

Stanislav Grof Receives Vaclav Havel Award

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R.M. Crockford is a Canadian writer researching the psychiatric use of LSD in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s. Last year, MAPS published Stan Grof's latest book, *The Ultimate Journey: Consciousness and the Mystery of Death*, available in the MAPS Webstore at: MAPS.org/catalog.

ANOTHER CHAPTER in Prague's history as a city of unusual wonder was recorded on October 5, when the VIZE97 Foundation, created by playwright and former Czech president Vaclav Havel, presented a lifetime achievement award to Dr. Stanislav Grof, one of the world's leading psychedelic researchers. Dr. Grof, who was born near Prague in 1931, pioneered LSD-assisted psychotherapy in Czechoslovakia until he emigrated to the United States in 1967.

The ceremonies took place at the Prague Crossroads, a deconsecrated 10th-century church converted into a spiritual and meeting center by Mr. Havel's foundation. The day began with Dr. Grof signing copies of *New Perspectives in Psychiatry and Psychology*, a collection of his recent writings in Czech, and then joining a two-hour panel discussion about his work, and the challenges of trying to reconcile mystical experiences with organized religion and modern psychiatry. The discussions, open to the public, were attended by about 100 well-wishers - a local magazine recently named Dr. Grof one of the 20 most important spiritual leaders in the Czech nation's history - along with several Czechs trained in holotropic breathwork, a drug-free method to induce non-ordinary states of consciousness that Dr. Grof developed with his wife Christina.

"Many addicts are on a journey to find something, and they had several mystical experiences, but most of them were not able to integrate them," said Stanislav Kudrle, a Czech psychiatrist who has used breathwork to treat drug and alcohol addicts for 18 years. "What Stan Grof did is, he brought the maps, he brought the model and the method which makes it possible to support these people on their quest."

Not everyone was pleased about the awarding of the Havel prize to Dr. Grof. Priests and psychiatrists were quoted in a Prague newspaper that day saying the foundation had made an "embarrassing

mistake," and a Czech skeptics' society accused Dr. Grof of "propagating absurd ideas" by claiming that breathwork enables participants to re-experience past lives and their own birth. But such criticisms were dismissed later in the evening by Havel himself, in his speech to the packed auditorium.

"This prize is for visionaries, for explorers, for people who overstep boundaries and notice new and unpredictable connections," said Havel. Such researchers take risks, he noted, because they're often attacked by "hard traditionalists who can't imagine that science could step beyond its own limits. These people can even be fanatical opponents to anything that is outside traditional thinking. In the name of rationality, they sometimes actually fight against new ideas."

"I've always believed that what happened once can't be erased, that the whole history of our planet, and the cosmos, is being written somewhere, that Being has its own memory," Havel continued. "The work of Dr. Grof showed me that sometimes, something can return from this greater memory to our own consciousness. And that we can surprisingly experience, maybe only for a few minutes, something that happened a long time ago, or in faraway places, that we couldn't know by other means."

Havel and his wife Dagmar presented Dr. Grof with a stylized staff of St. Vojtech, the patron saint of Bohemia. Afterwards, Dr. Grof said he was deeply moved by the ceremony. It brought his work back to his birthplace, he noted, and it was an honor to be recognized by a statesman and philosopher he greatly admires.

"And then [there was] the tremendous surprise that Vaclav Havel had the courage to appreciate research in something that's so controversial. It's extremely important in terms of other people taking a second look, because of who he is. I hope that it can ultimately help the field." •