

**Sex, Spirit, and Psychedelics**, the theme of this special issue of the *MAPS Bulletin*, is the second in a series edited by Jon Hanna and Sylvia Thyssen, the first being the “Psychedelics and Creativity” issue. These issues are a departure from most MAPS Bulletins, which primarily include articles related to MAPS’ core mission to develop the medical uses of psychedelics and marijuana. The theme issues enable MAPS to expand the scope of its educational activities to include discussions about the risks and benefits of a wider range of uses, including spirituality, creativity, sexuality, and celebration. MAPS offers this issue as a contribution to the cultural debate over whether legal contexts for the use of psychedelics and marijuana should be limited to medical and scientific applications, or perhaps also include other potentially beneficial uses. **Letter from Rick Doblin, MAPS President**

**The connection** between psychedelics and spirituality is thousands of years old. It’s also as current as the on-going litigation between the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and representatives of the US branches of two Brazilian Christian/syncretic religions, whose sacramental use of ayahuasca tea is legal in Brazil and elsewhere but is still prohibited in the United States by the DEA.

**The connection** between psychedelics and sexuality also extends back into recorded history—apparent in the cross-cultural quest to enhance sexual desire and performance through the ingestion of aphrodisiacs, some with psychoactive properties. Psychedelic substances have played a role within the ancient practice of tantra, a form of yoga that uses sexual energy as a vehicle for generating unitive spiritual experiences. Contemporary concern centers around the risk that the use of psychedelics and marijuana within a celebratory context could lead to impaired judgment and unsafe sex; a valid concern, but far from a complete discussion of the topic.

**Since** there has been virtually no scientific research into the intersection of psychedelics with sexuality and/or spirituality, we’re left mostly with art and anecdotal reports. Though not an artist, I can offer an anecdotal report from a legal MDMA experience in 1985, shortly before MDMA was criminalized. I was alone on a clear night at a campsite on the edge of the Pacific, near Big Sur. The campsite, a bed of small stones I’d gathered at low tide, was a bit larger than one sleeping bag. It was located at the base of a cliff a few feet above high tide, with several large boulders directly ahead in the water that blocked the waves. A freshwater stream close by emptied into the ocean.

**After** taking the MDMA, my thoughts turned to life inside a nearby Christian monastery, to monks I knew and respected who had chosen a life of celibacy. I just couldn’t understand how a celibate life could be nurturing enough, without the love and comfort of a romantic partner.

**As the night deepened**, I became increasingly dwarfed by the immensity of the stars and ocean. I felt myself disintegrating, pulled apart and drawn away from my little perch into the vast sky. As I relaxed, I realized that I still remained solid and alive, supported by the massive mountain behind me. I felt my body being cradled in the arms of Gravity—a permanent, personal caress woven into the very fabric of the universe. I finally understood the forces that could provide sufficient emotional warmth to sustain a celibate monastic lifestyle and cure worldly people like myself of desperate loneliness. In the morning, I rose with a sense of peace and felt renewed enthusiasm for exploring the interplay of sex, spirit, and psychedelics—a theme so thoughtfully and artfully presented to us in this special issue. – **Rick Doblin, Ph.D.**