

Learning **How** to Learn

Myron Stolaroff

In a lot of the responses sent in by MAPS members, a central theme was that the creative influence of the psychedelic experience has a spiritual aspect to it. The “connection to God” allowed access to creativity. It isn’t surprising. Before one builds a house, one must have the *idea* to build a house. The non-material world of thought transforms into the material world of objects through creative action taken based on that thought. If one considers that a primary purpose attributed to God is the creation of everything—a seeming unfolding of nothingness into somethingness—then it is perfectly reasonable to believe that psychedelics, by acting as a conduit to the transpersonal realm, can allow people to harness the same type of creative force that brought about existence itself. In the following paper, Myron Stolaroff elegantly presents ideas that are clearly shared by many.

THE MOST IMPORTANT aspect of learning how to learn is to immerse oneself completely and without reservation into the Knower.

For within each of us is that unimaginable place, our Real Self, known by a variety of names in various times and cultures, listed by Stan Grof: “Brahman, Buddha, the Cosmic Christ, Keter, Allah, the Tao, the Great Spirit, and many others.”¹ This Self, which dedicated explorers find to be intimately connected to every aspect of the Universe, seems to hold infinite knowledge. From this perspective, if we have become totally free, vast knowledge is available.

To become one with this Self, one must become free of all attachments, conceptualizations, judgments, investments, reifications,² and unconscious barriers, until the mind can be held perfectly still without distractions. Mind training and disciplining as taught by the Buddha, Hindus, and other wisdom traditions are valuable procedures to accomplish the required state of quiescence. A powerful tool for accelerating this process is the informed use of psychedelics. Informed use includes preparation in understanding the nature of psychedelic experiences and possible outcomes, deep intention, and integrity in the form of honoring the experience and the commitment to put what one learns into effect in one’s life. It may take a number of experiences at varying dose levels and settings to achieve a glimpse of the Ultimate Self.

A common experience for those who penetrate deeply into the levels made available by psychedelic experience is the realization that we are all One, that we are all intimately connected through the life force that manifests in every living thing and every aspect of the universe. This being so, we can understand the Buddhist precept that our own ultimate realization depends on committing ourselves to the happiness and welfare of all sentient beings. I have personally found that my own adverse judgment of certain individu-

als puts a definite lid on my own development.

Sri Ramana Maharshi, according to Ken Wilber,³ “is arguably the greatest Guru who ever lived.” He has stated that the only reason we are not enlightened is that we do not know that we are already enlightened. While this is no doubt true, I have in my own some forty years of psychedelic exploration, enhanced by Tibetan Buddhist meditation practice, uncovered a vast variety of conditions that seemed to form barriers to this realization. Some of these are listed in the second paragraph above. While I have found meditation practices extremely valuable, and an important factor in deepening and increasing the profundity of psychedelic experiences, I have found properly conducted psychedelic experiences to be the most powerful aid in rapidly resolving the obstacles that separate us from full realization. But it is well to remember that experiences alone, as influential and valuable as they may be, may not accomplish completely freeing the mind without dedicated application of newfound wisdom. An excellent way of focusing, clarifying, and applying learned wisdom is through a good meditation practice.⁴

All the following factors promote effective psychedelic application: preparation, intent, honesty, set and setting, a qualified guide, experienced and dedicated companions. As interior obstacles are resolved and transcended, one sinks deeper into the intimate, priceless connection with our inner Being. As one develops proficiency and the ability to hold the mind steadily focused, one can discover that the most promising activity is to search out, encounter, and then maintain the connectedness with the Heart of our own being. For me, this has led to the most satisfactory outcomes.

I do not want to create the impression that this is a simple thing to accomplish. I have found this kind of straightforward surrender very difficult to achieve and maintain, often because we resist the

Robbins Rants

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feelings or experiences that spontaneously wish to arise. It may take exploring with different attitudes and occasionally focusing our attention on various considerations, especially if we are prone to getting tense by trying too hard. Things that may work in one situation may not work the next time, and a fresh approach is required. And since we are all different, results may well vary considerably from person to person. For it is fresh, unmediated experience that we are seeking. Just reading this information or hearing similar ideas and concepts from others will not accomplish the objective. We each in our own way must seek out how to best discover and maintain this priceless connection. For myself, I have found that simply being still and “just being” is extraordinarily difficult.

Yet I firmly believe this to be the highest prize. Having achieved an on-going connection or realization of our True Self, we are free to direct our attention wherever we wish. It is from this perspective that any object of attention is seen in its clearest light, in its truest aspects, in the most meaningful connections with other aspects of reality. It is from this perspective that the greatest creativity flows forth. By learning how to maintain this connection, we have truly learned how to learn. •

Notes

1. Grof, S. 1998. “Human Nature and the Nature of Reality: Conceptual Challenges from Consciousness Research,” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 30(4): 351.

2. To reify, as used here, is to invest some concept or idea with the power of the mind so that for us it becomes true or real. Such reifications then become barriers which interfere with our direct perception of Reality.

3. Wilber, K. 1999. *One Taste*, p. 223.

4. An excellent book covering the essentials of a good meditation practice is Wallace, Alan B. 1999. *Boundless Heart: Cultivation of the Four Immeasurables*. Snow Line Publications.

THE TIN CAN was invented in 1811. The can opener was not invented until 1855. In the intervening 44 years, people were obliged to access their pork ‘n’ beans with a hammer and chisel.

Now, the psychedelic can opener, the device that most efficiently opens the tin of higher consciousness, was discovered thousands of years ago and put to beneficial use by shamans and their satellites well before the advent of what we like to call “civilization.” Yet, inconceivably, modern society has flung that proven instrument into the sin bin, forcing its citizens to seek access to the most nourishing of all canned goods with the psychological equivalent of a hammer and chisel. (I’m referring to Freudian analysis and the various, numberless self-realization techniques.)

Our subject here, however, is creativity, and I don’t mean to suggest that just because one employs the psychedelic can opener to momentous effect, just because one manages to dip into the peas of the absolute with a lightning spoon, that one is going to metamorphose into some creative titan if one is not already artistically gifted. The little gurus who inhabit certain psychoactive compounds are not in the business of manufacturing human talent. They don’t sell imagination by the pound, or even by the microgram. What they ARE capable of doing, however, is reinforcing and supporting that innate imagination that manages to still exist in a nation whose institutions—academic, governmental, religious and otherwise—seem determined to suffocate it with a polyester pillow from WalMart.

The plant genies don’t manufacture imagination, nor do they market wonder and beauty—but they force us out of context so dramatically and so meditatively that we gawk in amazement at the ubiquitous everyday wonders that we are culturally disposed to overlook, and they teach us invaluable lessons about fluidity, relativity, flexibility and paradox. Such an increase in awareness, if skillfully applied, can lift a disciplined, adventurous artist permanently out of reach of the faded jaws of mediocrity.

The impact of psychedelics upon my own sensibility was to dissolve a lot of my culturally-conditioned rigidity. Old barriers, often rooted in ignorance and superstition, just melted away. I learned that one might move about freely from one level of existence to another. The borderlines between reality and fantasy, dream and wakefulness, animate and inanimate, even life and death, were no longer quite as fixed. The Asian concept of interpenetration of realities was made physically manifest—and this served to massage the stiffness out of my literary aesthetic.

Unbeknownst to most western intellectuals, there happens to be a fairly thin line between the silly and the profound, between the clear light and the joke; and it seems to me that on that frontier is the single most risky and significant place artists or philosophers can station themselves. I’m led to suspect that my psychedelic background may have prepared me to straddle that boundary more comfortably than those writers who insist on broaching the luminous can of consciousness with a hammer and chisel, and, especially, those who, spurning the in-CAN-descent altogether, elect to lap their watered-down gruel from the leaky trough of orthodoxy. •