroom is also a Way of Faith, and for exactly the same reason, which is simply that *There Is No Other Way*. Either you give up tying yourself up in knots with the endless twists and turns of the ego, or you don't. Either you "die before you die" (which is to say, die to your

self), or you don't. Either you have faith and surrender to life unmediated by foolishness and wayward passion, or you don't.

Paul Tillich writes of the need for the existential courage to despair and the need for absolute faith in the face of meaninglessness beyond the dishonest but comforting half-measures and cop-outs of the ego. The courage to be holy is the courage to despair of Babylon and put all your trust in the power of Being-itself. Whether you call it "the love of Amida" or "the love of God" doesn't really matter. Just have faith, absolute faith.

"Love breaks down the barrier that shuts most of us from Heaven. That thought is too much for us really, yet it is the central truth of the spiritual life. And that loving, self-yielding to the Eternal Love - that willingness that God shall possess, indwell, fertilize, bring forth the fruit of His Spirit in us, instead of the fruits of *our* spirit - is the secret of all Christian power and Christian peace."

Evelyn Underhill

All is One

When a trippy hippy says "All is One" the natural response is to roll your eyes. Yet there is no other way to say it. The universal message of a breakthrough "spiritual" experience

on psychedelics is just this: the world of separation and division is actually an illusion and the Ultimate Truth of Reality and the Ultimate Meaning of Life is contained in the fact that All is One.

But then what to do with this knowledge? When you come down from your high, all that One seems to be very many separate people and things indeed. Soon the vision of the One is just a distant memory and ordinary everyday reality is just "one damn thing after another". Either you just forget about it, or you keep the knowledge in your heart as a precious secret, jealously guarded against the scoffing and mockery of unbelieving cynics and skeptics.

Some people have a full-blown experience of this mysterious Unity of Being or Being-ness, which they might describe using more philosophical or religion language, depending on their predilection. Others will have only heard about it second-hand through the reports of mystics and more traditional religious channels, and will take it on trust (call it "faith"), even if what they actually believe is a little hazy.

Talk of the One is a very Greek way of talking, basically Platonic and Neo-Platonic. The more common religious term is "God". So what do you do with the belief or certain knowledge that All is One or that All is God? How do you reconcile the One with the Many or God and the world? At the very least, you try to live the best you can in the light of this knowledge, loving your neighbour as yourself, and so on and so forth. This "so on and so forth" is what is commonly called exoteric religion, or the "Outer Mysteries".

It is a complex of symbols, rituals and teachings designed to help you remember the One/God, but is most concerned with, although obviously not restricted to, moral conduct.

Some people are not satisfied with this "acting as if" and want to experience this “All is One/All is God” not once, not fleetingly, not vaguely, but over and over again, powerfully, incontrovertibly, ecstatically. They may follow a calling to dedicate themselves to prayer and meditation as a monastic. They may heed the call of psychedelics. Some will fail in this quest for the Holy Grail, the Beatific Vision, and some will succeed.

Those that succeed establish a cycle of remembering and forgetting, journeying back and forth between the One God and the world of multiplicity. This is often expressed as a kind of death or ego death, as the separate self dissolves into the Oneness, and a rebirth or resurrection, as the world re-emerges with the freshness of a new creation. Here we are dealing with the "Inner Mysteries", the esoteric, hidden teachings of religion.

Eventually the One and the Many become experienced simultaneously, so that neither one nor the other is completely forgotten. This is described in religious terminology as the Presence of God, in which we "live and move and have our being". Finally the One and the Many fuse in a non-dual synthesis, where Samsara is Nirvana. It is the third step in Shankara's famous formula, "the world is illusion; Brahman is the only reality; the world is Brahman". Here there is no more doubt or confusion. Thou art That. The One and the Many are One. In a flash, you are adopted

into the communion of saints as a hidden child of the living God.

The Real Reason for Bad Trips

Bad trips are not the result of indigestion, malevolent spirits, wrong dosage, or infelicitous set or setting. They are the result of personality disorders. As it says in the *Theologica Germanica*, "nothing burns in hell but self-will".

Unless and until you burn away all trace of self-will, you will suffer mental and emotional distress, confusion, anxiety, paranoia, disturbing imagery, negative thought loops, nausea and physical discomfort. Plant medicines hold up a mirror to your ego, and an ugly ego is a frightful and fearful thing.

Beware of your ego. You will suffer in your own personal hell if you are a grandiose or covert narcissist; you will suffer if you are a sadist; you will suffer if you are borderline, dependent or obsessive-compulsive. There is always the possibility of redemption and healing, but the only way out is through: you must suffer into truth.

"And in this bringing back and healing, I can, or may, or shall do nothing of myself, but just simply yield to God, so that He alone may do all things in me and work, and I may suffer him and all his work and divine will. And because I

will not do so, but I count myself to be my own, and say 'I', 'Mine', 'Me', and the like, God is hindered, so that he cannot do his work in me alone and without hindrance; for this cause my fall and my going astray remain unhealed. Behold! This all cometh of my claiming somewhat of my own."

The Frankfurter

Love your Enemies

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

(Matthew 5: 43-45)

The good people among you might protest, "but I don't have any enemies!" It certainly appears to be the case that in modern polite society enemies are rather thin on the ground and only the very unlucky or the very irascible actually have any. But for a spiritually sensitive person,

though it might sound like a rather severe case of paranoia, enemies are literally everywhere.

C.S. Lewis famously wrote that being a Christian was like being parachuted into enemy-occupied territory: "Enemy-occupied territory - that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us to take part in a great campaign of sabotage."

So who is the enemy? A Christian might say, "the world, the flesh and the devil". But then what exactly are "the world, the flesh and the devil", and if we knew, could or should we *love* them?

Obviously you can't love your enemy unless you know your enemy. And you can't know your enemy if you think everyone is your friend. Again the good people will protest, "but good people should see the good in everyone!" From a spiritual point of view, this is dangerously naive.

From a spiritual point of view, your enemy is anyone who knocks you off course, lures you off the path, steers you away from God, steals your soul. The archetypal Biblical enemy is of course the serpent in the garden of Eden who tempts Adam and Eve with the promise of god-like status if only they disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit. But in modern polite society, it's not always so easy to spot serpents.

Know your enemy. On the Wheel of Babylon there are six "enemies": *Diva, Demon, Victim, Addict, Muppet, Muggle*.

These are really six subpersonalities which arise in consciousness under certain conditions in response to certain triggers. We express them through the prism of our particular personalities when we identify with them in characteristic Diva, Demon, Victim, Addict, Muppet or Muggle thought, word and deed. These are the psycho-spiritual enemies we must contend with every day if we are to make any spiritual progress.

With discipline and practice, it is possible to recognise the tell-tale signs of these subpersonalities, disidentify from them and stop acting them out. At the same time, we can develop a sensitive radar to recognise them in others, perhaps most especially in our nearest and dearest friends, family and partners. When we see how the people around us are periodically possessed by these six spirits of Babylon, we see that we are in fact in enemy-occupied territory, that we are beset by enemies on all sides.

Spiritually speaking, we are exiles in Babylon. Day and night we are working with the enemy, drinking with the enemy, sleeping with the enemy. Very occasionally we may come across a *Mystic*, *Shaman*, *Warrior*, *Monk* or *Nun*, *Philosopher*, *King* or *Queen*, but these are rare encounters. The sad truth is that, although we may believe the converse, we actually have many more enemies than friends.

When Jesus said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26), he didn't mean that you should hate

yourself and your family, but that you should know that the people in your life are your enemies, and that you are your own enemy, perhaps even your worst enemy.

Know your enemies, but love them, otherwise you will make your life and theirs a misery. Love your enemies, bless them, do good to them, pray for them. Because hate gets you nowhere - hating on serpents, whether those within you or without you, only poisons you with their poison. Love is the cure. Love is the way. Love is the bruiser of the serpent's head.

The Courage to be Holy

Paul Tillich and Rudolf Otto get to the bottom of what it means to tread the Way of the Holy Mushroom in their classic works, *The Courage to Be* and *The Idea of the Holy*. When you understand the radical, existential nature of courage and faith and the radical, supernatural nature of the numinous and the holy, you understand how the ritual, sacramental use of psychedelics makes for a strong, faithful and holy people.

The courage to be Holy is the courage to despair of Babylon and to put all your trust in the power of Being-itself. Beyond the wisdom of the world and the morality of the world, beyond psychedelia and mysticism, beyond

duality and non-duality, there is the immutable and infinite holiness of God, the source of all holiness.

Holy, Holy, Holy

When you realize that the psychedelic experience is holy and sacred, you treat it with respect and trust. You treat it with reverence. When you take a high dose, you are on holy ground. So you are very careful. Careful to be quiet, careful to pay attention. Careful to behave yourself. This is true sacred ceremony. Your left brain gives up the reins and your right brain takes the lead. The experience is whole and holy. If the left brain refuses to surrender, the experience is fragmented and frightening.

The "first holy" is the psychedelic experience with the right brain is in charge. This is why we meditate in preparation for the trip. The "second holy" is religion with the right brain in charge. When the left brain is in charge, religion is absurd, whether you are religious or not. If you are religious, you embrace the absurdity; if you are atheist, you reject it. Either way, it is not holy. The holiness of religion - the scriptures, the music, the art, the ritual, - is only experienced as holy when the right brain is in charge.

The "third holy" is everything. Life. Every moment of existence. Again, this sense of the holiness of everything is only possible when the right brain is in charge. But how to

surrender the comforting control of the left brain hemisphere in everyday life? How to give up the picture of reality in exchange for reality itself? Reality is too scary. It's too real. Anything might happen.

It's very difficult to leave the safe houses of the left hemisphere. It takes faith. But where can we find this faith? In the "first holy", faithful surrender to the holy mushroom, and in the "second holy", faithful surrender to religion.

When you train yourself in right brain dominance through sacred psychedelic ceremonies and religious study, worship, prayer, meditation, etc., when it comes to being right brain dominant in the rest of your life, it's not so difficult. It's just one more step. The "third holy". The third leap of faith.

When you have faith, you can let go and be here now. You can stand firmly in the right brain hemisphere, in direct, unmediated, open zen awareness. Only then, with the third holy, with the three holies of psychedelics (gnosis), religion (pistis) and zen (kenosis), are you truly a holy man or holy woman. You are whole and holy indeed when the rightful Master, the deposed King, the crucified God, is returned to the throne. You are a child of God in the kingdom of Heaven.

Wisdom and Virtue in the Tree of Life

This meditation is a simplified version of the Jewish kabbalistic tree of life with seven elements, which differ very slightly from the traditional meanings:

Keter (Divine Light)

Hokhmah (Insight)

Binah (Knowledge)

Da'at (Wisdom)

Chesed (Love)

Gevurah (Restraint)

Tiferet (Beauty)

The basic idea is the same: the first sefirah (emanation) from the transcendent Godhead is an influx of divine light. This works its way down the human organism via the remaining sefirot, enlightening both mind and body in the process.

In my version, the first sefirah is located at the third eye chakra. This is Keter (Ras), the divine light. The other six sefirot are arranged in two down-pointing triangles. The upper triangle is made up of Hokhmah, Binah and Da'at,

with Hokhmah at the left shoulder, Binah at the right shoulder and Da'at at the heart chakra. The lower triangle is made up of Chesed, Gevurah and Tiferet, with Chesed at the left hip, Gevurah at the right hip and Tiferet at the root chakra.

These two triangles represent analogous processes, whereby the exuberant, superabundant energy of the divine source of light and life is channeled into the human realm.

Hokhmah represents the influx of insight in the form of thoughts and visions. These are extremely compelling because of the divine charge they contain. However, they can be easily misunderstood and can lead to grave errors and delusions. Therefore we need the balancing force of Binah to correct the errors and curtail the excesses of Hokhmah. The result of the interplay of Hokhmah (insight) and Binah (knowledge) is Da'at (wisdom).

Chesed represents the influx of love in the form of emotions and sensations. These are also extremely powerful because of the intense energy released. Unchecked, they can overwhelm the usual bounds of human affection, friendship and eros, sweeping away all boundaries in a tsunami of "free love". This can lead to emotional and sexual abuse, both of oneself and of others. Therefore we need the disciplined restraint of Gevurah to contain the love and channel it in a healthy and nurturing direction. The result of the interplay of Chesed (love) and Gevurah (restraint) is Tiferet (beauty).

Silver and Gold

What should you think about on psychedelics? If you start your trip with a negative mindset, especially if your mind is swarming with ants (anxious negative thoughts), you are setting yourself up for an unpleasant journey. Hence the importance of "set and setting".

Second worse to a bad trip, however, is no trip. Pre-session nerves generally revolve around *fear* or *greed*: the sweaty fear of a bad trip or the burning desire for a good one. Both can derail the experience: fear obviously makes a bad trip more likely and greed makes a good one less.

So what should you think about? Thoughts have an extraordinarily powerful effect on your state of consciousness when you're under the influence. "Right thought" isn't just about avoiding bad experiences and damping down the flames of fear, anxiety and paranoia, but also about encouraging positive experiences and fanning the flames of shamanic power. The right thought at the right time can raise the frequency of a mild psychedelic buzz, just barely ticking over, to a full-blooded high pitch of intensity firing on all cylinders.

Such is the power of thought. And the most powerful thoughts are religious thoughts, that is, "the Word of God". Which is why religious education and training is so important for the manifestation of spiritually powerful, transformative psychedelic experiences.

Pistis is essential. However, it's no good just mouthing the words without actually believing them. Pistis is not pistis without faith. And the mushroom is no sucker: it knows whether you really mean it or not.

To wake the slumbering spirit of the psychedelic dragon, drop a silver Word into the lake of your mind. And to send the dragon deeper into the lake, drop golden Silence.

For words are silver, but silence is golden. And it is the skilful use of both the silver and gold of *pistis* and *kenosis* that will take you all the way, bare-back dragon-riding, to the blessed isles of spiritual enlightenment and bliss.

To Integrate or To Be Integrated

There is much talk in psychedelic circles about preparation and integration. You should prepare yourself and your environment beforehand so that you have the right set and setting for a good trip. You should integrate the experience into your life so that you can grow and mature spiritually and psychologically.

That's all well and good for a moderate experience. But breakthrough experiences are different. The tables are turned. Instead of integrating the psychedelic vision into your ordinary life, you feel compelled to integrate your ordinary life into the psychedelic vision. This is precisely

what Saint Augustine was getting at in relation to the Eucharist (the body of Christ) when he said:

I heard Thy voice from on high: "I am the food of grown men: grow and you shall eat Me. And you shall not change Me into yourself as bodily food, but into Me you shall be changed."

This is the difference between the psycho-therapeutic approach to psychedelics, seeking wholeness, and the spiritual approach, seeking holiness. Do you change the mushroom into yourself like bodily food, or do you change yourself into the mushroom spirit?

And what is the Mushroom Spirit but the Holy Spirit? And what is the Holy Spirit but God? And what is the man or woman changed by the Holy Spirit but a Son or Daughter of God? (This explains the Trinity).

"The world is not saved by evolution but by incarnation. The more deeply we enter into prayer the more certain we become of this. Nothing can redeem the lower and bring it back to health, but a life-giving incursion from the higher; a manifestation of the already present Reality. 'I came forth from the Father and came into the world': and this perpetual advent - the response of the eternal Agape to Eros in his need - is the true coming into time of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Pentecostal energy and splendour is present to glorify every living thing: and sometimes our love reaches the level at which it sees this as a present fact and the actual is transfigured by the real." (Underhill)

Relax!

When we were little children, we couldn't tell the difference between goodness and obedience and badness and disobedience. If we were "good" it was because we did what we were told. If we were "bad" it was because we didn't.

The problem with being a good little boy or a good little girl soon became apparent when we crossed paths with less good boys and girls. Because the "bad" boys and girls discover a very useful secret: you can tell good boys and girls what to do! they are so obedient!

The result of this discovery is covert or overt bullying. The victims either suffer in silence like good little victims or else they learn to stand up for themselves, which means that they learn to be disobedient. They learn how to say "No".

Those who can't say "No" are used and abused by others. We generally find out this basic fact early in life. Then we find that we can say "No" to a huge variety of things. Perhaps we are like those rebellious types who say "No" to practically everything. No-one dares take advantage of us or tell us what to do.

It's good to be a bit of a rebel. You are more self-reliant and independent and people don't mess with you. However, there is a sting in the tail of disobedience. After years of habitual rebelliousness and disobedience, you realize that not only do you struggle to follow the

instructions of those who are trying to help you, but you can't even obey *yourself*.

"Relax!" you say to yourself.

"No!" you reply.

Some people struggle more with "Yes" and some more with "No". And sometimes you just don't know when to say "Yes" and when to say "No", or you can't let your "Yea" be "Yea," and your "Nay," "Nay."

In theological terms, the best way (*Te*) to live is simple: say "Yes" to God and "No" to the Whisperer.

A skeptic might retort, "Yeah but your instructions to yourself that you think of as coming from god are just the internalization of things you've read in your holy books!"

"Exactly!"

Be still and know that you are God.

The ABC of Psychedelic Integration

What's the point of having a deep psychedelic experience if you can't integrate it into your everyday life? But then again, as Marc Bolan sang, "life's a gas". At the end of the

day, it's all experience, isn't it? *Art for Art's sake* and all that. Not everything has to have a point.

If nothing else, we can learn to appreciate the wonder of present lived experience on psychedelics without looking to exploit it for utilitarian ends. We can learn the art of flow. And there are subtle ways, below the threshold of conscious awareness, in which these mysterious compounds change us, almost imperceptibly, from the inside out. In the aftermath, we may sense a curious shift in our outlook and demeanor that we can't quite put our finger on.

However, for those who want to reap the abundant fruit of the psychedelic experience, there is the added dimension of conscious integration. This conscious integration can be described in three steps: *gnosis*, *pistis* and *kenosis*.

When people in the psychedelic community talk about integration, they usually mean something like, "absorbing and applying the insights gained from the altered state". This has two main components: one philosophical, the other psychological.

First, there are ontological and epistemological questions of reality and worldview, our pictures of reality. We typically see the world through the filters of deep-seated assumptions and beliefs, inherited for the most part from our family and culture, but also individually constructed through reflection and inquiry. These will be to varying degrees challenged and/or confirmed by the insights arising from the psychedelic experience.

Second, there are personal questions relating to the self in isolation and in relation to significant others. Who we are, who other people are, and what our relationships are, are also questions that challenge our assumptions and beliefs. If we hold negative self-beliefs which limit us in particular ways or make us anxious or depressed, for example, powerful, compelling insights which explode these personal stories have clear psychotherapeutic value.

Human beings are of course story-telling animals. We can't really live without stories. But the stories we tell about ourselves and the world can be endlessly refined and updated, enabling us to live by more positive, helpful stories as well as more truthful ones, ones that fit better with the reality that reveals itself to us in moments of clarity and insight, those "spots of time" that afford us a glimpse into the heart of Truth.

The process of revising and refining our pictures of reality is what I call *pistis*. It takes a lot of careful thought and mental effort. It usually involves some form of study, reading, discussion, etc., perhaps with a therapist, perhaps with a mentor or tutor, perhaps with a partner, perhaps with friends. We find our way in artfully and skillfully adapting our working models of reality to accommodate our new insights.

If we don't do this, the insights are simply forgotten. They evaporate and disappear into the ether ("life's a gas"). However, if we do it rashly or clumsily, we end up confusing ourselves and constructing a mental Frankenstein's monster. We may adopt bizarre beliefs and

superstitions and turn into a woolly-headed hippy. Or we may cling to certain apparently inalienable revealed verities and turn fundamentalist. Either way, we are not integrated. We have start thinking outside the *muggle* box only to find that we are now thinking inside a *muppet* box.

When people in the psychedelic community talk about integration, they usually mean good *pistis*. This is certainly an important part of it. However, there's not much scope for good *pistis* without good *gnosis* (revelatory insight). If you don't have the insights, what exactly are you integrating?

For good *gnosis*, we need both quality and quantity. Plenty of good insights. Both the quality and the quantity of our insights would appear to be outside of our conscious control (and they are), but they can be encouraged and facilitated through the conscious application of a third element, *kenosis*.

Kenosis means "self-emptying". It implies the suspension of our assumptions and beliefs, but also of the habitual use of all our human faculties of perception and cognition. Insight comes most powerfully when you clear a space for it. Kenosis is "space-clearing". It is really the same thing as Zen (or *Cha'an* or *Dhyana*), which really just means "meditation".

So good integration depends on three things: good meditation (*kenosis*), good insight (*gnosis*) and good re-appraisal of life, the universe and everything (*pistis*). It should also be noted that the integration process is not a

one-off thing that ends when the insights gained in the psychedelic experience are exhausted. Insights don't stop once you've come down from the revelatory summits of your trip. If you nurture them through good *pistis* and *kenosis*, they just keep on coming.

If done right, the integration cycle following a profound psychedelic experience typically lasts for a few weeks. But the effects last a lifetime.

Waiting

You're waiting for your bride-to-be at the Arrivals terminal; you're the paparazzi waiting for Johnny Depp to come out of the club; you're a sniper waiting for the President's cavalcade to turn the corner; you're a soldier waiting for the order to charge; you're a goalkeeper waiting for the penalty to be taken; you're a sprinter waiting for the starter gun.

You watch and wait. You are awake and ready. You're poised. You're filled with charged expectation. You are in a state of heightened alertness and focus. You don't daydream or ruminate or look at your phone. Your mind is empty. You are all attention, fully in the here and now.

This quality of attentive, mindful waiting is also present when you wait for a big life event, a birth, a death, a

marriage, an important job, an award ceremony, an initiation ceremony. The best preparation for death, and the best preparation for a ceremonial psychedelic journey is to enter as much as possible this kenotic state of expectant waiting. *Kenosis* comes before a psychedelic ceremony.

Gnosis is the gift of the psychedelic ceremony itself; *pistis* is the post-trip process of integration; and *kenosis* is the self-emptied expectant waiting for the next one. For you never know when the next one will be the big one, the breakthrough, the unveiling, the apocalypse.

"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." (Matthew 24:42)

Watch and Pray

Successful talking therapies clarify issues and produce insight. They help bring unconscious patterns of thought and behaviour into the light of consciousness, where they are processed and resolved, ideally to the point of closure. It's a bit like tidying up the mess in your house and putting it away neatly in drawers. Or like a lawyer working through a heavy case load, one "case closed" after another.

Unsuccessful therapy just moves the mess around in interminable analysis. It ends up being "all talk" and loses

sight of the fact that it is a means to an end, which is peace and quiet.

Thinking, talking, reflecting, ruminating, analysing, are essential to understanding ourselves and the world. This is the specialty of the left brain hemisphere, and it is a big part of what makes us human. It is also an essential component of growing up and of being mature and responsible adults. However, when we rely too much on our thinking, we are in danger of getting lost in a dream world of mental representations and fabrications. We are in danger of "falling asleep".

This is why Ken Wilber talks about *growing up* and *waking up*. Talking therapies helps us to grow up, but we need to look elsewhere if we want to wake up. We need to look to spiritual practices and to religion. Specifically, to meditation and prayer.

Psychedelic ceremonies are hot-houses of intense experience and sensory overload. Where quiet sitting (zazen or centering prayer) help us to wake up by gently shifting our attention from our habitual left hemisphere ruminations to right hemisphere mindfulness, psychedelics help us by brutally shaking us awake. And it's often a rude awakening.

The psychedelic experience is not for the faint hearted or for the big headed. As the old cliché has it, the only way out is through, and the only way through is not by the way of thinking, but by the way of meditation and prayer.

A Trinitarian Theory of Psychedelics

What do psychedelics do? Good question. There is a neurological answer, a phenomenological answer and a metaphysical answer. The neurological answer has to do with the 2A receptor in the brain. The phenomenological answer has to do with visuals and visions. Here I will give a metaphysical answer.

Psychedelics open the channels between transcendent Parashiva, beyond all horizons, and immediately given conscious awareness, Shiva. Shiva comes from Parashiva (the Son is from the Father), but under the influence of psychedelics, it comes trailing clouds of glory.

The influx of spiritual energy (for want of a better term) from the infinite wellspring of life and light that is the Godhead (Parashiva) charges the consciousness of the shaman (Shiva) to such a pitch of intensity that every object of awareness (Shakti) is charged with the grandeur of God.

Thus Shakti is received by Shiva in wonder, awe and beauty, and with a sense of inexhaustible sacredness. All things disclose the Holy Spirit, and are revealed as profoundly numinous and holy.

Alternatively, the influx of spiritual energy fails to find its way from Parashiva to Shiva and Shakti, but is diverted and hijacked by the ego, the psychological mental construct we call our "self". In which case, the super-charged, hyper-active ego produces a plethora of confused thoughts and

feelings, sometimes resulting in hallucinations, fantasies, delusions, anxieties and paranoia.

If you can put your ego to one side, and get out of your own way, then, and only then, will psychedelics do what they were sent to do - sanctify you and the world.

The Bread of Unforgetting

People come to psychedelic ceremonies for many reasons. They want insight. They want healing. But most of all they want magic. Life without magic is unbearable for magical beings.

Some may have a genuine psychedelic breakthrough and glimpse the source of all magic and all existence. This is the beatific vision, moksha, awakening, *apokalypsis*.

Then the veil descends once more and the cloud of forgetting obscures the light once again. But a trace remains, a distant memory of seeing and believing.

Now the spiritual work is no longer about seeking, but about remembering. Now it's all about unforgetting, *anamnesis*.

Kenosis is anamnesis. We remember to be here now. We remember to be more zen.

Gnosis is anamnesis. We remember the beatific vision. We remember what is behind the veil.

Pistis is anamnesis. We remember the timeless teachings that flow from kenosis and gnosis.

Lord, help us to remember. Grant us anamnesis. Give us this day our daily bread. Grant us pistis; grant us kenosis; grant us gnosis.

Pistis is our daily bread. We read the scriptures every morning on arising and every night before bed. We read a chapter from one of the twelve books on the reading list every day.

Kenosis is our daily bread. We live a life of meditation, a life of self-emptying. Every-day zen. Every-minute zen.

But gnosis, as the gnostic psychedelic apocalypse, is our monthly bread. Humankind cannot bear very much reality.

A Vicious Circle

Watch out for these three pitfalls on the psychedelic path:

Spiritual Emergency

Humankind cannot bear very much reality. Too much, too fast can provoke a spiritual emergency which, if not

properly handled, can turn your world upside down and produce serious mental health problems.

Spiritual Bypassing

Humankind cannot bear very much reality. Spirituality and psychedelics can be engaged in as an escape from psychological problems, which may then manifest in disguised forms.

Spiritual Narcissism

Humankind cannot bear very much reality. Powerful spiritual experiences can inflate the ego, deluding us into believing that we are special, superior, even in some cases beyond good and evil.

Unintegrated spiritual emergencies lead to spiritual bypassing which leads to spiritual narcissism which leads to spiritual emergencies. And so on. The negative connotations of the "hippy" moniker are in large part due to this vicious circle.

St. John understood this well:

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

(1 John 5-10)

The Serious Play of the Imaginal

Psychedelic ceremonies and rituals are (amongst other things) places for "the serious play of the imaginal in order to enhance people's sense of connectedness, especially to their future self." (John Vervaeke)

However, the serious play of the imaginal is only truly serious if it is in dialogue with a wisdom tradition. *Gnosis* without *Pistis* is as lame as *Pistis* without *Gnosis* is blind. (And without *Kenosis* both are unclean, diseased, leprous).

The imagined future self with which one is connected through serious play must of necessity be a wiser self, by definition connected more deeply with the wisdom contained in our inherited traditions.

There is no true Way without the serious play of *Gnosis, Pistis, Kenosis*, where "Way" is understood as a path, a process, a journey, an adventure, in which one's future self, though dimly felt, is wiser, more connected, and so more real, more true, more alive, than the self one starts out with.

I think it's fair to say that the serious play of the imaginal connected to a future self in dialogue with a wisdom tradition is (amongst other things) "the way, the truth and the life".

The Real Thing

The real thing is neither Buddhist nor non-Buddhist, neither Christian nor non-Christian. It is neither psychedelic nor non-psychedelic. Zen is acutely sensitive as to whether or not something is the real thing or not, but neither Zen nor non-Zen is it.

Zen is the real thing; Buddhism is the real thing; Christianity is the real thing; Shamanism is the real thing. But only real Zen, real Buddhism, real Christianity, real Shamanism is the real thing.

The real thing is not material, spiritual, psychedelic, religious, holy or enlightened. But it is not the real thing if it is not all of these things.

The Living God of the Mushroom Christ

The "God of the philosophers" is the God of metaphysical speculation, traditionally associated with Aristotle and his *Metaphysics*. In modern times, it would probably be associated with big names in Transpersonal Psychology such as Stanislav Grof and Ken Wilber or advocates of The Perennial Philosophy such as René Guenon, Huston Smith and Aldous Huxley (who wrote a popular book of that name), not to mention theologians of all persuasions trained in the Analytical philosophical tradition and others.

Nothing wrong with all that. But there is, as there has always been, a "living God" of wild power and might, of the numinous, the uncanny and the weird, alongside the polite, rational, moral God of the lecture theatre, pulpit and drawing-room. Jesus may have been alluding to this God when he said, "he is not a God of the dead, but of the living" (Luke 20:38)

In the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as "son of God", "son of Man" and "son of David". In Luke's gospel, his genealogy is redacted all the way back from his "biological" father Joseph via King David to "our first father" Adam, concluding the long list with: "the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God." (Luke 3:38)

The living God is not just the first name in a family history, whose "son" of the first human, Adam. As "the son of Joseph ... the son of Adam, the son of God", through

descent, Jesus is "the son of Man". But through direct contact with the Divine Source in the here and now, "eternally begotten of the Father", Jesus is "the son of God" directly, without intermediary. There is a horizontal connection in time and space and there is a vertical connection beyond time and space.

Jesus was plugged directly into the Source, but also into a particular history of "the living God", that of the Jewish people as recounted in the Old Testament:

The living God of All Creation;

The living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob;

The living God of Moses and Aaron;

The living God of David, Solomon and the Kings of Israel and Judah;

The living God of Elijah, Elisha and the Prophets.

Christianity is of course built on the living God of Jesus Christ, understood as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which in essence is the same living God that walked with Adam in the garden.

Psychedelic Christianity is also grafted onto the same vine, connected by a million threads of mycelium to the same living God, the living God of the Mushroom Christ.

The Summum Bonum

Whether we are conscious of it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, we are all religious in the sense that we have an ultimate good that gives meaning to our lives. The worship of this ultimate good, this *summum bonum*, is what constitutes our religion.

Do you worship mammon (money)? Then your religion is all about consumerism and material possessions, wealth and prosperity. Do you worship power and influence? Do you worship popularity and honour? Do you worship pleasure and gratification?

Whatever you worship is your god, is your religion. It may be that you worship several gods, that you are a "polytheist". Some of these gods may be abstract values, some may be admirable historical personalities and great thinkers, some may be pop idols. In the Biblical view, they are all idols, all falling short of the only proper *summum bonum*, which is God.

But what is God? God is love. Not affection (*storge*), friendship (*philia*) or sexual attraction (*eros*) but the transcendent love (*agape*) which flows through them. Not care, fairness, loyalty, authority, sanctity or liberty, but the transcendent love which flows through them.

The *summum bonum* of a healthy soul oriented rightly (righteously) to God is love. The *summum bonum* of an

unhealthy soul is pretty much anything else, even "mental health" or "psychological well-being". This is the god of the modern religions of psychotherapy and personal development.

Psychological well-being is a human good, of course, but like wealth, power, honour or pleasure, becomes an idol when we worship it as our ultimate good. It eventually becomes a psychological trap, a "happiness trap" as Russ Harris put it, a god which is never satisfied, however many sacrifices we bring to its altar.

Just as affection or care are reduced and inadequate versions of the transcendent love of God, so is psychological well-being. It is a form of self-love, even where it tries to be more loving to others for the sake of psychological well-being. The motive is not love but health. At the extreme it breeds narcissism, "therapy narcissism" and "spiritual narcissism".

This is a particular pitfall for mental health professionals, spiritual directors and shamans. In worshiping their own spiritual and psychological health, as well as the spiritual and psychological health of their clients, they lose sight of the true end, the true goal, the true aim, which is the love of God, pure and simple. Their self-concern eclipses their proper *summum bonum*.

"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

(1 Corinthians 10:31)

The Love of Vision and the Vision of Love

One possible explanation for the empathic insights typical of psychedelic journeys is that we are saturated with positive psychic energy (whatever that is) so that the imaginative surveys of our life and the people in our life is refracted through the prism of love.

Many surprising insights arise as a consequence simply because thinking lovingly is thinking differently. We realise the error or our judgmental and dismissive ways and are painfully reminded that the people we habitually think about as jobs to be done or boxes to be ticked are actually complex sentient beings of flesh and blood just like us.

Psychedelic integration often focuses on ways to retain the messages we receive and apply them in our everyday life in a sensible and considered manner, whether it be to change jobs or call our mother more often. Not all insights, messages and visions are that practical and straightforward though. They can be pretty abstract, philosophical and downright cosmic, and it's not always obvious what to do with them.

Although "love is blind" in ordinary states of consciousness, it actually makes us see clearer (most of the time) on psychedelics. Visions illumined by the light of love glow with noetic power. They reveal truths, especially uncomfortable truths, in ways we wouldn't ordinarily perceive or appreciate.

Personally I love visions. Most psychonauts do. When the tide of love has receded, however, what I am left with often looks like tiddlers and baby crabs in a rock pool. But the vision of love remains. Plus the suspicion that it's not really the insights from love, or gifts of the spirit, but the possibility of love itself that matters.

The vision of love is a glimpse of another way of being in the world. Not fantasy and not hippy idealism, but real and really attainable. With the vision comes the aim and eventually the method, which for me turned out to be surprisingly Christian.

In a Nutshell

Enlightenment is awareness of the presence of God. But what is God?
The Great I AM Paramãtman (Exodus 3:14; Psalm 46:10; John 8:58).
This I AM is behind everything, inside everything. Awareness of it is "Paramãtman Dhyana":

LORD I AM THAT.

But the light of perfect enlightenment shines clearest when those words, and all words, are dropped. (Be sure to listen out for the sound of one hand clapping).

If that doesn't work, take the lowest room, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.'

The first room is for the faithful servants (in *storge*), where God is addressed as LORD.
The second room is for the secret friends (in *filia*), where God is addressed as FRIEND.
The third room is for the spiritual brides (in *eros*), where God is addressed as BRIDEGROOM.
The fourth room is for the hidden sons and daughters (in *agape*), where God is addressed as FATHER.
The fifth room is for your very Self, where God is addressed as I AM.

For God is Love
and Thou art That.

(But, as Dame Julian discovered, nutshells can be very capacious):

LORD (*Jah*) I AM (*Ba*) THAT (*Gaia*)

LORD (*Parashiva*) I AM (*Shiva*) ZEN (*Shakti*)

(Father = *Nous* = *Parashiva* = *Jah*
Son = *Logos* = *Shiva* = *Ba*
Holy Spirit = *Pneuma* = *Shakti* = *Gaia)*

Repent and Believe

"Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

(Matthew 22:36-40)

Christianity can also be boiled down to two other commandments: repent and believe.

Repentance opens us up to the possibility of forgiveness, which Christians believe will be freely given to those who truly repent. Human beings are not perfect - we are careless, we make mistakes, we do stupid things, we are selfish and blind, we hurt ourselves and others. We're only human. But if we are unrepentant, we are unforgiven. We carry a heavy weight of existential anxiety, the existential anxiety of guilt and condemnation.

The weight of our guilt is proportionate to the weight of our sin, the weight of our accumulated karma. This is not just an abstract idea. The body remembers. It carries a toxic "body of sin", a "pain body". Whether or not we are "more sinned against than sinning", the trauma of sin is in us. It creates discomfort and disease. It cries out for healing. It

cries out for release and purging, for detox and purification.

Each of the four gospels begins with John the Baptist's call to repentance and the symbolic cleansing rite of baptism with the promise of an even more powerful cleansing to come:

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire"

(Matthew 3:11)

But modern secular people have forgotten how to repent and how to be cleansed of their sins. Liberalism has put paid to both sin and repentance and has pathologized guilt, which it claims can be treated with psychotherapy and psychiatric drugs. However, no amount of therapy or drugs can expiate the existential anxiety of an unrepentant soul. Liberalism is so deeply ingrained that even Westerners exposed to ancient shamanic traditions close their ears to the plant medicine's clarion call to repentance and reformation, however much they may purge.

Another major source of existential anxiety, according to Paul Tillich, is doubt and meaninglessness. This is a problem in its own right, which can result in the despair of a full-blown existential crisis, and even suicide. However, in its less acute form, it also has negative consequences. Where there is doubt, there is vacillation and relativism.

There is no motivation to do the right thing, no moral conviction, no firm resolve. There is no compelling reason to not sin again, nothing to prevent you from creating more bad karma.

The forgiveness that comes with repentance clears you of past transgressions and emotional baggage. The righteousness that comes with belief restrains you from committing further transgressions in the present. Love forgives. Faith guides. These are two of the Christian virtues, dealing with the existential anxiety of guilt and condemnation in relation to the past and the existential anxiety of doubt and meaninglessness in relation to the present. The third is hope, which deals with the existential anxiety of fate and death in relation to the future.

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

(1 Corinthians 13:13)

Seeing God, Seeing Death

Some people believe in God for intellectual, cultural or religious reasons. They believe through faith, consoled by Christ's saying to doubting Thomas after his resurrection,

"blessed are they who have not seen and yet believed" (John 20:29).

Some believers believe that you cannot see God and live anyway (Exodus 33:20). What could seeing God even mean, considering "God is Spirit" (John 4:24)? And as theologians are at pains to remind us, God is not a being among beings, but Being itself. How can you "see" Spirit or Being itself?

Strange as it may sound to sober ears, people do actually report seeing God on high dose psychedelic trips. They won't be able to describe the experience in a convincing or even comprehensible manner, but it doesn't seem to bother them - they know what they've seen.

Another strange psychedelic experience is seeing death. How can you see death? As Epicurus argued many years ago, it is irrational to fear death, since death cannot be experienced, being by definition the end of consciousness. Yet psychonauts commonly report experiencing death, or at least approaching it closely enough so as to "see" it.

Seeing death is unsurprisingly associated in the psychedelic experience with darkness, with silence, with emptiness and with the vanishing point of consciousness on falling asleep. There is also usually some anxiety and resistance present, which is also unsurprising. The will to life is strong enough that we generally don't want to die, just in case!

Whether or not we actually see God or just imagine it, or whether we actually see death or just imagine that, the

high dose psychedelic experience is profoundly existential, by which I mean that God and/or death are deeply felt in the core of our being. It's not just belief in God or the thought of death as concepts, in the abstract, but actually *seeing* God and *seeing* death. Not literally, of course, but existentially.

"In the midst of life we are in death", as the Book of Common Prayer has it. This is the basic existential insight. We are mortal and we will die, which you know as well as I do. But it's one thing to know it intellectually and quite another to know it existentially.

So what? What's the point? Is there any value in seeing death? Well, to put it somewhat poetically, so light shines in the darkness, music sings in the silence, and life blossoms in the grave.

Just as "our heart is restless until it finds its rest in God" (Augustine) so is our life restless until it finds its rest in death. We do not know who we are until we know God, and we do not know what life is until we know death. And we don't know that we don't know until know.

Why Kenosis is Not Enough

"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

(Luke 11: 24-26)

The Way of the Holy Mushroom depends on kenosis, gnosis and pistis. Without *kenosis* (self-emptying) we lose our simple connection with the ground of Being and get lost in thought and experience. We lose our ability to Be Here Now in the childlike innocence of "zen mind, beginner's mind".

Without *gnosis* (revelation) we lose our direct connection to the transcendent source of Light and Love and the holiness, virtue and wisdom that flow from it. We get lost in emptiness and "zen sickness" or intellectual abstractions: religious ideals, ethical systems and received wisdom.

Spiritually oriented psychonauts understand that a psychedelic experience (gnosis) should be combined with a meditation practice (kenosis) in order to minimize the possibility of a "bad trip" and to maximize the possibility of a transformative "ego death". However, if the ego, the

"house of the spirits", is left empty, it is fair game for squatting by wicked spirits and "the last state of the man is worse than the first."

So who is the rightful owner and inhabitant of the house? Who has the keys to move in when the ego "dies"? The simple Christian answer is Jesus: we are crucified with Christ so that we can be resurrected with him. But this requires *pistis* (faith), which requires religious understanding, which requires familiarity with Christianity and the Bible.

This would be my answer, because I am a Christian. However, Christianity is not the only path to God and pistis can take different forms. In the Way of the Holy Mushroom, the unregenerate ego, caught in the "Wheel of Babylon", is constituted of six archetypes: Diva, Demon, Victim, Addict, Muppet, Muggle. The dissolution of these archetypes through ego death allows their opposites, Mystic, Shaman, Warrior, Monk, Philosopher, King to manifest.

These are universal archetypes. They are nor exclusively Christian. But they do point to the positive regeneration of the personality which is at the heart of Christianity. They provide positive content for the ego that capitalizes on its negative deconstruction and dissolution. They are character building.

Paradoxically, the first archetype, the Mystic, is characterized by radical emptiness, thus personifying the state of kenosis. The Mystic is the bridge between the dissolution of ego death and the reconstruction of the ego in the direction of sanctification. It puts flesh on the

emptiness, so to speak. And it gives space for the other archetypes to emerge.

But kenosis is not enough. Unless the sacramental use of psychedelics is rooted in zen and religion, *kenosis* and *pistis*, it will not produce good fruit, and the tree will be cut down and thrown into the fire and "there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:42)

I have Overcome the World

A Christian is a follower of Christ, who "overcame the world" (John 16:33) Therefore a follower of Christ must strive to overcome the world. To overcome the world is to overcome conventional society, or "Babylon". Three things necessary to overcome Babylon are "Heaven", "Earth" and "the Word". Heaven is reached in the *gnosis* of psychedelic mystical experience. Earth is reached in the *kenosis* of mindful presence and zen. The Word is reached in the *pistis* of religious contemplation.

Psychonauts who believe in Heaven but not Earth or the Word are defeated by Babylon. Neo-Pagans who believe in the Earth but not Heaven or the Word are defeated by Babylon. Christians who believe in the Word but not Earth or Heaven are defeated by Babylon. One out of three is not enough. Two out of three is not enough. The only way to

overcome the world and defeat Babylon and extract yourself from the Matrix is by fully engaging mind, body and spirit with the Word and with Heaven and Earth.
This is the Way of Psychedelic Christian Zen.
This is the Way of the Holy Mushroom.

The Three Great Mysteries

There are three great mysteries in the life of the spirit: the mystery of zen, the mystery of psychedelics and the mystery of faith.
The first is presence, here and now, beyond space and time, body and mind. It is the still, small voice of the self which is no-self in the boundless field of nonduality.
The second is encounter with the numinous, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. It is the wholly other, the alternating wrath and grace of the unapproachable divine source of all.
The third is the divine logos, the peace which passes all understanding, the love which never fails. It is the covering atonement, the propitiation, absolution, reconciliation and redemption.
These three great mysteries of *kenosis*, *gnosis* and *pistis* are mutually reinforcing. Each precedes and succeeds the other two, preparing the soul to receive the holy mysteries in ever greater fullness.

Great is the mystery of zen.

Great is the mystery of psychedelics.
Great is the mystery of faith.

The Holy is the Gateway Drug to Holiness

What do you do if you are a committed Naturalist and believe that the world you live in is the product of a long process of Darwinian evolution by natural selection but feel strangely discontented with a strong "spiritual" impulse to be more connected to everything?

There are five options really: politics, therapy, prescription drugs, meditation and shamanism. Perhaps you are discontented because of the socioeconomic conditions of late capitalism and need to work towards reform or revolution. Perhaps you are discontented because of a chemical imbalance in your brain and need medical treatment. Perhaps you are discontented because of psychological blockages and traumas and need to uncover and heal them. Perhaps you are discontented because your mind is too busy and you need to find stillness and quiet to appreciate the present moment. Perhaps you are discontented because you have lost touch with your body and the natural world and need to "return to the native".

If you are a Naturalist and feel the discontents of civilization keenly enough, you will inevitably set up a

dichotomy between Culture and Nature, Delusion and Enlightenment. This is why scientifically-minded rational Westerners are drawn to Buddhism and Taoism, which offer a path of liberation from alienation and discontent (*dukkha*) within a Naturalist paradigm. It also explains why Westerners are drawn to shamanic traditions and to psychedelics, which promise to re-connect us to our True Nature.

Of the five options listed above, the first three are more "worldly" that the other two. Politics and psychotherapy generally move within the orbit of human culture (apart from the further reaches of Humanist-Transpersonal therapeutic modalities) and prescription drugs can't do much more than alter your mood. You may feel better up to a point, less alienated and discontented, and enjoy "ordinary unhappiness" as Freud put it, but you won't scratch the "spiritual" itch.

If you take meditation and shamanism seriously and practice assiduously, you will begin to get results. You will start to feel more connected, more natural and more yourself. If you persist, however, you will also start to feel something else, an ineffable and mysterious sense of "the holy". In deep meditation, the experience of the moment is imbued with holiness. In shamanic immersion, everything begins to glow with other-worldly numinosity. The forest glade feels like a sacred place. The drumming and chanting sound like sacred music.

In the presence of the holy, you begin to have a deeply-felt, intimate sense of the holiness of all things. In those

moments, you no longer feel alienated and discontented. You feel connected and whole. You feel reverence and awe. You begin to have recognizably "religious" feelings, even if intellectually you are still a committed Naturalist.

Many people stop here or pull back. The re-sacralization of the world has been adequately achieved and they can get on with their lives a little wiser and happier, with a deeper sense of the sacredness of life. Others press on to "the source of all holiness". However, once God has put his foot in the door, religion inevitably comes flooding in. It becomes clear that the true aim of human life is holiness and that the most direct way to holiness is exposure to the holy, and that the greatest repository of the holy is religion.

Abiding Nondual Enlightenment

The highest level of the psychedelic experience is called Amnesia because it is impossible to remember it.

Why? Because where there is One without a second, there is no discrimination between this or that, light or dark, self or other, and no possibility of distinguishing anything whatsoever. And what you don't experience, you don't remember.

The next highest level is trinitarian, since we are aware of Parashiva (consciousness), Shiva (consciousness) and Shakti (consciousness). As we descend further, we begin to make a clearer distinction between these three moments (or Persons) in consciousness: Parashiva is the absolutely transcendent spirit (Father), Shiva is the individual incarnate soul (Son) and Shakti is the immanent spirit of the phenomenal world (Holy Spirit).

When we come up on a breakthrough dose of DMT or other powerful psychedelic, we remember the One (the "Tao") and forget the Many (the "Ten Thousand Things"). When we come down from the heights, we remember the Many (the "Ten Thousand Things") and forget the One (the "Tao").

The Many in characterised by total amnesia of the One, just as the One is characterised by total amnesia of the One. There is no total recall of either. However, when we are Three, we are close to One and have a faint memory of the Many. When we are Twelve, we are close to Many and have a faint memory of One.

"Twelve" is religion, which cycles through the festivals, seasons and holy days of the liturgical calendar, the most important of which (for Christians) are Easter and Christmas. Without the reminder of religion, we become too forgetful of the One and lose ourselves in the Many. Similarly, without the reminder of the Trinity, we become too forgetful of the Many and lose ourselves in the One. Both types of total amnesia are forms of death: the former death of the soul, the latter death of the body.

The bridge between the One and the Three on high and the Twelve and the Many on low is the Seven. The chakra system is the best illustration of the essential nature of this bridge, as that which psychically and energetically connects Heaven and Earth within the human bodymind. The Seven is poised between the One and the Many and makes reconciliation possible, so that we see the One in the Many, "unity in diversity", and the Many in the One, "diversity in unity" and achieve abiding nondual enlightenment.

A Sevenfold Trinity

Taking the famous Chinese T'ai Chi symbol as our model - a circle divided into a curved black fish with a white dot and a curved white fish with a black dot - we can imagine seven permutations of the trinity, *Kenosis-Gnosis-Pistis*.

Consider the original Chinese elements in the T'ai Chi. The white half represents *yang* (active) and the black half represents *yin* (passive). The circle itself represents *tao* (unmanifest). We can adapt this schema to the idea of consciousness and say that the white half represents the conscious, the black half represents the unconscious and the circle represents the subconscious/superconscious.

As with the Rubin Vase optical illusion, where you see either a vase or two faces, depending on where your focus

is, we can take the white and black halves of the T'ai Chi symbol to represent figure (conscious) and ground (unconscious). The black dot in the white fish symbolises the vestige of awareness of the unconscious ground which persists in our awareness of the conscious figure and vice versa.

What happens when we apply this understanding to the trinity *Kenosis-Gnosis-Pistis*?

When *gnosis* (mystical experience) is foregrounded and conscious, *kenosis* (emptiness) is backgrounded and unconscious. When *kenosis* is foregrounded and conscious, *gnosis* is backgrounded and unconscious. This oscillation of emptiness and form occurs within the horizon of intelligibility, which means that it must be held in intelligent awareness, which is inferred from the fact of emptiness and form but is itself subconscious/superconscious. This is *pistis* (faith).

The same dynamic obtains when we pair *gnosis* with *pistis* and *pistis* with *kenosis*. This gives us six possible relationships in total:

1. Conscious *gnosis* and unconscious *kenosis* held in superconscious *pistis*.
2. Conscious *kenosis* and unconscious *gnosis* held in superconscious *pistis*.
3. Conscious *gnosis* and unconscious *pistis* held in superconscious *kenosis*.
4. Conscious *pistis* and unconscious *gnosis* held in superconscious *kenosis*.

5. Conscious *pistis* and unconscious *kenosis* held in superconscious *gnosis*.
6. Conscious *kenosis* and unconscious *pistis* held in superconscious *gnosis*.

And the seventh? The seventh is the eternal cycle of *kenosis*, *gnosis* and *pistis* in linear time.

The Yin/Yang Dance Paradox

A high dose of magic mushrooms takes you to the paradoxical heart of reality, which is neither solid nor liquid. Too solid and there is only dry land; too liquid and there is only sea; too muddling and there is only mud.

There are no absolutes here: whether life or death, day or night, light or dark, waking or sleep, present or past, summer or winter, hot or cold, wild or tame, loud or quiet, naughty or nice, messy or tidy, forbidden or accepted, perfect or flawed, open or secret.

It's an open secret: a sacred sensual dance in the half-light at the still point of the turning world.

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come.
AΩM

The Stained Glass Temple

As the sound of waves lapping the shore faded into silence, I caught a glimpse of myself through God's eyes. Every experience, every impression, thought, feeling, every relationship, every event, every memory, everything that had ever happened in my inner and outer life, was one coloured piece of glass in a great stained glass temple. It was beautiful. God seemed to like it anyway. But I was just one among millions of temples he enjoyed visiting.

Jesus was in there. But He was only one small part of a much larger structure. He was in me, but not I in Him. In a flash I saw all the world's religious personalities merely as elements in the great crystal mosaic that was me, but that God's experience of Himself through me was much more than any or all of them, much more than any religious ideas or religious experiences. I saw that God is much bigger than "spiritual-God-related-sacred-stuff", that He is literally everything I am.

What's the point of religion then? What's the point of Jesus? I understood in another flash that an organising principle is necessary in order to create a coherent, ordered structure of translucent beauty. A random jumble of chaotic impressions and experiences is not well pleasing to God, and neither is a tangled thicket of confused and frustrated desires and opinions. The point of religion then, and the point of Jesus, is to help us build a fitting temple for Him to enjoy during our brief sojourn here (not

necessarily in three days!), that He may see us and Himself through us and that we may see ourselves through Him, that our joy may be full.

"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple."

Psalm 27:4

Alternatively, what I saw was the two dimensional quantum information boundary of the holographic projection of a three dimensional self in Hilbert space, which kind of looks like a stained glass temple.

"You are not a collection of things, you are a song the universe is singing, a temporary melody in an eternal composition. And when the melody ends, the music doesn't stop, it simply moves on to the next note, the next pattern, the next moment of the eternal symphony. There are no particles, there is only the field, there is only the process, there is only the pattern, and you are one beautiful, temporary, infinitely precious pattern in the infinite creativity of the quantum fields. Not made of things, made of music, made of mathematics, made of the same fundamental reality as stars, stones and distant galaxies. You are not separate, you never were. You are the universe experiencing itself for a brief moment before dissolving back into the eternal field structure from which all patterns emerge and to which all patterns return. There are no particles, only fields, only patterns, only process, and

you are that process aware of itself for one precious fleeting moment."

Roger Penrose

"All that you touch, and all that you see, all that you taste, all you feel, and all that you loved, and all that you hate, all you distrust, all you save, and all that you give, and all that you deal, and all that you buy, beg, borrow or steal, and all you create, and all you destroy, and all that you do, and all that you say, and all that you eat, and everyone you meet, and all that you slight, and everyone you fight, and all that is now, and all that is gone, and all that's to come and everything under the sun is in tune, but the sun is eclipsed by the moon."

Roger Waters





Moral of the story: *Get your head out of the way*

Charging, Tripping, Vibing

For me, the classic mushroom ride has three broad phases: charging, tripping and vibing.

The onset may be gradual or sudden, but at some point early on, I find myself in a psychedelic palace of bright geometrical colourful light, soon to be plugged in to the great alien charger in the sky. Sometimes parts of my body, often starting with my teeth and jaw, are nuked one pixel at a time. Sometimes great surges of high voltage energy course through me in incandescent waves.

Then suddenly, it stops. I am unplugged. The energy drains away and the lights go out and I am left shivering uncontrollably. I reach for a blanket and pull it over me. And the journey begins. I know this place. It's like waking up in a recurring lucid dream. I know that I am in for a hard and humbling existential journey into the heart of the human condition and the human story. There will be suffering and pain, but with it insight and compassion.

The trip varies in length and intensity, and can be more or less enjoyable or challenging. As it fades, I find myself back in the "real world", ready for the third phase. In this phase, I surrender to the music. I listen so intently and intensely that I am almost aware of nothing else. It is a whole other trip in its own right, but dictated by the musical imagination of the artist. At this stage of the playlist, lyrics

are introduced, which fires the imagination, as it resonates and vibes ever more deeply with the music.

This vibing phase has a strong emotional and then spiritual texture, as the music moves into sacred mode with a choral mass setting. We bless and are blessed.

Between the One and the Many

The problem of the One and the Many is a perennial philosophical problem reaching back into the mists of antiquity, in Greece first encountered in the writings of the Pre-Socratics Thales, Parmenides, Heraclitus, Democritus, Pythagoras and co.

This is not just a question for speculative philosophy, however. It is an existential question that can confront us in the heights and depths of psychedelic mystical experience. We can actually experience the One as a nondual unity encompassing all of Reality, ourselves included. This is often alluded to as "ego death" because all the usual categories of self and other dissolve. We can also experience the Many as a dizzyingly infinite multiplicity of beings and things numberless as the sands of the seashore or the stars in the sky.

In print, in the comfort of your own human mind, this sounds fine, even desirable. Who would turn down the chance to experience the One and the Many first hand? Well, be careful what you wish for. Allen Ginberg hauntingly wrote, "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness", and I wager that not a few of those will have been driven mad by a precipitous fall into the One or the Many.

The human mind cannot fathom the One or the Many. The One is unnameable, as Jewish tradition has it, just as the Tao is unnameable according to the Chinese, because in the One everything dissolves. There can be no name, no namer and no named. We can point to it with a sign, JHWH, Tao, God, in order to talk about it, but these are just pointers. In the experience of the One, even the idea of Oneness dissolves. Likewise, the Many is impossible to grasp. Although we can have a coherent idea of the meaning of the word "infinite", for example, our minds cannot grasp even very large numbers, such as the number of stars in our galaxy, or the number of galaxies in the universe.

We can have glimpses of the One and the Many in deep psychedelic meditation. They are awe-inspiring and occasionally terrifying. Sometimes fleeting, sometimes never-ending (seemingly), these strange experiences feel like they complete us in some mysterious metaphysical way. However, as I indicated above, they are also potentially dangerous, if you're not ready.

So what does readiness entail? How can you prepare for the eventuality of a seismic breakthrough to the limit of ultimate Reality itself?

In order to answer this question in a way comprehensible to the human mind, I will approach it pictorially. Imagine a long ruler or *x* axis numbered between 0 and 10,000. The number 0 represents the One (even the One disappears in the One) and the number 10,000 represent the Many (as Taoist convention has it).

Now imagine that the number 10 represents conventional human reality. Everything is experienced and understood within the defining structures of base 10 (so to speak). People in this position may have a theoretical notion of the One and the Many, but they cannot actually experience them. They may believe in God, for example, but it will be, at best, a conventional, dualistic, base 10 God, and at worst, a psychological projection.

10 is relatively close to ground 0 so people at 10 are kept in orbit around the massive black hole of the One and don't fly off into the infinite void of outer space. It's as though they lived on Mercury, orbiting tightly around the sun. Staying with the solar system metaphor, Venus would then represent 11 and Earth 12. Imagine further that Venus (think angel number 1111) is an unstable magical place, elusive and ephemeral. People can't stay there very long, and quickly find themselves back on Mercury or on Earth.

Now imagine that Earth's orbit represents a limit beyond which the distance from the sun stretches too far. Mars

represents the next number 13, unlucky for some. Mars is habitable, but not hospitable. For a start, it's too cold. Beyond Mars is the chaotic asteroid belt and the gas planets.

In our analogy, people on Mercury (10) are safe, but narrow. People on Mars (13) have a more expanded consciousness, but are on a risky trajectory. Inherently unstable, they are prone to expand uncontrollably outwards into cosmic infinity. Too far from the unifying gravity of the One, they are in danger of fragmentation and madness. I suppose Ginsberg's unfortunate friends were probably mostly Martians.

People on Earth (people of the 12 tribes) are in a comfortable Goldilocks position. However, they can easily slip onto the 10 or 13 position and get either stuck or lost. We need something extra to keep us in place. G.I. Gurdjieff called this something extra "the Law of Three" and "the Law of Seven". I won't go into the intricacies of all this now, but for the purposes of this imaginative exercise, simply picture lines connecting 3, 7 and 12 on the axis.

10 is rigid and predictable and 13 is irregular and unstable. People on 10 and 13 orbit the One but are not intimately connected to it and so cannot safely navigate the Many. But people on 12 who are connected to the nondual 1 via 7 and 3, are protected from disintegration and dispersal in the 10,000 things.

In the psychedelic context, to "turn on" is to have a vision, perhaps even a beatific vision, of the 1, the 3, the 7, or all

three at once. It is a kind of *kensho*, a waking up to the true nature of metaphysical reality. Once you have seen it, you know you have seen it, and you cannot unsee it. You have achieved *gnosis*. You have turned on the spiritual faculty, or opened the third eye.

If this mystical experience is to have any lasting effect on the personality, however, it must be integrated through a process of consolidation. You now need to "tune in". This is done primarily through contact, regular and sincere, with the riches of your spiritual tradition. In so doing, you awaken and strengthen faith, *pistis*. This process is both linear and cyclical and typically follows a 12 month cycle.

Once you have sufficiently tuned in and have achieved "great faith" (Rinzai) or "absolute faith" (Tillich), you are ready to "drop out". This does not mean you become a *dharma bum*, as many Timothy Leary fans did in the 1960's and 1970's. It means you leave the world of dualistic human left-brain thinking behind, through self-emptying *kenosis*, and begin to live in the nondual world of headless immediacy. This is called "being born in the Pure Land" or "entering the Kingdom of God". It is living out 1, 3, 7, 12 in the 10,000 things.

With this understanding, Leary's hippy slogan, "turn on, tune in, drop out" is not a recipe for selfishness and irresponsibility. It points to the same liberation that Christ and Buddha point to. In Buddhist terms, it is "escape from Samsara". In Christian terms, it is both "escape from Babylon" and "escape from Zion". Salvation through Christ is salvation from the religious bondage of Mercury (10) and

the worldly bondage of Mars (13) through connection with the One and the Many.

Jesus said to his disciples, "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). In his final discourse he said to them, "ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world" (John 15:19). When questioned by Pilate, he declared, "my kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

Key:

10 = religious but not spiritual (Mercury 10) = "bound"

11 = magical (Venus 11) = "unhinged"

12 = spiritual and religious (Earth 12) = "contained"

13 = spiritual but not religious (Mars 13) = "unmoored"

1 + 3 + 7 = mystical (Sun 11) = "detached"

11 + 12 = magical, spiritual and religious (Venus and Earth 23) = "fantastical"

1 + 3 + 7 + 12 = spiritual, religious and mystical (Sun and Earth 23) = "incarnation"

11 + 13 = magical and spiritual but not religious (Venus and Mars 24) = "space cadet"

How High Can You Go?

In the previous chapter I elaborated a cosmic scheme with the One at the centre (the Sun), the Twelve at the periphery (the Earth) and Three and Seven between. Here I would like to relate these four numbers (1, 3, 7, 12) to levels of psychedelic altitude, with the One as the highest and the Twelve at the lowest.

Although I refer to planet Earth as 12 (representing cyclical time in the yearly orbit around the Sun), this is in the context of the *collective unconscious*, the *imaginal* or *heaven*. Everything that happens in the psychedelic dimension happens in heaven. The "12th heaven" is the lowest heaven. It designates a realm of personal and transpersonal images, ideas, fantasies, etc. similar to those that occur in ordinary dreams, or rather "big dreams" as Jung called them.

Get higher, beyond the "12th heaven", and you'll find yourself in "7th heaven". This is where you experience one or more of the seven levels of the Ray of Creation (Emptiness, Energy, Matter, Life, Mind, Planet, Universe). If you are on the level of Matter (*Atum*), for example, you may experience dancing atoms and molecules, the elementals (air, water, earth and fire) and other natural forces. The level of Life (*Ka*) is experienced as cellular "organic goo", whereas the Mind (*Ba*) level is populated by myriad organisms, plants and animals, or rather their souls/consciousness.

Beyond the "7th heaven" is the "3rd heaven" which is an abstract realm of primitive archetypes arranged into triads. The two primary ways these triads manifest is objectively as *Tao, Yin, Yang* (a dynamic polarity within a higher unity) or subjectively as *Parashiva, Shiva, Shakti* (consciousness and form within a higher consciousness). You either observe reality from a detached perspective as the endless play of infinite triads or participate in reality and experience it from within as the infinite play of one foundational triad. In the Christian context, the latter is experienced as interpenetrating dynamic relationships between the persons of the Trinity, *Father*, *Son* and *Holy Spirit*.

The "1st heaven" is absolute unity, plenum void, one without a second. In other words, God (or Godhead). This is very difficult to recall in consciousness, and only possible to remember at all because a trace remainder of self manages to steal a glimpse of the unfathomable Source and Goal of everything before being swallowed up like a firefly in the Sun. Talk of "ego dissolution" and "amnesia" often, but not always, refer to the "1st heaven". You know you've been there, but you don't know where you've been.

I would like to say that this is the highest level, if only for the sake of tidiness. However, I suspect that it may be possible that on the other side of God, so to speak, something like on the far side of a Black Hole, there is another dimension altogether. Perhaps "God" is the portal between this reality and a another parallel universe where the DMT entities live. Perhaps.

Be that as it may, I do think that this is a useful map with which to position various psychedelic ecosystems. Broadly speaking, I would say that the conventional therapeutic secular humanist community focuses mostly on the "12th heaven". Their primary interest is in processing and healing personal, interpersonal and even transpersonal pathologies and traumas. New Age Neo-Pagan Hippies spend most of their time in "7th heaven", especially in *Atum, Ka, Ba* and *Gaia*. Christian mystics, as well as mystics from other traditions, get as high as "3rd heaven" (e.g. St. Paul, 2 Corinthians 12:2), and sometimes "1st heaven" (e.g. Meister Eckhart).

One, Three, Seven, Twelve

Zen is at the centre of spiritual practice.
Zen means "meditation" but also "enlightened awareness".
It is both a practice and a state of mind, or rather no-mind, *mu-shin*. Emptied of self, Zen is *kenosis*. It is nondual consciousness. It is ONE.

The ONE becomes THREE with the birth of duality. A exists in relation to A' (not-A), producing three terms: A, A' and AA'. In Kashmir Shaivism, we have Parashiva, Shiva and Shakti; in the Christian Trinity, we have Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The THREE becomes SEVEN in the same way. A, B, C exist as A, B, C, AB, BC, AC and ABC. This constitutes an octave, expressed in the "Ray of Creation" as emptiness, energy, matter, life, mind, planetary and universal consciousness. The Law of Three and the Law of Seven make possible direct seeing into the nature of reality, *gnosis*, with or without psychedelic assistance.

The TWELVE represents a cycle of deepening faith, *pistis*, around the zodiac and months of the year, associated with the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of Jesus. The spiritual practice is *lectio divina*, contemplative reading and *auditio divina*, contemplative listening in liturgical participation.

In *pistis* we deepen our faith; in *kenosis* we strengthen our mindfulness; in *gnosis* we align ourselves.

*

The One is what we commonly call "God". It is One without a Second, the Absolute, All and Everything. We can get a taste of it in breakthrough experiences of ego death on high doses of DMT.

The Three is what we commonly call "the Trinity". It is the basic structure of existence, that which makes the world of form and multiplicity possible. In Trika Shaivism, it is consciousness and form (Shiva and Shakti) held in absolute

consciousness (Parashiva). In Christian terms, Parashiva is the Father, Shiva is the Son and Shakti is the Holy Spirit. In Gnostic Christianity, the Holy Spirit is also Sophia (Wisdom), the feminine principle, which is also the manifest Creation, like Shakti.
The Seven is what I call "the Ray of Creation". It describes seven levels of existence in the evolution of the universe: emptiness, energy, matter, life, mind, planetary and universal consciousness: Amun, Ra, Atum, Ka, Ba, Gaia, Jah.

"Amun" is the Plenum Void (or the Quantum Void) out of which the universe emerges, what Lao Tzu called "the mother of the universe".

"Ra-Atum-Ka" is the Holy Spirit/Shakti (energy, matter, life), called "the Lord, the giver of life" in the Nicene Creed.

"Ba-Gaia" is the Son/Shiva (higher consciousness).

"Jah" is the Father/Parashiva (a fully evolved and unified conscious universe). Parashiva, as the transcendent principle, is therefore both "Amun" and "Jah", both Mother and Father, embracing the entire family of Creation as Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end; and Shiva and Shakti are Son and Daughter, the Christ and Sophia/Holy Spirit, completing the quaternity of the Cosmic Family.

The Twelve represents the cycle of time through the zodiac and thus the months of the year. It represents the outer movement of the inner workings of the Seven-in-Three-in-

One. It will repeat endlessly until the last syllable of recorded time. It is the history of the eternal return of the same intersected at every point by a ray of eternity.

The Gate, the Bridge and the Fence

1

Through the gateless gate, the gate disappears: all is one. Nothing more can be said; nothing more can be thought: one hairbreadth's difference and heaven and earth are set apart.

3 and 7

The shaman is a bridge between heaven and earth. So is the the prophet, the priest, the Christ, the Logos, the Mantra, the Shushumna, the Axis Mundi.

12

The garden is fenced about by the cycle of time, which is the orbit of the Earth around the Sun. Without a fence, all things fall apart and all things fly apart.

Psychedelic Mysticism

The highest possible psychedelic vision is the vision of the One. This is similar to the unitive vision of the mystic, but not identical. Both visions are encapsulated in the statement, "All is One". Both are experiential, intuitive, embodied, felt visions, far more real than mere theoretical, intellectual intuitions.

The psychedelic vision, however, has a stronger noetic quality. For the duration of the experience, there is only the One in exclusive, complete and resplendent clarity. The most ancient and unambiguous symbol of the One is AUM, the primordial sound of the Indian Vedas. AUM is the Singularity from which the All proceeds and in which All subsist. Although One, it is composed of three distinct elements:

A - Parashiva;
U - Shiva;
M - Shakti.

Parashiva is "One without a Second", pure subjective consciousness without any conscious object. This is God the Father in Heaven, infinite Being-Consciousness-Bliss (Satchidananda).

Shiva is "Self consciousness", the inner spark or soul of every living thing. This is the Son of God, the indwelling Christ, Atman or Buddha Nature.

Shakti is "the Many", the infinite multiplicity of All and Everything. This is the Holy Spirit, the Creation transfigured as a new Heaven and a new Earth.

Psychedelic mysticism is about remembering the One (AUM); remembering the Two (Parashiva, Shiva); and remembering the Many (Shakti).

Shakti proceeds from Parashiva and Shiva (the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son); only Shiva can approach Parashiva (no-one comes to the Father except through the Son); AUM contains Parashiva, Shiva and Shakti (the Trinitarian God is Three-in-One).

Pray Without Ceasing

How it works is a mystery, but what is beyond dispute is that there is both upward causation and downward causation. Alter the structure of your brain by ingesting a psychoactive compound such as psilocybin and your consciousness changes. Alter the state of your consciousness by thinking certain thoughts and the structure of your brain changes.

The brain is like an instrument and the mind is like music. The kind of music you can play is constrained by the physical limitations of the instrument. However, unlike a physical instrument made of wood or brass, the brain is malleable and plastic. It is constantly morphing into different neural configurations. This means that the "music" you play on it actually changes the "instrument" it is played on. This is downward causation, or "mind over matter".

The most direct and powerful types of upward causation (excepting brain disease and injury) are effected by psychedelics. The most powerful types of downward causation are produced by meditation and prayer. Put a Tibetan monk in a brain scanner and you will see extraordinary changes in the activity and structure of his brain as he enters into higher stages of meditation.

Psychedelics cause temporary changes in human brain structure and consciousness, ranging from a few minutes to twelve hours or more. A magic mushroom trip (psilocybin) lasts around six hours, but peaks at around two hours. Meditation and prayer also cause temporary changes in human consciousness and brain structure. With continued and repeated practice, however, these temporary states can become established in mind and brain as permanent traits.

This is why St. Paul exhorts his followers to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:16). But what is prayer exactly? The simplest and most straightforward definition of prayer is the turning of the mind towards God, captured in the Greek word *metanoia*, which is often translated as

"repentance", but which literally means something like "a turning about in the seat of consciousness". A nice image to illustrate this turning about is the sunflower's heliotropic movement to face the sun.

How can we do this? Most simply and straightforwardly, by *remembering God*. But what or who is God? Maybe we don't believe in God. Either way, do we really know what it is we do or don't believe in? Does it even matter? At the minimum, the word "God" refers to some kind of unity. Neo-Platonists would point to "the One". SBNR (spiritual but not religious) people usually plump for something like "Nature" or "the Universe". The Jewish Shema Prayer has set down for all time the fundamental declaration of the radical unity at the heart of monotheism: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

To remember God is to bring this "One" to mind. We can do this by simply repeating the word "God" or "Lord" or even "the One" as a mantra. If we are drawn to the Indian tradition, we can repeat the word "Aum" or "Ram". By this simple movement of the mind away from the multiplicity of world and ego and towards the unity of God, we find stillness and a kind of unified consciousness of the mind.

This *metanoia* or turning to God in all simplicity is beautifully illustrated in "the practice of the presence of God" of the lay Carmelite monk Brother Lawrence. It is such an easy practice, it is easily overlooked by our proud egos, which prefer something clever and difficult to do. Brother Lawrence was uneducated and illiterate and worked in the kitchen. But he had deep understanding and he had deep

faith. It is precisely because this practice of the presence of God is so easy, that it is so hard. It requires too much faith for people of little faith like us.

We can make the unity of God more intellectually satisfying, and perhaps easier for our clever egos to swallow, by noticing that there are actually three principles involved. The apparent unity is actually a trinity. This is expressed in the Christian tradition as *Father*, *Son* and *Holy Spirit*, but it also appears in other traditions as *Sat*, *Chit*, *Ananda* or *Parashiva*, *Shiva*, *Shakti*. This "Three-in-One" allows for a dynamic interaction between the transcendent, immanent and incarnate principles of reality, connecting Being and Becoming, the One and the Many, Heaven and Earth.

We can break this down further into seven principles, *Amun*, *Ra*, *Atum*, *Ka*, *Ba*, *Gaia*, *Jah*, which I won't go into here (chapter fourteen of my book *The Confessions of a Psychedelic Christian*, "The Presence of God", explains how the Seven are contained in the Three and the Three in the One). This may sound terribly esoteric but it is actually quite straightforward. The basic point I am trying to put across here is that by recourse to the One, the Three and the Seven, it is in fact possible to pray without ceasing, and in so doing, to conform ourselves to the body and mind of Christ.

Cosmic Christianity

Today is Palm Sunday. Traditionally, on Palm Sunday you are given a "palm", a slender reed which you can fold into the shape of a cross. The symbolism, in reference to Christ's entry into Jerusalem and his impending crucifixion is obvious. But is there a deeper, more esoteric meaning?

With the long reed placed before us, we can imagine that it represents time. The left end of the reed is the beginning and the right end is the end of linear time. The beginning is described in the first book of the Bible:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

The end is described in the last book:

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away". (Revelation 21:1)

What is before the beginning and after the end of time? God. What is eternally present in the invisible cleft of the here and now? God. What is beyond the far and near horizons of your world? God.

So what happens when you fold the reed into a cross? What happens when you fold this universe of spacetime in upon itself?

"In my beginning is my end"

“When the tongues of fire are in-folded
into the crowned knot of fire
and the fire and the rose are one”

"at the still point of the turning world."

(T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*)

The Biblical story is about the life of Jesus and the history of the Jews and the whole of Creation from beginning to end.

Fold it in on itself and beginning and end meet at the intersection of eternity and time, the vertical and horizontal, at the centre of the cross of Christ, who says:

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."

(Revelation 22:13)

So what happens when time folds in on itself like this, esoterically symbolised in the folding of the palm reed cross on Palm Sunday?

Eternal life.

Nondual Christianity

Conventional Christianity is dualistic:
there is God and there is Creation;
there is Heaven and there is Earth.

Esoteric Christianity is nondual:
there is one God;
and that's it.

Nothing exists outside God.
But how can this be?
Because of the Trinity.

God is Three-in-One:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
or Parashiva, Shiva, Shakti.

Metaphysically speaking,
this is panentheism:
God is immanent, transcendent and phenomenal.

The phenomenal (Shakti)
is the world of your experience,
which is the only world you can know.

The immanent (Shiva)
is the conscious subjectivity
which makes experience possible.

The transcendent (Parashiva)

is the absolute consciousness
which grounds and sustains the conscious world of Shiva-Shakti.

Parashiva is the Father;
Shiva is the Son;
Shakti is the Holy Spirit.

In nondual Christianity,
the Holy Spirit is not just a subtle spiritual influencer
or an inward rush of pranic energy, but the entire cosmos.

Shiva is mind; Shakti is cosmos.
Shiva-Shakti is mind and cosmos;
Parashiva is sustaining absolute consciousness.

All is One;
All is Three-in-One;
God is All.

The Law of Three

All is One.
There is One God.
God is All.

But what about us?
And what about the ten thousand things?
How can we reconcile the One with the Many?

If there is only Self there is no Other;
if there is only One without a Second
there is no Universe.

If we insist that All is One,
we may conclude that appearances can be deceptive
and that the Many is actually just an illusion.

This is the claim of Advaita Vedanta:
the world of appearance is Maya,
the dream of Brahma.

If we hold to the One,
either the phenomenal world is an illusion
or consciousness is an illusion.

If Monism holds,
either immaterialism is true
or eliminativism is true.

Alternatively, we can give up on Unity

and say that there is Duality.
This is traditional Theism:

If the Universe is real,
there must be a Creator and a Creation,
God and not-God.

In traditional Theism
to say that you are God
is the highest sacrilege.

You are not God.
You are a Creature
created by God.

Traditional Theism is dualistic:
God is One,
but God and not-God is Two.

However, Two logically entails Three.
If there is God and not-God,
we have God, not-God and "God plus not-God".

In the Chinese Yin/Yang symbol
we have the black half, the white half
and the circle uniting them.

In Vedanta,
we have sat, chitta
and ananda.

In the Hegelian dialectic
we have thesis, antithesis
and synthesis.

In Gurdjieff's system
we have active, passive
and neutral.

In the Indian guna system
we have tamas, rajas
and sattwa.

In Trika Shaivism
we have Parashiva, Shiva
and Shakti.

In Christianity
we have Father, Son
and Holy Spirit.

The simplest geometrical three dimensional shape,
the basic building block of reality,
is the tetrahedron.

In fact, the very possibility of a dynamic, relational universe
of multiplicity and diversity
depends on the Law of Three.

One is static.
Two is unstable.
Three is infinitely creative.

Hence the Trinity:
God is One
and God is Three-in-One.

A Vision

In a vision I saw the world contained in a bubble in the middle of the ocean. The domed sky above was the inner surface of the bubble, as was the peripheral view as it disappeared to my left and right and the ground as it rose to join the sky in front of me.

Imagine you are in the bubble. At this moment, you are viewing the bubble world from one point on the inner surface. You can't turn around to see what is behind you, but it seems as though your view in is through an aperture on the surface of the bubble behind you.

What is behind you? What is on the near side of the opening into the bubble world? The same as that which is beyond the far side, beyond the horizon, beyond the sky. The ocean. The world is in a bubble in the middle of the ocean, remember? But it's not an ocean of water, it's an ocean of consciousness, infinite consciousness, *Parashiva*.

The thin film that constitutes the bubble itself is *Shiva*, which is to say, your individual consciousness aware of your individual world. The opening directly behind you is your Self, your personal consciousness, behind which is the infinite ocean of *Parashiva*. Everything that *Shiva* experiences in the bubble is *Shakti*, the "world".

Once you become cognizant of this state of affairs, you soon discover that *Shiva* can move in one of two directions

- backwards or forwards. You can back up to the noumenal Source or enter the phenomenal Stream. You can merge with *Parashiva* or *Shakti*.

Both movements result in a nondual mystical experience, one "introvertive" and the other "extrovertive". Merging individual *Shiva* consciousness back into universal *Parashiva* consciousness is experienced as ego-dissolution, or ego-death. Merging with *Shakti* is experienced as an egoless state of nondual Zen.

That's all very well, I hear you say, but haven't we missed something important? What about the mind? What about our feelings, sensations, desires, habits, memory, will, understanding? What about the unconscious? What about the soul?

It's as if the bubble has another smaller bubble floating around it, like a moon. This is the "Imaginal", the soul-space where all the soul-stuff happens. *Shiva* shuttles back and forth between these two bubbles all the time.

All the time, that is, while time exists. When *Shiva* is merged with *Parashiva* in perfect unity (as the One) or with *Shakti* in perfect multiplicity (as the Many), there is no time, at least not in the way we ordinarily experience it, and there is no Imaginal.

Maybe some real life,
to refresh beginner's mind
all over again. Zezan Tam

if you go to heaven

you will burn in hell

until you learn to bear the beams of love

so put on the armour of Christ

and the robes of light

and approach the unapproachable

before God

in absolute faith

alone