

PSYCHEDELIC RESEARCH REVISITED

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ABSTRACT: In the two decades before the government banned human subjects studies in the mid 1960s, an enormous amount of research was done on psychedelics. These studies hold far reaching implications for our understanding of diverse psychological, social, and religious phenomena. With further research all but legally impossible, this makes the original researchers a unique and invaluable resource, and so they were interviewed to obtain their insights and reflections. One of these researchers was James Fadiman, who subsequently became a cofounder of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology and the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. Discussion topics include his research studies and personal experiences, the founding, nature and purpose of transpersonal psychology, social effects of, and responses to, psychedelics, and religious freedom.

INTRODUCTION

For half a century psychedelics have rumbled through the Western world, seeding a subculture, titillating the media, fascinating youth, terrifying parents, enraging politicians, and intriguing researchers. Tens of millions of people have used them; millions still do—sometimes carefully and religiously, often casually and dangerously. They have been a part—often a central and sacred part—of many societies throughout history. In fact, until recently the West was a curious anomaly in not recognizing psychedelics as spiritual and medical resources (Grob, 1998, 2002; Harner, 1973).

The discovery of LSD in 1943 (Hoffman, 1983), and later its chemical cousins—such as mescaline, psilocybin and MDMA—unleashed experiences of such intensity and

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impact that in the sixties they shook the very foundations of society. Suddenly significant portions of the culture were boggling their minds with varieties of experiences and states of consciousness that were, quite literally, beyond their wildest dreams. A Pandora's Box of heavens and hells, highs and lows, trivia and transcendence cascaded into a society utterly unprepared for any of them.

Their effects reverberate to this day, and the Western world will probably never be the same. For better and for worse, psychedelics have molded culture and counter-culture, art and music, science and psychiatry, and helped catalyze movements such as those for peace and civil rights [for a well written history of the emergence and impact of psychedelics see Jay Stevens (1988) *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*]. They continue, for some, to fuel spiritual practices such as meditation and yoga, to inspire raves and rebellion, to fertilize research on brain and behavior, and to suggest new understandings of consciousness and creativity, on the one hand, and cults on the other. At the same time, the “war on drugs” continues unabated, making thoughtful distinctions almost impossible—such as the stark differences between toxic stimulants like cocaine, and problematic but potentially therapeutic substances like psychedelics. Yet, such a distinction is extremely important. Unfortunately, to a large extent, hype and hypocrisy have overridden reflection and research.

From the beginning, however, serious researchers have investigated these drugs. In fact, these curious chemicals have fascinated some of the greatest names in psychology and psychiatry, sociology and anthropology, philosophy and religion. Some of the foremost researchers and thinkers of the twentieth century zeroed in on these substances as soon as they emerged: people such as Aldous and Laura Huxley, eminent philosophers and social critics; Huston Smith, one of the world's most distinguished religious scholars; Michael Harner, the world's leading expert on Shamanism; Rabbi Zalman Schacter, an originator of the Jewish Renewal Movement; Stanislav Grof, cofounder of the holotropic breath work movement; Richard Alpert, a Harvard psychologist who later became known by the name Ram Dass as one of the 20th century's best known spiritual teachers; James Fadiman, one of the founders of transpersonal psychology; and many more. For interviews of these pioneers see Walsh & Grob (forthcoming).

In a brief period lasting less than 20 years, an enormous amount of research was done on psychedelics. True, much of it was methodologically limited by today's research standards, for example, often lacking controls for expectations and demand characteristics (Grob, 1998). Even so, some of the scientific, psychological, spiritual, and clinical implications of the findings, as described and referenced below, were remarkable.

In the psychological arena, psychedelics revealed depths and dynamics of mind rarely glimpsed by western psychologists. They unveiled complexes, archetypes, and early traumas that provided unexpected insights into, and possible support for, depth psychologies such as those of Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and Otto Rank (Grob, 2001). They sometimes facilitated powerful transcendent and mystical experiences previously only available to advanced contemplatives, and in doing so provided new understandings of religion, spirituality, and mysticism, as well as their associated practices such as meditation, yoga, and contemplation (Badiner & Grey, 2002; Forte,

1997; Roberts, 2001; Roberts & Hruby, 2002; Smith, 2000; Walsh, 2004; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). From these insights emerged new and more expansive models of the psyche, the most sophisticated and best known of these psychedelically derived theories being those of Stanislav Grof (1988, 1998, 2001).

Clinically, the psychedelics showed therapeutic promise for a diverse array of difficult, in some cases almost intractable, problems. To name but a few of these pathologies, psychedelics seemed therapeutic for severe psychosomatic disorders, chronic alcoholism, death anxiety in cancer patients, and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in trauma victims. They even proved helpful in the most horrendous of all PTSDs: concentration camp syndrome [for an almost overwhelmingly moving first person account of one such concentration camp syndrome therapy, see *Shivitti: A Vision*, by Ka-Tzetnik 135633 (1998)].

Of course, these clinical claims must be regarded as tentative since, as previously described, many studies were methodologically limited and many were only case reports. Given the enormous power of the psychedelic experience, strong expectation and placebo effects are likely. In addition, there is a saying in medicine which advises physicians to “use a new drug quickly while it still works,” implying that the initial enthusiasm that often accompanies a novel treatment may be therapeutic in itself. Nevertheless, the net effect of the more than 1,000 publications reporting on some 40,000 subjects certainly supports the claim that psychedelics may have significant therapeutic potential and that further studies are warranted. [For reviews of clinical research, see Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1997; Grob, 1998, 2002; Grof, 2001; Walsh & Grob, forthcoming.]

Healthy subjects showed a variety of psychological and spiritual benefits. For some of these normals, including James Fadiman, the experience initiated a life long spiritual quest (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1983; Grof, 1998; Tart, 1991; Vaughan, 1983). Charles Tart (1991) found that a significant percentage of Western students of Tibetan Buddhism reported that psychedelics had played a role in initiating their practice.

These studies occurred with a remarkably low casualty rate. This was in stark contrast to the painful panic episodes and worse that sometimes resulted from unskillful use—such as among ill-prepared casual users or the unwitting victims of purported secret CIA experiments—that subsequently filled blaring newspaper headlines (Lee & Shlain, 1985; Stevens, 1988; Wolfe, 1968). By contrast, clinical use of psychedelics resulted in no mortality and extremely low morbidity. The most comprehensive review of side effects is that of Strassman (1984), who concluded that “in well screened, prepared, supervised, and followed-up psychiatric patients taking pure psychedelic drugs, the incidence of serious adverse reactions is less than 1%. It is even lower in ‘normal’ volunteers” (Strassman, 1997, pp. 154–155). This makes psychedelics—contrary to the public’s media distorted perception—among the safest drugs in the medical pharmacopoeia, *when used carefully and clinically*.

Yet all this research crashed to a halt in the sixties, banned by the United States government. This period ushered in the beginning of what has been termed “America’s longest war,” the war on drugs, which many social scientists now agree, is unwinnable and does more harm than good (Currie, 1992; Duke & Gross, 1993;

Nadelmann, 1998; Schlosser, 1994). Although these drugs remain widely available in most major cities of the Western world, they also remain almost totally unavailable to researchers for study of their psychological and possible therapeutic effects. What many investigators regard as one of psychology and psychiatry's most important research tools has largely been relegated to the museum of medical history.

Paradoxically, this makes the original psychedelic researchers a uniquely valuable—and because of their age, an endangered—resource. In their laboratories and clinics, they observed and recorded, puzzled over and analyzed tens of thousands of psychedelic sessions. In doing so, they witnessed a perhaps unparalleled range and intensity of human experience. In fact, probably no group in human history has been privy to such a panoply of experiences: subtle and intense, painful and ecstatic, high and low, sublime and satanic, loving and hateful, mystical and mundane. The entire range of human experience, including some of the rarest and most profound, erupted in their volunteer research participants with an intensity rarely seen except in the most extreme existential conditions. Not surprisingly, many researchers reported that not only their subjects, but also they themselves, were transformed by their work.

In the late 1990's, several individuals and organizations realized that these researchers constitute an invaluable resource, and an irreplaceable reservoir of knowledge and wisdom that may never be available again. Recognizing this, members of The Oral History of Psychedelics Research Project—Alise Agar, Gary Bravo, Charles Grob, and Roger Walsh—funded by the Fetzer Institute and the Institute of Noetic Sciences, organized a meeting of these researchers. Given the advancing age of these researchers, this would probably be the last time such a group would ever meet.

The researchers convened in 1998 to recall and record their discoveries, and to reflect on what they had learned. Participants included, among others, Betty Eisner, James Fadiman, Stanislav Grof, Albert Hoffman (the discoverer of LSD), Laura Huxley, Ralph Metzner, Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, Ram Dass, Alexander Shulgin, Ann Shulgin, Huston Smith, and Myron Stoloroff. For three days they talked, their conversations were recorded, and they were interviewed individually. The result was a distillation of fascinating anecdotes, irreplaceable knowledge, and hard-won wisdom, born of half a century of research and reflection on one of the most intriguing and challenging topics of our time.

From this, a book tentatively titled *Higher Wisdom* is being prepared. What follows are excerpts from the first of these interviews, an account by James Fadiman of his own odyssey and the work done at one of the major psychedelic research institutes—the International Foundation for Advanced Study. The decision to highlight Fadiman in this article is based on his role as a cofounder of the transpersonal movement, and the fact that his interest in spirituality and transpersonal phenomena was sparked by his personal experiences with, and research on, psychedelics.

EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEW WITH JIM FADIMAN
(INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR ADVANCED STUDIES)

INT: Let's start with some history, Jim. How were you first introduced to psychedelics, and what led you to research them?

JF: I would have to say that I am one of the inadvertent pioneers with psychedelics. It began when I was an undergraduate at Harvard, and ended up in a small tutorial with a young, dynamic professor named Richard Alpert. We became friends and ended up renting a house together for the summer at Stanford, where I worked for him on a large research project. . . . After my senior year at Harvard, I went off to live in Europe. The following spring Dick showed up in Paris with Timothy Leary on their way to Copenhagen to deliver the first paper on work with low-dose psilocybin. Dick then guided me through my first experience which was with a small dose of psilocybin.

Out of that [and subsequent experiences] came my first realizations that the universe was larger than I thought, and my identity smaller than I thought, and there was something about human interaction that I had been missing. It was definitely a powerful bonding experience between us. Afterwards, a lot of my attachments seemed to be a little more tenuous. However, this session did not involve a dramatic stripping away of levels of reality. That came later. [Fadiman entered graduate school at Stanford University.]

I started my graduate work feeling disappointed with psychology, because now I had used psychedelics and I knew there was a lot more. I didn't know what 'more' was, but I sure knew that psychology was not teaching it. But hidden away in the back of the course catalog I found a 'graduate special,' taught by Willis Harman, called "The Human Potential." The little write-up said, "What is the highest and best that human beings can aspire to?" and suggested various kinds of readings. As I read it I thought, "There is something about psychedelics in here, I don't know what it is, but this man knows something of what I know." At that point I was dividing the world into people who knew what I knew—which wasn't very much, but more than I'd known two months earlier—and those who didn't. For instance, I'd look at Impressionist paintings, and I'd think "Did this person see what they were painting, or were they copying other Impressionists?" And somehow, I knew. Whether I knew correctly or not was totally beside the point to me at that time.

Anyway, I wandered into Willis Harman's office, which was a typical associate professor of electrical engineering office in a building as drab as a hospital, and said "I'd like to take your graduate special." He replied gently, "Well, it's full this quarter but I'll give it again. Perhaps you would be interested at a later date." I looked at him and said, "I've had psilocybin three times." He got up, walked across his office, past the engineering bookshelves, and closed the door. And then we got down to business. . . .

After talking for a while, we decided that not only would I take the class, but I would kind of co-teach it. I was willing to be open with what was happening with me. I had much less to lose. So we gave it together, beginning with the question "What is the

best and highest a human being can be?" Gradually we moved from psychology to philosophy, on to the mystics, and then to personal experience.

Around that time I was also starting to work with the International Foundation for Advanced Study. This foundation had been set up in Menlo Park, California to work with psychedelics and was funded by Myron Stolaroff. Willis Harman was involved, as were a few other people. They had no psychologist on their team, so I became their psychologist. . . . We began by working on a paper together, with the working title, "The Psychedelic Experience."

While we were waiting for that paper to be published, Willis asked if I'd like to have a session with them. . . . I showed up on October 19th, 1961 at the Foundation's headquarters. I was offered the opportunity to take some LSD with Willis as a male sitter, a lovely woman professor as a female sitter, and a physician.

In that room, my little mind washed away, much to my surprise. The day went on in classic psychedelic high-dose entheogenic fashion. I discovered that my disinterest in spiritual things was as valid as a ten-year-old's disinterest in sex: It came out of a total unawareness of what the world was built on.

I went to a place of total aloneness—the you've-got-to-walk-this-valley-by-yourself deep awareness of separation from the universe—the sense that there really was nothing at all you could hold onto. This, fortunately, is very, very close to the place next to it, in which there was only one thing and I was part of it. At that point there was what might be called songs of jubilation throughout the heavens: another jerk Wakes Up: not jubilation at the realization of who I, Jim Fadiman, was, but who I was part of. What a relief! I moved into a space of feeling that I was—not part of everything—but everything was part of everything, and I was clearly part of that. Suddenly, it was obvious there is no death, and that the fundamental waveform of the universe is best described in human terms as love. This was all incredibly obvious. And for some peculiar reason, I, Jim Fadiman was being given this awakening to my true self. From that place I looked at various structures in my life and they were all, at best, amusing. . . .

That evening, before going home with Willis, I went up to the top of Skyline, a glorious mountain ridge above Stanford. I looked out, and had an amazing feeling of identification with Creation. . . . I went to Willis's house to come down for the evening, and looked into his son, Dean's, eyes. Dean was just crawling around at that point, and we shared one of those moments.

"You're in just a little baby body."

"Yeah, that's what I'm doing now, but don't worry about it."

He was an old soul, too.

Eventually I was dropped back off at my graduate student hovel. The next day I emerged, wondering what I should do, now that I knew what I knew, and given that

I'd been "reincarnated" as a first-year graduate student at Stanford, a world not hostile, but totally oblivious, to all of this. . . .

That's an initial answer to your question, of how I was introduced to psychedelics.

Then I began researching them as part of a team—Willis Harman, Myron Stolaroff, and others. The work we were doing was determining whether or not, if you used psychedelics in a totally supportive, non-medical setting, with a high enough dose to matter, you could facilitate an entheogenic experience. And if so, would that be beneficial? For a few years this group had federal approval, because we cooperated with the government at whatever level seemed necessary. . . .

INT: Tell us more about the research you were doing at Stanford? How long were you able to work with psychedelics there, and how did it end?

JF: Well, I worked on my dissertation, "The Effects of Psychedelics on Behavior Change" . . . It took me two years to get a committee that was willing to have their names on it. So, now I was a Ph.D. and therefore had learned a certain amount of research design and had some credibility.

The federal government then allowed us to do a totally different study. This one was on the question of creativity, whether psychedelics could facilitate problem-solving of a technical nature. Oscar Janiger and a lot of other people had done work with artists—but here was a real challenge: could we use these materials and get people to work on highly technical problems?

To plan the project, we ourselves took a very low dose of LSD, and then we worked on the study. We reasoned that if we could design a study under a low dose, then it would be reasonable to run it, because we were doing exactly what we were asking the subjects in the study to do: namely, to focus on the technical problems of research design (without getting caught up in the beauty and grandeur of the universe), . . . which we did.

We began to run this really gorgeous study with senior research scientists from a number of companies. We told them that we'd assist them in their most pressing technological problem, particularly if they were really stuck. Our criteria for admission was that they had to bring at least three problems that they had spent at least three months on. We had a range of people from the hard sciences, and from theoretical mathematicians to architects. We took them in, four at a time. The mornings were the same as if we were doing a high-dose experience—have them relax, put on eyeshades, listen to music, try not to work on their problems. Then, around noon, we'd pull them out and ask them to work on their various technical problems until around 4:00 p.m. Then we'd let everyone review their work and assess its value and how they approached the problems.

A number of patents emerged out of that study. One of my favorite successes was an architect who had the task of designing a square block in Santa Cruz into a small shopping mall. It was a task with complicated architectural possibilities. At the end of the four hours, as he put it, "I saw the entire structure." He literally had seen it and

walked around in it. It was designed; it existed as a kind of platonic form. For him this was just a total pleasure, because that was not the way he'd ever been able to do a project before.

But all good things come to an end. One morning in 1965, when we had four people doing the first, relaxing part of the experiment, we got a letter saying, in effect, "Hello, this is your federal government. We are now concerned that psychedelics are available, that people are misusing them, that there are bad things happening in the youth culture. We can't, as far as we can tell, do a thing about the problem that is bothering us. But we can stop somebody somewhere, which will make us feel better. So, we've decided this morning to stop all research in the United States." That effectively ended our research.

We did, however, publish those results and there are a number of rather distinguished, very happy scientists who were involved in those studies. One became a vice president of [a major technological corporation], another has won virtually every major scientific award that the computer world offers. The irony of course, is that this was a totally acceptable way to bring psychedelics into the culture. Not only was it acceptable to the culture, it was also acceptable to us as not denying people's spiritual values, because these were problems that people wanted to work on, things that mattered to them. And yet we were asked not only to stop the research, but—as we all know—to try and deny whatever we had already learned, and to keep society as ignorant as we could. We were asked to do this, while millions of people in the culture at large were running around experimenting without knowledge, help, or support.

INT: Given that you'd had such profound experiences yourself, what did you do with your psychedelic vision then?

JF: I really stepped back at that point. I felt more aware of the absurdity of this moment than I felt personally affected, because I was at a place where things didn't affect me much personally; they just happened and I did whatever I needed to do. So I stepped back and thought "Well, what else is available?" So, I tried to make use of my psychedelic vision in a very simple-minded way which was to exhibit whatever I'd learned in my own life.

One of the things I did was begin to work with what became *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, a journal in which different religious and intellectual traditions could come together to talk, not about doctrine, but about experience. It allowed them to cooperate with each other in a way that hadn't previously been possible in either religious or psychological circles.

The *Journal* came out of a meeting at Esalen that we put together with the help of Esalen's founder, Michael Murphy. We brought together the best catholic theologians we could find—the most open, the most liberal, the most scholarly—and a number of us—not outlaws exactly, because there weren't too many laws, but people clearly beyond the fringe. We met for a weekend, and came away with the realization that a bridge between spiritual experience and psychology had to be built.

One model that existed was the humanistic psychology journal and its association. So we began to form something similar, on the basis of friendships. We wrote to all the editorial board of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, and said, “We’re moving on. There is more to the human condition than we have experienced with our humanistic orientation. We don’t quite know where we’re going, but here are some of the things that we’re going to look at . . . Would you like to join us?”

And the editors split, saying either “I have some vague idea of where you’re going and I’ll go with you,” or “Absolutely not.” . . . Rollo May, for example, for various reasons, became a serious enemy of the spiritual, and worked actively against it.

INT: I recently looked through a listing of all the articles in the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology over the years. In the first six or seven years there were a great number of articles addressing the psychedelic issue. Then, for about fourteen years there wasn’t a single article on psychedelics. What happened?

JF: What you had in transpersonal psychology were people who were working with their own transpersonal and psychedelic experiences, and also trying to create and define this branch of psychology. We found that as we expanded, there were more and more people deeply concerned with a variety of aspects of spiritual traditions and how they affected consciousness. . . . The idea of what was transpersonal became much larger, and the explicit role of psychedelics was less important to filling in the puzzle.

People ask, “What is the difference between transpersonal psychology and conventional psychology?” I start by saying “Well, conventional psychology is at least 150 years old, and transpersonal is 45,000 years old.” What we quickly learned was that we were re-discovering things that many peoples had already found. We began to look to the Buddhists and the Tibetans and the Hindus—not only in order to explore our own personal experience, but also to see how a related worldview was discoverable through these much longer and more sophisticated lenses. We began to realize that rather than draw only on our own personal experience, which was initially naïve and wobbly, we could publish articles of incredible depth and sophistication, by drawing on thousands of years of other people’s experiences. . . .

Basically we moved from our own self-congratulatory explorations to a much wider version of the world. Personally, I’ve given lectures and written books on certain religious traditions. Can I find psychedelics in those traditions? Of course. Do I need to mention them? Not particularly. . . .

INT: So now there’s a sense of psychedelics coming out of the closet again. Can you envision a transpersonal medicine that would more directly address psychedelic drug administration?

JF: I think you need to look at the use of psychedelic material in two contexts. One is psychedelic, and the other is entheogenic. The entheogenic context says that religion must be a private act, and that government suppression of private, internal events is fundamentally against humanity. President Clinton, on his first trip to China, said there are certain fundamental human freedoms. In the United States one of these has

been the freedom of religion. That's the entheogenic path, the path that I am totally committed to. I now realize that the government did not just stop my research with that letter halting the creativity study in the next room. What it really did was say "You may not practice your religion, or we will physically imprison you." And that's a rather striking departure from what the United States has historically been about.

The other context—where my dissertation, for example, focused—is the use of psychedelics to help people live better lives by having less neurosis, less psychosis, less fixations, less perversions, and so forth. This is a very different realm, which should be in the hands of the people who historically administer interventions, which here have been called 'medical.'

Now I'm personally a lot more radical, because I recall in the United States around 1830 the laws were that anyone could practice any kind of healing or medicine they wished. If you hurt people you could be sued, but if you didn't hurt people then you wouldn't be sued. I like being free to help people. But now, I am not a licensed psychologist, which means that I cannot legally help people and charge them. But I am a minister, so I can help people from a different angle if I wish. I have that freedom to be helpful.

If I were a psychologist I would have an enormous set of restrictions on how I could help them. If I were a physician I would have a different set of restrictions. I've opted for the religious way, which gives me the maximum freedom to be of maximum use.

INT: Looking in your crystal ball, projecting ahead into the future, do you see a role for psychedelics or entheogens in these religious and healing areas?

JF: Not until we get to the end of this current era. Hopefully, the next wave will not only allow psychedelics in the medical model, and entheogens in the spiritual model, but will really begin to set up structures, which make sense.

For example, there are now two religions coming out of Brazil which have found not only very sensible structures for the use of entheogens, but are remarkably middle class, non socially disruptive, non tear-down-the-foundations-of-society structures. That's what made our actions so difficult in the '60s. It's not that our vision of what the world could be was incorrect. It's that by tearing down the buildings we happened to be standing in, we created a lot of problems. Hopefully that won't happen on this next round.

The nice thing about the desire in the medical profession to alleviate human suffering is that everyone at some point needs to be helped. . . . Medical marijuana is really the camel's nose under the tent here. . . . I think the future is basically bright, in cycles. I find this to be a very terrible time, but from a slightly larger perspective, this is one of those "act two" events. Act one was the Sixties and act two is now when everything gets terrible. But when you work in fiction, you know that act three is where either you have a kind of joyful exuberance of discovery and reunification and the evils get undone, or you have a tragedy. Either one is art, either one can have the same message, which is: No matter how great the darkness, there are still places of light.

This is a call for people who are interested in being bold and brave . . . This is a wonderful time to be a hero, because the forces of darkness are everywhere. . . . I'm aware that there is so much to be done. . . .

INT: Jim what would you say to young people about psychedelics?

JF: I would basically give them my "60s lecture" on set and setting, which is: If you're going to use psychedelics, do it with someone you love, and hopefully someone who's been there before you. . . . What I learned from my own research is that psychedelics take your life experience and compost it, so that something new can grow. If you don't have much experience, you don't get much out of it. I always looked at psychedelics as learning tools. Even in the middle of a psychedelic experience I would begin to think, "I wonder what I'm going to do with this?" In a sense I wanted it to be over so I could start to get to the digestion and assimilation phase, because the psychedelic experience itself wasn't my major interest.

INT: Have you used psychedelics in more recent years? And if so have you found anything useful?

JF: Well, I had a long period in which I didn't use them. Partly again, the problem was set and setting. Making things illegal really doesn't improve it. Most of my work was legal and legitimate, and when I took psychedelics near the end of that period, it was still basically an acceptable thing. . . . In [my] last major psychedelic experience I wanted to explore . . . the question, "Had I lived my life within the framework of this larger vision which I'd had before, and now had again?" It was really like a precursor of the Last Judgment, where they get those scales and they weigh all those dirty things you did and all that groovy stuff you did, and you just watch the scale. . . . Did I make use of what I'd learned in the way that I treated human beings, the way I treated myself, the way I loved, the way I expanded? It was a long self-evaluation session. I could very comfortably, and certainly want to, go to a more directly spiritual space where we bypass all that, but I think what I got out of the experience was a reaffirmation that my personality doesn't hold my interest. It's a good tool; I like it. And it's a tool for the kinds of things I do in the world. But so is my car.

INT: What do you think you would have been like without psychedelics?

JF: Without psychedelics I would have been pretty boring. And I certainly couldn't have maintained a decent marriage. I have a pretty good idea of who I was as a Harvard undergraduate: a silly, smart, clever, sarcastic, childish, arrogant yecchh! I mean, I'm amused by who I was, but I certainly wouldn't have him for dinner. My world was very very tiny, based on having a large vocabulary, a moderately high IQ, and little soul, so little that if you measured it in teaspoons you probably wouldn't have been able to taste me. So, I am very clear that psychedelics are the fundamental resource upon which I have drawn to become a human being.

INT: How would you say that the psychedelic experience in your own life has affected your personal views about aging and death?

JF: Well, those are really two separate questions. So, let's take death, because that's easy. My psychedelic experience has made it very clear that for Jim Fadiman

death is certainly going to end a lot of interesting anecdotal material. And, as Jim Fadiman, I certainly think that's terrible. But as I—this other I—big deal! I have the deep feeling that my personality is like my shirt, and when my shirt gets ragged enough I'll take it off. And there are other shirts. So, death is something that I don't particularly look forward to. But, as someone said, it will cure whatever ails you. . . .

INT: Shifting gears a bit, who do you think should take psychedelics? Say, if it was in your power to design policy?

JF: If it was in my power to design policy I would probably design something the way adult literacy is designed, in which people are given this experience in a good setting, and those who are interested in helping other people are empowered to do so. Certainly it would be very useful for people who are trained in either mental health or physical health to be there as the primary guides, because sometimes there are problems, because these are very powerful and important materials.

I feel very strongly that returning entheogens to the context of a guide relationship, which has been the case in every culture that I have studied, is crucial. The idea that people should go off and trip with people their own age who don't know any more than they do, be they 50 or 20 or 12, has never worked very well, and it certainly doesn't work well in our culture. So if I were the religion czar, the spiritual experience czar, and decreed that people would be allowed to have freedom of religion in the United States of America, I would start by saying that freedom of religion of an entheogenic sort will be done similarly to the way one flies a private plane; you don't start by going up alone. You go up with someone who knows more than you do, and they drive until you're ready.

INT: What advice would you have for those of us who are interested in making psychedelics available for healing or for religious experience?

JF: . . . I feel a combination of admiration and sorrow at the large rock you're pushing up a very steep hill, because when you get it up to the top each time, somebody pushes it down.

In some sense you are in a holding action; you are preventing it from being lost totally. But it's kind of like the Irish monks in the 9th and 10th centuries: You're holding the knowledge until it can be used. If you were allowed to do research I would be much happier for you. I just admire you, really, for being willing to do this work that I clearly have dropped out of, because I was unwilling. That was the only door that was open to you. All the others were closed. I watched them close a number of them in my face, and therefore took some alternative routes to keeping the vision alive: That's the psychiatric side.

On the spiritual side, I am encouraged that people continue to let the divine wind blow through them, however that can be done. And if it's satsang, if it's meditation . . . I find that the national park system, as far as I can see, is a set of absolute cathedrals designed for people to let go of their small self. So, I'm very supportive of the national park system. You know, give me Bryce Canyon, Death Valley, Zion,

Yellowstone. I think that's the one thing that the government has not figured out: how much sedition is created by people falling in love with Nature.

INT: From the long view, are you optimistic?

JF: On the long view, I would say that there is no clear view of history that shows us moving in one positive direction. Socrates is about as good as we get. And we've now had a few thousand years, and there've been no improved models. So, I'm neither optimistic nor pessimistic. If you've been in enough theater what you realize is that the play will go on. But one of the things about correct use of entheogens is that it engenders a core of optimism that no amount of "this world" can defeat. If you look through history with entheogenic eyes, you realize that, since the truth is always available, some people are going to discover it one way or another in every generation. In this generation a lot of us had a chance to discover it.

The potential problem with the transpersonal movement is the same one that confronts every wisdom tradition. Every spiritual tradition that is worth the name has at its origin somebody who had a breakthrough into reality. And when they came back into being their bodies they said, "How am I going to share this with anybody?" Somehow they find a way to do it . . . The religious urge—the need to be part of your whole Self—cannot be repressed any more than the sexual urge. But the expression of it always, inevitably—and I say that without any ill will—gets ossified.

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