
Preface

by Alexander and Ann Shulgin

There are many people, particularly in the Western world's scientific and medical community, who regard the entire concept of a so-called 'spiritual' level of existence as self-deluding nonsense. They are comfortable with a belief system that says, in essence, 'We are born, we live our lives, and we die, and that's all there is to that; nothing of us continues after death; no consciousness, no awareness, no identity. All experiences of out-of-body consciousness, of mystical bliss states, or encounters with some entity not contained in a physical body are delusions, brought about by a refusal to accept the simple truth about our universe: there is no great 'meaning' to life; it arose out of an accidental fusing of certain molecules, and there is no spiritual mystery to be explored.'

Yet, strangely and even incredibly, these same people are able to accept without unease a theory called the Big Bang, which involves the explosion of Everything out of an exquisitely small point floating in Nothing. If this is not a supreme mystery, what in heaven's name is? Those who feel comfortable negating all meaningfulness and anything called God, the Ground of Being, or the Great Mind (among many other names) insist that we will, some day, understand how this explosion of matter out of nothing came about. It's simply a matter of time before we have the answer, and until that happens, we can just accept that it did take place without any divine intervention or thought or purpose. There's no need for spirit or the spiritual; it will all be resolved in a few years, by physicists and chemists and astronomers. End of story.

So these words are not for those people. They are welcome to their material world, devoid of spirit, while we remain aware of the interpenetration of another dimension – or many other dimensions – in every corner of the physical world. Few of us know what and how and why; we just know there is a spiritual energy and intelligence within us and within everything that surrounds us.

Many humans are born with the ability to sense and sometimes see and hear the flow of spiritual energy throughout our world. For most, the ability to perceive this companion reality is lost with the firming of ego and focusing

of the physical senses which come about when babyhood grows into childhood. Three- and four-year-olds often speak of past lives, but their memories dim and eventually fade as they participate more and more in the busy world of the five- and six-year-old child. As adults, they usually have no conscious access to these early experiences, unless something happens to allow the memories of long ago to resurface.

One of the ways in which the early memories of a spiritual reality can be recaptured is by the ingestion of a psychedelic drug. It is certainly not the only way. The practice of meditation, holotropic breathing and yoga – to name a very few – can also release these memories, as well as making it possible for the adult to see again the emissions of light from plants and the flow of atoms across surfaces. How often have we who make use of psychedelics heard the phrase, ‘I found myself in a world that was completely familiar, although I had forgotten it for years!’

We all know, but it has to be said again and again, that these special consciousness-expanding drugs are not for everyone. For a young adult who hasn’t yet fully formed and firmed his core self, and who has not yet made the vital decisions about who he intends to be, with whom he will ally himself, and what he wishes to accomplish, these drugs may produce more confusion than insight. But decisions about such a person taking a psychedelic are not often left in the hands of wise elders. He himself will usually decide to experiment with friends, out of curiosity and a desire to win the approval of his peers. The results can sometimes be frightening, disturbing or even dangerous, for instance if a state of psychological inflation takes hold, or if the Place of Sorrow and Meaninglessness is the first to open up to him.

When an adult is ready to use a psychedelic drug to open doors within his psyche, the experience can be – and often is – one of the most important of his life. Not only may he feel the warmth of familiarity, a sense of coming home, but an interior landscape seen and felt only in the deepest dream states can appear to the inner eye. He might experience one of the most treasured states known to humankind, that of knowing himself to be a participant in the great River of Life, being connected on many levels with all other living beings, and being engaged in a process filled with intense meaningfulness. He may find himself filled with cosmic laughter and taken over by immense love and deep joy.

Many, although not all, psychedelic drugs or visionary plants produce insight into ones' self, one's direction in life, and previously unconsidered alternatives which might steer one in a different and more productive direction. The best and most friendly drug or plant of this kind will also allow the searcher to feel acceptance and love for himself, warts and all, and this may be truly the most valuable experience: love and validation of his own existence, and the ability to forgive mistakes and inadequacies of the past.

The spiritual path that makes use of visionary plants and psychedelic drugs is full of pitfalls and even dangers, which is why the wise traveller will always have a knowledgeable and experienced friend by his side when he embarks on such an journey. This minimises the threat of despair that may arise if one of the dark places is opened and the psyche delivers the message that this, too, is part of the universe and must be acknowledged. The friend will know that the traveller is not obliged to stay in a place of greyness and sorrow, but is meant to find his way through and out, back to the world of Kwan Yin, the goddess of mercy and compassion, the Christ, bringer of love and light, and the Buddha, the archetype of wisdom, cosmic laughter and forgiveness.

Nicholas Saunders was a wise and gentle searcher, a person of immense compassion and active involvement in his world, always doing whatever he could to ease the problems of others and bring light and joy to those caught in depression and darkness in their lives. He knew that the spirit invades every cell of our physical world, and because of his own nature and the nature of his experiences on this particular path of development, he maintained an integrity of soul and purpose which could be felt by anyone meeting and greeting him. His work – on both the material level and the spiritual – will shine for the rest of us, and for thousands of others, for a long, long time to come. We bless him and ask him to bless us. It was an honour and an immense pleasure to have known Nicholas in this world and, for the two of us, it has been an honour and pleasure to write these words for his book.