

The Secret Chief

A Review and Commentary by **Ralph Metzner**

I AM PROBABLY one of the readers of this book in manuscript form that Myron Stolaroff refers to when he says (p.29) they would have preferred some editing of Jacob's "uninhibited language and looseness of expression," as it might turn off some potential readers. Whether this is so we will of course never know; but I am happy to go on record as saying that I'm very pleased that Jacob's story has been published and that his words have been presented just as he expressed them, without academic or literary varnish. We can all be grateful to Myron Stolaroff and MAPS for making available to a larger public the teaching and legacy of a remarkable man — a pioneer in the applications of psychedelic substances to healing and psychotherapeutic transformations.

I first met Jacob in the early 1970s, when he was running group weekend experiential workshops in a house by the ocean in Bolinas. I was withdrawing from psychedelic research and becoming involved in the Agni Yoga teachings of Russell Schofield. My book *Maps of Consciousness* had been published, and Jacob invited me to present a workshop on astrology, the Tarot, the *I Ching* and the other "maps." It is a measure of the extreme discretion with which Jacob operated, that psychedelics were never mentioned during this weekend; although I'm pretty certain that this same group met at other times for group psychedelic experiences.

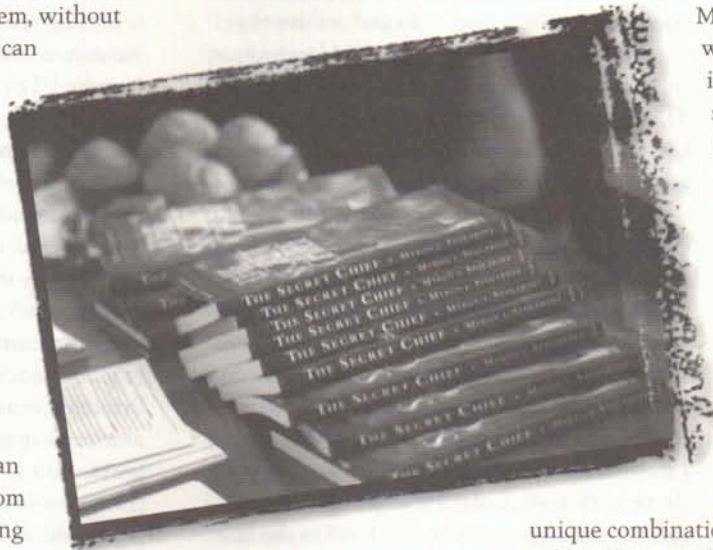
My next encounter with Jacob was in the early 1980s, when I was emerging from a self-imposed 10-year hiatus in psychedelic explorations. I learned from him then that he had been steadily and quietly conducting individual and group psychotherapy sessions over the last decade with the classical psychedelics, as well as with lesser known substances such as MDA, ibogaine, and harmaline (which they mistakenly referred to as yagé). He and his sizable

group of collaborators, clients and students had developed, over time, a humane and effective set of procedures for working with people on these "trips," as he called them. These procedures, which are well described in Stolaroff's book, reflect the psychological wisdom and spiritual humility which were the hallmarks of Jacob's approach.

I was fascinated to hear Jacob talk about the results obtained with his favorite, MDMA, which he called "Adam," which later became famous, or infamous, as XTC, Ecstasy or simply E. "Adam" as primordial human being, original nature, a condition of primal innocence and paradisiacal unity with all life — all seemed apt descriptions for the experiences people were reporting. Jacob offered to initiate me into this wondrous medicine, and guided me into an experience that was one of the most joyous of my life. I was deeply touched, as others have been, by Jacob's

unique combination of imperturbably cheerful calm and kindly warmth. Since my previous work with psychedelics had all been in groups, it was a new experience for me to be the recipient of such concentrated benevolent attention. He came to my apartment and sat by my bedside, while I lay on the bed. He provided me with earphones, eye shades and changed the music, as desired. He told me he would be sitting there, reading a "light" book — so his attention would not be too absorbed, ready to engage with me if requested to do so. The high point of my amazement at his graciousness came when he offered me a glass of water that had a bendable straw, so I wouldn't have to sit up but could drink from semi-reclining position.

For several hours I mostly hummed and sang, laughed and chuckled, as emotional defense patterns dissolved in empathic acceptance. I remember asking him what to do about a tenacious pain I'd had for years in my hip, that had resisted all my attempts at



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solving or dissolving it. He suggested that I try just accepting it — that the healing power of acceptance was very great. I worked with that process for a while — the pain diminished considerably, but there was still a residue. I asked Jacob: "How can I accept the unacceptable — the fears that this pain might get worse, might lead to cancer and death?" He replied calmly, "Whatever you can imagine... you can accept." I suddenly realized, with immense relief, that to accept those fears, accept that I had them, did not mean I was moving closer to pain and disease. He then told me that he suffered from migraines for forty years, and had tried to treat them medically and resolve them therapeutically by every imaginable technique, until he learned to accept them unconditionally. They eventually disappeared — "I just outgrow them." This was a very valuable teaching for me, allowing me to relax into my process more.

AFTER this initiation, I started to work with Adam as an adjunct to psychotherapy, along the lines recommended by Jacob. This was in the innocent days before it was illegalized. I was as impressed with the results as everyone else who has worked with this medicine. With my colleague Sophia Adamson, I started to collect first-person accounts of therapeutic and meditative experiences with Adam, that were published in 1985 in the book *Through the Gateway of the Heart*. Jacob was very supporting of this project and contributed a good number of accounts from his own files and those of his colleagues and collaborators. He was also one of several financial supporters who made the first printing possible. He supported quite a few similar research projects in a quiet, behind the scenes kind of way. Characteristically, and in keeping with his practice of keeping a low profile, he never wanted or expected any public acknowledgment for this kind of benevolent activity.

A final point worth making concerns the origin of the term "secret chief." Terence McKenna used this term to describe Jacob at his memorial service, and everyone instantly felt it was perfect (p. 23). Jacob was unassuming, modest and not given at all to public pronouncements of any kind; yet everyone who knew him held him in the highest regard and willingly followed his guidance. The original "secret chief" is a character in one of Hermann Hesse's stories — *The Journey to the East*. In our paper on Hesse in an early issue of the *Psychedelic Review*, Timothy Leary and I pointed out that four of Hesse's novels (*Siddhartha*, *Journey to the East*, *Steppenwolf*, and *The Bead Game*) are written in what can only be considered as "psychedelic code." They appear to related the experiences and adventures of a league of seekers who secretly used psychedelic substances as part of their spiritual practice, which they described as "journeys to other places and times."

Journey to the East described a pilgrimage to Eastern lands by a league of seekers, each seeking a particular personal goal or treasure (e.g. the Tao, Wisdom, the Kundalini, the Princess), but all sharing the goal of enlightenment and spiritual liberation. "For our goal," writes Hesse, "was not only the East, or rather the East was not only a country and something geographical, but it was the home and youth of the soul." On the journey, artists, poets and musicians mingle freely with the characters that are their creations, as well as with figures from the times past and other lands. Our happiness, writes the narrator, "arose from the freedom to experience everything imaginable simultaneously, to exchange outward and inward easily, to move Time and Space about like scenes in a theatre." There are scenes in the story that are easy to recognize as multidimensional psychedelic celebrations.

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THE CENTRAL CHARACTER of *Journey to the East* is a man named Leo, a servant who later turns out to be the President of the League. A secret chief. "Leo was one of our servants (who naturally were volunteers, as we were). He helped to carry the luggage and was often assigned to the personal service of the Speaker. This unaffected man had something so pleasing, so unobtrusively winning about him that everyone loved him. He did his work gaily, usually sang or whistled as he went along, was never seen except when needed — in fact an ideal servant... This servant Leo worked in a very simple and natural manner, friendly in an unassuming way." After a conversation with this servant Leo about what he calls "the law of service," the narrator says his words "left me with a feeling that this Leo knew all kinds of things, that he perhaps knew more than us, who were ostensibly his employers.

In Hesse's story, the servant Leo is later revealed to be the President of the League, wearing a "magnificent festive robe," and bearing his office conscientiously, "like a pope or patriarch." Although Jacob never assumed the office or robe of a president, pope or patriarch (indeed would probably have strenuously avoided it), he did have the quiet dignity and moral authority of a respected elder. One cannot help but be struck by how much the descriptions of this servant Leo resemble the language used by people who knew Jacob to describe him. I myself was reminded of Jacob's solicitude in our first Adam session. And I remember him once being the non-partaking guide in a group session with ayahuasca, where he quietly and cheerfully took care of the necessities for our safety and comfort, meditating or dozing peacefully when there was nothing to do. He had a calm dignity and radiance that made me see him as a king, like the elven king out of a Tolkien novel. Jacob was a "servant" in the sense that he dedicated his life and work to the service of others in their healing and growing process.

In serving others to reach their highest potential, Jacob understood what Hesse's character Leo called the Law of Service: "He who wishes to live long must serve, but he who wishes to rule does not live long." Jacob lived a long and productive life, serving others with wisdom and courage, for which his friends remember him with gratitude. He understood too that in serving others, you serve God. Jacob's spirituality was an integral part of his approach to psychedelic psychotherapy, although it was more implicit rather than explicitly verbalized. He was proud of his Jewish heritage, although also a devoted student of the Course in Miracles. It goes without saying that he never imposed his spiritual beliefs or values on anyone else, in or outside of a psychedelic experience.

As the interviews in *The Secret Chief* make abundantly clear, it was his sense of being spiritually guided that provided the antidote to the fear and paranoia that were the inevitable accompaniment of working in the legal-political borderlands of our drug-phobic society. "You see, again, a spiritual trip is what's involved here. This I have to say — it's the only way I know how to talk about it — what I do and even how I do it is not up to me. I'm guided. I can't define that, I can't explain it. If God didn't want me to do it, He would have stopped me a long time ago. I have a lot of faith that that's true. At the same time I keep a close eye on my integrity and my security... We're all in it together." (p.60)

Perhaps this is Jacob's most valuable legacy to his many friends and admirers: follow your spiritual vision and guidance, but keep your eyes open to the social and political realities that surround you. As the Sufi proverb goes: "Put your trust in Allah, but don't forget to tie up your camel." Thank you, Jacob. We can all do well to follow your example. •

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