

Side 1: Going Out / Side 2: Coming Back

Broadside Records BRX 601

# THE PSYCHEDELIC EXPERIENCE

By Timothy Leary, Ph. D., Ralph Metzner, Ph. D. and Richard Alpert, Ph. D.

Readings from the book "The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead"



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Astronomers tell us that there are around one thousand million (i. e. one billion) galactic systems. Each galaxy contains from 100 million to 100,000 million suns -- one hundred thousand million planetary systems like our own in each galaxy. Each planetary system slowly wheeling through the stellar cycle that allows for a brief time the possibility of life as we know it.

Almost everything we know about life and energy, our science and our philosophy is restricted to local, recent events on one infinitesimally small planetary satellite of a dwarf star we call sun.

Neurologists for their part tell us that the human brain contains around 13 billion nerve cells and that everything we consciously "know" is limited to a fragment of this far-flung neurological galaxy. Our symbolic mind, our ego, our personality is to the vast potential of our brain as the planet earth is to the stellar universe. In recent years technical advances have made it possible for man to leave the surface of the earth and to voyage into extra-terrestrial realms where new forms of energy and new lawful patterns of physical and chemical phenomena are to be found.

The possibility of voyaging into inner space, of leaving the tiny area of symbolic-learned consciousness and exploring extra-symbolic realms where new patterns of neurological energy are to be encountered ... this possibility has been known to men for thousands of years. In the great civilizations of Babylonia, China, India, Tibet, Egypt the central concern of philosophy and mental science was to escape from that neurological speck we call mind and to make contact with other areas of the brain. Complex and exhausting methods of altering consciousness were developed and the bulk of the religious, psychological and poetic literature of these classic civilizations centered on the internal voyage -- consciousness expansion.

Today psychedelic drugs such as LSD make it possible for anyone to propel himself out of his mind into unknown, uncharted neurological regions.

The yogas and spiritual exercises of the past are no longer needed to escape from the gravitational inertia of the symbolic mind. Exit is guaranteed.

But this new freedom-to-explore consciousness is a mixed blessing. For let him who experiments with consciousness beware! The untrained, unprepared psychedelic voyager may find himself suddenly high, far out of his mind, spinning through the bewildering vastness of his own nervous system, lost, terrified, confused, out of touch with everything he has known in his routine mental life.

The opportunity provided by psychedelic drugs to examine one's own consciousness, to visit the far-flung galactic realms within the brain may well be the most important step in the evolution of the human species. Expansion of consciousness, increased control of one's brain is obviously the only hope to prevent man's enslavement by his machines and his mechanized social institutions. The only solution lies within. To take external-materials seriously is to make a joke of life and to neglect the potentials of that unique and completely undeveloped instrument -- our 13 billion cell cerebral computer.

What is required is a staggeringly complex effort. Man must learn to move his consciousness accurately around the neurological galaxies -- he must learn the language, the meanings of the countless levels of reality within.

The language of the body, the language of life, the language of the nervous system is chemical. The billion-year-old dialects with which our bodies and brains communicate must be decoded. Bio-chemists and geneticists are laboriously working out the alphabets of some of the energy languages by means of sophisticated external symbol systems. But the receiving instruments, the coding and decoding events occur within our bodies and man's next evolutionary step is the experiential learning of these chemical dialects. We must experience the language of our bodies, listen to them, and learn their messages.

Here we confront a "break-through" in human knowledge. What is a "break-through" in the sociology and psychology of knowledge? A new area is opened up to investigation. A new level of energy is discovered to exist. People begin to look in new directions, for realms of events that they previously did not consider lookable. Entirely new classes of questions begin to be asked.

A policeman one dark night finds a drunk crawling on his hands and knees underneath a lamp post.

"What are you doing?"

"I am looking for my key, officer."

"Did you drop it here?"

"No, officer, I dropped it down that dark alley over there."

"Well, why are you looking for it here?"

"Because there's light here and the alley is dark."

Beyond the flicker of our current conceptions and scientific models await the new discoveries.

As soon as man realizes that there are meaningful, clearly perceptible, de-codable languages flashing through the dark regions of his own body-brain the secondary job of slow, painstaking empirical study of these energy patterns will develop.

Since the recent introduction of psychedelic drugs many thoughtful persons -- both within and without of the scientific professions -- have set out to study the meaning of the psychedelic experience. The first problem encountered is the lack of any maps and models for charting meta-conceptual experiences. The alley which contains the key is unlighted. Western psychology has not yet gotten the point -- that the great discoveries always lie outside the narrow circle of the current lamp light. That you have to go out of your mind to discover and use your head.

The great founding giants of psychology -- Fechner, Wundt, William James, Freud, Jung -- did not make this mistake. They knew that consciousness and the expansion of consciousness was the key method of psychology. Behaviorists have re-written psychological history to disregard the seminal teachings of these men. Current psychology texts pay little attention to altered states of consciousness, to the galaxy of potentials with the brain -- and the few references which are made treat new levels of consciousness as pathological, psychotic, and dangerous.

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The serious student of the psychedelic experience thus looks in vain for methods and explanations in western psychology. But, if he persists in his seriousness, he realizes that the psychedelic experience has been studied systematically for thousands of years by Eastern psychologists.

Zen Buddhism is a theory and method for the psychedelic experience. The going out of your mind is called satori. The method is meditation and the mind-defeating technique is the koan.

Tantric Buddhism is a theory and method for the psychedelic experience.

The going out of your mind is called by various names -- nirvana, illumination, etc.

The method is to decipher and control the chemical languages within your body by a variety of methods described below.

Hinduism presents an enormous range of psychedelic methods and models.

The going out of your mind is called samadhi.

The methods include five forms of yoga and hundreds of techniques for severing attachments to external events.

Islamic Sufism has developed effective psychedelic methods based on rhythm and a theory of vibrations.

The going out of your mind is described as reaching higher levels of energy the most absolute of which is called Zat.

The methods include the use of sound, color, movement and drugs.

Chinese Taoism is perhaps the most straightforward philosophic interpretation of the everchanging nature of energy and of the relationship of man's nervous system to the energy flow around it.

The state beyond mind, beyond static structure is called Tao.

The methods include a watchful, patient, passive observation of the endless cycle of energy change and a wise harmonization with it. The book of changes (I Ching) presents a psychedelic method based on the Tao. The Secret of the Golden Flower is another Taoist text which presents a metaphor and chemical methods for expanding consciousness.

Careful examination of these ancient texts reveals several important clues.

1. They all state that man can change his level of consciousness and find higher wisdom within.
2. They all agree that man's mind and man's inertial attachment to externals prevents his reaching other levels of consciousness.
3. They all present maps, metaphors, models for charting internal constellations.
4. They all describe - allegorically or directly - methods for getting out beyond the conceptual.
5. They all warn of the dangers - terror and confusion - which await the unprepared voyager.
6. They all list methods for dealing with these terrors and confusions.
7. The explanations, descriptions and methods perfectly describe the psychedelic experience, but only to those who have the experiential background to read the message.

All of these ancient manuals reach us by circuitous routes of philological distortion. Most have been translated by academic orientalists - sinologists, Tibetologists, scholars of Sanskrit. With rare exceptions, academic orientalists are completely insulated from direct experience, dusty experts in highly abstract verbal shells.

Most of the translators of the Sacred Writings of the East have performed a rote task of verbal transposition not having the slightest feeling for the texts they worked with. Thus, when we read these texts they seem dull, repetitious, dead symbolisms.

It is easy to overlook the fact that these ancient classics were manuals, cook-books, eminently practical accounts of how to lose your mind and reach new neurological areas.

An excellent case in point is the Tibetan Book of the Dead. This sacred text which has been called "one of the most remarkable works the West has ever received from the East", is said by some authorities to have been written in the time of Padma Sambhava, "the precious guru", who introduced Tantric teachings to Tibet in the eighth century A.D. Other Tibetologists believe the book to be a cumulative compilation -- recorded in recent times but tracing back into the early history of Buddhism in Tibet.

The title of the book in its own language is Bardo Thodol -- liberation by Hearing on the After-Death Plane.

The aim of the manual is to guide one through the intermediate stages between death and rebirth -- to list systematically the levels of consciousness to be met after consciousness leaves the plane of routine reality and to forewarn and prepare the reader for the range of visions to be encountered.

Here again we meet the paradox of the exoteric and the esoteric -- the confusion between the literal, rational abstract interpretation and the living experiential meaning of the text.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead is not a mortician's guide. It refers to changes in consciousness which occur during life. The Bardo Thodol is a manual for voyaging into inner space -- preparing the voyager who leaves the small planet of his conceptual mind and plunges into neurological space.

Here is the first grave misunderstanding. Most Western scholars and (according to their own testimony) most Tibetan lamas today consider the Bardo Thodol to be a ritual for the physically dying. They appear to overlook the key -- to miss the fact that the Bardo Thodol is a book for the living, a manual for consciousness expansion in this life.

Lama Anagarika Govinda, the venerable sage of Almora, who has divided his long life between painstaking scholarship and direct, poetic experiential confrontation with Tibetan methods of consciousness expansion, has put his finger on the esoteric core of the Bardo Thodol.

"... we have to do here with life itself and not merely with a mass for the dead, to which the Bardo Thodol was reduced in later times. ...

"Under the guise of a science of death, the Bardo Thodol reveals the secret of life; and therein lies its spiritual value and its universal appeal."

A second misunderstanding about most sacred manuals in general and Tibetan book in particular is the literal and ritualistic interpretation of the mythology, the metaphor.

The Bardo Thodol was written for Buddhists, for persons who had spent a lifetime meditating on the pantheon and spiritual geography of Tantra. Lamist Buddhism is a highly complicated methodological and mythic structure. Central to this psychedelic approach is a familiarity with:

1. mandalas, visual machines for producing a "high", for getting you out of your mind by locking the retina of your eye to the external retinal structure of the painting.
2. The Pantheon of Dhyani Buddhas, representations of various forms of illumination. Each Buddha is associated with an element, a color, a form of enlightening wisdom, a gesture, a center of body consciousness, an animal protector, a symbol, a vehicle, a mantra.
3. - mantras, syllables, sound patterns which are used as psychedelic tools; repetition of the mantra sets up vibrations which connect to specific forms of consciousness. To use the metaphor of inner-space-travel each mandala, each Buddha, each mantra, each color, each symbol, each gesture, each element guides



one to a specific constellation in the galaxy of expanded consciousness. Each is a navigational aid.

4. The psychedelic quality of color is well known to Tantric psychologists. Each color of the prism represents a different energy pattern indicating certain properties, spiritual associations or neurological areas.

5. mudras. Sacred gestures of hands, arms and body again are associated with specific realms of consciousness and are designed to guide the voyager through moments of confusion and panic.

6. cakras. Centers of consciousness within the body which, according to the Lama Govinda, "collect, transform, and distribute the forces flowing through them." It is well known to neurologists that messages from different organs in the body are collected in clusters called plexes. One of the aims of Tibetan Buddhism is to direct consciousness so as to contact these centers of bodily energy. These cakras might be considered universes within the nervous system -- each with its own needs, terrors, ecstasies, and functions in the overall galactic system of the body. The mantras, mudras, colors and Buddhist figures associated with each cakra are the details of inter-stellar geography which have been worked out by Tibetan psychologists.

7. Psychedelic symbols. Just as different planets have been given symbolic labels by astronomers and astrologers, so have the different levels of consciousness been associated with specific symbols. These associations of neurological areas with external symbols are not accidental. Certain states of consciousness are suggestive of certain external forms.

8. Elements. There are different areas of the nervous system and different levels of awareness which similarly can be associated with the elements of organic life and inorganic energy manifestations crucial to life. These become, in the Tibetan system, guides to specific levels of awareness.

Thus we see that the Tibetan theory of consciousness is a complex method for describing and controlling various states of consciousness. A psychedelic psychology, this system was developed by a pastoral people over a thousand years ago. These metaphors are not in terms of our modern physical sciences -- but are valid, accurate, effective guides to the phenomenological. They work in communicating and directing states of consciousness because they are basically empirical. Decades of psychedelic research -- via meditation, drugs, mudras, mantras -- slowly worked out these neurological correlations. Crude, primitive, but effective enough to embarrass Western psychologists who, with all their statistical manipulation of certain behaviors, have not yet discovered the possibility of controlling and changing consciousness.

In considering any ancient, sacred psychological text it is important not to focus on the exoteric symbol, the literal meaning of the mythology. To do this is to engage in a classification of static abstractions. Where the Tibetans refer to The Buddha Amitaba they do not refer to a concrete historical person like the orthodox Christian's Jesus Christ -- they refer to a state of illuminated consciousness, a psychedelic moment.

When the Tibetans refer to blood-drinking demons, symbolic animals, the reference is suggestive and evocative of a psychedelic effect.

When they recite mantras they are not communicating in prayer, or expressing a denotative meaning -- they are trying to "turn on", "to get high" by means of a sound vibration.

Consider, for example, this section from the Bardo Thodol about the experiences of the second day after death.

"On the second day the pure form of water will shine as a white light. At that time, from the deep blue Eastern Realm of Pre-eminent Happiness, the . . . (Buddha) Akshobhya. . . holding in his hand a five pronged dorje, seated on an elephant throne . . . will appear to thee . . . Mirror-like wisdom will shine as a

bright, radiant white light . . . with such dazzling brilliancy and transparency that thou wilt scarcely be able to look at it (and) will strike against thee. And a dull, smoke-colored light from Hell will shine alongside the light of the Mirror-like wisdom and will (also) strike against thee.

"Thereupon, through power of anger, thou wilt beget fear and be startled at the dazzling white light and wilt (wish to) flee from it; thou wilt beget a feeling of fondness for the dull smoke-colored light from Hell . . .

"Be not fond of the dull, smoke-colored light from Hell. . . If thou be attracted by it, thou wilt fall into the Hell-Worlds; and, falling therein, thou wilt have to endure unbearable misery, whence there is no certain time of getting out."

Now this barrage, strange as it may sound to a modern American, is a straight, step-by-step account of an experience which almost every person faces during a psychedelic session. When you understand the meaning of the language, this barrage is as prosaic and practical as an AAA road guide -- "at kilometer 72 you will find a filling station and at kilometer 75 an unmarked intersection -- stay to the right."

Let us examine this barrage more closely to demonstrate its practical, psychedelic meaning.

"On the second day". This is the second part of a forty-nine unit sequence. It means towards the early part of the session.

"the pure form of water". The element water here suggests the mirror-like quality, the glittering, colorless, pure nature of this particular vision, this area of consciousness.

"will shine as a white light". One of the most memorable aspects of the psychedelic experience (remarked on by mystics throughout history) is the radiant light effect which comes at the early, high moments. When the subject experiences a mirror-like radiant white light he remembers this section of the manual.

"from the deep blue Eastern Realm". East because it is early in the session. Deep blue because this particular vision is often preceded by undifferentiated consciousness sky blue in its clarity.

"the (Buddha) Akshobhya". The reference to this personage which, mysterious to the Westerner, evokes dozens of powerful associations to the initiated, frames consciousness with powerful evocative images. Like Christ to the Christian, God to the Jew, Akshobhya is a deep, basic, powerful neural imprint to the lamist evoking a profound sense of all-encompassing "pure, spontaneous awareness", "clarity, steadfastness and (the) impartiality of a mirror which remains unaffected and untouched by the objects it reflects." This word, this idea, Akshobhya, is not a deity with personal characteristics but a state of consciousness, a neurological condition, a specific equilibrium of the nervous system -- as real and specific and recognizable as the taste of chocolate or the sensation of orgasm.

"a five pointed dorje". . . the dorje, sometimes called vajra, is a thunderbolt -- not the emblem of a power-god -- but "symbol of highest spiritual power . . . irresistible and invincible . . . compared to the diamond, which is capable of cutting asunder any other substance . . ." Like the Christian cross, the dorje is a basic, powerful symbol of Tibetan Buddhism and sets up automatic cerebral reactions. The vajra to most Tibetans may have only symbolic meaning (as the cross to routine Christians stands for sacrifice or Christian soldiers) but to the Lamist who has used this symbol in meditation the sight or image or mention of the vajra is like a shot of LSD or 100 milligrams of thorazine -- it flips him out into a specific neurological realm of jewel-like, regal calm.

"An elephant throne", described by Lama Govinda as a "throne carried or supported by elephants, symbols of steadfastness, and therefore emblems of Akshobhya, the Immutable."

Another shot of the same neuro-specific bio-chemi-



cal necessary when one is exposed to the glare of undifferentiated consciousness . . . "which will appear to thee . . .", which . . . "will shine as a bright, radiant white light . . . with such dazzling brilliance and transparency that thou wilt scarcely be able to look at it . . ."

Again, straight experiential neurology as commonplace to the mystic vocabulary as the taste of salt or a cramp in the leg. Neural messages, dear friend. Planets in the cerebral galaxy as incomprehensible to the person who has never had a psychedelic experience as the flicker of a candle to a blind man.

Do you get the point?

What Padma Sambhava is doing in his manual for the intermediate state of consciousness is describing the phenomena of one planet to the inhabitant of another. Describing sensations, nerve impulses, flavors, touches, sounds to the person who has never been exposed.

And it's all inside your cranial galaxy.

Words change. Symbols lose their living impact, but the nervous system hasn't changed in 10,000 years and the guided tour of the Lotus born teacher, better known to the Tibetans as Guru Rin-po-che, the precious guru, is as timely today as tomorrow's newspaper.

You may not believe it, but ask your brain.

"And a dull, smoke-colored light from hell will shine alongside the light of the mirror-like wisdom and will (also) strike against thee."

Here is another reflex of inner-space travel -- as common to the psychedelic adept as the shock of a cold shower to the suburbanite. The ecstatic flare of the undifferentiated illumination -- that radiant flash of the nervous system momentarily freed from conceptual structure is inevitably followed by a dulling -- as the needle of consciousness relentlessly moves. The memory of routine reality flicks in and out.

"Thereupon . . . thou wilt beget fear and be startled at the dazzling white light and wilt (wish to) flee from it; thou wilt beget a feeling of fondness for the dull smoke-colored light from hell. . ."

There comes the desire to return to the familiar static routine. In the midst of radiant, gravity-free space there comes the nostalgic desire to return to earth-bound heaviness, or perhaps panic that one will never return. As common to the psychedelic experience as the tourist's home-sick wish to leave the bright lights of Paris for the tidy security of the living room back home.

"Be not fond . . . if thou be attracted to it, thou wilt fall into the Hell-worlds . . . to endure unbearable misery . . ."

The LSD traveler who, frightened by new experience, struggles to slow down the flow of realities and return does suffer torments which dwarf the pains and discomforts of routine life. The manual's advice not to struggle away from the flow of light and not to scramble back to game reality is as prosaically obvious as the advice not to panic and leap from an airplane because you fear the sensation of take-off. Advice that is obvious to the initiated but completely incomprehensible to the person who has never seen an airplane -- incomprehensible to several generations of Oxford scholars who solemnly translate such counsels even though they do not believe that airplanes exist.

The survival and evolution of sacred books (books which deal with energy processes and their transformation) is a complex affair. If the language is operational (chemical formulas, for instance) the terms are translated accurately and faithfully. They have to be, because otherwise, they don't work. Change in the text occurs as better empirical operations develop.

If the language is experiential a paradoxical situation develops. Unless subsequent generations continue to have the same experience the sacred text is handed down as an intellectual or ritualized performance. Changes are introduced based on the intellectual distortions of each subsequent generation of scholars or priests. Bureaucratic counsels repeatedly reinterpret the manual handed down by Jesus Christ until the original psychedelic meaning is lost.

But each generation develops a new group of psychedelic explorers who repeat the experience and then re-interpret the old text in new experiential language. The six common characteristics of all sacred writings

(listed above) remain the same -- the metaphor changes to remain alive and current.

With this historical perspective in view, the Harvard-IFIF-Castalia-Millbrook group of psychedelic researchers has re-examined ancient sacred writings, Eastern, Hermetic, gnostic, Christian, Sufi, and has prepared current versions to be used by persons in the twentieth century who intend to venture into the timeless regions of their own nervous systems.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead was the first ancient text which we translated into modern psychedelic dialect.\* The Present Recording

The readings recorded on this album are extracted from this book, which should be consulted for further detailed instructions on the planning, preparation and conduct of psychedelic sessions.

The Psychedelic Experience, following the Bardo Thodol, distinguishes three phases of the out-of-the-mind voyage. The first phase, which comes immediately after the first exit, the moment of death, is direct contact and union with unformed energy processes.

\* Leary, Timothy, Metzner, Ralph & Alpert, Richard The Psychedelic Experience. A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead. New Hyde Park: University Books, 1963.

The second phase, the bardo of hallucinations, is the longest part of the session, in which the mind imposes its learned conceptual-perceptual structures on the flow of undifferentiated energy, and "visions", "hallucinations", "revelations", etc. result. The third phase is the period of re-entry, in which the voyager attempts to return to his familiar world, his everyday "reality". In an actual session the experience does not of course follow such a tidy sequence; consciousness flashes in and out of these realms many times. It is of crucial importance to recognize the transition points -- the going out and the coming back -- and to be fully conscious and impartial when they occur.

The Psychedelic Experience contains detailed instructions for each of the three phases and for the sequence of visions within each phase. In the present recording two passages have been selected:

Going Out (Side I): to be listened to at the very beginning of the session, just before and after the time when the going out begins, i. e. when the psychedelic begins to take effect.

Coming Back (Side II): to be listened to towards the last third of the session, when the ego is beginning to re-assert itself, when "I" first makes its appearance in thought and speech. The exact time will of course vary from person to person and with the particular chemical used.

Side II increases in effectiveness if repeated two or three times during the re-entry phase. Side I may also be played towards the end of the session if the voyager wishes to regain the earliest and highest part of the voyage.

The effectiveness of these readings during a psychedelic session depends largely on the prior preparation of the voyager and on the setting in which the session is taking place.

For details on preparation and setting the voyager is urged to consult "The Psychedelic Experience". The following brief guide lines may be helpful: 1) the room should be kept free of distractions and interruptions, such as telephones, door-bells, everyday business to attend to, child-care obligations, etc.; 2) the room should be arranged to be comfortable and aesthetically pleasing; 3) the outline of the "program", that is what music is to be played or passages to be read should if possible be agreed on ahead of time, so that one does not have to get involved in decision-making during the voyage.

The readings presented here can best be regarded as radio-signals sent out from a satellite tracking station to the explorers floating freely through space. The instructions can be attended to or ignored but at least they provide a kind of basic signal around which the voyager can orient his explorations.

We dedicate this recording to the many men and women whose accounts and reports of their explorations in the interior universe have helped us prepare these maps.

Timothy Leary and Ralph Metzner