



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society May 2022

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Psychedelics & Spiritual Growth

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

In the March newsletter I wrote about the “Trickster,” which was an account from a man who was searching out his inner darkness through the use of psychedelics. I knew it had the potential to be a controversial subject, because drugs are bad, right?! I’ve always been a believer in the inherent badness of drugs of all kinds. I rarely drink, and don’t smoke because I know nothing good comes from it. I say this not to extoll any personal virtue, but to provide some personal context showing that I don’t take drug or substance use lightly. Before I started researching into this, my preconceived notions with psychedelics were mostly around getting high and seeing all sorts of strange colours and patterns while under the influence. But that’s why I wanted to open the subject with that story, because it shows how wrong those preconceptions are. You can see clearly in that account that Haight wasn’t high. He had full use of his mental faculties. More importantly though the story shows that psychedelics can be a gateway to transformative spiritual experiences.

We know from examples in the Word just how powerful a spiritual experience can be. Saul of Tarsus completely transformed from a Jesus persecuting Jew to a founding member of the “Jesus Without Borders” club, and all it took was a visit from God Himself. Moses seemed pretty content as a shepherd in Midian until he encountered the burning bush. Did he believe in God before? Maybe. But after that experience he didn’t believe. He knew. Even when things with Pharaoh didn’t go as he thought they would, Moses didn’t question God’s existence. He was a changed man. No longer just a guy, he was a man on a mission. Experience will do that.

What I’m learning is that psychedelics can get us that experience. There’s actually a very strong psychedelic compound - DMT (Dimethyltryptamine) - that is found in a number of animals and plants, but also occurs naturally in humans too. It is believed to be produced in the pineal gland, which is more or less in the centre of the brain. There are a number of people who believe what is happening physiologically when we have a “natural” spiritual experience, such as what can happen in deep meditation, during a near death experience, or perhaps when checking out a burning bush that isn’t being consumed, is that the pineal gland is flooding the body with DMT? While science hasn’t confirmed the truth of it, when you look at the startling similarities between a DMT trip and a near death experience it doesn’t seem unreasonable. I know at first pass it may seem to cheapen the burning bush story if all we think is that God gave Moses’ pineal gland a squeeze, but at the same time when God does do miracles He still works within the system. Did He give Moses’ pineal gland a squeeze? I don’t know. But we do know that Moses was a God fearing man after that encounter.

Believe it or not, normal people have had a similar experience to Moses. Dr. Rick Strassman conducted U.S. Government-approved and funded clinical research at the University of New Mexico in which he injected sixty volunteers with DMT. His book, “DMT: The Spirit Molecule,” recounts the protocol and experiences of some of his patients. The regimen was fairly simple, as they injected the patient with pure DMT, starting with a low dose and ramping it up in subsequent sessions if the patient was willing. As you would imagine, lower doses generally produced “lesser” experiences where people might see some colours, feel a little disoriented and ultimately didn’t create any sort of mental or psychological breakthrough for the participant.

But a bigger dose produced something more profound. Beyond a particular threshold, the volunteers told Dr Strassman that you could no longer be an atheist. They no longer believed that God didn’t exist. They, like Moses, *knew* that there was a God. I’ve certainly heard of this happening as a result of a NDE, but didn’t realize it was also an outcome associated with DMT. As a theist who is watching the world trend more and more towards atheism, I start to think that maybe it would be a good thing to start offering up DMT more liberally. Perhaps it is the hells who want to perpetuate the lie that there is no God that are creating the fear of psychedelics.

In fact, so many people have reported such profound change in their mental state after experiencing a psychedelic retreat that there are heaps of articles, books, and podcasts available now extolling their virtues, with most agreeing with the sentiment that shamanic guided ayahuasca experiences are essentially 10 years of therapy in one night. These kind of claims are forcing the mainstream medical establishment to take notice. Dr. Roland Griffith and his team of researchers at Johns Hopkins University did an extensive study on the benefits of psychedelics. They found that there was an 85% success rate in the cessation of smoking – on a single dose. That’s completely unheard of! How many people do you know who have tried to stop smoking? How many of them have successfully quit on the first try? Not 85%! How many people are addicted to hard drugs and could benefit from this?

In another study, the effects of psilocybin were studied in 51 cancer patients with life threatening diagnoses and symptoms of depression and/or anxiety. Participants, staff and community observers rated participant moods, attitudes and behaviours throughout the study. The result: high dose psilocybin produced large decreases in clinician and self-rated measures of depressed mood and anxiety, along with increases in quality of life, life meaning, optimism, and decreases in death anxiety.

At the 6 month follow up, these changes were sustained, with about 80% of participants continuing to show clinically significant decreases in depressed mood and anxiety. “It is simply unprecedented in psychiatry that a single dose of medicine produces these kinds of dramatic and enduring results,” wrote Stephen Ross, co-investigator, speaking to *Scientific American*. There are heaps of other studies too, and the results are the same whether they’re treating any other terminal illness. It isn’t that they cure the illness, but the patient has a new state of mind about life and death. Much like a person who has had a near death experience, they don’t hope that there’s an afterlife, they *know* there’s an afterlife. As you can imagine, that brings a lot of peace to a terminally ill person!

There are two things that really pique my interest about these studies. The first is that they are “one and done” experiences, i.e., they’re non-addictive. Second is that these studies are seeing people get long lasting results. I’ve been attending church services for the vast majority of my life, and have seen plenty of people doing and/or thinking things that they know they shouldn’t be doing. They’re spiritually stuck. They attend Holy Supper praying to the Lord to help them out of any number of things... a particular evil, release from anxiety, worry, or just a help focusing less on work and more on family... and yet nothing changes. They keep coming back asking for help on the same thing over and over and over. They’re stuck. How do we get unstuck? How do we get that Saul on the road to Damascus experience where we are transformed by encountering God?

The Writings don’t inform us about a certain threshold of DMT to take in order to meet our Creator, but instead teach us that the conjunction and presence of the Lord is through the Word, ... because the Word is the union of man with heaven, and through heaven with the Lord (AC 9378.2). Yet Saul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, he sure seemed to have the Word, but the problem was that his keen and penetrating mind kept coming to the wrong conclusions. What went wrong for him? Seems to me he needed to scrub his mind of everything he thought he knew before coming to the Word. He had to come to the Word with something the Writings call “humility.

Yet getting rid of that stuff we’ve already learned is hard, especially because Saul *knew* he was right. Jesus was a heretic! So how do we shake off our old self in order to make space for the new self to arrive? In the South American ayahuasca ceremony, one of the powerful components is the “purge” that takes place after you ingest the brew. Ayahuasca is a plant based concoction that contains DMT, and also other ingredients that induce a physical purge... the brew will come back out one end or the other... but more importantly the shamans say that there’s a spiritual purge as well. We’ve got to get rid of the garbage we’ve picked up over the course of our life. Some have reported that while they have a physical puke, they also see various bugs, cockroaches and other creepy crawly things that are non-physical being spewed

out as well. It isn't pleasant, but it sure makes the point that a spiritual scrub down is more necessary than perhaps we realize.

This reminds me of a quote in *Divine Love and Wisdom* that tells us that there are "forms of use" that are "helpful for absorbing malignancies" (DLW 336). The Writings do teach us that reformation cannot take place or proceed in states of mental or physical illness (DP 141, 142), so does ayahuasca absorb some of the attacks of the hells involved in PTSD, depression, addiction and such? I would imagine that if you puked up some spiritual cockroaches you might think there's something to this. It may sound strange, it may sound crazy, but it is hard to argue with the outcomes that people are getting.

It reminds me of an old joke about a preacher and a pilot reaching the gates of heaven. In it, St. Peter is talking to the pilot, who wasn't actually very good at flying, welcoming him to heaven, giving him the key to his mansion, and telling him of the joy he is about to enter into. The preacher is thinking, "Wow, if a crummy pilot gets all of that, I'm going to get something truly amazing." However, St. Peter directs the preacher to a less glamorous part of heaven, and gives him a nice, but rather plain home. The preacher, disappointed and confused asks St. Peter why it is that the pilot gets a better eternity than him who had dedicated his life to God.

St. Peter replies, "Up here we go by results. The fact is that when you were preaching, people were sleeping, but when he was flying people were praying!" This mentality resonates with me. What is the purpose of reading and studying the Word? Results. We call it personal transformation or regeneration, but the point is that it is all about change, the death of the old will and birth of the new will. In the same way I think there's a strong case for the use of psychedelics for spiritual development. Like a pilot whose bad flying has us rediscovering our dormant faith, psychedelics may be the tool that the modern world has just rediscovered from ancient religions to get us spiritually unstuck and bring the profound and lasting change that we are – or at least should be – looking for.

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Easter Recap

As usual, Easter service is our best attended service of the year, and as always it is nice to see everybody. I also offer a special appreciation for those of you who brought your kids from a fair distance away to take part. In an attempt to have some greater continuity between Palm Sunday and Easter, I did something different this year by way of having a common theme in the two services: donkeys.

For Palm Sunday the tie in is pretty obvious. The Lord rides in on a donkey, and so that service we looked at the attributes of a donkey to better understand why it is that the natural mind needs to be put in service to the Lord. The donkey in the Easter story, or as I called it the Easter donkey, was a bit less obvious. Basically though I made the case that Thomas, because of his need to see physical proof of the Lord's resurrection, was very naturally/worldly minded and thus was very much like a donkey personified. If you're interested, you can find these two services on our YouTube channel which is probably accessed most simply through the "Media" page on our website.

Despite all the rain we've had this year, thankfully Easter week was overall pretty dry, which meant that our Easter egg hunt after the service was able to happen on dry ground instead of a swamp. Zach hid 48 eggs, and 30 of them were found without too much trouble. The problem is that many of the remaining 18 required the skills of a forensic analyst, private investigator, or some sort of super sleuth to locate. Eventually, with Zach's help, all but one were found. Next year we'll have to give him some guidelines on the appropriate level of difficulty!

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Autumn Women's Weekend

We're finding our groove! A handful of New Church-minded women from across Australasia, plus one in North America, gathered physically at Stanwell Tops, and virtually via Zoom, for our sixth semi-annual women's weekend in early April. Session topics included 'giving a hoot' about not polluting any type of environment (think relationships, airwaves, etc), the Queen of Sheba, and near-death experiences; in addition, there were fun get-to-know-you ice-breaker activities, painting bowls of fruit, a rousing game of 'Taboo', a guided meditation plus two worship services, one on 'sisterhood' and another on 'peace'. What it all came down to, though, was the *sisterhood* shared amongst the participants, something we can't easily get outside of such gatherings. Already we're looking at dates for future get-togethers; in fact, we're targeting Dec 9-11, 2022 for our spring women's weekend! The more the merrier – if you'd like to learn more about these and get onto the email list, please drop Jenn a line (jenn@beiswenger.net). Watch this spot for more info!

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May Class – Thinking Like an Angel – May 5 at 11am

First off a reminder that we are offering a doctrinal class on the first Thursday of the month at 11 am, so for May that will be on the 5th. It is followed by some bring-your-own-lunch social time. In order to spice the class part of it up a bit, **David Moffat** has agreed to be our presenter for May. He's been working on this topic for years, continually expanding and refining it. Here's a teaser for it:

Free your mind! Expand your consciousness! Learn to think like an angel! These ideas are not as difficult as they might sound, in fact, you already have all the resources you need, and you are already familiar with this way of thinking. We will spend some time thinking about the way that time, space, matter and person provide a basis of our thinking, but then how stepping away from them opens up new worlds.

“A natural person may believe that we would have no thought if concepts of time, space, and matter were taken away from us, that all our thought is based on these foundations. Let such people know, though, that thoughts are limited and constrained to the extent that they derive from time, space, and matter, and that they are freed and expanded to the extent that they do not derive from such things, because to that same extent the mind is raised above bodily and worldly considerations.” (Heaven and Hell, paragraph 169)

This class will be offered on Zoom and via YouTube live stream, details for which will be sent out in our weekly email. If you're not on the email list and would like the links for this class, just let me know.

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Birthdays

Happy Birthday to, **Naomi Heldon** (20th), **Matthew Cooper** (25th), **Daniel Walsh** (27th), **Brian Walsh** (31st)

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Women's Weekend for Men!

CALLING ALL NEW CHURCH-INCLINED MEN

Inspired by the good work of Hurstville's own, Jenn Beiswenger, we have decided to try our hand at organising a Men's Weekend for late October or early November 2022. The location has yet to be determined but will likely be within a 2 hours drive from Sydney. Location and specific dates will be dependent on interest.

As this will be our first effort at such an event in some time, we need your help. Please get in contact with Howard (revhathompson@gmail.com) if you are interested in attending and with an expression of preferred dates.

Howard
Roseville New Church

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