

## A Conversation with **Albert Hofmann**

On November 26, 1996,

### **Charles Grob, M.D. visited with Albert Hofmann**

in Rheinfelden, outside of Basel, Switzerland,

where Dr. Hofmann was recovering from knee surgery.

The following are excerpts from their conversation.

CG: Dr. Hofmann, thank you for speaking with me. I would like to tape record our discussion, with the understanding that you will be provided a transcript for review and approval before publication. I would first like to ask how old are you currently, and how is your health?

AH: I am 90 years old, and I am feeling very fit. I had knee surgery last month, but am now doing very well. The rehabilitation hospital has provided excellent physical therapies for my knee, and I am almost ready to go home to Rittematte. I am in very good condition, and swim in the indoor pool every day. I will miss the swimming, but I am looking forward to going home soon.

CG: I would like to speak with you about your views on psychedelic drugs. To start with, do you believe it is possible to re-establish psychedelic research as a respectable scientific field?

AH: I think there are many good signs. After years of silence, there have recently been some investigations in Switzerland and Germany, and also in the United States. We had a meeting in Heidelberg last year (*European College for the Study of Consciousness*), and there were many good presentations. In Heidelberg I enjoyed meeting with Rick Doblin (*of MAPS*) and Professor Nichols (*of the Hefter Research Institute*), and I think both of their organizations are doing fine work. Their approach appears to be quite different than that of some of their predecessors from several decades ago.

CG: Are you referring to Dr. Leary?

AH: Yes. I was visited by Timothy Leary when he was living in Switzerland many years ago. He was a very intelligent man, and quite charming. I enjoyed our conversations very much. However, he also had a need for too much attention. He enjoyed being provocative, and that shifted the focus from what should have been the essential issue. It is unfortunate, but for many years these drugs became taboo. Hopefully, these same problems from the Sixties will not be repeated.

CG: From the vantage point of where we are now, in the late 1990s, what implications do psychedelic drugs have to the field of psychiatry?

AH: I believe that shortly after LSD was discovered, it was recognized as being of great value to psychoanalysis and psychiatry. It was not considered to be an escape. It was a very important discovery at that time, and for fifteen years it could be used legally in psychiatric treatment and for scientific study in humans. During this time, Delysid, the name I gave to LSD, was used safely, and was the subject of thousands of publications in the professional literature. Actually, just last week, I had visitors from the Albert Hofmann Foundation, to whom I gave all of the original documentation, which had been stored at the Sandoz Laboratories. This early work was very well documented, and shows how well research with LSD went until it became part of the drug scene in the 1960s. So, from originally being part of the therapeutic pharmacopeia, LSD became a drug of the street and inevitably it was made illegal. Because of this reputation, it became unavailable to the medical field, and so the research, which had been very open, was stopped. Now it appears that this research may start again. The importance of such investigations appears to be recognized by the health authorities, and so it is my hope that finally the prohibition is coming to an end, and the medical field can return to the explorations which were forced to stop thirty years ago.

CG: What recommendations would you give to researchers now who want to work with these substances?

AH: When LSD was distributed legally by Sandoz, there was a little brochure which was given together with the Delysid, which explained how LSD could be used. As an aid to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, and also as a means for psychiatrists themselves to experience these extraordinary states of mind. It was specifically stated on the package insert that the psychiatrist who was interested in using Delysid should first test it on himself.

CG: So, you would say that it is very important that the researcher, the psychiatrist, know first hand the psychedelic experience?

AH: Absolutely, absolutely. Before it can be used in clinical work, it must most definitely be taken by the psychiatrist. From the very first reports and guidelines written for LSD, this was clearly stated. And this remains of utmost importance today.

CG: Are there lessons we can learn from the past insofar as what went wrong with the research, why it was stopped, that we should be attentive to, so mistakes are not repeated?

AH: Yes, if it would be possible to stop their improper use, their misuse, then I think it would be possible to dispense them for medical use. But as long as they continue to be misused, and as long as people fail to truly understand psychedelics and continue to use them as pleasure drugs and fail to appreciate the very deep, deep, psychic experiences they may induce, then their medical use will be held back. Their use on the streets has been a problem for more than thirty years. On the streets the drugs are misunderstood, and accidents occur. This makes it very difficult for the health authorities to change their policies and allow medical use. And although it should be possible to convince the health authorities that in responsible hands psychedelics could be used safely in the medical field, their use on the streets continues to make it very hard for the health authorities to agree.

CG: It appears that young people are once again becoming interested in psychedelics and MDMA. We also have this new phenomenon of the rave, where young people take substances like MDMA and dance all night. What is your view on why these young people seek out such experiences? How can we respond to what they are doing?

AH: This is a very, very deep problem of

our time in that we no longer have a religious basis in our lives. Even with religion, with the churches, they are no longer convincing with their dogma. And people need a deep spiritual foundation for their lives. In older times it was religion, with their dogmas, which people believed in, but today those dogmas no longer work. We cannot believe things which we know are not possible, that are not real. We must go on the basis of what we know, that everybody can experience. On this basis, you must find the entrance to the spiritual world. Because many young people are looking for meaningful experiences, they are looking for this thing which is the opposite of the material world. Not all young people are looking for money and power. Some are looking for a happiness and satisfaction which is of the spiritual world, not the materialistic world. They are looking, but there are no sanctioned paths. And, of course, one of the ways young people are using is with psychedelic drugs.

CG: What would you say to young people?

AH: What I would say would most certainly be: Open your eyes! The doors of perception must be opened. That means these young people must learn by their own experience, to see the world as it was before human beings were on this planet. That is the real problem today, that people live in towns and cities, where everything is dead. This material world, made by humans, is a dead world, and will disappear and die. I would tell the young people to go out into the countryside, go to the meadow, go to the garden, go to the woods. This is a world of nature to which we belong, absolutely. It is the circle of life, of which we are an integral part. Open your eyes, and see the browns and greens of the earth, and the light which is the essence of nature. The young need to become aware of this circle of life, and realize that it is possible to experience the beauty and deep meaning which is at the core of our relation to nature.

CG: When did you first acquire this visionary appreciation of nature?

AH: When I was a young boy, I had many opportunities to walk through the countryside. I had profound and visionary encounters with nature, and this was long before I conducted my initial experiments with LSD. Indeed, my first experiences with LSD were very reminiscent of these early mystical encounters I had had as a child in nature. So, you see that it is even

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possible to have these experiences without drugs. But many people are blocked, without an inborn faculty to realize beauty, and it is these people who may need a psychedelic in order to have a visionary experience of nature.

CG: How do we reconcile this visionary experience with religion and with scientific truth?

AH: It is important to have the experience directly. Aldous Huxley taught us not to simply believe the words, but to have the experience ourselves. This is why the different forms of religion are no longer adequate. They are simply words, words, words, without the direct experience of what it is the words represent. We are now at a phase of human development where we have accumulated an enormous amount of knowledge through scientific research in the material world. This is very important knowledge, but it must be integrated. What science has brought to light is true, absolutely true. But this is only one part, only one side of our existence, that of the material world. We have a body, and matter gets older and changes, so therefore as far as our having a body, we must die. But the spiritual world, of course, is eternal, but only insofar as it exists in the moment. It is important that we realize this enormous difference between these two sides of our lives. The material world is the world of our body, but the material world is also where man has made all of these scientific and technological discoveries. We must see, then, that science and technology are based on natural laws. But we must also accept that the material world is only the manifestation of the spiritual world. And if we attempt to manifest something, we will have to make use of the material world. For you and I to speak with one another, we must have tongues, we must have air and so forth. All of this is of the material world. If we were to read about spiritual things, it is only words. We must have the experience directly. And the experience occurs only by opening the mind, and opening all of our senses. Those doors of perception must be cleansed. And if the experience does not come spontaneously, on its own, then we may make use of what Huxley calls a gratuitous grace. This may take the form of psychedelic drugs, or perhaps without drugs through a discipline like yoga. But what is of greatest importance, is that we have personal experience. Not words, not beliefs, but experience.

CG: Projecting into the future, do you envision that there may be an accepted role

within Euro-American culture for psychedelics?

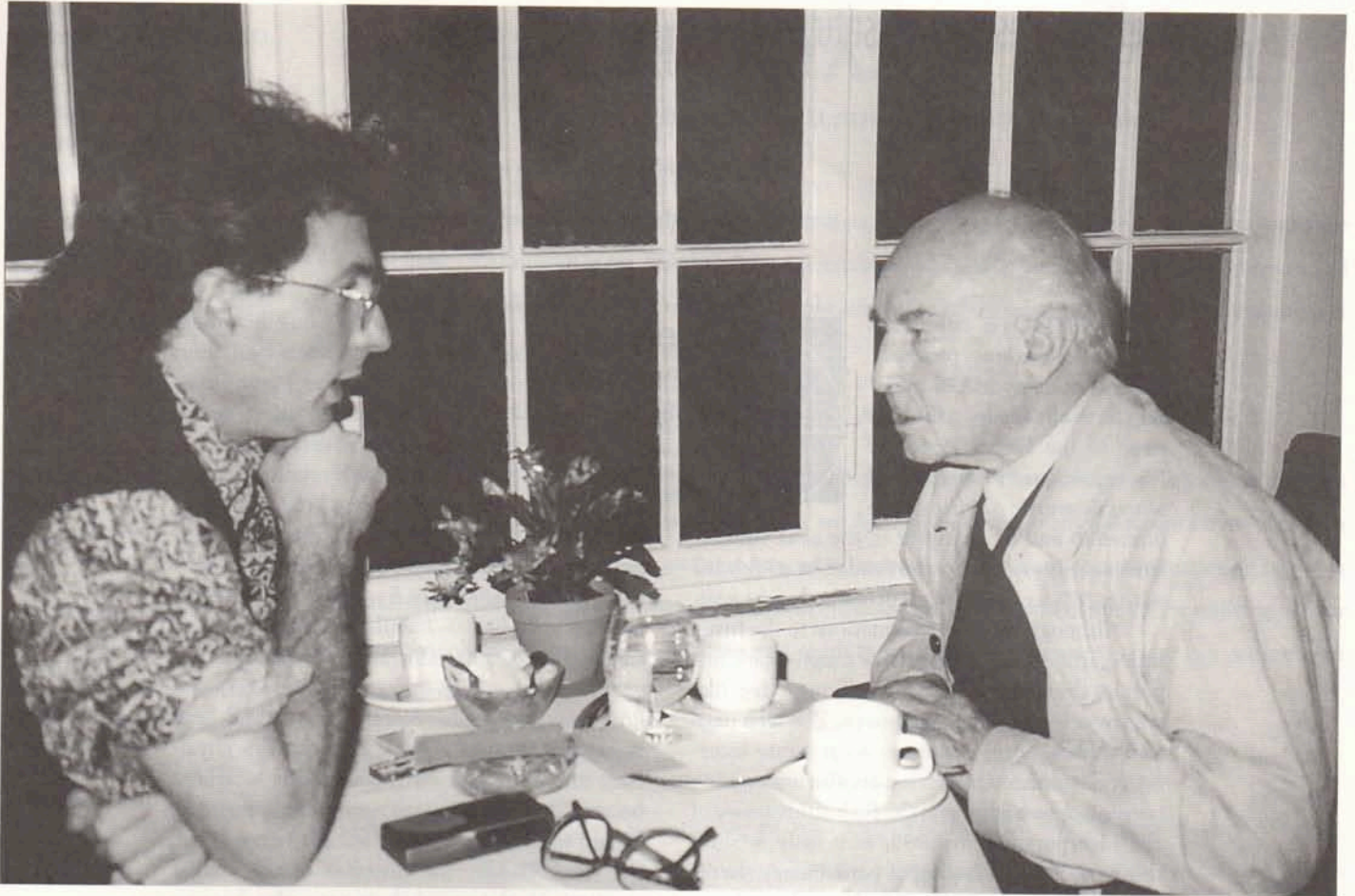
AH: Absolutely! I am convinced that the importance of psychedelics will be recognized. The pathway for this is through psychiatry, but not the psychoanalytic psychiatry of Freud and not the limited scope of modern biological psychiatry. Rather, it will occur through the new field of transpersonal psychiatry. This transpersonal view takes into account both the material world, including our body, as well as the spiritual world. It recognizes that we are simultaneously part of the material and the spiritual worlds. What fits with the concept of transpersonal psychiatry is that we open our doors of perception. What transpersonal psychiatry tries to give us is a recipe for gaining entrance into the spiritual world. This fits exactly with the results of psychedelics. It stimulates your senses. It opens your perception for your own experience. How this phenomenon affects our existence in the material world can be understood through scientific research, and how we can integrate this knowledge with our spiritual selves can be achieved through the transpersonal path.

CG: Dr. Hofmann, you have lived through two World Wars and a Cold War. When you look ahead into the future of mankind, are you hopeful or not?

AH: I am hopeful for the long distant future, but for the near future I am terribly, terribly pessimistic. I believe that what is occurring in the material world is a reflection of the spiritual state of mankind. I fear that many terrible things will occur around the world, because mankind is in spiritual crisis. But I hope that over time mankind will learn, finally learn, and that there will be hope. I just re-read the twelve lectures Aldous Huxley gave in San Francisco in 1959, called *The Human Situation*. I think that everything that we are concerned about today, about the ego, consciousness, the survival of mankind, it can all be read in this book. I would like to recommend it. Everything we are now trying to say, the ideas we are formulating, has been discussed by Huxley.

CG: What can we learn from the so-called primitive cultures who used psychedelic substances as part of their religious practices?

AH: I think the most important thing is that they use it in a religious framework and we don't. We must learn from them, we must identify the right structures, we must find new uses. I could imagine that it may be possible to create meditation centers for psychedelic use in natural surroundings, where teachers could



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have experiences and train to become adepts. I perceive this as being possible, but first psychedelics will have to become available to medicine and psychiatry. And then it should be made available for such spiritual centers. Basically, all that we need to know we can learn from how the primitive people use psychedelics as sacraments, in a religious framework. We need such centers, but we also need the psychiatrists. These psychiatrists must become the Shamans of our times. Then I think we will be ready to move towards this kind of psychopharmacopeia.

CG: Back in the Sixties many people became frightened of LSD and other psychedelics, including many psychiatrists. Why was that?

AH: They did not use it the right way, and they did not have the right conditions. So, they were not adequately prepared for it. It is such a delicate and deep experience, if used the right

way. But remember, the more powerful the instrument, the more the chance of damage occurring if it is not used properly. And back at that time, there were unfortunately many occasions where psychedelics were not treated with proper respect, and used in the wrong way, and consequently caused injury. That is the great tragedy, that these valuable medicines were not always respected and not always understood. So, the psychedelics came to be feared, and were taken out of the hands of responsible investigators and psychiatrists. It was a great loss for medicine and psychiatry, and for mankind. Hopefully, it is not too late to learn from these mistakes, and to demonstrate the proper and respectful way psychedelics should be used. •