

SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES DURING THE LSD TRAINING SESSION

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Dosage: 250 Gamma (150 + 100)

Before I start my account of the session per se, I would like to emphasize two important aspects of the set and setting that made this session different from the other training sessions.

(1) This session was the first of a series of training exposures in which we intend to use the new sophisticated equipment for measuring the major physiological parameters. It took place in the basement, in a small soundproof chamber and in the middle of complicated appliances, with at least seven other persons listening to the verbal feedback. I had attached to my body electrodes for continuous recording of the EEG and ECG and gadgets for measuring of P, BP and respiration rate. Urine was collected into a pitcher for subsequent biochemical analysis.

(2) There were many technical problems, and the start of the experiment was delayed about three hours. During this time, I had more than enough opportunity to examine my feelings and my subjective reaction to the unusual setting. Most of the time I felt a deep parallelism between the preparations for my session and those for the launching of the astronauts (especially that of Walter Schirra, with whom I had a similar fate of endless delays). I was trying to anticipate the type of session I might have. I expected a very technological session with emphasis on automation, telecommunication, electromagnetic waves, energy, etc. The actual course of the session, however, was very different from the expected one.

About twenty minutes after I drank the first cocktail of LSD (150 gamma), I started feeling interesting changes in the perception of time and space. Everything started slowing down, almost to the point of complete "freezing" of time. Spatial perception was likewise profoundly influenced, and I felt a tremendous expansion of the subjective space and melting of the ego boundaries. In general, the

experience was very pleasant. At that point, Wallie introduced the ESP experiment. I found it a little difficult to cooperate; the procedure in itself was quite interesting, but the motor movements incredibly complicated. I used various cues -- sometimes it was vision of one of the colors, in another attempt I tried automatic movement of the hand or various more complex indicators (such as visions of scenes that seemed to be intimately linked with certain colors, e.g., war scenes for red, natural scenes for green, polar landscapes and scenes from the life of Eskimos for white, etc. For the whole time I had a very convincing feeling that the possibility of ESP is very natural and so obvious that it is ridiculous to test it. I felt that it should be obvious to everybody that time and space are not what we think they are. A look into the skies should be a sufficient proof as well as realization of the insoluble paradoxes our brain is getting into when it tries to understand the riddle of finity versus infinity, both in time and space. Our scientific and rational approach to the understanding of the universe seemed to be much more absurd and irrational than some of the alternatives experienced in this condition.

After some time, I started feeling that the testing of ESP, out-of-body experiences, etc., cannot be isolated from the problem of the basic nature of the Universe. What was in question was not the existence or nonexistence of the phenomenon of ESP, but the existence of an alternative, totally different world view. I discovered a new possibility of approach to the experiment and tried to use the sensory organs of persons in the adjacent room to read the keyboard on the ESP machine. The first experience was a total and convincing identification with John, to the point that I seemed to see the experiment in the way he might have seen it, and had what felt like his authentic emotional reactions to it. I had a very strong menthol taste in my mouth and was convinced that he was sucking on a mint candy or chewing gum. Then I felt more and more attracted to Helen and had a

strong and convincing feeling that I saw the colors through her eyes. At that point, the possibility of the ESP phenomena seemed obvious, childishly easy to accomplish. This feeling coincided with Wallie's suggestion that we switch to the feedback concerning correct and incorrect answers. When I got the first correct one, an intoxicating and overwhelming feeling started developing. After I got the second one immediately afterwards, this feeling became enormously concrete, and the image of a universe where no laws of time and space in the usual sense exist started imposing itself on me. When I got the third correct answer in a row, the feelings were so powerful that I could not continue. The reason for discontinuation of the ESP experiment was a strange mixture of a conviction that it is absurd to test the obvious and, on the other hand, a metaphysical fear of confusion that would follow if I had to give up the usual concept of time and space and with it all the related reference points we feel so secure with.

After I gave up the ESP experiment and started listening to the music through the headphones, for some time the experience was very pleasant. Extremely powerful vibrations were streaming through my body, as if in waves; the experience had a very definite sensual and sexual undertone. It was the atmosphere of the Middle East: A Thousand and One Nights, Arabian Nights, harems and belly-dancers. I think I mentioned my recent visit to Philadelphia's Middle East restaurant, where I spent a most delightful evening. On the other hand, it could have been an anticipation of my planned trip to the Middle East and India. I felt, however, a slight touch of the magic and supernatural and could not resist the idea that my recent dinner in Philadelphia, experiences in the session, and my future trip were all part of some enigmatic cosmic scheme.

Then without any warning and quite abruptly, the experience ceased to be pleasant; it reached incredible profundity and was subjectively perceived as an

enormously serious and significant event, in some way more important than my life itself. Up to this point, I feel I have been able to communicate reasonably well the sequence of my LSD experiences. At this point the task starts appearing absolutely hopeless. The experiences that followed formed a multilevel and multidimensional dynamic continuum, where many things were happening in different places simultaneously, but yet at different times. The dimensions of both time and space that were subjectively experienced are totally beyond description. Yet there was a deep order in all these experiences; they were meaningfully and logically interrelated, but their logic did not have anything to do with the one taught in Western schools. The emotions involved also exceeded by far the limits given normally for a single individual and covered a wide range from utter metaphysical anguish, horror and despair, through feelings of awe and mystery, to indescribable bliss.

With all these reservations concerning the accuracy and adequacy of the account, I will try to communicate the basic trends of my experiences.

During the culmination period, I found myself on the frontier of life and death; this was, however, experienced on many levels, from many points of view and in a way that was different from the usual concept of individual death (certainly very different from the type of dying involved in the sessions dealing with ego death-rebirth). Although I experienced myself as an individual entity, the basic question seemed to be, on the one hand, viability and survival of life in general (on a planetary scale, but possibly even broader than that), on the other, the old problem of the Buddhist wheel of birth and death and the possibility of transcending it.

In the following descriptions, it is necessary to imagine an almost constant deep experiential baseline of parabiosis (the term that comes to my mind as an apt name for the state between life and death). All the following sequences were only

various more superficial facets and illustrations of this basic theme. For the purpose of the description, I will try to tease out several major trends from the described experiential continuum. In the session the following themes appeared simultaneously, multiply interwoven.

(1) Survival of Life in General.

Quite early in the session I felt I started representing life in general, rather than myself as an individual or even homo sapiens as a species. I became the total phylogenetic tree in the Darwinian sense in all its endless ramifications. This was experienced as eternal and everchanging energy seeking to express itself in endless forms. This avid search for self-expression covered a wide territory from tentative testing of various metabolic pathways on a subcellular level to natural selection and the struggle for survival.

These experiences had two major aspects:

(a) The Viability of Life in General and Its Cosmic Adjustment.

The crucial question seemed to be: is life going to survive, or are there more positive trends intrinsic to life, or will the destructive forces take over? I had numerous visions and experiences ranging from autointoxication (such as chicken embryo in an eggshell increasing the level of waste products in its own limited milieu or autointoxication of the vertebrates by products of putrefaction in the large bowel in Mechnikoff's sense), through pollution (where the last offshoot of the life energy -- man -- contaminates the air he breathes and water he drinks) to self-destruction by high-level technology warfare (here automation, cybernetics and release of nuclear energy were perceived also as an advanced step of the development of life).

For a prolonged period, the problem of survival of life seemed

to be a very important question. Moreover, it was experienced on a very "gutsy" level, as a gigantic struggle of life for its own survival.

This particular aspect of the session resolved itself in a most interesting way. On the one hand, I was able to identify finally with the totality of creative energy in the Universe; there was nothing else, but this energy, unfathomable, infinite, eternal, restless, playing endless games with itself and enjoying it. This was a complete Atma-Brahma union in the Hindu sense and the concept of the Universe as a cosmic drama. Although I arrived there through biology, I could explore the developmental trends in many other sciences, such as astronomy, psychiatry, physics, archeology, etc., and had the feeling that I could foresee their ultimate findings. It seemed that developed to sufficient complexity and sophistication, they will all end with the same type of discovery: finding that the ultimate basis of the Universe is this play of energy that cannot be reduced to anything else and cannot be understood rationally. I saw this ultimate goal as a melting cauldron and final synthesis of religion, art and science. The last step in all scientific disciplines appeared as an AHA experience; when the scientist reaches a certain point, he transcends his own data and experiences similar feelings that we usually have when we suddenly understand after a prolonged effort the point of a good joke. This moment could be symbolically expressed in Hindu terms as a sudden breaking through the screen of the world's illusion and seeing the Universe as dancing Shiva.

The creative energy was experienced as a much broader phenomenon than the life force. Identifying with this energy en gross, I felt that the problem of survival of life seemed to be a rather unimportant question.

On the other hand, the experience opened into magnificent visions of Hindu cosmology with its concept of the yugas. From this point of view, cycles of creation, preservation and destruction appeared as lawful and inevitable. I felt that my consciousness expanded to dimensions I never considered possible, both in time and space. I suddenly understood the metaphor that the Hindu's use to approximate this concept to the everyday mind (a little bird visiting every thousand years a diamond mountain of the size of Gaurisanbar to sharpen his beak; when the mountain is completely abraded, one unit of Hindu time has elapsed). I have known this intellectually for a long time; in the session I could feel these dimensions, or better I "was" these dimensions. From this place, it appeared as inevitable that life as we know it is going to perish; whether it will be in the next decade or at a time when the sun extincts, did not make too much difference.

What we see as tragedies and blessings, agonies and ecstasies, births and deaths, appeared only as meaningful facets of this cosmic drama.

(b) Survival of Individual Species.

The general problem of the adjustment of life and its survival was most poignantly exemplified by the extinct species, those that have not succeeded in the struggle for life. I could somehow feel the problems involved in all their complexity; again, from biochemical problems within the cell through intra- and interspecies combat for survival to adjustment in regard to physical factors of the environment. The major emphasis here seemed to be on the problems of the gigantic antediluvian reptiles (brontosaurus). Surprising and very convincing were insights into the problem of food requirements versus availability

of food, body weight versus the supporting and locomotor systems, etc., all in great details. These problems were not only understood, they were experienced.

(2) Survival of the Individual.

On this more general background of survival problems, some of the experiences were relatively isolated as related to one individual in the usual sense, i.e., related to one unit of biological organization, one physical body. (I make this specification because what was described as totality of life, or totality of creative energy, also experienced itself as some kind of subjective entity.) There were several varieties of these experiences.

(a) "Now and Here" Survival Problems Experienced as Related to My Present Form.

There were episodes in the session where I lost completely the "as if" approach to the experience of dying and felt really in physical danger. I was even able to fabricate a "logically consistent" explanation why this was happening. I do not remember the details, but it was a complicated theory somehow related to my anamnesis and the recent vaccination against smallpox, cholera and typhoid. At one point, I believed that this emergency was showing in my physiological recordings, and I even experienced some chaotic action around me that I interpreted as rescue maneuvers. I was not able to communicate this to Walter. On the one hand, the suffering was too profound, and I could not be articulate, especially not in English. On the other hand, the fact that I was all wired up enabled me to deceive myself and believe that the situation was objectively demonstrated to the outside world beyond any doubt. I could not understand that Walter wanted to go on with the

experimental design under such circumstances.

Much more frequent, however, than the feeling that I was going to die in the session (that LSD would kill me against my will) was the feeling that I had the option to choose death deliberately. I thought that my decision not to come back would have all the objective consequences (i.e., there would be my dead body left behind in the session room). This was somehow connected with the Buddhist idea of "getting off the wheel" (cycles of death and birth). Even if the identification with cosmic energy was very ecstatic, after having experienced it for endless aeons, I started feeling a deep craving for peace and tranquillity, rather than enjoying the constant dynamic urge. I felt that this was possible and that leaving the wheel is something highly desirable that we strive for over the ages. It seemed obvious that the situation of this choice will return again and again until I solve this problem. There was also a convincing feeling that this problem will reoccur during my actual dying. The problem, therefore, seemed to be: "Why not now?"

From my subjective point of view, I did not take the chance because of the circumstances of the session (other people responsible for me, the research program that would be in danger, etc.). I also thought about the reactions of other people who might be adversely affected by my death.

(b) Survival Problems Experienced as Phylogenetic Memories.

These experiences were almost entirely related to periods of the large reptiles (Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous). The general atmosphere

here was that of a deep swamp. I experienced a life and death fight with a monstrous carnivorous reptile, while being in a reptilian form myself. I would like to emphasize here that all the sensations seemed absolutely authentic, far beyond anything I could construe in fantasy from the material available to me from my individual experience. These involved specific animal sensations, indescribable concept of body image, animal feelings, etc. Also the mixed tastes of blood and the stale and putrid swampy water were more than authentic. I actually experienced my loss in that fight and had my head driven into mud by the blows of the rival. This was the most consistent phylogenetic theme, although there were flashes of survival fights related to other species.

(c) Survival Problems Experienced as "Past Life" or "Karmic Memories."

One of the facets of dying in an individual form was interpreted in the session as related to previous lives. Many of these experiences involved just the feelings and sensations related to dying plus the cognizance that this was related to a past life (something that I call "past life experiential quality.")

There was one of these memories that clearly stood out among all the others of this kind by its clarity and richness of detail. It was a very vivid experience of dying on a dirty wooden floor of a Bavarian inn; I could hear German songs and typical "ländler" music with "yodel" and smell beer and tobacco as well as various dishes (roast duck and sauerkraut). The specificity and concreteness of details was flabbergasting in regard to the very universal character of most of the other experiences.

There were many sensations and feelings that were identified as "past life" experiences; they were not, however, related to any specific

place, time and circumstances. There were characterized by the general "past incarnation quality."

The experiences during the culmination period can be summarized as a most instructive illustration of the conflict between Hinduism and Buddhism (or Jainism). They had an ecstatic aspect of identification with all creation, the Atma-Brahma union, but at the same time the realization of the ultimate futility of the world of changes and of the craving for nirvanam and for leaving the wheel of rebirth. The experiences were extremely profound and basic, accompanied with the feeling that I was confronted with the most basic question a human being can have. The resulting feeling was that I had "mapped" these territories throughly, but had not solved the Riddle of riddles. I was leaving this area with the conviction that sooner or later I would face this problem again. The feeling of a possible identity of the LSD experiences with the altered states of consciousness occurring in a dying brain had the form of absolute conviction during the session; it withstood partially the test of time and persists as a plausible hypothesis that makes a lot of sense. The profundity of the experience is best exemplified by the fact that when Wallie was later offering the stroboscope as an enhancer of pleasant experiences, I refused it as an artificial and low level show, in spite of all its brilliance.

After the survival emergency was over, the rest of the session was ecstatic and fascinating. I first returned to multifaceted explorations of the swamp; instead of being a realistic part of the setting (as in the phylogenetic "memories"), it became an object with most interesting metaphysical meanings. I saw it as a beautiful fusion and union of the basic elements -- it was a mixture of earth and water, the process of putrefaction as a slow oxidation represented the fire element and the resulting gas bubbled the air. At the same time, there seemed to be something

sacred in its lack of differentiation -- it seemed to be a real cosmic cauldron from which things originate and into which they return. I also had insight into the sacred aspects of excrements and sewage for the same reason (the symbol of the sacred scarab). It does not seem to be accidental in this connection that I had a very strong feeling that the experiences of this session were caused by chemical activation of imprints in the caudal parts of the spinal cord; this seemed to be the center of the subjective awareness throughout the session. Part of the chemical aspects of pollution and auto-intoxication seemed to be related to the absorption processes in the large intestine.

This whole problem area of mud, swamp, sewage, feces was represented in the Egyptian framework. I had numerous visions of landscapes of the Nile delta with reed, papyrus, hippopotami and crocodiles and images of various Nile deities, pyramids and Sphinxes. This was accompanied by intuitive insights into the meaning of various aspects of the Egyptian culture.

During the music test, I thoroughly enjoyed myself; I felt that I had a sharp feeling for real art and that I could easily sift genuine artistic creations from cheap ones.

After this test, the long sought for time came, and I was released from the experimental "harness." Before I describe the rest of the evening, it might be interesting to mention the influence of the experimental setting of my session.

It was, in general, much less important than I expected. A few times I scrutinized what I wanted to say, realizing that at least seven persons would hear what I said. Occasionally, I got confused in my roles of experiencer, reporter and experimenter. Reporting meant not letting go and being a "good subject;" not reporting meant impoverishing the experimental data. At one point when I drank

some apple juice and asked for more, I wondered whether I did it because I was thirsty, wanted to enjoy its taste or thought that I should increase my urinary output. The implications of the physiological monitoring for the experiences of dying were mentioned above. On the whole, the experimental setting was a nuisance, but not a serious obstacle.

The tank experience was thoroughly enjoyable and most interesting. The water seemed to be a perfect milieu, and the body image was completely nonexistent. The most unusual aspect of the water experiences was the smooth transition and alternation between the micro- and macrocosm. At times, I could experience the tank as one cell and myself as its nucleus. I explored the biochemical processes, the secrets of the protein code, relations between chemistry, evolution and mythology, etc. At no time, however, could I shift the focus and perceive the tank as a whole galaxy. The way back in time seemed to be equally easy, and I could experience myself as a fetus in the womb or as various ocean animals. The use of the snorkel with forceful and noisy breathing returned me to the phylogenetic experiences and to the giant reptiles (brontosaurus).

The perception test was experienced as a surrealistic theatre performance, during which Jim, with his black beard, kept appearing and disappearing in a strange setting of black draperies, swinging fluorescent lamps and leading me through the maze in a most ritualized way.

The rest of the evening was a purely pleasant, floating experience. I was completely relaxed, my sensory pathways wide open (incredible taste of food) and I still retained the deep awe, reverence and feelings of wonder in regard to the mystery of existence.