

Kinetic Synergy

by Anonymous



WHEN I'm on psychedelic drugs, I'm much worse at most of the things that I try to do. I'm worse at tying my shoes, for instance, and I'm worse at keeping track of time. I suck at operating electronics when I'm stoned, and at finding large objects in small pockets. I'm bad at remembering what I was just thinking or saying, I can scarcely read printed text, and making sense of subway maps is entirely out of the question. I'm fantastic at playing with my toys, though.

I'm active in the fire spinning and flow arts community, which means that I like to set things on fire and swing them around. Sometimes the thing is a hula hoop or a big staff, other times it's something more like a baton or a small ball on the end of a chain. I mostly don't practice with real fire, of course (for which sobriety is emphatically recommended), but I practice quite a bit. I do it every day. I know what I can do and I know what's just barely out of my reach, and I can state with complete confidence that I'm noticeably more awesome at twirling things around on, say, a touch of acid than I am when I'm stone cold sober.

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Such, in any event, is my consistent perception. Importantly, sober observers tend to agree with me, and video records made at various altitudes confirm my suspicions. One great thing about the psychedelic flow experience is that it's totally possible to catch the genie in the bottle. Many have been the times that I seemed to automagically download a brand new move in a trance state only to find that by the next day I couldn't repeat the damn thing at gunpoint. I figured out how to beat that with a digital camera, though. Now I can reverse engineer these things by watching myself do them in slow motion until I figure it out. Then I can actually learn the new move and teach it to others. I love living in the future!

There's a point of diminishing returns, obviously. A good +1 on ye olde Shulgin Scale is enough to give me an appreciable edge. At +2 I'm a freaking Jedi if I can manage to work my way into the flow, which I can almost always do by performing the simple and expedient ritual of actually getting up off of my ass and spinning for a few minutes. I've tried to spin at +3 and when it works it's a spiritual experience, (as is picking some gum off of the sidewalk or whatever else I happen to be engaged in), but I tend to lose focus and I can't try to figure out new moves. Simple repetitive pat-

terns seem to be the thing at high doses. You can't spin at +4. I'd like to see you try, though...

I stumbled upon the magic of harmonized motion as a little raver kid swinging lightsticks around, and it became sort of a trip anchor for me. I honestly don't know how many times I would have fallen into the abyss if I hadn't had a convenient and reliable way to balance myself. I think it has something to do with the left brain and the right brain synching up when you force them to cooperate and pass things back and forth, but that's just speculation. All I know is that it works for me. When I need an endorphin boost, spinning is a quick chi-up. When I'm bubbling over with excess energy it can also be the perfect chill down. When I need to focus my mind, I can attempt the most challenging move I know, or I can simply concentrate on trying to do an easy move perfectly. On the other hand, if my brain needs a break I can just trance out and spin on automatic pilot, watching in wonder as my light tools trace beautiful sacred geometries in scintillating rainbow colors against the darkness.

I teach flow arts as a meditation and self transformation practice that improves patience, balance, confidence, dexterity, focus, coordination, and self-esteem. People didn't used

to think of it that way, or at least very few people taught anything other than moves and tricks. When you ask all the serious badasses, though, and I asked a whole bunch of them, you find out that a lot of them privately see flow arts as a sort of spiritual path. And a surprising percentage will admit to having made huge breakthroughs along those lines whilst under the influence of mind-expanding substances. This is so common in the ecstatic dance world that it's almost taken for granted. Everybody has a story about the time they finally clicked into the trance, and nine times out of ten the experience involved some kind of psychedelic or empathogen. (Interestingly, the catalyst often isn't necessary to repeat the experience once the dancer finds her flow.)

This might also explain why some musicians find that psychoactives enhance their art. And indeed I hesitate to speculate about who would be left holding their statuettes if they started stripping folks of their Grammys and whatnot on the grounds that some of the past winners made use of performance-enhancing substances.

It's one of those things that everybody knows but nobody really talks about. In recent years this topic has been discussed more openly in the flow community as many of the top-tier spinners have connected up and spent time together at festivals like Burning Man, and I think it's had a real impact on the art. Nowadays more and more instructors are focusing on the energetic body as well as teaching technique and beginners are coming to the practice expecting something more like yoga than yo-yo. Yay better living!

Flow is obviously not unique to flow arts. In fact, the movement only started using that term relatively recently, as the practice has evolved in that direction. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the author of the book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, defines flow as a state in which "action and awareness are merged." Flow is the state of relaxed responsive focus that you feel when you're "in the zone" and ready for anything. Flow is what happens when your body, mind, and spirit are in dynamic balance and the Now is so compelling that everything else fades away. Ego and fear dissolve in the perfect moment, time slows down, and whatever you're doing becomes a meditation.

When you're really in the flow, the Universe seems to cooperate with you. Stories of psychedelic synchronicity are abundant enough to be cliché. And yeah, I know we're pattern-recognizing machines and all that. But almost everybody knows what it's like to really be "on" sometimes; it's that state when you seem to hit all the green lights, books fall open to the right page, and your comic timing is impeccable.

And somehow psychedelics seem to make that state easier to access. More importantly, they help us to learn the tools that we need to catalyze it on our own. These lessons can then be passed on to others who can totally make use of them without ever actually having had to go there themselves. Psychedelics aren't for everybody, but we could all use a little more flow in our lives. Remember, shamans take drugs so the straights don't have to. I never mention drugs in my classes at all, but my experience informs the way I practice and teach every day.

So what's really going on here? Why are so many people better at spinning and dancing and making music when they're high? Is it a Chi thing, like a surge in The Force that I grew up wanting to believe in? Or is it something more akin to having a faster processor speed and a better connection? Is it the result of some kind of perceptual shift, like time dilation, increased visual acuity, or super-sensitized kinesthetic awareness? Is it a concentration thing? Is it just the placebo effect? Is it immersion in the Tao or some more Jungian organizing principle? Is it magic? Is it an illusion? Is there a difference? The debate flows on.

It really is a thing though. If you've never had it happen to you, try dancing more. •

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