

Putting “All-One” Into Practice: An Interview with David Bronner, CEO of Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps

WITH BRAD BURGE, MAPS DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING



David Bronner



Brad Burge (BB): Can you tell us a little bit about the history of Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps?

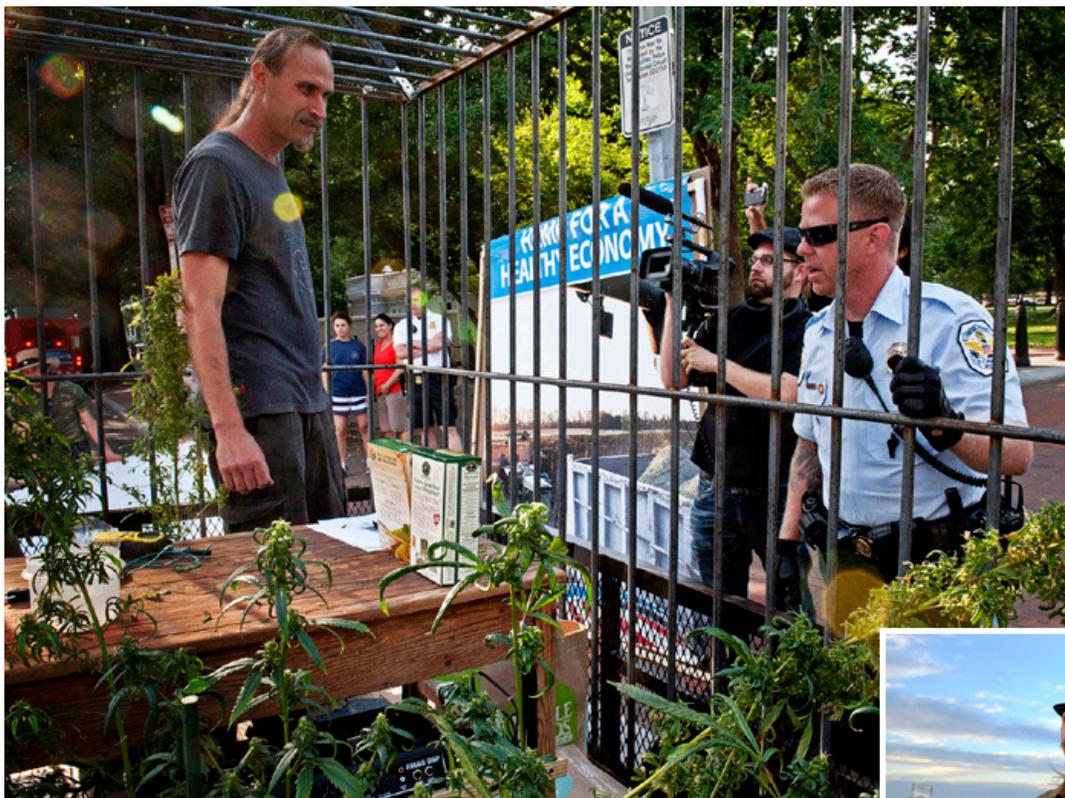
David Bronner (DB): My grandfather, Dr. Emanuel Bronner, was a third generation master soapmaker born into a prominent German Jewish soapmaking family. He was an intense guy from day one. By the late 1920s, he was constantly clashing with his father and two uncles over his Zionist beliefs and new-fangled soapmaking ideas. His father, like many German Jews, thought the fascist madness would blow over and that Emil should stop rocking the boat. Emanuel eventually immigrated to the U.S. in 1929, trying subsequently to get his family to join him. While his two sisters got out, his parents stayed too long and were murdered in the concentration camps.

Somehow, in the midst of this massive personal tragedy, my grandfather experienced intense mystical insights of love and unity. His message of “All-One!” is, at its core, a call for healing a fractured world. He lived in the shadow of the Holocaust, at a time when global nuclear annihilation seemed imminent. For him, the need to realize our transcendent unity across religious and ethnic divides was urgent: Humanity had to heal and come together as one, or perish.

After World War II concluded, he gave up his career as a

consultant to the U.S. soap industry and began traveling the country advocating his message of peace and unity, selling his ecological soaps on the side based on his family’s old-world quality recipes. He soon realized that people were coming more for the soaps than to download his message, so he started putting the message on every label of soap. The soaps took off with the rise of the counterculture in the 1960s, thanks to the hippies who dug the versatile simplicity of my grandfather’s biodegradable soaps and his sweet message of love and unity. From there, Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soap spread into every health food store in the country, and in the past 20 years have gone mainstream in a major way.

My brother Mike and I have been running the company for the past 15 years, along with my mom Trudy and recently departed Uncle Ralph. We inherited the company from our father, who oversaw soap production while also running his own chemical consulting business, which developed (among other things) the fire-fighting foam still used today in structure and forest fires. In the early 1990s, my grandfather got sick and the company was forced into bankruptcy by the IRS, which disagreed with Dr. Bronner’s tax-exempt non-profit religious designation. At that point my dad, mom, and uncle stepped in to run Dr. Bronner’s. They implemented many of the progressive



David Bronner locks himself in a metal cage filled with marijuana plants outside the White House to protest laws criminalizing hemp (July 2012, above); David holding a glass of moonshine at the 2013 Colorado Hemp Harvest (right).



employee and business practices we have today, and reorganized the company as a for-profit that holds to true to the non-profit religious DNA of the original mission and vision. The legal corporate name is still “All One God Faith,” although our trade name is Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps.

BB: What does your vision have in common with your grandfather’s “All-One” message, and how are you putting that vision into practice through the company?

DB: My own personal journey to understanding my grandfather’s vision was helped by powerful experiences with cannabis and psychedelics. These sacramental allies helped open my eyes to our insecure ignorance with which we judge both ourselves and others different from us, and to the disastrous global impact of our thoughtless collective consumption choices. These experiences precipitated a much deeper appreciation for my grandfather’s “One Love” message, and helped awaken my political activism. I clearly saw my responsibility to carry on the legacy of our family’s ecological soap business as a vehicle for positive social change.

Today we translate our grandfather’s vision in practical ways, including making sure all our major materials are from certified organic and fair trade sources, including olive oil from

both Palestinian and Israeli producers. We have capped all executive compensation at five times our lowest paid position, and all profits not needed for the business are dedicated to causes and charities we believe in. Among other things, this includes the responsible integration of cannabis and psychedelics into American and global culture.

BB: How did you first find out about MAPS and what motivated you to begin supporting our mission?

DB: Based on my own major psychedelic experiences—most importantly circa 1995 in Amsterdam—I realized that psychedelics, especially when used responsibly in therapeutic settings, are effective tools for awakening compassion, healing trauma and catalyzing progressive social change. Sometime in the years after I found out about MAPS, and was excited to see MAPS at Burning Man 2005 as part of the Entheon Village theme camp. I learned about Sanctuary, MAPS’ psychedelic harm reduction project now known as the Zendo Project, and met [MAPS founder] Rick Doblin; we hit it off immediately. One night, I got to see him in beautiful action when one of our campmates lost it on mushrooms. We brought her to Sanctuary, and Rick helped her ground out and navigate through to a positive space.

The Zendo Project is doing incredibly important work

by helping people navigate overwhelming psychedelic experiences to a positive outcome, rather than a harmful one. Having had difficult psychedelic experiences myself, supporting MAPS' harm reduction work is a primary inspiration for me. Designing and building the Rainbow Bridge art car for Zendo Project staff and guest transport in style has been one of my favorite projects.

BB: Why did you join MAPS' Board of Directors, and what are you working to accomplish with MAPS?

DB: I appreciated Rick's strategy to fund FDA-approved clinical research on the effectiveness of psychedelic medicine for diverse conditions, and to change the political climate that makes this type of research so difficult to conduct. Ever since, we have been major financial supporters of MAPS, and in 2013 I was asked to sit on its Board of Directors.

Our primary project is to bring MDMA-assisted psychotherapy through the FDA approval process for the treatment of chronic, treatment-resistant posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). But our larger goal is to see psychedelic medicine responsibly integrated into American and global culture, readily available to those who most need it, while helping the rest of us open our hearts and minds to each other and the wonderful, living world we are all part of.

BB: In addition to supporting MAPS' psychedelic and medical marijuana research, you're also known for your work on GMO labeling and the legalization of hemp and cannabis. How do you choose which causes to work on?

DB: We use our company as a progressive activist engine to make the world a better place. We are half ethical consumer products company, and half activist NGO. Our philanthropic work is in some ways a progressive, authentic form of marketing—we're in the news a lot, and our customers get pretty pumped with our roll and turn other people on.

The causes my family and I take on through the company have to do with where we have leverage, as well as our resources. The more of the latter we have the more we can engage on other fronts as well.

Hemp is a no-brainer, being at the nexus of drug war reform and agricultural sustainability. It's a leverage

point to land body blows on the drug war machine, as well as an important sustainable rotation crop for U.S. farmers. Similarly, we are major supporters of medical cannabis and Americans for Safe Access: while we are having a cultural debate about full legalization, those who are in most need deserve life-saving medicine. Since many of us use cannabis responsibly to elevate

Many of us are in cultural, familial, or existential straitjackets, and psychedelics can help us free ourselves to live in a deeper, more authentic way.

Begin with the end in mind then work backward to plan for reaching ambitious goals

—Ashawna Hailey, who left \$5.5 million to MAPS in her will

Help create a world where psychedelics are integrated into society by including MAPS in your end of life plans. If you tell us about your plans, you can join our *Next Horizon Society*, and we will invite you to receptions, learning opportunities, and other special events.

Please contact MAPS Development Director Virginia Wright to discuss your plans.
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our roll and appreciation in life, we also support responsible adult use generally.

We are also major proponents of sustainable organic agriculture, and very concerned about the impact of the industrial agricultural machine on the planet. The United Nations has designated 2015 “The International Year of Soils,” in recognition that Earth’s soil is a living membrane crucial for proper ecosystem and human health over the long term. Our soil biota are in bad shape, thanks to industrial agriculture’s intensive use of pesticides and fertilizers. The same pesticide industry is also engineering food crops to resist high doses of the herbicides they sell, including 2,4-D, one of two major ingredients in the infamous Vietnam War-era defoliant Agent Orange. I wrote a recent *Huffington Post* article you can check out called “GMO Pesticide Propaganda Machine Continues to Bamboozle” (March 4, 2015).

BB: How do you see psychedelics and psychedelic experiences relating to your grandfather’s “All-One” philosophy?

DB: Used properly, psychedelics can help catalyze experiences of unity and connection with each other and all life, showing us that we are not fundamentally different from the world we live in, but instead that we are one with it. We can appreciate that it’s the attitude of reverence and gratitude that various religious traditions at their best encourage that’s important, not the particular sets of beliefs, symbols and rituals that they use. Thus we are more respectful and tolerant of other religious faiths, as well

as appreciate that “secular” experiences (like rock concerts and music festivals) can also open gates to the spirit world. These experiences can also connect us to Gaia consciousness, and our consumption and policy choices should be mindful and honor that connection.

Psychedelics can address sickness and malaise of the soul, as well as the body and mind, and represent a more expansive view of health and wellness and freedom and being. Many of us are in cultural, familial, or existential straitjackets, and psychedelics can help us free ourselves to live in a deeper, more authentic way.

BB: Do you think that psychedelics and medical marijuana are becoming more mainstream?

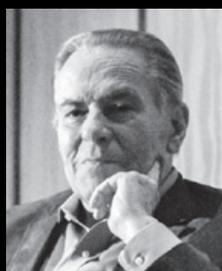
DB: Absolutely, and I’m excited to continue rocking this project forward with MAPS and the larger psychedelic community in the years to come. 🌀

David Bronner is President of Dr. Bronner’s Magic Soaps, the top-selling natural brand of soaps in North America. He graduated with a degree in Biology from Harvard University in 1995. David dedicates resources to different issues on behalf of the company’s mission to make products of the highest quality, and to use profits thereof to help make a better world. He can be reached at info@drbronner.com.

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