



# Psychedelics Teach Ordinarity

Mary Cosimano, LMSW

*This essay is based on my personal experiences and observations both as a psychedelic guide and my life journey, and not that of Johns Hopkins Center for Psychedelic and Consciousness Research (CPCR).*

**Mary Cosimano, LMSW**, has been working with the Johns Hopkins Center for Psychedelic and Consciousness Research since 2000 when they began research with psilocybin. In her role as Director of Guide/Facilitator Services she is responsible for training and supervising Session Facilitators. She has served as Session Facilitator and research coordinator involved with all the psilocybin studies and has conducted over 450 study sessions. In addition to her work with the psilocybin studies, she has worked with the Club Drug Studies including Salvia Divinorum and Dextromethorphan. She taught individual and group meditation to breast cancer patients in a Johns Hopkins research study, and taught at California Institute to Integral Studies (CIIS) for their Psychedelic-Assisted Therapies and Research program. In 2003 she started and has maintained a meditation group for employees in her department. She also has 15 years of experience with direct patient care as a hospice volunteer. In addition to her interest in altered states of consciousness, Mary enjoys time with family, friends, nature, reading, walking, meditating and playing games.

**Watch Mary Cosimano's TED Talk on Psilocybin, Love, and the Meaning of Life**

## Reference

*Reflections of an Elder Brother: Awakening from the Dream* by Bartholomew

Permission was granted from the participant referenced to share her experience

**I was inspired to write** this after a particularly powerful weekend of teaching for a psychedelic-assisted therapy certificate program. These classes were more energizing than usual. I was in my element talking about love and psychedelics. I felt incredibly connected with the participants—and it seemed they felt this as well, given their outpouring of gratitude, admiration, and joy. I loved it. It was magical. All of this brought up questions I have been dealing with, contemplating, and trying to make sense of for a long time: I know I am not alone in this quest. Specifically, why do I love these feelings so much? And how do I take this all in? Is it pure passion or is it ego, or both? Could love and psychedelics be part of the answer?

Let me step back and give a little history. My name is Mary Cosimano and I have been working at Johns Hopkins conducting psilocybin research for over two decades since these studies were first initiated. I was recruited to be one of the two guides needed for our first clinical trial with psilocybin. I have now been a guide for approximately 500 psilocybin study sessions. Since that time, the field of psychedelic research has grown immensely. I am not one of the most prominent in this field, and yet having been involved for so long and been witness to so many incredible healing journeys along the way at Johns Hopkins, I am fairly well known in the psychedelic community. I have been referred to as the “heart” of our studies. It is something I strive to be (living from the heart), so I am honored to be seen in this way. This is exactly what my dilemma has been about starting many years ago, but the culmination of my questions rose to the forefront of my mind as I was teaching this particular weekend. I felt overwhelmed with the feedback I was given by this group.

The praise raised new questions within me: How does one take in praise/adoration respectfully while at the same time remaining humble without being self-deprecating? Was it my ego creeping in and saying that I am better than others? And yet when I sat with this question about the ego, it didn't feel right. I wondered if it is egotistical to acknowledge praise.

I continued to sit with the question that weekend. I had a deep desire to get to the root of it—right then! I was tired of dealing with it and knew there was an answer. I just hadn't found it. I kept going inward and asking—asking for the answer.

Slowly, I began to understand something I knew but hadn't put in the following context. That is, the people at that teaching weekend who were projecting the admiration, the love, the joy towards me likely felt that way because I became a mirror into their own hearts and they into mine. They think they love someone else, that the teacher is special. But from my perspective, it is the opposite—it is because they saw and felt that love in themselves. A reflection! I began to point this out to them during that weekend and it seemed that they got it. The result was that this outpouring of love for me was given back to them. Exactly where it belongs.

I knew there was more to understand, so I continued asking and searching for more clarity. I was exhausted. I went to bed. When I woke, I began my day as I had been doing for a while, writing affirmations, breathing, meditating, and reading a passage from a

book that I feel sets me in the direction I want to be for the day. I usually open to a random page. That particular morning I opened the book, *Reflections of an Elder Brother: Awakening from the Dream*, and the sentence I read was, **“Ordinary is the answer.”**

In awe, I read more:

*“You are ordinary because love is absolutely ordinary. It is ordinary because it is what you are and what everyone is! It is what everything is! To love is not the exception. It is the easiest thing to do because it is your very nature.*

*Please think of ordinary as simple, as in uncomplicated, as in ‘like everyone else...’ when you attempt to be something other than yourself you kill the feeling in the moment. If you are trying in any way to act loving, to be right, to feel better, to convince others, whatever it might be, just ‘let go’ and be ordinary in the moment. Ordinary is the answer.”*

I see ordinary as the state of love.

As I read further, it became even clearer.

*“There is only One. If you feel yourself to be extra-ordinary, you are trying to place yourself above the stream of the ordinary wonder of consciousness... when you get into the realm of the finder, there is nothing but the ordinary, which is love, the One, light, peace. What is extra-ordinary is the ego motion that tries to move itself out of the ordinary and become greater.”*

There is no hierarchy in consciousness, love, nor in ordinary.

In the past I have written and talked about my belief that one of the teachings of psychedelics is that love is our true nature, our authentic self. I had not thought about love as ordinary but now I see the connection. Love is ordinary because it is who we are, who everyone is. I believe that love is connection—to ourselves, others, to everything, and that we are all one, all connected. To be ordinary is to be “like everyone else” because we are all one, all connected—that is ordinary consciousness in all its wonder.

Shortly after I wrote this, I went on a walk. At one point I started thinking about the psilocybin experience of one of my study participants. Towards the middle of her experience, as she lay on the sofa, with eyeshades and headphones, her body began stretching upward (towards the ceiling) and she was beaming. She wasn’t talking during this time but later told us what took place. In a session report she wrote:

*“... I floated onward into a vast love that I could feel all around. Propelled on this love I rose upward toward a great light. As I approached, the light grew brighter and began to coalesce into form.. It was truly magnificent and awesome. It glowed*

*more brilliantly than anything imaginable. I continued to propel upward. It was so bright as to be partially blinding. I began to form the thought and then realized that I was approaching the ultimate reality, the source of all the universe. What would this look like? Could I stand it? My anticipation and excitement compounded. At a point as I drew closer to the mountain top I realized with a sense of intense awe and exhilaration that I was about to see the face of the Creator Intelligence Force, the face of “God.” As I moved closer my vision seemed to be blocked somewhat by what appeared to be a section of screen floating before me. I squinted and pressed forward to see. Suddenly an ordinary nickel appeared in sharp detail before my eyes. Astounded I asked, “You’re a nickel?” The voice came back with humor and said, “A nickel is as good as anything!”*

I was immediately struck with the coincidence that this experience spoke to that of being ordinary. I interpreted this as the participant expecting the face of God to be extra-ordinary. And God turned out to be a nickel—an ordinary nickel—a simple, uncomplicated nickel.

This is just one example of the many volunteers’ psychedelic experiences that I have witnessed relating to the ordinariness of who we are. Another study participant wrote:

*“Thinking about being a doer of good deeds, I don’t need to dedicate my life to it. I don’t need to go to either extreme- good (higher) or bad (fire) evil. I’m neither a saint... nor a sinner. Just an average guy, a regular guy. But I have everything that I need.”*

His insight that he need not be “a saint or a sinner” and he had everything he needed speaks to that of being ordinary and affirms to me my belief in the merit of being ordinary.

The desire to be ordinary is the desire to be simple, uncomplicated, “like everyone else.” Love is ordinary and our true nature. It is our authentic self. These are the teachings of psychedelics. I too am ordinary with a heartfelt passion for the healing properties of the psychedelics and the tremendous joy I receive when teaching the classes. The love, joy, and laughter and simply the reflection of ourselves in all of our ordinary love—me to you and you to me—together we are one. I just want to meet you where you are and connect with you.

So, is my love of this work, the boundless rewards I receive and embrace, the healing I see happening all around me, purely ego? I don’t think so. At least not when my ordinary self responds with gratitude, love, joy, and laughter as one. When we respond in this way, we feel at one with each other and together in ordinary love, our true nature.