The Spirit of Basel

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The Spirit of Basel — there are probably no better words to describe the groundbreaking event that took place in this ancient town over three days in January 2006. Organized by the Gaia Media Foundation to celebrate the occasion of Dr. Albert Hofmann’s 100th birthday on January 11, it brought together over 80 brilliant presenters and over 2000 people from all over the world to listen to a cornucopia of outstanding lectures.

The event, LSD: Problem Child and Wonder Drug, was held in the modern Basel Congress Center. From the moment of arrival until the end on Sunday evening, it was obvious that a lot of work by very skilled people had gone into organizing this conference. One could wander for hours enjoying displays of rare books and documents, psychedelic album covers, blotter art, an entire wall of photographs covering Dr. Hofmann’s life, an eclectic bookstore with a wide selection of outstanding books, and walls of wonderful artwork. Of course, once the lectures started the hardest part was deciding which of the simultaneous presentations to attend. Outside of the large lecture auditoriums, other presentations and workshops could be found in walled-off areas of the main hall, where a movie screen showed a wide range of films, from an ancient Pink Floyd lightshow to old footage of Leary to Connie Littlefield’s wonderful documentary Hofmann’s Potion.

A spacious cafeteria on one side offered food and drink and a wonderful resting place to just sit and take it all in. Filled with colorful people of all ages, from dreadlocked kids to gray-haired elders, and even some families with little kids, the conference was bustling with energy. A friendly excitement was in the air and one could feel that this historic event was a special moment.

Of course, the main attraction was the attendance of Dr. Hofmann himself, who spoke on at least two occasions with a lively, clear mind and a joyful spirit. Greeted by standing ovations, he gave inspired speeches and was clearly pleased by the attention and gratitude that flowed his way. It is impossible to estimate the influence that his discovery of LSD (or LSD’s discovery of him?) had on the world and society as we know it today.

There is not enough room here to get into details of any of the presentations; hopefully we will be able to find transcripts of the most important ones online eventually. The Albert Hofmann Foundation had the honor to add our board members Myron Stolaroff and John Beresford to the list of presenters, both of whom gave great presentations. John Beresford read some wonderful letters by incarcerated drug war prisoners that congratulated Dr. Hofmann on his birth-
Gaining approval for the medical use of psilocybin, or “medical psilocybin,” continues to be the current major aim of the Heffter Research Institute. Our research focus is two-fold. First, we are continuing our studies on how psilocybin affects various aspects of consciousness. This research involves numerous fundamental studies demonstrating that psilocybin can be safely used in medical applications, especially in persons who have never taken a psychedelic. The second prong of our research is the identification of a medical indication for the use of psilocybin. The research data we produce will be used to identify a medical indication for psilocybin and to show it is safe enough for humans, the two key requirements that must be met for psilocybin to be moved out of Schedule I and developed as an FDA-approved medical treatment.

Heffter Research Institute: Update April 2006

Under the direction of Franz Vollenweider, M.D., the Heffter Research Center Zürich is conducting two studies at this time. A major Positron Emission Tomography (PET) study with psilocybin will be completed this year. By correlating the PET results with changes in body image and other variables, the study will provide a scientific basis for treating patients eating and obsessive-compulsive disorders. This information will help us obtain the approval for treatment research with actual patients, which we plan to begin later this year. We believe the PET data may also help to attract funding from major foundations for the treatment studies. The three-dimensional EEG brain mapping study, which compares psilocybin with meditation on ego-functions, sense of self and perception, also will be completed this year.

Board member Charles Grob, M.D., has an ongoing program at the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center to study psilocybin in the treatment of anxiety in advanced-stage cancer patients. The five subjects treated so far have had very positive responses. Unfortunately, we are finding that it takes a long time to recruit subjects with the courage to commit to this innovative treatment. MAPS members can participate by spreading the word: if you know of someone who might wish to be a subject, please direct them to www.canceranxietystudy.org, where they can obtain further information.

The research data we produce will be used to identify a medical indication for psilocybin. We continue to support a mix of both clinical and basic science applications in order to promote interest in psychedelic research and medicine among both the public and the scientific/medical establishment.

On the West Coast, board member Charles Grob, M.D., is continuing his clinical research with psilocybin in the treatment of anxiety in advanced-stage cancer patients. To date, the five patients treated so far have had very positive responses. Unfortunately, we are finding that it takes a long time to recruit subjects with the courage to commit to this innovative treatment. MAPS members can participate by spreading the word: if you know of someone who might wish to be a subject, please direct them to www.canceranxietystudy.org, where they can obtain further information.

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