

DRUGS: THE ALTERATION OF THE SELF - PART 2
December 8, 2010

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

The problem for many drug users is not that LSD snatched away the curtain from the Wizard of the Self (troubling enough), but rather that behind the curtain there was no one there. This is what gave us pause. The philosopher Hegel wrote in his main work "The Phenomenology of the Mind," the following: "We go behind the curtain of the self to see what is there, but mainly for there to be something to be seen." Think about that. Hegel is one of the very few western philosophers that grasped the nature of the self, which is the stock and trade of Zen and Tibetan Buddhists: the fact that the Self has no permanent existence. If the self is held together only by our attachment to its components and LSD fractures our attachment, then many of us who took those conscious-altering drugs have experienced non-attachment. We have seen what only yogis see.

There you have a taste. I could go on and give you more chapter and verse in what I am pointing out here, but I don't think that is necessary. If you had a real LSD experience at one time or another, you should have the idea by now, which summarized is this:

The 'Self' (our self) is a most convenient reference point, the center of attention for most of us, our identity, and is not unlike the warm blanket a toddler carries around for comfort. We have never really looked at our self all that closely and, as long as it is always nearby as a touchstone, we have learned not to ask too many questions. We assume that our self has or is a permanent center, when the truth is that the self has (as adepts have pointed out for centuries) no real permanent center other than our own attachment to its components, and these components change constantly. Our attachment itself is the center we identify with. Think about that for a moment. So what happens if we lose our attachment?

When the attachment to the self is suddenly removed by drugs or broken up (much like a dust devil of wind is broken up when it encounters something), the life-line hold of attachment we had on the concept of our self is broken and our self suddenly seen as the many pieces it in fact is and always has been, empty of any particular meaning and direction. We gave them meaning. The self without our attachment is going nowhere and means nothing. When the illusion of a self is severed, we instantly see what only yogis have seen: a true glimpse of the mind beyond the self. However, most of us are not yogis.

What happens next depends on how much mind training or familiarity with the mind we actually do have. For most of us back in the day the shock of suddenly losing a grip on our self, losing self-control, etc. was devastating, sending us into days, weeks, months, and years of scrambling to put our Humpty-Dumpty self back together again the way it was before so that we can feel "normal," feel as we use to. Well that never happened. We had to move on in life with an altered sense of our self, which gradually became more and more familiar. We quickly agree to forget what we find just too hard to remember. So far I have sketched out the rough idea. Now here is the interesting part:

For those of us who had experience with hallucinatory drugs such as LSD, Mescaline, mushrooms, etc. and became disoriented either temporarily or permanently, there is a cure for our disorientation from drugs and it is not getting on prescription drugs, downers, years of therapy, or whatever-else-we-tried. All that remains for us to do is to complete the education

that LSD gave us a glimpse of and learn to know the true nature of the mind, what adepts have spoken of for centuries. With acid we had a lightning-flash course in the mind, which illumined something (our mind) for a moment, but then left us back in the dark or perhaps half-enlightened. Now we have to finish the job.

I know this may at first sound impossible, but it is not. It simply involves learning to train the mind and to gradually become more familiar with the mind itself that we glimpsed way back then. And it is never too late. When our mind gets stuck, it waits for us to unstick it, however long that may be. Learning about the mind is teleological. It is not time dependent, but waits on us to finish the job. It is up to us and we may wait lifetimes if we choose. Each step in the mind-training process increasingly removes the confusion that drugs earlier in our life cast upon our consciousness. What was unknown becomes known. What needs to be removed is removed, and what needs to be added is added. And as we come to know the actual landscape of our own mind, we can see where we mistook or misunderstood what we only saw a glimpse of way back then.

Druggies after they take LSD invariably create their own cosmology like "The world according to Michael," but just as invariably it becomes a patchwork quilt with holes in it. We get some pieces of it right, except for the gaping holes where we are missing large chunks. We don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater, but mostly we have bathwater and very little baby. For many of us it is difficult to abandon our one-horse world view and accept some spiritual system that is better organized. It is the old not-invented-here syndrome and/or a righteous avoidance of organized anything, like: religion. I know; I had this problem.

I was raised Catholic, with what that suggests. For all that Catholics got wrong, they did give me a sense of awe and mystery about the universe and life in it. So after I began having problems putting my particular Humpty-Dumpty self back together after LSD, I sought out advice. At the time I was fearless and had no shame. I began to visit all the folks I imagined as experts where they lived: doctors, lawyers, professors, spiritual folks, etc. I walked right into their offices and asked to see them, and I didn't have an appointment.

While most were too stiff to share or able to understand me, others sat with me and we wept together. It was like that. I can remember sitting with the great economist Kenneth Boulding in his office while he recited poetry and we wept together about the wonders of life and all its struggles. He said "Michael, we learn to fail successfully." And of course I wanted to go to those Catholics who historically are the most trained in the mind, and this would be the Jesuits. I went to them. I sat down with them. I shared my trip with them. They were no help whatsoever, I am sorry to say. They just did not get it.

It was only when I met the Zen and Tibetan Buddhists that I found any resonance, found where I belonged. They just took me in. Moreover, the Tibetan Buddhists knew right off exactly where I was at. Nothing I could come up with or throw at them fazed them one iota. In fact they simply filled in the blanks, making sense of my story and providing me with practices that would remove any remaining impurities in my vision and strengthen my view. They absorbed what was unique about my drug experience, what made me at times feel special or superior to others, and never blinked. I was welcomed and took this as a very good sign indeed. I was home and had found my lineage; there were others in the world like me.

This is why the remnants of LSD trips frequently include a bit of the savant, a sense that the tripper knows something that others do not, and has been initiated in some way, albeit partially or badly. And they have. For many years I did drug counseling with clients who had bad trips

and I can say that the hardest part in working with someone who had a too-powerful LSD trip is to get them to give up that little bit of vision they did have way back then and simply move on. That LSD vision is like a baby taking its first breath, that first glimpse of reality, which was so important (or true) for them that they held their breath and have yet to exhale. In other words, they stopped breathing back there and then and are still holding onto their insights with a death grip. Some may even need a slap on the back to get them breathing again. I was able to do that for them. They realized they were not unique, not the only ones, woke up, and moved on. An unresolved LSD trip leaves the user in a semi-autistic state. No one can reach them, and they prefer it that way as opposed to the pain of real integration.

Part One

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=305700&id=587252657>

Part Two

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=305701&id=587252657>

Part Three

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=305702&id=587252657>

Part Four

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=305703&id=587252657>

