



BECKLEY
FOUNDATION

Introductory Talk

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PSYCHEDELIC SCIENCE 2017

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The long hibernation of psychedelic research, forced upon us by repressive drug laws, is hopefully drawing to a close.

Since we last met here 4 years ago, a tipping point has been reached: cutting-edge research has demonstrated the value of psychedelics. Phase-3 clinical trials are on the horizon; people are being treated with psychedelics in a number of clinical trials; and the possibility of turning these compounds into licensed medicines looks well within reach.

My own journey in this field began when I was introduced to LSD in 1965. This was at the beginning of the cultural explosion, following the escape of LSD from the labs.

A short while later, I started working with an outstanding scientist, who was the first to develop a hypothesis describing the physiological changes underlying altered states of consciousness.

This hypothesis rested on the notion of an increased blood-supply to the capillaries in the brain, and a diminished control of the 'ego'.

For me this was a turning point. I suddenly understood how LSD, and related compounds, could be used for the *benefit* of mankind, *to dive into the deeper levels of the psyche*, and *to enhance cognitive functioning*.

It is obvious that the human animal is an amazing species, unique in its capacity to rise to the top of the pile, and take control. But it is equally clear that we are deeply flawed, and have some serious *fault-line* in our make-up, rendering us capable of the most incredible *stupidity* and *cruelty*.

Why this is so, and how can we remedy it, became my dominant thoughts.

The late 1960s were a wonderful period. They seemed to open up the potential to change the world, and the human psyche, for the better. We were riding a flood of optimism of what LSD, and related compounds, could do. We felt sure that with greater understanding of the human condition, and how it could be enhanced with the responsible and careful use of altered states of consciousness, we could help heal the sicknesses of humanity, and make the world a happier place.

However, with the advent of the 1970s, the *War on Drugs* wrapped its tentacles around the dancing hippies and the youth playing with their altered states of consciousness, and flung a sizeable number into prison.

Here, the Land of the Free, which comprises roughly 5% of the world's population, now has a staggering 25% of the world's prison population, largely made up of drug users!

One might imagine that the *right to control one's own consciousness*, the very core of one's personality, would be protected as a **human right**. However, maybe the Founding Fathers never imagined that anyone could question this right, and so failed to mention it.

LSD had threatened too much too quickly. Tragically, due to mishandling and paranoia, society has had to wait 50 years, so far, for the realisation of the extraordinary healing power of psychedelics to break through the repressive network of misinformation, fear and vested interests.

I realised then, as the doors of prohibition slammed shut on these valuable compounds, that the only way through this globalised network of taboo, which seemed almost impenetrable, would be, with the very best science, to carefully demonstrate the potential of these compounds to heal, and enhance the human psyche.

In order to open the doors to the scientific investigation of these substances, in 1998 I set up the Beckley Foundation, to change the policy preventing the research, to raise funds, and to gather a team of scientists with whom I could work to kick-start the studies again. It has been a long, uphill struggle, and we are nowhere near the top yet, but the views are getting better and better each year.

What I thought back then, I continue to think today: the importance of psychedelic research is because *psychedelics can reach a deeper level* of the psyche than mere talking-therapy. They can *remove*, or *weaken*, the defensive mechanisms of the ego, and allow the individual to dive deeper into his or her consciousness, fishing for hidden trauma, and/or facilitating a transcendent and spiritual experience.

In the last few years, we have broken new ground in our understanding of how psychedelics do this, how it is that they **shake the roots** of the human psyche, and **reboot** the setting of our consciousness, and how it is that they are such deep, curative medications.

Throughout our research, we are finding that these compounds reduce the sensoring, controlling power of this specifically human mechanism called the '**ego**', or in modern neuroscientific terminology, *the Default Mode Network* [in short, the DMN]. This network of *hub centres* is *superimposed* upon all the other networks in the brain, and acts rather like the government, or the conductor in an orchestra, dictating what gets through to consciousness, and what does not.

The result is that, in our normal consciousness, we see a highly-sensored, reflection of reality, like Plato's shadows on the wall. When trauma happens, the ego raises the defences, and closes off the blood-supply to brain-areas associated with the trauma. Talking-therapy can only skirt around these repressed areas, unable to lance the boil and let the poison out. But with the aid of a psychedelic, the defences are lowered, and blood returns to the troubled areas and washes out their poisons, freeing them up to become part of the whole again.

With clinical trials and brain-imaging technology, we are revealing for the first time how psychedelics are **non-specific medications**, meaning that they can treat an amazingly wide spectrum of illnesses, which are often *treatment-resistant* to other currently- available medications.

Apart from healing sickness, psychedelic compounds such as LSD, psilocybin and ayahuasca, can increase those *beneficial* characteristics of humanity, such as compassion, empathy, openness and creativity - those qualities that make humans noble. All these qualities can blossom under the influence of a wisely-used psychedelic compound.

How is it possible that these amazing compounds, which have this ability both to heal and to enhance, and that have been used for millennia, from the very beginning of human cultural evolution, have been *excluded* from the modern world's pharmacopeia?

Why have psychedelics been criminalised and categorised as substances which have absolutely *no* medical benefits, and the *highest* potential for abuse? Substances such as LSD and psilocybin have very low, or *no* toxicity, and very little evidence of harms. Indeed, an overdose of LSD has never killed anyone, unlike an overdose of alcohol, which is easily reached.

The reason is *deeply-entrenched Taboo*, and political expediency.

Perhaps we are now reaching a *new portal*, where slowly society is beginning to realise the potential benefits of these compounds, and their value in the treatment of currently intractable psychological conditions, suffered by an *ever-increasing* proportion of the population. Conditions such as depression, anxiety and addiction are a mounting burden for society, that are highly costly in terms of suffering and government expenditure.

Although we are making major breakthroughs, because of the legal restrictions, and lack of funding, we still have a long way to go. Occasions such as this are an opportunity to *increase our connectivity*, and to find new ways forward.

In order to break the taboo and better regulate the psychedelics, to minimise harms and optimise benefits, we should begin with removing the classic psychedelics and cannabis from Schedule 1, to a lower schedule, so that scientific research can be carried out, without expensive and time-consuming obstructions, and so that doctors can prescribe them to individuals in need.

We need not be far from realising this goal. Independent governments can do this. The opening of clinics, which could provide psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy, would allow, at least some of those millions suffering from the scourges of psychological disorders to seek treatment. Our own research and that of others have shown remarkable improvements in patients receiving just one or two doses of psychedelic medication. This is *unheard-of* in contemporary psychiatry, which relies on *daily* doses

of medications, that often have unpleasant side effects, or on regular therapy-sessions that can continue for years.

I am excited at what lies ahead: later this year I look forward to starting a microdosing study with LSD, and a study investigating the efficacy of LSD for treating alcohol addiction. We will also be furthering our ayahuasca, DMT and 5MeO-DMT studies, as well as developing our cannabis research and the formulation of cannabis medicines.

I am committed to expanding our neuroscientific and clinical research; making these compounds licensed medications; and setting up clinics at which they can be provided, as well as simultaneously removing the shackles of prohibition, and enabling the immense beneficial possibilities of these **neural-transformational medicines** to flourish.

I hope you have a wonderful conference.