

LSD AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF ZEN

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There is a central human experience which alters all other experiences. It has been called satori in Japanese Zen, moksha in Hinduism, religious enlightenment or cosmic consciousness in the West. The experience is so central that men have spent their lives in search of it. Once found life is altered because the very root of human identity has been deepened. I wish to draw attention to the fact that the still experimental drug d-lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) appears to facilitate the discovery of this apparently ancient and universal experience. Many ways have been taken to enlightenment. Now I draw your attention to a relatively new way.

I would like to describe the vicissitudes on The Way using this drug and describe the experiences of one individual especially to show what satori looks like from this approach. Lastly, I would like to take up the relative merits of a drug approach compared to the more ancient approaches to satori.

LSD is a synthetic modification of d-lysergic acid discovered in 1938. However, it wasn't until 1943 that its hallucinogenic properties were discovered and serious experimentation began. Although there have been over 600 publications regarding it (5,6) the drug is still considered experimental and its use is controlled by Sandoz Pharmaceuticals. It is usually taken orally and operates in doses of 50 to 200 millionth of a gram. It is released for study under the direction of a psychiatrist in a hospital setting. There is, unfortunately much misinformation regarding its effects and its danger. This misinformation is greatest among professionals who have heard a bit of its effects. A careful study by Cohen (1) of 5,000 subjects and 25,000 sessions suggests that with the application of certain minimal safeguards untoward effects of the drug can be eliminated.

The whole point of the cautions surrounding the use of LSD is that the drug opens up the subject to himself so that while it is nearly harmless physically it is psychiatrically quite powerful. It should not be given to any subject who is not anxious to explore his own experience. Those not wanting to discover themselves with LSD can be precipitated into a panic flight. It is usually given by an experimenter who is himself experienced with it, in a quiet, pleasant, comfortable setting for the subject. I won't go into all the cautions involved since they are treated adequately by Cohen. I select subjects who seem to want to learn something of themselves. I usually begin with a 50 microgram dose and build up in 25 microgram steps until a reaction is obtained. In the following sessions I let the subject partly set the dose they want to explore. There is much question as to what the relationship of the experimenter should be to the subject. Some attempt to be psychotherapists and intervene in the drug reaction. With normal subjects, I prefer to be just an experienced friend present who can be of whatever help is required. My impression is that there is an inner wisdom to the LSD reaction that is better without my intervention. In this way subjects learn along their own lines at their own pace.

The reaction starts in one half hour to an hour, reaches a peak in about four hours and

subsides in 7 to 8 hours. Trace effects may be present 24 hours later. Effects lasting longer than this may be changes in the person's adaptation or due to suggestion. The drug is nonaddicting and leads to rapid tolerance if taken in closely spaced doses. The reaction can be lessened by sedative drugs such as compazine or sodium amytal. But enough of the cautions. In general, those who know little or nothing of it often fear it, while those who took it wishing to see themselves respect it, but have no fear of it.

How does satori look under LSD? Of my 18 subjects 6 or one third have known satori in one degree or another. Two of the subjects had known satori before LSD. Usually it took three or more sessions before satori was known. If I had given more sessions to the other 12 subjects (average number of sessions 3.8, range 2-11) the number who knew this experience might have been higher. Some seem never to know satori no matter how many sessions they have. My impression is that satori comes after symbolic death or a letting go of the personal identity. Some are simply too anxious to let go so they never find what lies behind personal identity.

Psychological differences between people under LSD are dramatically underlined. The first session is usually the greatest surprise to the subject and the experimenter. There are surprises in the second and all other sessions, but they tend to lessen. It is as though the subject finds he is enacting a complex drama and once he finds its main features subsequent LSD sessions permit the drama to unfold further, but already the subject has a sense of its general meaning and direction.

Under LSD one can see psychic processes projected as hallucinations and yet, unlike true psychosis, know these are hallucinations and deal constructively with them. One can explore sensory experiences as never before. The sound of music can be utterly fascinating, the texture and color of surfaces captivating. The faces of people are more than faces—They are vivid caricatures of the person's life. One is reminded of Herrigel's statements (3) of the way in which Zen meditation awakens the senses to full clarity. Such a common thing as a polite social conversation might look like the stiff, uncomfortable game that it often is. On one occasion I swam while under LSD and saw for the first time how my swimming was a fight against the water. Under the drug, the water and I became liquid friends.

There is a marked tendency for these explorations to take on meaning as the ordinary events are holding a dialogue with the individual. Water seemed to speak to me of liquid ease and peace. Pulling weeds in the garden I learned of the psychotherapeutic encounter with another person. As with a weed, I had to circle all his hidden entanglements before I could grip another by his main stalk, his central concerns, and yank him out of hiding. Another subject found himself naming all the objects in the room. He had done this un-self-consciously for years. Now he could see it and discovered this was to reduce them, keep them in place and in control. As with Zen, the present here and now becomes the whole of meaning. The here and now is the sought for.

Under LSD one seems to discover one's style of living. Some aspects of this style appear defensive and hamper the person. The more natural aspect of one's style is found multileveled and complexly interrelated. It is my impression that one has to work down to the root of one's uniqueness to approach satori. The actual experience of satori appears to come when the

individual finds the core of his identity and finds he can afford to give it up in psychological death. It is after this death that satori comes as a sudden surprise breaking thru the personal identity. It appears satori may not be willed. Willing blocks it. It is the sudden surprising willing in the midst of no-willing. All grasping, all effort is a block to it. It is beyond all our effort but within our giving up.

It is my impression that satori is a universal and quite ancient insight which comes in a different form in each individual. But, paradoxically, in spite of infinite variation, it is always the same. It may be described in many ways from the Hindu *tat twam asi* to the Christian discovery that Christ lives within. It comes in many degrees from the simple "I am here" to the complete shattering of personal identity. One of my subjects had a little satori. She was a young student who, under LSD, found at the bottom of all her concerns a fear that her heart would stop and she would die. Bravely she explored death and even witnessed her own autopsy piece by piece. When the heart had been cut into suddenly the problem of death had vanished and she awoke to life wide-eyed. She stared around her saying, "Was ist das?" In this playful way she addressed the magic of a life that was her and all things at the same time. This is a small satori. For several subjects the experience was entirely beyond naming. One said, "You name it and I'll be it." So may I be forgiven for this naming and description.

The following is the first LSD experience of a rather gifted normal. It is another example of satori and one that is recognizably Zen-like in quality.

"After the ingestion of 150 mcg of LSD, I experienced many walls that would crumble only to reveal a wall. This continued about seven times, then there was an experience of vast nothing. At first I toyed with myself seeing "this" and "that"—then the vast nothing. It was as if I had been torn apart; as if I were on the other side of this torn apartness. Concreteness disintegrated into nothingness. If I'd grasp at this nothingness it would slip away in many directions. There was an awareness of many directions—but all at once.

When I did not try to grasp anything in this—there everything was, but all of one piece. Gradually there was no longer an "I" or a "me." There was no them. There was just vast, total nothing. There was no sound but there was the hearing of no sound. There was nothing to see but there was seeing of this nothing to see.

There was a being in a process, or moving in a process. But there was no "process." There was just being. No inside or outside but the "other one." Dualities ceased, there was just a wonderful moving in nothing—empty, still and quite nothing. There was hearing of the sound of no sound.

In my own experience I spent my first three LSD sessions discovering my life was arranged in layers. The outermost and most superficial was my position and concerns as a psychologist. These seemed unimportant. The papers on my desk were nonsense. Status striving was no more meaningful than walking up hill. The second and more fundamental layer was my physical self. As I withdrew from that my stomach and leg made a last bit of disturbance. The third and more central layer was the inner me. Now I was withdrawn from my world concerns and even from awareness of my body. Imagery became active. I saw the inner domes of churches, I was in a Hindu temple, then there were geometric patterns. I wanted something more, I didn't know what, so I got rid of all these pretty visions by identifying with them. If they were projections, I would swallow them again. In the fourth session I was in bed and withdrawn to this primal me-ness. If this went I would die because it was all that was left of me. In this black void where there was just me, I prayed accepting this death. God was walking on me and I cried with joy. My own voice seemed to speak of His coming, but I didn't believe it. Suddenly and totally unexpectedly the zenith of the void was lit up with

the blinding presence of the One. How did I know it? All I can say was that there was no possibility of doubt. Down beneath *me*, above the *One*. Suddenly the light from above fused into the me below. Then I knew there was only God and from the beginning of time I was destined to reappear as a psychologist. Sadly I was thrown out of paradise to return as a most upset man. How could I be God and man at the same time? My conventional concept of myself had been shattered in a few moments.

Later, there were many other similar experiences in which I soared into paradise and saw structure of the whole of things. I saw beyond time and space to the eternal unchanging One who was at the same time the whole of changing creation. Each time I was thrown to earth again. Then the mystery of the here and now of the commonplace began to open up. The One beyond time and space and the One of the commonplace were the same. This was the most bitter lesson of all. Things exactly as they are, are paradise, are the perfect will of the One. I looked for heaven and found the commonplace. This was 21 days of exploration.

The four unexpected points in the whole experience were to go thru psychological death only to find eternal life. Another was to experience beyond what I had dreamed possible. A difficult lesson was that we cannot will the divine. It is, in effect, the other side of willing or the not willed willing. Lastly, it was a surprise to find the divine and the commonplace are the same thing. We live in a paradise and don't know it. The structure of the whole of things has become apparent. Creation as we know it is the One's self affirmation and in creation the One reappears endlessly as all things just for fun. As creation the One endlessly explores the full range of possible existence. Part of this range is from knowing (the One in itself) to not knowing (the ordinary state of man). As creation the One *appears* to split into opposites and then each of the pair of opposites goes in search of the other to complete itself. I say *appears* to, because from the viewpoint of the divine what appears as opposites to us, to the divine are the same thing. An example of a critical pair of opposites in psychology is what has been called the conscious and unconscious. I don't want to go into the many psychological implications of satori now. My main point is simply that LSD does appear to facilitate its appearance.

There are a number of likely criticisms. Some will affirm that the experience was fabricated out of my own prior religious interests and desires. In a sense this is true. But one then has to answer what interests and desires are formed from. For myself, I found they are formed out of the eternal. LSD doesn't change people so much as it does make them more of what they were already. The experience turned against my expectations at several points and gave me grave difficulties. In fact, my initial expectation with LSD was that I would go thru psychosis rather than have religious experience. After the experience it was a comfort to find in Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and other accounts the same experience. In fact, in some respects the Tibetan Book of The Dead (2), written in the 8th century A.D., is a good guide to LSD experiences beyond symbolic death. This particular edition has a helpful introduction by Carl Jung. Actually there were some small miracles in the midst of the experience to affirm its own truth. But this is not important. It is enough to say the experience appears ancient and universal.

Some psychologists will fear ego inflation. It is a difficulty more for some than others. In my normal subjects each inflation was balanced by deflation. So nature balances herself.

The What Is of things-as-they-are serve as a good anchor to keep one from soaring too high. To avoid the experience out of a fear of ego inflation is to choose death to avoid the dangers of life.

Some of the more experimental minded agnostic scientists may be inclined to link satori to madness. I would put the shoe on the other foot. I say no satori is madness, the most prevalent kind. They will point to schizophrenics who felt they were God. These are very defensive gods who vaunt themselves up to reduce all others. In satori it is apparent all the others are God too. So one inclines to a more humble respect of others.

Some will argue that satori is better attained by years of meditation. In some ways I am inclined to agree. Experiences with LSD can be rough and difficult, especially when one is taught the opposite of what was formerly believed. I would prefer years in a quiet monastery. But, in the Western world at least, we don't have the time. It is curious that a fast approach should come out of Western chemical laboratories! Yet, if LSD is rejected in favor of meditation because the latter is natural and the former not, I can't agree. In the view of Zen this is a foolish distinction. The Lord designed LSD and LSD experimenters and LSD experience just as much as He designed monasteries and sitting meditation. It does look as though the slower way of Zen meditation lays a more solid foundation, though this needs to be tested too. Some will always prefer a traditional way. Personally, if enlightenment could be obtained by sitting in cow dung with ashes on my head, I would do it. It would be curious to study the effects of a number of LSD sessions on acknowledged Zen masters to more directly compare the two ways.

LSD is used to break through stalemates in psychotherapy and could perhaps be used in a monastery in conjunction with conventional Zen practices to facilitate the student's development, though this may be Zen heresy and merely reflect my Western attitudes!

Some may wonder if other drugs wouldn't also be useful in this connection. It appears that any of the hallucinogens might be. Mescaline has been used by American Indians in religious practices and psilocybin has been used in mushrooms by the Aztecs for the same purpose. An interesting book by Puharich (4) suggests a mushroom was used by Egyptians. There is a possibility that any of the hallucinogens might be used, though LSD appears superior to the others in some respects. Self-experiments of being lowered gradually into a state near physical death with nitrous oxide anesthesia came to essentially the same findings as with LSD except that with this medium the experiences are difficult to recall.

One might wonder whether a drug approach to religious enlightenment wouldn't lead to an unwanted dependence on the drug. With LSD this does not seem to be the case. All of the experiences that occurred with LSD have later occurred to me without the drug though they are lessened in intensity. At first there is a dependence as though only this drug can bring back the vision of paradise, but with the opening up of the commonplace the need of the drug draws to a close. One major advantage of a drug approach is that it intensifies the experience of a giant satori so that thereafter the little satori of simply living is more recognizable for what it is.

In conversations Betty Eisner has reported similar findings with her patients under LSD. The Oriental scholar Alan Watts has experimented with LSD and reports in his book *This Is*

It (7) similar findings.

My own impression is that satori is not just an experience among others, but is rather the very heart of human experience. It is the center that gives understanding to the whole. Because LSD appears to facilitate this experience in one third or more of normal subjects I recommend its study to others. If there are dangers associated with LSD they appear to lie not in the drug itself but in the danger it will be misunderstood and censored out of existence before its value can be fully appraised. Would it not be interesting if the Orient borrowed from Western laboratories the means of rediscovering ancient Oriental truths?

Lastly, may I be forgiven if I pose for the reader a Zen koan:

What is it—when eternally varied,
remains exactly the same.

Look close, and the question is the answer.

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MS. received XII 13, 60.

I wish to thank Paul Frey, M.D. and Ernest Klatte, M.D., superintendent of Mendocino State Hospital, for their generous medical support and aid, Mr. Harry Althouse of Sandoz Pharmaceuticals for LSD, Mr. Art Heiser for a research grant, Mr. John DeGuerin for the anesthesia experiments, and Miss Ruby Thompson for help in some of the most trying phases of the experiments.

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