

CHAPTER 10. PLACES IN THE MIND

(Alice's voice)

Some form of alteration of consciousness can happen to anyone, anywhere, without warning and having no apparent cause. It could range from an unfamiliar shift in perspective, creating a feeling of disorientation, lasting only a few minutes, to a profound change in perception and comprehension, persisting for days and even weeks. Understandably, most people who find themselves in such a state for the first time tend to get frightened. Their fear and anxiety drive out whatever learning might have been possible if they had known from the beginning that, first, the altered state would be temporary and second, that such an experience does not imply sickness of either mind or body.

Of course, if there are indications of actual mental illness or brain disorder, such as intense headaches, noticeable changes of personality (for instance, episodes of violent behavior in a usually calm person) or other such symptoms well-known to the mental health community, there certainly should be an effort made to contact a psychologist or psychiatrist for an evaluation. But what I am talking about in this chapter is a change in perception and perspective, not in social behavior or the ability to think rationally and logically.

Unfortunately, too many psychiatrists haven't the slightest idea of how best to handle an experience of this kind, which some people call a transformative process. They tend to treat it the way they would treat psychosis (which this is not), and to prescribe tranquilizers or, worse, anti-psychotic drugs. The primary purpose of these drugs is to re-close the doors which have opened — unplanned and unbidden — between the conscious mind and the unconscious.

If the person who is undergoing an episode of this nature has heard of the "Spiritual Emergence Network," (see acknowledgements) he can at least hope to speak to a therapist of some kind (some psychiatrists are available) who will be understanding, reassuring and supportive, and not

treat him as if he's mentally ill.

It is important to add here that whether or not a person experiencing this shift in perspective has ever taken a psychedelic drug in the past, this is *not* what is called a "flashback," and should not be dismissed as such. Genuine flashbacks are described in a later chapter.

As to why these spontaneous shifts in consciousness occur in some people, it seems to me that the human psyche has its own program, tucked away somewhere in what we call the unconscious mind. It has its own unpublished schedule, its own private plans for the learning and psychic stretching that is to be done, and often little, if any, concern about the inconvenience it may cause to have one's customary orientation to the world turned upside down, however temporarily.

Most difficult of all, the unconscious psyche doesn't seem to be interested in letting the conscious mind know what's going on, except in the language of dreams, and that language — when the dream can be remembered at all — is very hard for most people to decipher. Each human psyche has a personal dream language, and it isn't possible to accurately interpret somebody else's dreams without knowing him and his symbolic language intimately.

Although this isn't a book about dream analysis, there are a couple of things you might remember when trying to understand your own dreams. One: except for Big Dreams (as Jung called them) and lucid dreams, most dreams are status quo reports from the unconscious. Two: the important things about dreams are not usually the symbols or images chosen by the unconscious, but the feelings and emotions that pervade the dream. They are the clues to what is being reported. Three: interpretation is easier if you can keep in mind that the unconscious does not censor according to the rules or mores of your culture or religion; its job is to tell you what's going on inside you and what emotions are being felt; the approval or disapproval of your conscious mind is of no concern whatsoever to your unconscious. And finally, four: many people ask, "Why go to the bother of remembering or thinking about your dreams anyway?" One answer is simply, "To keep myself honest about myself." Another, of course, is, "To keep learning about the nature of the human mind."

So, if you are one of those who find themselves trying to deal with a breakthrough of the unconscious psyche into the everyday field of awareness, it is hard to know how to handle it, how to evaluate it, and how to get something positive out of the experience.

I would like to make some suggestions about coping with non-drug related alterations of consciousness. These experiences are not necessarily different from those resulting from psychedelic experimentation, except that the non-drug eruptions can sometimes last several days, while the

psychedelic breakthroughs usually come to an end when the drug is no longer effective.

If you find yourself in one of these states, without having taken a drug shortly beforehand, remember that you're not "stuck;" remind yourself that it will pass, most likely in a few hours; at most, a few days. In the meantime, there are things you can do.

If you have a close friend who is available to stay with you until you are through the experience, call him or her and explain that you've suddenly been plunged into a strange, unfamiliar mental place, and you need the company of somebody who can watch over you with caring, and without being judgemental, since you have no way of predicting how this experience will play itself out, or what you will go through before it comes to an end. You can reassure your friend, however, that you can be depended on to conduct yourself in a way that will not endanger anyone else, and that this kind of altered state does NOT involve psychotic acting out of any kind.

Your friend can help you by cooking simple meals when you're hungry, answering your phone, taking care of your pets, and making sure that you feel safe in your home. And, above all, by listening to what you need to express, and being quietly supportive. Don't expect a friend to interpret anything you're seeing or feeling. That is, and will be, your job — if not immediately, then eventually.

(If you feel that you need more help than a friend can give, in managing this experience while it is going on, or help in understanding it after it is over, you can call the Spiritual Emergence Network, as I mentioned before. And the members of the organization known as Subud — if one is listed in your city directory — are also familiar with this territory, as are many spiritual teachers of all faiths. If you have no access to such people, your nearest public library may offer you the greatest variety of answers. Help can be found in the book, *Spiritual Emergency*, edited by Dr. Stanislav Grof, and Christina Grof, and in the other writings of Dr. Stan Grof. Also of value are the writings of Dr. C.G. Jung, Dr. John W. Perry and Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception*, *Heaven and Hell*, and *Moksha*.)

Whether or not you can find a friend to keep you company for a while, you should — if at all possible — excuse yourself from work (there's always a flu bug around to blame), because changes in your perceptions of space and time, and probably some increased sensitivity to sound, color and emotional fields, might make a normal work day difficult to maintain. Give yourself some quiet and privacy, and a chance to go along with whatever is flowing through you, so that you can learn as much as possible.

Some of us seem more prone to these kinds of breakthroughs than others, and, again, there is no way to know why. However, I tend to believe that the attitude of one's family (and of the society, the culture, in which that

family has its place) toward matters non-physical and non-material may have something to do with it.

In other words, in a country like India, where numerous gods and goddesses are assumed to be involved in human affairs, the possibility of a drift into an altered state could be a lot less frightening to the average person than it would be in this country. Here, generally speaking, the spiritual world is considered either non-existent or safely confined to certain designated buildings, to be dealt with for only one or two hours per week, and even then with a mediator — a priest, minister or rabbi — running interference.

You might also fare better if your family is one in which dreams are often shared, and everyone understands them as being reports from the unconscious. When a child grows up among people who are fascinated — not frightened — by all aspects of the human mind, he stands a good (or at least better than average) chance of being able to get through a sudden, unplanned alteration of his normal consciousness with the least possible degree of anxiety and the maximum amount of learning.

It was at just such a time in my own life that I was told, by a wise old psychologist whom I have called Adam, "What you're going through is a process. All you have to do is not get in its way." He told me to learn everything I could while it lasted, and assured me that it wouldn't last more than a few days. This turned out to be the case, probably due to my unconscious mind having heard Adam's limited-duration prediction, and believing it, or perhaps just deciding it was a good plan to follow.

I would add this to Adam's admonition: take notes. As much as you can, write everything down as it happens; every feeling in body or mind, every concept, every shift of emotion. The notes could be of immense importance to you at some future time. However, the main value of keeping track of your experience, finding words to express what's going on, is that it will help you to assimilate the changes you're undergoing, and put them in perspective.

If you have had feelings of helplessness, of being out of control during your altered state, you'll find that focusing your thoughts on the words and phrases that best describe whatever is going on (it doesn't matter whether you use pen and paper or a tape recorder) will gradually bring back a sense of being in charge of what's happening within you and to you.

Why? Because you are taking input which is coming at you fast and with great intensity — colors, concepts, emotions, a sense of cosmic dimensions within the most ordinary objects, and a continuing sense of immense meaningfulness — and you're attempting to contain it as much as possible. Writing everything down, or talking into a tape recorder, are ways of imposing your own structure on interior chaos, and it will, bit by bit, give

you a sense of participation to replace the feeling of being victimized. It will enable you to let go of fear, and perhaps open yourself to whatever it is that your psyche wants you to discover.

If, for any reason, you cannot or don't want to write or tape, then make use of whatever form of artistic expression you can: clay modeling, painting, anything that will express what you are experiencing and allow you to reshape and restructure it, thus helping you regain some sense of control.

For those who are used to praying, this is a good time to practice whatever you understand is meant by the word "*prayer*," asking your own higher Self — or God or your angel — for support, guidance and blessing.

In time, the shift in consciousness will right itself, and you'll be back to your normal baseline, or at least close enough to it to allow you to function comfortably in the world again. You should emerge from this kind of unexpected stretching of psychic muscles with a feeling of having opened up new dimensions within yourself, and an increased awe at the wealth of information that lies below the conscious mind in all of us. There are treasures of light and treasures of darkness within our souls, all of them wanting to be discovered and explored, and eventually understood.

Alterations of consciousness are inevitable if you are on a spiritual path using psychedelic drugs, visionary plants, or other methods such as, for instance, holotropic breathing, hypnosis or meditation.

You can find yourself (whether you are prepared or not) in a place inside your mind where familiar landmarks are nowhere to be found. Some of these places can infuse you with power and light; others will hold you in terror or sorrow. You must learn your way through each one because only by doing so can you begin to become familiar with the deeper levels of your own psychic interior; it is the only way to begin to understand who and what you are.

The choices you make, in all areas of life, help define who you are, not only as an individual human being, but as a member of your family and community. They form your personality, the part of you which other people know. Beneath this persona, however, is an essence which can never be completely known by another person, and it is the awareness of this core Self that will give you a psychic anchor if you should find yourself in a difficult, disorienting place, somewhere along the way. The core Self is not a personality; it is not a definable, stable *thing*; it is a form of spiritual energy, so it is never still, yet it remains the same. You will always recognize it as yourself, the essence of who you are, and you can seek it out and hold onto it when you're facing interior chaos.

I can only speak with authority about what I know personally. Many, though not all, of my most intense spiritual experiences have been

brought about by the use of psychedelics — visionary drugs and plants. This method of learning has one great advantage: the experience has a beginning, a middle and an end. This means that, no matter how difficult my passage through a particular interior place may be, I know there will be an end to the fear or anxiety. As the effects of the drug wear off, I will find myself inevitably rediscovering my normal life and all the familiar, reassuring ways of being in that life.

The same can be said of the numerous other methods by which a person may pursue a deliberate path of spiritual exploration and learning. Most exercises taught by such methods have a beginning, middle and end, allowing for a predictable return to everyday life and awareness.

Let me take a moment here to say that, of the many inaccurate, uninformed and just plain wrong things that have been said about visionary or psychedelic drugs, the two most often heard are that they are addictive and that they are "escapist."

As to the first untruth, there are no known psychedelic drugs that cause physical dependence or addiction. There are, of course, many people who might be called "addictive personalities," and they tend to become psychologically dependent on any number of things, from food to gambling, but generally speaking, the psychedelics do not cause any kind of addiction or dependency.

As to the claim that the psychedelics are escapist drugs, I can say this: there are, indeed, moments of intense beauty and wonder as well as the occasional burst of laughter to be had during a psychedelic experience, but I have never gone through one that didn't involve some work.

I don't mean to imply that "escaping" is in itself wrong or destructive, if done occasionally and in balance with other aspects of one's life. After all, listening to music can be called escape; so can watching television, making love, reading a book, or taking a walk under the stars. All these can be thought of as escapes, especially if your view of life and what you call reality is generally grim and sour.

The young college-age psychedelic users who take drugs at rave dances might be said to be using them for escape, rather than for psychological or spiritual work. This is certainly not the highest and best use of these drugs, in the opinion of some. I'm not so sure. For many of the dancers at a rave, the combination of trance-inducing music and a (usually) low dose of MDMA, for instance, or LSD, creates an emotional openness and a sense of psychic participation with their fellow dancers. They sometimes experience a degree of euphoria which is absolutely unknown in their everyday lives. There is some question as to whether this state is induced as much by the trance-dancing as by any drugs they might have taken, but whether it is or not, I believe that euphoria is good for you, especially when it is achieved at no cost or pain to anyone else.

Most of the dancers at rave parties have spent a good part of their lives living in big cities, and they are not used to trusting or feeling affection towards strangers. In fact, life in most of the world's big cities, as a rule, demands continual caution and suspicion when one is outside the home. For some of these young adults, the only time they can let anxiety and fear of the stranger drop away is at a rave. There, they can experience trusting fellowship with many others, in a dancing situation which threatens no one and can, instead, open their hearts and give them a feeling of pleasure, companionship and hope.

As far as I'm concerned, none of this adds up to a threat to society.

Psychedelic exploration, for me, has always meant working, trying to come to terms with some aspect of my interior universe that makes me uncomfortable; dealing with insights into my own past or present behavior which may be disturbing; trying to dig out answers to basic questions about the nature of the world, the cosmos and whatever it is we call God. I have had well over a thousand exposures to these particular chemical tools. Escape is precisely what they have never given me, and my return to consensual reality — so-called ordinary life — has always been a pleasure, no matter how positive the psychedelic experience. But, then, I am blessed in having a good life to return to. For those whose everyday lives are not happy or fulfilling, the psychedelic experience can serve to renew their sense of meaningfulness and put them back in touch with wonder and joy.

INFLATION

(THE PRIESTESS)

I can still remember vividly the day I stepped into the inflation place. Shura and I were home on the Farm, and most of the research group was with us; only Dante and Ginger were absent. The experimental material was 2C-T-8, (which is short for 2,5-dimethoxy-4-cyclopropylmethylthiophenethylamine), and I had taken 42 milligrams about half an hour before. In previous trials, I had taken 35 mgs. and 40 mgs. and found it generally friendly.

(For most researchers, this material was not one of the great favorites; a few reported having had a hard time with it, but it hadn't given me any particular difficulties before the time of this experiment, aside from dampening erotic response in both Shura and me. One researcher loved it, since under its influence she produced more expressive and dynamic paintings than usual.)

This may be the moment to emphasize that the drug or visionary plant does not, in itself, contain any particular experience; each psychedelic

drug simply makes it possible to open interior doors through which that experience might emerge. The doors opened by DMT tend to be quite different than those opened by mescaline, for instance, but once you are through those doors, what you encounter is part of yourself.

Our group had already gone through the ceremony of gathering in a circle, clinking glasses and blessing each other, and each of us had wandered off to find the right place in which to ride out the transition phase.

Ruth and George were on the couch, holding hands, as they often did during this stage, especially with a drug that was new to them. John was moving slowly through the house, hands in his pockets, peering at book covers, pausing to look at a bunch of daffodils in a vase. I found David seated at the dining room table, talking to Shura about their favorite subject and mutual passion — chemistry — and I saw through the dining room windows that Leah and Ben were heading down the path which leads to the old cow barn, their fingers interlaced.

Having walked through the house long enough to reassure myself that nobody was having problems, I did what I usually prefer to do during transition, whether the drug is an old friend or a new one: I looked for a place to be by myself.

I stepped outside and closed the front door quietly behind me. The air was fresh and sweet, tasting the way it does only in early spring. I walked down the short dirt path to what we call the barbecue patio, a half-circle paved with red bricks, set against a slope planted with ivy and geraniums. On the low brick wall at the bottom of the slope, I found myself a place, brushed a few twigs and leaves off the surface and sat down. Before me was a wide view of hills, still green after the winter rains, dotted with live oak trees. Looking beyond the hills, to the north, I could see the faint brown line of a fog-blurred horizon and, above it, the pale blue of the sky.

I straightened my back briefly, stretched both arms skyward, and relaxed again into a comfortable slump.

Well, no question; I'm feeling it. Lots of body energy; foot wants to tap. Whole body wants to tap! Okay, though, so far.

I reached into a pocket of my long grey-blue caftan, brought out a pack of cigarettes, and lit one. I kept my gaze focused on the curve of hill across the highway from us, where a large cluster of trees glowed like dark sculpture against a background of bright green.

Better appreciate that color while we still have it; any moment now, the yellowing of the grass will begin, and after a while it'll be hard to remember how beautiful the hills were in spring.

The sensation was on me before I had a chance to track it from its beginning as a burst of euphoria, deep in the gut. Suddenly it was there, radiating through every cell — pure power; I was sitting upright on a low

brick wall, energy pouring into me, filling me. It brought with it a quieting of the desire to move around, tap feet, squirm on my ledge. The energy pulsed softly, and all of me was open to it.

I was full of strength and knowing, infinitely wise.

I sat quietly, radiating light and energy, noticing that, although my mind was suffused with something you'd have to call intense pleasure, each thought was distinct and clear; there was no confusion anywhere in my head, just as there was no illness or weakness within my body.

Oh, my everlovin' God! This is what's meant by a bliss state. I'm a body of energy; my mind is like crystal; there's no question in the universe that I can't find the answer to. All I need in the world is myself, living in this serene rhythm, filled with livingness and knowledge.

A tiny concern nibbled at the edge of the magnificence. What if somebody came out here to join me? Or even just to make sure I was all right?

Don't want to scare people; I know anyone else coming out here would feel this power; it's too strong to be hidden. I'll have to gentle it out, somehow, if somebody turns up. Maybe I'll be lucky and no one will come.

An image rose in my mind; it was the one and only thing I had left out of the description in PIHKAL of my first real psychedelic experience — with peyote — around thirty years earlier. I had considered including it, but somehow it just didn't get written, and I had finally acknowledged to myself that it still, after all this time, made me uncomfortable because it remained part of my dark side, and I still needed to keep an eye on it occasionally, especially during psychedelic sessions.

It had risen suddenly, clear on the mind's screen, during the early hours of the peyote day, while Sam Golding and I had been lying side by side on my bed. A few minutes before, we had both slipped into the full magic of the peyote world, and as I turned my head to say something to Sam, I saw an image of myself, seated on a throne, dressed in long robes — there was an impression of purple and blue — with a circlet of gold around my head. I was The Priestess, full of knowledge and power, seated above the rest of humanity, dispensing wisdom. It was a picture of supreme intellectual and spiritual arrogance, and although it was visible for only a few seconds, I had taken it as a warning: this was an aspect of myself that I had to keep under control.

Now, here I was, blazing with the fullness of this form of myself, knowing I needed nothing else and nobody else, and that I could continue being utterly sufficient unto myself — should I choose to stay in this place, in this state. I was complete.

That's inflation. That's what my Priestess is. I disliked it — no, I hated it — all those years ago. I was ashamed of it. And now, here it is, here I am. I am

SHE, and the sense of wholeness, of utter fulfillment, is the most wonderful, delicious—I wonder if I can stay here forever, just basking, thrumming, swimming in this ocean of energy, my mind diamond dear.

Somewhere, in the midst of the glory, a dialogue began. A part of me detached itself sufficiently from the radiance to ask questions and listen for answers from yet another part.

Q. What can possibly be negative about this place, this state?

A. Nothing. It's absolute heaven.

Q. Then why is there a faint uneasiness?

A. Because the Priestess is not what I've chosen to be.

Q. Why not?

A. Because she would have no use for anyone else in the world.

Q. What's wrong with that?

A. I prefer the version of me that likes people, interacts with the world, makes love with Shura; the one that mothers my kids.

This Priestess just isn't the person I want to become in this life. But, boy, does it feel GOOD! What a fantastic place to be in, even if only for a moment, and maybe only once; being a superhuman force, barely contained in a human body, does damn well have its points!

Q. So what are you going to do?

A. I'm going to get out of the Priestess.

Q. And you won't regret leaving all this behind?

A. Yes, I'll regret it, and I hope I can feel it again, just for a little while, perhaps. But it's pretty good, really, just being the usual me. And I enjoy relating to people, being a friend. I love Shura, and my children, and they like me being human.

Q. So we let the Priestess go. Goodbye, then, Great and Wonderful Lady! Hope to see you again, someday.

Now that the decision had been surely and firmly made, I was able to immerse myself in what was left of the euphoria, the energy, for a few minutes before there came a gradual softening of the image, a subtle, slow washing out of the magnificent state, like a vibrant watercolor painting being held under a fine misting spray.

Finally, feeling glowing streamers of the Priestess still clinging to my soul, I stood up and walked slowly toward the house, to reconnect with Shura and our friends.

Looking back on that day, the obvious question comes to mind: what would have happened if I had chosen to stay in the Priestess? I suspect that, within the hour, I would have found myself coming down, drifting out of that place, eventually understanding that I could not stay there forever.

In the meantime, of course, I might well have acted out of that archetype, to the considerable disturbance of the rest of the group—making pronouncements, delivering eternal truths, exercising my power and wis-

dom, and generally making an ass of myself. Even if I had experienced an hour or two of genuine inspiration, the expression of it would probably have caused no less discomfort to those around me. Playing the part of a seer — even for only a few minutes — isn't exactly the way to encourage your friends to feel relaxed and intimate in your company.

The Priest or Priestess is an archetype within the human unconscious, and I believe it's essential that it be experienced and worked through by anyone who wants to know all he can about the nature of his (and everybody else's) mind and psyche. The value of working through it is in the fact that it forces you to face the temptation, the seductiveness of that aspect of yourself. In gaining familiarity with it, you begin to understand, by contrast, the validity and value of the "normal," non-inflated personality you have developed throughout your life. This is the version of you that interacts and relates and listens to others, and admits to occasional mistakes, just like everyone else; the person you have chosen to be, who doesn't like arrogance in others, and certainly doesn't want to see it in her- or himself.

By "working through," I mean simply letting yourself go fully into the experience, enjoying the sense of power and wisdom and complete self-sufficiency. Resonate with it, let it fill you with its energy. If possible, go to some place where you can be alone; resist the temptation to communicate with others during the height of this marvelous state. Stay alone. After you've spent a bit of time enjoying the sensations and feelings, let yourself begin to pay attention to your Observer, the part of you that watches and keeps track and learns, but doesn't get swept away by feelings or emotions. This aspect of yourself will help to ground you, in the midst of the euphoria.

Recognize that this illuminated, powerful, totally self-sufficient being which you have become is valid, but it is only one version of yourself, and it is not what you have chosen to be in your everyday life.

Stay in the inflation place for a while, by yourself, then let it gradually subside. Understand that, seductive as it might feel, it cannot replace your usual, normal self, the one that has relationships, the one that is a social being, a friend, a sibling, a parent.

CERTAINTY AND KNOWING

Absolute certainty, a feeling of knowing without any doubt what is true and not true about some particular thing, is a common experience to all adults. It's part of living, and ideally results from a process of questioning, testing, evaluating and eventually confirming.

The same feeling of absolute certainty, of complete conviction that your view of something (or everything, for that matter) is the ultimate truth, can and often does happen when you're under the influence of a psychedelic drug. It can be part of a state of inflation, as I've described above, or

it might be just a momentary burst of enthusiastic self-validation.

There is a real problem associated with this sense of "knowing," when it is part of a psychedelic experiment. It feels good (certainty usually feels good), but the trouble is that it also feels, at the time, like a genuine experience of Truth. Your soul has no doubt at all; there is no question that your evaluation of whatever it is you feel certain about fills you with a sense of absolute "lightness."

If it remains a feeling and only a feeling, it can be enjoyable — like any other aspect of inflation — and will do no harm. If you act on it, however, you might find yourself saying things to those around you (for instance, analyzing the personalities of your friends) which you may regret intensely several hours later, when the inflation-certainty wears off with the drug effect.

The rule has to be: under the influence of a drug, do not make a phone call, do not write a letter and mail it, do not make pronouncements about anything at all. Enjoy the feeling, and tell others around you that you are experiencing a delicious inflation, then either leave the company of your friends until the all-knowingness begins to mellow out, or stay with them and just keep your mouth shut and your strong, wise opinions to yourself. You will be deeply grateful later.

Now, here comes the really hard question. How can you know if your certainty about something, during a psychedelic session, is or is not actually valid? Can you ever trust that certainty, that absolute knowing? The only reasonable answer I can give is this: wait until you wake up the next morning, presumably at baseline, and review the certainties of the day before. If you have, indeed, arrived at some solid truths, or some new (to you) concepts that have validity, they will have lasted through the night, and you will be able to enjoy them all over again in the morning, only this time without the inflation, and presumably with your normal common sense and humor restored.

THE VOID

This is one of the terrible places. While it takes different forms for each person, the essentials of the experience tend to be the same. I call it the Void, because it involves facing a total loss of any sense of meaning. If it comes to you as part of a psychedelic experiment, you're lucky, because it should pass within a relatively short time. If you are in the company of other experienced travelers, someone else is sure to be familiar with it and can help you make your way through. If it happens spontaneously — without any drug use — as it sometimes does out of the blue, it is not only extremely frightening, it might lead to suicidal impulses in a sensitive person because

whoever finds himself in this particular place is always convinced, at least temporarily, that what he is seeing and feeling is the basic truth about the world he lives in and the cosmos at large; that all life is absolutely meaningless.

This state of mind, if not drug-induced, is usually seen by the medical profession as a form of acute depression. If it persists beyond one day, and if there appears to be no progression towards some kind of resolution — a way out, a return to color and light — you should seek psychiatric help as soon as possible, because there are medications that will bring you back to normalcy. Keep in mind that acute depression is most probably the result of chemical imbalance in the brain, and can be treated.

If you have taken a psychedelic or visionary drug and find yourself in the Void (which has also been called the Sorrow Place or the Valley of the Shadow of Death) where everything feels gray, dirty and senseless, and the only emotions you experience are sorrow and total hopelessness, you must remember: it is *not* the final truth about the universe you live in; it's a genuine part of what is, but only a small part. It is no more the complete truth about life than Adolf Hitler and Vlad the Destroyer are the complete truth about the nature of the human race.

The second thing to remember is that you have no obligation to stay in this dark place. You have to know that it exists, and you should get the smell of it, for this reason, among others: a large number of people all over the world find themselves, perhaps for days, but sometimes for years, stuck in that hopeless, meaningless state, with no mental health professional or spiritual advisor available. You might find yourself able to be of help to some of them, if you know the territory and have found your way out of it.

One way to get free of this place is by focusing intently on certain images: perhaps the Laughing Buddha, or your favorite mental picture of Jesus the Christ, newborn babies being welcomed and adored by their parents, your own loving of your mate or your children, the music you like to hear, the deep pleasures of planting and harvesting, or whatever else you can remember of the beauty and joy in life. Concentrate on one of these, or let all of them parade through your mind, to the exclusion of everything else. See them clearly, your chosen good images, give them power by saying Yes to them, with all of yourself; let them radiate light within you. The Void, the hopeless place, will begin to disintegrate, color will gradually replace the dull grey, and meaningfulness will return.

Everybody's definition of "meaning," or "meaningfulness," is a bit different. My own is this: "meaningfulness" is the sense that everything that exists has a purpose, that there is a great story being told throughout the universe, and that each of us — along with every other form of life — is playing an important part in that story.

PARANOIA

This unpleasant state often strikes people who experiment with marijuana; some (myself among them) do not outgrow this particular effect of the plant, and simply have to avoid exposing themselves to it. However, it can occur with any psychedelic or visionary drug. A single experience of paranoia under these circumstances can be of great value to you. For one thing, to be rather obvious about it, you'll know first-hand what is meant by paranoid thinking. You'll probably emerge from the drug effect with a greater understanding of what is called psychological "projection," and — ideally — an increased interest in understanding the deep-seated reasons for the shift that your mind took into distrust and suspicion.

If you find yourself feeling paranoid during a psychedelic experience, whether the drug involved is marijuana or something else, there are certain things to keep in mind. First, if you are seeing menace or hatred in the faces of people you know and love, try to activate your Observer, the part of you that watches, learns, and evaluates without emotion (although it does, at times, have a subtle sense of humor). The Observer is always present; remember it's there for you to use, and you must call it in. It should tell you something like this: "You have taken a drug, and it's changing your perceptions. Don't get trapped in this negativity and distrust. It's a part of your psyche, it's an aspect of your Survivor — the corner of your soul that assumes it's still living in the jungle, and senses danger everywhere — and what you're seeing has nothing to do with the truth about your friends or how they feel toward you; it has to do with projections from deep within your unconscious mind. Just ride It out, and it'll fade in a while."

Naming the state as paranoia does help you regain objectivity. No matter what drug you've taken, you may simply have to wait until it wears off, remembering not to act on the suspicion and fearfulness, reminding yourself continually that it's all the effect of a drug which is not friendly to you, and which you may not want to experiment with again. Also, consider the possibility that you are experiencing a one-time-only (it is to be hoped) exposure to a certain potential within all human beings to see their surroundings as dangerous.

If you are perceiving hostility in faces looking at you, or words said to you, remember that the perceived anger or disapproval — whether you feel it coming from people or trees or, for that matter, the sky — is a projection upon the outside world of negative judgements made upon yourself, tucked away in the unconscious mind. In other words, some part of you has learned, probably in childhood, to regard yourself as undesirable, bad, worthy of punishment, or worse. This is what you are seeing in the hostile faces of your friends or the menacing plants in your garden: a projection of the feelings of that judge and jury you have residing deep

inside you.

Allow the paranoia to become a teaching about that part of your psyche and, when the drug session is over, discuss with others what you experienced. If the feeling of paranoia disturbed you with its intensity, perhaps consider going into therapy, if you can, to dig up that self-destructive unconscious programming and to consciously put it to rest.

SELF-HATRED

For certain psychedelic explorers, there seems to be an early stage during which the overwhelming sense is one of self-rejection; in some cases, the strength of the negativity can be extreme enough for it to be called self-hatred. For these people, it can happen with a number of psychedelics, though seldom with all, and is usually part of the transition phase (from ingestion to full effect).

Again — as with paranoid thinking — self-observation and simple logic can help get you through it. Your Observer should be able to tell you (if you'll listen), that this kind of focus on only the warts, only the failures and inadequacies, is not coming from a perspective of balance and fairness, but from some part of you that has been programmed — probably by parents, peers, or other authority figures in your childhood — to make harsh and unforgiving judgements of yourself.

The question you must ask yourself, persistently, is: would I judge a good friend with this much implacable negativity? And if I wouldn't pass sentence on a dear friend this way, why am I doing it to myself? Where is compassion, understanding, patience, and just plain love? Don't I deserve as much of these as any friend of mine?

Watch and listen to the words and phrases you're using against yourself, and ask just where this hostility could have come from. Where did you learn it, and how can you supplant it with love, humor and tolerance for yourself?

In most psychedelic sessions, this stage passes within the first hour, and what takes its place is usually a mellow, good-humored self-acceptance. But it is because of the possibility of an eruption of childhood-programmed self-condemnation, or its cousin, paranoia, that your first experiment with a new (to you) psychedelic drug should always be in the company of an experienced guide, usually called a "babysitter." There should be someone present who can spot trouble and move in with sympathy and common-sense, to diffuse the potentially damaging self-rejection.

And by "potentially damaging," I mean that, in the case of self-hatred, if it is overwhelming and intense enough, and the researcher is not experienced, there can be an impulse to self-destruction. The damaged self-

image is believed to be the ultimate truth, and no human being can tolerate living with an image of himself that is everything he hates and loathes.

Suicide is not liable to be a threat in the case of a person who is experienced with various psychedelics, because he's already gone through some version of this self-rejection and he's probably done some insight work and has come to understand this kind of eruption of self-loathing. It happens, in one form or another, to many people who experiment with psychedelics. The experienced traveler is certain, or has a pretty good idea, where the negative program originated, and he knows that it isn't even remotely the real nature of his soul. Experience has taught him that, if he gives himself whatever compassion he can and a little time, the dark state of self-hatred will dissipate and he'll find himself where he wants to be, possessed again of a sense of balance and humor and love for the totality of who and what he is.

The value of going through this horrible place is in coming face to face with childhood conditioning which has remained unconscious until opened up by the drug. Only when you are forced to acknowledge what you've been taught to believe about yourself, (almost always by parents and almost always unwittingly), can you begin the work necessary to the eventual transformation of your inner Beast into a Prince or Princess.

THE OCEANIC EXPERIENCE

This is also known as *participation mystique* in the words of the great Mircea Eliade. It's as hard to find the right name for this state as it is to do it justice in words. For the serious explorer, it's usually one of the first places he'll find within himself. This experience will probably make a permanent change in his way of seeing his world, particularly his natural surroundings. I've discovered recently that I'm not the only psychedelic traveler who takes for granted that the beginning of the modern ecological awareness movement was not in Rachel Carson's important, ground-breaking book, *Silent Spring*, but in the psychedelic experimentation of the 1960's.

Young people who take psychedelic drugs solely for the purpose of partying and dancing at raves may indeed experience some of the heart-openness and warmth of feeling, empathy with others, and visual fun and games associated with some of these drugs, but they might not undergo the oceanic experience in its fullest, most complete form. For that place to open, it seems best to have quietness, both inside and outside, and to be in natural surroundings. However, there are no firm rules about the human psyche; if it is time for the oceanic experience to happen, it will happen, no matter where one is.

This state is characterized by a sense of connection — emotionally and spiritually — with all other living things, including the body of the

planet itself. It is a place of exquisite joy; you feel immense gratitude for being alive and able to participate in an extraordinary natural system which is suffused with wisdom and an all-encompassing love. All plants, animals and insects appear as contributors to an immense tapestry of life, of which you yourself are a treasured and essential part.

There is a rare (at least, among the people I know) and more profound form of this experience which may involve you first in sorrow, before you are healed by joy and love. The sorrow is that of all living things caught in pain, fear and loss, everywhere in the world, and you will find yourself participating in their emotions, feeling what they feel, while simultaneously experiencing your own agonizing pity and compassion. After being in this place for a time, you will begin to be aware of an immense, boundless love permeating everything that exists, and with it, a growing sense of joy/euphoria/bliss. This bliss state does not negate the suffering you have participated in; it includes and contains it. You may find yourself on a cosmic knife-edge, with your soul balancing between vast, deep darkness on one side and an infinite stretch of light on the other. It is here, I believe, on this knife-edge inside us, that laughter is born.

One of the lasting effects of this experience is a sense of the livingness of everything around you, the *dearness* and even sacredness of all forms of life, including those you have never personally liked, and an abiding respect for them and their right to exist alongside you on the Earth.

The oceanic experience has happened upon people unexpectedly, without the aid of drugs or any other tools, probably from the beginning of our species. It is a deeply spiritual alteration of consciousness, and I have never heard or read of anyone who has regarded it as other than a priceless gift, even when it has happened without warning or anticipation. The poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay, described the more complete form of it in her superb poem, "Renaissance." Here are three brief passages from different parts of a very long work:

"...I saw and heard, and knew at last
The How and Why of all things, past,
And present, and forevermore.
The universe, cleft to the core,
Lay open to my probing sense...

"No hurt I did not feel, no death
That was not mine; mine each last breath
That, crying, met an answering cry
From the compassion that was I...

"The world stands out on either side
 No wider than the heart is wide;
 Above the world is stretched the sky,
 No higher than the soul is high.
 The heart can push the sea and land
 Farther away on either hand;
 The soul can split the sky in two,
 And let the face of God shine through..."

I believe that it is impossible for a person who has found himself in this place of the soul to ever again think of a tree as just another "crop;" to deliberately set out to kill *a* wild animal without sending to that animal a conscious thought of respect and regret at having to take its life; to consider building a house without first listening to the sounds of insects and birds and the rustling of small ground animals in the field he is planning to invade.

To such a person, the news of the extinction of yet another species of animal or plant — however inevitable — brings a wave of regret bordering on sorrow. He knows that species have been born and later extinguished countless times in the history of this planet, long before man came along to accelerate the process, but he feels the loss as he would the death of a fascinating acquaintance whom he had hoped to get to know more intimately.

The person who has been in this place knows to his marrow that he is part of nature, not separate from it, and that the Earth itself, the great body beneath our feet, is a living entity with a consciousness all its own, of a kind far different from anything that can be understood intellectually. He has felt the edges of that planet-consciousness, so he knows that some part of his psyche is connected to it, and that this is true of every living thing in the world.

If you find yourself opening to this experience, whether it begins with suffering or goes directly to love and bliss, you will not need your Observer at all, because the entire process is a gift of Grace, and you will recognize it as such by the time it ends.

SYNAESTHESIA

For people who experiment with psychedelics, this can be one of the most impressive and enjoyable aspects of the experience. The definition of synaesthesia in one dictionary is: "A sensation produced in one modality when a stimulus is applied to another, as when the hearing of a certain sound induces the visualization of a certain color." Under the influence of

most psychedelic drugs, not only can music present itself to the listener in all shades of color, in all degrees of brightness and subtlety, but the reverse can also be true; colors can translate themselves into sound. There are sometimes such exotic interpretive changes as feeling emotions as textures, and intellectual concepts as three-dimensional shapes. Synaesthesia sometimes occurs in dreams, without any drug having been involved. It is something that all human minds do, usually unconsciously, and synaesthesia underlies all forms of creativity. Poets, artists and musicians may have experiences of synaesthesia while they are focusing intently on their work, probably because the creative experience usually involves an alteration of consciousness, a trance state. The taking of a psychedelic or visionary plant simply makes this interweaving of sensory modalities apparent to the conscious mind.

Many years ago, shortly before the birth of my first daughter, I had a Big Dream (the kind that C. G. Jung defined as a powerful, impactful dream which awakens the dreamer when it ends, and stays in memory for a long time, often for life). In my dream, I was standing in a garden, looking up at a tall, slender golden column. At its top, the column flared out to become a shallow bowl. Within that bowl I could see what I knew to be flower-fruits; round, succulent fruits with red, coral and purple colors, which were also, simultaneously, flowers. There was no division or difference between the two expressions of the plant; they were flower-fruits. To put this image in context, the rest of the dream involved my about-to-be-born daughter, who appeared as a young woman named Ann (which I of course named her when she arrived). The entire dream was vivid, detailed and extraordinary, but my amazement — when I woke up — was at the ability of my dreaming mind to accept without difficulty the merging of two states of plant life, flower and fruit, which is exceedingly hard to do when awake.

It is possible to get the intellectual *concept* of such a merging when one is awake, but only in a symbolic sense. In the dream — as in a psychedelic state — the experience is that *offeeling* the two as one entity.

The degree to which synaesthesia is experienced under the influence of a psychedelic depends on the nature of the drug, the dosage level at which the drug is taken, and finally, the receptivity and curiosity of the user; if he is inclined to explore new dimensions of his interior world, he will pay more attention to unusual and unexpected juxtapositions which may occur when his unconscious mind has the freedom to play these kinds of games with sensory input.

Here are a few excerpts from a letter written by a gentleman named DanJoy:

"Synaesthesia is rich, resonant and meaningful. And it is

everywhere. In cartoons, you have the wiggly lines signifying motions or the lines splaying out from a trumpet, signifying its blast, sometimes accompanied by little musical notes... Drug experiences and phenomena are inseparable from the matrix/spectrum of human mental, sensory, perceptual, cognitive, etc., experience — *not a* distinct, self-contained cluster of anomalies. The vocabularies used for the different sensory modalities overlap, revealing an underlying synaesthetic sense in our language. For instance, both sounds and colors have 'tones' and 'overtones,' as do emotions; sonic tones, like color-spectral ones, can be 'bright' or 'dark;' sound tones can be 'high' or 'low,' language which synaesthetically connects them also to the kinesthetic and visual-spatial sensoria. It is known that *smells* vividly awaken the full sensory spectrum of memory, synaesthetically inclusive of visual, auditory and emotional aspects. All the 'separate' sensory channels, after all, feed into the same brain."

Synaesthesia produces a sense of *pleasure* in everyone I know who has experienced it. The human psyche seems to enjoy this melding of the senses. There are some people in this world who live with synaesthesia all the time; they apparently consider themselves among the luckiest human beings on the planet. I'm sure there are synaesthetic experiences which are dark and frightening, perhaps in nightmares or certain schizophrenic states, but I have never personally heard or read of such negative kinds of synaesthesia. For me, this is a place of great enjoyment and soul-satisfaction. Furthermore, it gives rise to a multitude of questions about the nature of the reality we perceive, or think we perceive, and the workings of our brains, minds and souls.

LAUGHTER

Anybody who has enjoyed marijuana has had the giggles, and — since for most users marijuana is a social drug — he has probably been through one of those hilarious sessions where everything seemed tremendously funny to everyone involved, and people were laughing about the smallest, silliest remarks or events until they were gasping for breath. Marijuana is famous for inducing this kind of hilarity, but it can happen to users of other psychedelic drugs, particularly psilocybin, and often does. It may have something to do with the release of the usual social constraints which hinder most adults — at least in our western culture — in their

expression of a good many of their feelings. Under the influence of these drugs, not only are repressed sorrows and angers sometimes released, so is humor and laughter.

Most of us have a lot of laughter inside us, but after childhood, we in the West learn to keep it to ourselves a good deal of the time. We let it loose — along with our sense of the ridiculous — when we've had some drinks which relax us, or a psychedelic which can serve the same purpose. And no matter how silly it may seem in retrospect, a bout of real laughter can strengthen the immune system, among many other good things, and should be treasured.

The question always comes up, eventually: what is laughter? It's a strange, choppy, spasmodic physical response to humor. So what is humor? A baby, when startled by a clown doll popping out of a box, will cry. The older child learns to suppress the startle response in favor of allowing something new and interesting into her world; she laughs and reaches out to grab the clown, to feel it and chew on it. Laughter, in child or adult, sometimes seems to be the result of this very rapid shuttling between fear and pleasure, or Yes and No.

But there are many kinds of laughter: bitter, sarcastic and cruel, as well as joyful and celebratory. The physical response may be basically the same, but the emotions that give rise to dark laughter are despair and anger, or simply the need to assert power and control. When we talk about "humor," or "laughter," most of us are thinking of that explosion of champagne bubbles that rises through stomach and chest, triggering an irresistible urge to open the throat and mouth and emit the odd staccato sound that expresses our pleasure.

The Laughing Buddha is an archetype, an illustration of what it is to stand on the knife-edge between Dark and Light, Death and Life, and to survey the universe from there. This is cosmic laughter, half pain and half bliss. One doesn't have to be a Buddha to know that place; it's inside every one of us mortals, and all that's needed is the willingness to open the door and step through.

THE BETH STATE

Shura's name for this rare place is the Beth state, but it could also be thought of as a long-lasting threshold. We have experienced it only with a drug called Aleph-7, and Shura often wonders if it is exclusively a property of that particular material. Or, to put it more accurately, perhaps Aleph-7 is the only drug that opens that particular door in the psyche. And then again, perhaps there are others we don't know about.

His notes include the following: "Slow start at one hour, quiet.

Walking feels strange at three hours and twenty minutes; a feeling of something impending, but there are no handles, no way to place the intoxication. At four and a half hours, transition to a more familiar altered state, quite pleasant. The previous hour or so not unpleasant, just without definition."

In summary, the Beth state is one in which you are aware of being in an altered state of consciousness, but you can't pin down exactly how you know, since there are no visual changes, no emotional stimulation, no colorful patterns appearing in the mind, no nuthin'. And there it stays, and there you stay, for three to four hours. At least, that is the case with Aleph-7. It must be remembered, though, that if any single drug can elicit such a response as the Beth state, it means that the capacity for experiencing the Beth, for finding oneself in such a place, is intrinsic to the human mind. The only negative that could possibly be associated with the Beth place is the fear of dying of boredom.

FLOODING

This can be one of the consequences of taking too high a dose of a psychedelic drug. It can also happen at a perfectly reasonable dosage level, but it is far less likely. You find yourself bombarded by a torrent of images, concepts and connections, all coming at you from your friendly neighborhood cosmos. The details of the experience will vary, of course, with every person who finds himself in this particular place in the mind, but the general feeling is one of being flooded by meaningful connections between everything in the universe and everything else. An experienced traveler, knowing that this, too, will pass, might manage to relax and enjoy the complexities of the onslaught, but to the naive experimenter, it can be overwhelming. The ego, the sense of core identity, might be hard to maintain; the sense of Self might be lost in the roaring noise of continual, intense input.

If you find yourself in this state, remember first of all that it's temporary. If you find it impossible to relax and swim with the roaring river, or simply need to recover your sense of identity and a bit more control over the experience, open your eyes (if you had them closed), then stand up and, start moving around, trying your best to focus on what your body is doing. Watch yourself walking, and talk to yourself, using your Observer to remind you of who you are, what your immediate situation is, and what you are attempting to do. Something like this might result: "I am Jacob Smith, I took so-and-so milligrams of Whatchamacallit approximately an hour and a half ago; I'm being flooded by too much information and I am attempting to get grounded by having this silly conversation with myself."

If you can manage to see humor in anything you're experiencing,

and especially if you can smile or laugh at yourself, you've won your battle. You may have hours of relative unease and mental overload still ahead of you, but if you can feel even the slightest little spurt of humor, you've recaptured the thread that will lead you back to your Self. When you can feel your own presence, when you can say to yourself, "I'm here, I'm ME," (never mind good grammar) your fear of dissolving into your surroundings, of losing track of your own existence, will gradually subside.

What you should be aiming for in such an experience is this: maintaining your sense of identity, your knowledge that you are a being distinct from other beings and from the world that surrounds you, while allowing the images and concepts and energies that are bombarding you to be what they are, to go where they are going, to flow through you and past you. After a while, everything will begin to soften and quiet, and the crashing flood of information will eventually become a trickle. One of the things you may be left with from this experience will be a new appreciation of what it means to live your life with a goal, a focus, an intent of some kind to help channel your energies and thoughts.

There's been much written over the years about the spiritual benefits of having your ego dissolve, of becoming part of the cosmos, of losing your sense of Self and experiencing the River of Life, the flow of universal spiritual energies, without the encumbrance of that separate identity, that "Me and I" thing, that terrible Ego, so beloved of individuals in the Western world.

I'm not comfortable with the way that concept is usually stated. For one thing, whose definition of "Ego" is being used? If what is meant is the "persona," the social face that all of us develop — and sometimes mistake for the real person inside — then yes, I couldn't agree more; anyone who wants to develop as a human being, as a soul, must be able to let the persona drop away at will.

But the Self, the core of you, the kernel of continually moving energy that is your essence, is not a burden. It's a piece of God, as tiny as a molecule and as large as infinity. It isn't necessary, I believe, to lose touch with it, in order to have the experience of dissolving into the stream of life; it should be your anchor, the place from which you launch into the interior cosmos, and the place to which you return.

There's a difference between an experience of overload or flooding, and one of mystical participation. Your instincts tell you when it's overload; you feel under attack, overwhelmed by too much, too much, and unable to learn anything of value (except, of course, that your dosage level of the drug was probably too high).

On the other hand, the experience of mystical participation, the oceanic experience — whatever you choose to call it — comes as a natural

unfolding of the soul, deep and sweet, and often unaccountably familiar.

Again, and yet again, the experience that I call flooding is another reminder of why experienced researchers in the area of psychedelics always try to have another person, a babysitter, present, especially when trying a new level of a compound.

If flooding happens spontaneously, without a drug being involved, and if it lasts more than 24 hours, you may need professional help. Most psychiatrists will treat this as a form of psychosis, and will medicate you heavily. This may be appropriate if you are really overwhelmed by the input and get into a panic, but if the input is tolerable and can be handled by other means, keep in mind that anti-psychotic drugs make it impossible to process such an experience or to learn anything from it.

If you find yourself in this state, having taken no drug at all, you should get a friend to be with you, right away. With the friend's help, locate someone in your vicinity who is a spiritual guide of some kind; a priest or minister or a Buddhist teacher. If you happen to know of an older psychedelic explorer who has not only experience but also some degree of wisdom — a wise elder, in other words — ask that person to help you.

This state of being flooded by more information, more connections and concepts than you can handle, can teach you about that place in the psyche. It can also make clear to you why, as a human being, it is necessary for you to control the rate of that flow, at least to the extent that you can hold onto your Self, and give time to the exploration of a concept or series of connections. Only this way can you hope to learn something of value. In this case, at least, less is indeed more.

TIME DISTORTION

This is one of the most common effects of a psychedelic drug. Almost all of these drugs cause changes in one's time-sense; most of the time, there is a feeling of time stretching, but there can also be an experience of the opposite, a compression of time. This is not usually disturbing to the traveler, with one very distinct exception. I have heard of first-time psychedelic explorers who found themselves trapped in what they were sure was eternity, with no way out.

One lady, living alone in the woods of Northern California, took LSD (dosage level unknown) for the first time, and had the terrible experience of being in a profoundly altered state forever. *Forever*. She did finally come down, to her astonishment and intense gratitude, but an eternity had passed during those hours of consciousness change. Understandably, she says she will never take a psychedelic drug again.

I know of only one way to avoid such an experience, and that is to

make sure that you take a relatively low amount of any psychedelic drug you haven't tried before. And when you are familiar with the drug, increase the dosage level very slowly, if at all. This is not an area in which being "macho" is advisable. You are experimenting with your own mind and with unknown levels of your own psyche, and it is best to go slowly and carefully, with great respect and humility.

If you do find yourself trapped in eternity, let your Observer remind you that it is a drug-effect, and that it will, indeed, come to an end when the drug wears off. In the meantime, make use of the state, in whatever way gives you most pleasure; writing notes, creating something of beauty out of clay or paint, sitting outside with growing things, and allowing yourself to look, listen and think. Keep reminding yourself that eternity, in this case, is temporary, and that you are experiencing a fascinating corner of your soul. Much can be learned from this experience about perceptions of time, about the nature of your Self, and about the extraordinary capacities of your mind.

OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCES

The first problem I encounter, in trying to tackle this particular subject, is that of definitions. What is meant by an out-of-body experience? To the average scientist, for instance, a person trained in logic and what is called scientific thinking, and with no exposure to the world of the spiritual, the term OBE (out-of-body experience) is meaningless, because he has been taught to believe that the physical body is all there is, and the implication that one can have any kind of conscious experience separate from the body is ridiculous. To such a person, then, this whole discussion is meaningless. It is to others that these notes are addressed.

The expert on OBE's is generally believed to be Robert Monroe, who wrote the first books about the process, and founded an institute on the East coast of the United States to teach people how to journey out of their bodies at will.

There are many reports of OBE's under the influence of psychedelic drugs, but I have never had one, so I can't speak knowledgeably about it.

My stepson, Theo, had a classic OBE when he was in his twenties, unassociated with drugs. He used self-hypnosis (concentrating on a spot on the ceiling), and found himself floating above his bed, aware of a thin, strong life-line or umbilical cord connecting him to his body. From there, apparently without any fear or anxiety, he took off to find his girlfriend, who had gone with her family for the weekend to a cabin in the Sierras. He was there instantly, and observed her sitting on a small pier at the edge of a mountain lake. He took note of what she was wearing (a red sweater and blue jeans),

then flew up to what looked like a small cloud, at which point he knew it was time to return to home base. "I just followed the cord — and, yes, it was sort of vaguely silver — and Wham! I was back in my bod," he told me.

Needless to say (I mean, I wouldn't be telling the story otherwise), when he later asked the girl if she had been in that particular place on that day, wearing those exact clothes, she said yes, she had been and how did he know? He sidestepped the question gracefully by laughing and changing the subject.

Theo stopped doing hypnotically induced OBE's only after a brief experience one day, when he concentrated on his favorite ceiling spot and, once out, went sailing into his father's bathroom, at the end of the hall. He drifted over to the mirror and looked in. There were the cabinets, the shower stall, the small shelf with Shura's shaving gear, all faithfully reflected. The only thing missing was his own face. There was simply no Theo in the mirror at all. For the first time since he had begun experimenting with OBE's, he became frightened. "I went back to my body immediately," he told me, "That was too much."

HALLUCINATIONS

In Appendix C of this book, Shura and I define a hallucination, and I will repeat that definition here, adding only two brief clarifications.

"An extremely rare phenomenon, in which a completely convincing reality surrounds a person, with his eyes open, a reality that he alone can experience and interact with. The inducement of hallucinations is a property that is commonly attributed to psychedelic drugs, but in reality is virtually non-existent in the use of such materials, unless there has been a massive overdose. In almost all psychedelic experiences undergone by normal, healthy people, using reasonable dosages, there is an awareness of real surroundings. Visual distortions are common, but they are not confused with objective reality by the subject; they are known to be visual distortions and appreciated as such. The delusional anesthetic drugs, such as scopolamine and ketamine, on the other hand, can and do produce true hallucinations."

Members of the medical (including psychiatric) community, being for the most part inexperienced in the use of psychedelic drugs, have gotten into the habit of using the word "hallucination" to describe an entire range of visual and auditory effects produced by such drugs, including many

which have nothing whatsoever to do with hallucinations.

The important distinction is this: if you have taken a psychedelic drug and are, for instance, seeing increased brightness of color and richness of texture, interesting faces in large rocks, or kaleidoscopic imagery on your ceiling, and if you remain totally aware of the fact that such visual enhancements are due to your having taken a drug, you are NOT hallucinating.

On the other hand, if you have taken a drug and see a pretty blue horse prancing across your living room carpet, and are convinced that everybody else in your vicinity can also see the horse; if you make no association between the blue horse and the taking of a drug, but are certain that what you are seeing is part of consensual reality, then you are indeed hallucinating. It is the conscious awareness of cause and effect — the taking of a drug and the seeing of a blue horse — that makes the difference between experiencing visual effects or visual changes and real hallucinations.

I have had one experience of visual changes occurring as the result of an altered state without any drug being involved. I was attending a most unusual meeting at the home of a famous psychic in the city of Berkeley, years ago. There were many people present, including a group that was the focus of everybody's attention that evening: about ten psychic healers who were there to describe their methods and problems.

Present with his recording equipment was a well-known expert on out-of-body experiments, Dr. Charles Tart. He had done ground-breaking work in a university laboratory, placing electrodes onto people who claimed to be able to travel out of body almost every night, while retaining conscious control and memory of the experience. Dr. Tart assigned each subject specific tasks to accomplish while out of body in the lab; one assignment, for instance, was to float up to the ceiling, where there was a small placard with a name or series of numbers on it, placed out of sight of the awake subject. The subject was asked to report back when she awoke in the morning, as to what she had read on the placard.

Dr. Tart was the first university professor to publish the generally positive results of such research, and he was at this meeting to ask questions and tape-record answers from the healers.

The proceedings were taking place in a very large room with a wooden floor, and most of us were sitting on floor pillows against the walls. Everyone was quiet except the particular psychic healer whose turn it was to report into the microphone. Along with everyone else, I was concentrating on what was being said, and learning a great deal from each account, especially about the ways in which these people protected themselves from taking into their own bodies the illnesses of their clients.

Finally, bladder pressure made it necessary for me to get up and pick my way carefully over extended legs and feet on my way to the bathroom. Once inside the little room, I sat on the toilet and looked around

me. To my surprise and delight, the shower curtain appeared to be rippling, the wallpaper was most certainly moving, and the faucets glinted with enthusiastic points of multi-colored lights. "Aha!" I thought, "What d'ya know! Never had this happen before. Maybe it's because of all that intense mental focusing. Wonder how long it'll last?"

Unfortunately, I was so impressed by this unexpected bit of fun and games that, when I returned to the big room, I lost my ability to fully concentrate on the continuing reports from the healers. By the time the meeting had broken up, all visual changes had disappeared, and things were back to normal.

In this case, I didn't think for one second that anyone else coming into that bathroom would see the movement of surfaces; I knew it was the result of changes in my own consciousness of a perfectly natural kind. Shura calls this, "Using the intellect as witness," and I call it using the Observer. When a person is having real hallucinations, his Observer has abandoned its post as reality checker, as witness, just as it does in the dream state.

If I had believed that the walls and shower curtain were really moving, and that the movements would be apparent to other people, i.e., part of consensual reality, it would have been an hallucination. I concluded then, and still do now, that it was a non-drug-induced alteration of perception produced by strong concentration; it was also thoroughly enjoyable, and I hope it happens again some day.

THE KALI

This archetype is best known in India, where one can find numerous paintings which portray the Goddess Kali, wife of the God Shiva, usually as a grimacing black or blue female monster, wearing a necklace of skulls and dancing triumphantly on dead bodies. In one hand she brandishes a bloody sword; in the other, a bearded, severed head. Sometimes she is shown with four arms, the third carrying a trident and the fourth, a bowl which catches blood from the head.

In the book, *Dancing in the Flames*, by Marion Woodman and Elinor Dickson, (Shambhala Press, 1996) there are these comments:

"At first glance, Kali comes across as a fierce embodiment of the devouring mother, who gobbles up everything, even her own children. A closer look, however, reveals a great halo around her head.... The halo attests to Kali's status as Goddess, to her need to be understood not only as de-

vourer, but also as transformer. She is black, dark as the matrix, from which all creation comes and to which it returns. To her devotees, she is like a black sapphire; radiance shines through her blackness."

"The mystery of Kali is that she is perpetually destroying and, at the same time, creating — destroying in order to create, creating in order to destroy, death in the service of life, life in the service of death. Kali is time, immanence, ceaseless becoming, nature as process. For Kali, all experience is one — life as well as death."

She is also understood to represent ego-death, which certain spiritual teachings believe to be an essential step on the pathway to illumination.

I've had two glimpses of The Kali, both of them astonishingly different from what I would have expected, and each giving rise to profound questions.

The first time was many years ago. It was in early summer, and I had taken around 20 milligrams of 2C-B in the early evening, while Shura was in San Francisco at the Owl Club, playing his viola in the orchestra, as he does every week.

At one point I went outside, climbed the brick steps and headed for my car to get something I needed. When I left the car and started back across the pavement towards the house, it was dark, except for the glow from the dining room below, illuminating the patio. Halfway to the steps, I suddenly stopped and stood riveted, my mouth open. About fifteen feet above the ground, glowing brightly against a shadowy mass of trees, was a large oval of light; seated cross-legged in its center was the figure of a lovely young woman. Her skin was the color of cream. Both arms were extended, hands open, as if to say, "Behold this!" She was surrounded by parts of dismembered human bodies — arms, legs, heads — lying on the ground, stretching as far as I could see. There was blood everywhere. What radiated from the vision was a feeling I can only describe as bliss.

The whole experience lasted barely two seconds, but I didn't move until it had faded out of existence, leaving me staring at the black outline of trees.

I walked slowly towards the stairs, thinking furiously.

What WAS that? With all those — those pieces of bodies and the blood, it MUST be The Kali. But I've never heard of a beautiful Kali; all the paintings show monsters. And that feeling; how can a scene of bloody carnage give off such a sense of rightness? And bliss? I don't understand.

I knew that I had just witnessed something not only important, but

sacred, and that it was part of the answer to my obsessive inner questions about the nature of what we think of as good and evil. But I couldn't grasp what it meant.

I hadn't yet solved the mystery, hadn't come to any satisfying conclusions, when — seven months later — the second encounter occurred. Shura and I were making love one night. He had taken 120 micrograms of LSD; I'd taken only 80 micrograms, because at higher levels, LSD is not particularly my ally. I was doing dances with my tongue upon the body of my love, when I saw in my mind's eye two figures far away, dressed in red, against a background of light. They were embracing, and I knew instantly that they were Death and Life, and suddenly they had melted into each other and there was only one figure there, facing me, seated in a halo of soft light, her clothes the color of blood.

This time, also, the duration of the vision was two or three seconds, and it didn't fade, as the first one had, but simply ceased to exist.

That's the level of the Gods. It isn't the human reality; we have to choose between the life force and loving, and the other side, The Kali — destruction and killing. How can that vision have any meaning for a human being?

I turned my attention again to Shura, tucking away the memory of the figures in red until later.

It took some time for me to acknowledge that my immediate thoughts after the second experience had been simply avoidance, an effort to postpone the work I was going to have to do to comprehend what I had been shown.

Just a few weeks ago, I heard from a friend about her experience of another form of the female destroyer archetype. It had come to her in a dream, several years ago, and her description of the dream state makes it clear that this was a "Big Dream," one which is vivid, numinous and always remembered.

What my friend, Lara, saw in the dream state was the Goddess Pele, sacred to the Hawaiians; she is the goddess of fire and volcanoes, and she is also the patron goddess of the Hawaiian Islands. Pele appeared to Lara as a magnificent being with a river of lava flowing around her. She spoke, but what she said to the sleeping woman had nothing to do with destruction; it was about the sacredness of knowledge and the immense importance of continual learning while in human form. Then she showed Lara the creative side of her nature; she displayed the growth of new land that results from the cooling of lava after a volcanic eruption, and invited her to rejoice at the sight. Then the vision ended, and Lara awoke. "I lay there in the dark," she told me, "And I felt this great happiness, and I went over and over the memory of Pele and what she had said to me. It was astonishing, and I am still feeling so grateful to her!"

I have gradually come to understand that all the dualities in the cosmos spring from a single Source, as does everything else; that duality, the dance of opposites, is necessary for life to exist, in any and all forms. I believe that, although perceptions of these archetypes may be possible only when one is in the God-space, the expression of these dual forces informs every second of existence, whether of plant, insect, animal or human.

My intellect can comprehend all this, but my heart and gut still rebel at grief, fear, pain, injustice and destruction. To work through that rebellion, I have to remind myself of certain things. For instance, although the great forces that shape all life can sometimes appear to the soul as serenely implacable and without mercy or love, this perception is not the truth. The archetype of Kwan Yin, the Chinese Goddess of Mercy, is also within us, as are numerous other archetypal images of loving, nurturing, creative energies.

As a species, we have always taken sorrow and transformed it into music and art; we have used experiences of pain to deepen our empathy and compassion for others; even fear and horror have had their uses, teaching us strength and will.

What we strive for, whether through the use of consciousness-altering drugs and plants or meditation and spiritual training, is to reach — however momentarily — that place inside us where there is true comprehension of the great dualities, and with it, a state of immense energy, acceptance and bliss. The Indian word for this place is "Samadhi," and a single experience of it will give life-long strength to your soul and spirit.

We, after all, along with all other life-forms, are pieces of the Source, expressions of the Source, so everything we do and feel is done and felt by the Source.

I am not stating any of the above as ultimate truth, but only as what I have experienced and learned. Every human being contains all of these places in his psyche; what he does with them, how he puts them together into a whole view of the universe and his role in it, will be unique to him and must be respected and honored.

EUPHORIA

The first thing that can be said about this experience is: it's good and nourishing, food for our souls. Euphoria belongs in all our lives, as often as possible, because it feeds us with energy and hope.

A dictionary will give you the following definition of euphoria, and when you've read it, think about the implications. From the Random House Webster's College Dictionary, 1991, I get this simple one: "A strong feeling of happiness, confidence, or well-being." And, as Shura has said, many

times, the prefix "eu-," means "normal," or "correct." The word, "euthyroid," means a normally functioning thyroid. The opposite of "eu-," is "dys-," which means something *not* functioning normally. For instance, "dysphoria," means abnormal, as opposed to "euphoria," which means feeling well, normal and good. Thus, "hyperphoria" could be bliss, and "hypophoria" could be depression.

So, how have we come to be a society in which euphoria means "feeling too good, happier than you ought to, more confident than you deserve to," instead of what it ought to mean? Why is euphoria listed in the Physicians' Desk Reference as a possible *negative* side-effect of various drugs?

I wonder if we are, as a society, becoming so used to being in a state of mild depression most of the time, that feeling well, happy and full of energy engenders, in some people, a certain amount of suspicion and even disapproval. Perhaps some of this comes from the early Puritan and present Fundamentalist Christian teachings that Man is a sinner and true happiness and bliss can be expected only in heaven, if you've earned your place there by living a life full of self-sacrifice and a lot of suffering.

I have experienced euphoria and its higher spiritual form, bliss, as an upwelling of thanksgiving to the Source, by whatever name it is called. The feeling I have when giving whole-hearted Thank You to the universe is identical to that felt in a state of euphoria. Some evangelical Christians in their worship services seem to experience the two states as one. Perhaps they are.

As with all emotions felt by human beings, euphoria does not last, cannot be present all the time, and is not meant to be constant. Unless you have worked your way through to becoming an Initiate, a spiritual master, (in which case it may be possible to live in a state comparable to euphoria), for the most part you will have ups and downs, sun and shadow, pain and exhilaration. All we can hope for, both for ourselves and those we love, is that all of us will have more moments of euphoria than sorrow, and that we will be able to renew our hope and excitement about life as often as possible.

The only negative I can think of in regard to euphoria is that certain people may try to find a way of making it a permanent state of being. With or without drugs, it cannot be maintained constantly by most of us, any more than orgasm can be. There are stories — legends — of people who have slipped into a bliss state and remained there for the rest of their lives; Saint Theresa of Avila, for instance. However, if you want to remain in the world of human beings, to live a human life, to change, learn and transform, euphoria must be looked upon as a temporary gift and a reminder of your innate capacity for exquisite pleasure.

Psychedelic drugs can help open a person to an experience of euphoria, just as they can open him to deep sorrow, empathy and humor, cosmic meaningfulness and total confusion. Again, it isn't the drug that creates the experience; it's the drug that opens doors to what is already resident inside the person.

For those of us who live in the western industrialized countries, daily life tends to be busy, stressful and not conducive to the practice of insight or the fullest possible openness to emotions. Adults learn to repress, hide and even deny feelings that are uncomfortable or painful. Unfortunately, this results in a repression of feelings that are entirely positive, along with the negative ones. When we put a lid on anger and resentment, we are also making it hard to feel joy, deep love and humor. Everything gets dulled.

In the psychedelic experience, we can discover a clear, open channel to feelings and emotions again. It makes us more vulnerable to the world around us, but without that vulnerability, we cannot feel out truth and we can never hope to grow wise.