



MIND STATES II

OAXACA, MEXICO 2004

TALK BY AMANDA FEILDING

My name is Amanda Feilding, or Neidpath. I have been interested in the study of consciousness and its altered states since childhood. For a while, in the early 60s I studied mysticism and comparative religion at Oxford with Prof. R.C. Zaehner,

In 1960 I was introduced to cannabis and in 1965 to LSD. The following year I met the Dutch scientist Bart Huges and I started studying the physiology underlying changing levels of consciousness. At that time I was a regular user of LSD and read the complete works of Freud while psychoanalysing myself. My interest in psychology and brain function continued and broadened. Since in those days it was impossible to talk about the potential advantages of mind altering substances, or one's children would be ostracised and one's overdraft terminated, I talked about the change in consciousness brought about by the historic practice of trepanation. This immediately cast one as a freak, but didn't necessarily entail being locked up.

During the next 20 to 30 years I did much research on psychoactive substances, psychology and brain function. I also campaigned for the benefits of enhancing consciousness while bringing up my two sons, painting and trying to solve the money problem. In the 90s I set up the Trepanation Trust and the Foundation to Further Consciousness. Around 2000 I changed its name to the Beckley Foundation.

The Beckley Foundation is a charitable trust based in Oxford. It reflects my own position of being interdisciplinary, respecting no borders between science, religion, philosophy, history and politics. It has three main areas of activity: a science programme, a policy programme and the organising of seminars.

The Science Programme directs research at leading scientific institutions, both in the UK and abroad. The studies use a range of research tools, including the latest brain-imaging techniques, to investigate changes in the neurophysiology and biochemistry underlying consciousness and its different states. These studies aim to compare and contrast 'normal', everyday consciousness with non-ordinary states, which may be brought about by yoga, meditation or the use of psychoactive substances. We also research whether such techniques may be used to enhance well-being in healthy individuals, and to help in the treatment of a variety of disorders, from depression, anxiety and addiction, to the relief of dementia and pain.

The Beckley Foundation Drug Policy Programme is a new project dedicated to providing a rigorous, independent review of global drug policy. It aims to research and disseminate information and analysis that supports the rational consideration of policy issues at international level, so leading to the more effective management of the widespread use of psychoactive substances.

Over the last 2 years, the Beckley Foundation has organised a series of seminars entitled, *'Society and Drugs: A Rational Perspective'*. The aim is to achieve an overview of the scientific, medical, social, economic and political

issues surrounding the use and abuse of drugs, illicit and legal. It is also organising a series of *Dialogues on Consciousness*.

Last week when landing at Kuala Lumpur and being told that anyone found with drugs faces the death penalty, one is reminded of the importance of the task in hand.

In 2002, the first seminar in this series, entitled 'Drugs and the Brain', was held at Magdalen College, Oxford. In 2003 there was a meeting at the Royal Society on '*The Role of Drugs in Society*,' and a seminar at Admiralty Arch, London organised in association with the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, entitled '*Alcohol and other Recreational Drugs*'. In 2004, the fourth seminar will be held at the House of Lords entitled *Global Drug Policy- Future Directions*.