

A HIGH YOGIC EXPERIENCE ACHIEVED WITH MESCALINE

JOHN BLOFELD

PRIOR TO THE EXPERIMENT described here, I had entertained some doubts as to the claims of Aldous Huxley and others, which imply that mescaline can induce yogic experiences of a high order. The experiment took place on 25 May, 1964 (Visaka Puja) at my Bangkok house under the supervision of Mr. Jonathan Stoker, who had had previous experience (direct and as an observer) of the effects of mescaline.

At 9.50 a.m., I took a half-dose (0.25 gr.). For some time there were no remarkable effects—nothing but a slightly heightened sense of color and form, as exemplified by the vividness of the patterns seen upon my eyelids when I closed my eyes after gazing through the open slats of a Venetian blind. At 10.40, an unpleasant state of mental tension supervened. I found myself involved in a struggle to preserve a hold on my "I," which seemed to be in process of disintegration. This schizophrenic effect was accompanied by a sensation of cold (although the temperature in the room must have been about 90° F.) and by an increasing lethargy which discouraged the smallest action. After awhile, these unpleasant symptoms abated and I was able to enjoy attending to what was happening to me.

At 11.10 a.m., I took the second half-dose (0.25 gr.). Shifting colors and forms danced upon my closed eyelids. Some of these were patterns of great intricacy, such as those which embellish certain parts of sacred buildings—mosques, temples, etc.—or sacred objects of various kinds. These elaborate patterns were abstract, floral, etc.; figures of deities, humans or animals formed no part of them. I recognized each one for what it was—Islamic, Tibetan, Indian, Siamese; but now, for the first time, I saw them not as arbitrary decorations but as profoundly meaningful. I felt that, in spite of belonging to widely varied traditions, they were all equally "valid" and all derived from a single source.

Presently, I tried to visualize the Tibetan Mandala of the Peaceful Deities, but succeeded only in conjuring up some rather metallic-looking demons; although they were far from frightening and not even very life-like or realistic (being something of a cross between metal statues and living beings), they did convey to me (as though mockingly) that to expect a profound religious experience as a result of taking mescaline was too presumptuous.

Soon after that, the sensation of a rapidly fragmenting personality returned to me with frightening force. I grew alarmed for my sanity and should have hastened to take an antidote for the mescaline had one been available. Though J. S. persuaded me to eat some lunch, I was in no condition to enjoy it. By then, things seen and heard presented themselves as independent visual and aural experiences with no seer and hearer to link them into one of those single compositions which, at any given moment, form the content of normal consciousness. The food went down my throat as usual, but it seemed to be disappearing into a receptacle connected with me only to the extent that it was too near to be visible. The mental stress grew agonizing. My fear of permanent madness increased and I suffered especially from the feeling of having no inner self or center of consciousness into which to retreat from the tension and take rest. An additional discomfort was the sensation of bright lights shining now and then from behind me, as though someone were standing there flicking a flashlight off and on. The movements of my man-servant, who came in several times with dishes of food, sweets and coffee, occasioned great uneasiness. Whenever he was out of sight, I felt he might be standing behind me for some vaguely sinister purpose; and, since he knew nothing of the experiment, I was afraid he would suppose that I was mad. Doubtless anyone else's uninvited presence would have made me equally distrustful and uneasy—though I was not bothered at all by the company of J. S., because he was “in the know” and I felt the need of a nurse or guard.

No words can describe the appalling mental torment that continued for well over an hour. All my organs and sensory experiences seemed to be separate units. There was nothing left of me at all, except a sort of disembodied sufferer, conscious of being mad and racked by unprecedented tension. There seemed no hope of being able to escape this torture—certainly for many hours, perhaps forever. Hell itself could hardly be more terrifying.

At about 1 p.m., I dragged myself to my bedroom, shut myself away from everyone like a sick animal and fell on my bed.

In my extremity, I suddenly made a total surrender and called upon my *Idam*.¹ Come madness or death or anything whatever, I would accept it without reservation if only I could be freed from the tension. For the first time in my life I ceased to cling—to cling to self, loved ones, sanity, madness, life or death. My renunciation

¹ In the Vajrayana it is taught that all “deities,” and therefore a man's own *Idam* (in-dwelling deity), are products of his own consciousness; and that when consciousness is unimpeded by the karmic incrustations left by the sensory experiences encountered during a long succession of lives, it is clearly seen to be not the property of the individual but common to all beings—to be the sole reality in all the universe. (Cf. C. G. Jung, William James and others, whose conclusions seem to tend in this direction.) Hence salvation through “self-power” and “other power” (God, deities, etc.) are in fact identical. Thus, a total

of myself and its components was so complete as to constitute an act of unalloyed trust in my *Idam*.

Within a flash, my state was utterly transformed. From hellish torment, I was plunged into ecstasy—an ecstasy infinitely exceeding anything describable or anything I had imagined from what the world's accomplished mystics have struggled to describe. Suddenly there dawned full awareness of three great truths which I had long accepted intellectually but never, until that moment, experienced as being fully self-evident. Now they had burst upon me, not just as intellectual convictions, but as experiences no less vivid and tangible than are heat and light to a man closely surrounded by a forest fire.

1. There was awareness of undifferentiated unity, embracing the perfect identity of subject and object, of singleness and plurality, of the One and the Many. Thus I found myself (if indeed the words "I" and "myself" have any meaning in such a context) at once the audience, the actors and the play! Logically the One can give birth to the Many and the Many can merge into the One or be fundamentally but not apparently identical with it; they cannot be *in all respects* one and many simultaneously. But now logic was transcended. I beheld (and myself was) a whirling mass of brilliant colors and forms which, being several colors and several forms, were different from one another—and yet altogether the *same* at the very moment of being different! I doubt if this statement can be made to seem meaningful at the ordinary level of consciousness. No wonder the mystics of all faiths teach that understanding comes only when logic and intellect are transcended! In any case, this truth, even if at an ordinary level of consciousness it cannot be *understood*, can, in a higher state of consciousness, be directly *experienced* as self-evident. Logic also boggles at trying to explain how I could at once *perceive* and yet *be* those colors and those forms, how the *seer*, the *seeing* and the *seen*, the *feeler*, the *feeling* and the *felt* could all be one; but, to me, all this was so clearly self-evident as to suggest the words "childishly simple!"

2. Simultaneously, there was awareness of unutterable bliss, coupled with the conviction that this was the *only* real and eternal state of being, all others (including our entire experience in the day-to-day world) being no more than passing dreams. This bliss, I am convinced, awaits all beings when the last vestiges of their selfhood have been destroyed—or, as in this case, temporarily

surrender of every vestige of the self can take the guise of surrender to what is "inside" (as in Zen, for example), or to what is "outside" (as in Amidism, etc.). The *Idam* or "in-dwelling deity," which is synonymous with "the Original Nature" of Zen (and perhaps with the Holy Ghost of Christianity), is a concept which, to my mind, admirably covers both inside and outside; as the Self beyond the self it lies beyond all dualistic categories; but, viewed as the real "you" or "me," it is "inside" and, viewed as "universal," it is in a sense "outside" the individual.

discarded. It was so intense as to make it seem likely that body and mind would be burnt up in a flash. (Yet, though the state of bliss continued for what I later knew to be three or four hours, I emerged from it unscathed.)

3. At the same time came awareness of all that is implied by the Buddhist doctrine of "dharma," namely, that all things, whether objects of mental or of sensory perception, are alike devoid of own-being, mere transitory combinations of an infinite number of impulses.² This was as fully apparent as are the individual bricks to someone staring at an unplastered wall. I actually experienced the momentary rising of each impulse and the thrill of culmination with which it immediately ceased to be.

I shall now attempt to describe the entire experience in terms of sensory perception, though not without fear that this will cloud rather than illumine what has been said; for the content of my experience, being supra-sensory and supra-intellectual, can hardly be made understandable in terms originally coined to describe the mental and physical content of ordinary perception.

Reality, it seems to me in retrospect, can be viewed as a "plasma"³ of no intrinsic color or form that is nevertheless the "substance" of all colors and all forms. Highly charged with vivid consciousness, energy and bliss, it is engaged in eternal play. Or it can be viewed not as plasma but as an endless succession of myriads of simultaneous impulses, each of which arises like a wave, mounts and dissolves in bliss within an instant. The whirling colors and shapes which result produce certain effects that recall flashes of rare beauty seen in pictures, dreams, or in the world of normal everyday consciousness; it can be deduced that the latter are in fact faint reflections of this eternal beauty. (I remember recognizing a well-loved smile, a well-remembered gesture of uncommon beauty, etc., though I perceived no lips to smile, no arm to move. It was as though I beheld and recognized the everlasting abstract quality to which such transient smiles and gestures had owed their charm.) Again, Reality can be viewed as a god dancing with marvelous vigor, playfully, his every movement producing waves of bliss. From time to time he makes stabbing movements with a curved knife. At every stroke, the bliss becomes intense. (I remember that the plunging knife made me cry aloud: "That's it! That's right! Yes, yes, YES!!!"). Or else Reality can be viewed as a whirling mass of light, brilliant color, movement and gaiety coupled with unutterable bliss; those who experience it cannot refrain from laughing cries of "Yes, yes, YES! Ha ha ha! That's how it is! Of course, of course!" (I felt as though, after many years of anxious search for the answer to some momentous problem, I was suddenly confronted with a solution so wholly satisfy-

² Analogous to electrical charges.

³ "Düdzü."

ing and so entirely simple that I had to burst out laughing. I was conscious of immense joy and of incredulous amazement at my own stupidity in having taken so long to discover the simple truth.)

Within this "play of the universe," there is endless giving and receiving—though giver, gift and receiver are of course the same. It is as though two deities (who are yet one) are locked in ecstatic embrace, giving and receiving with the abandon of adoration. (The Tibetan *Yab-Yum* representations of deities hint at this. The artists who paint them must be forgiven for their inability to indicate that giver and receiver are not only one but formless; though, indeed, some artists manage to suggest the oneness by blending the figures so well that the *Yum* is not seen unless the picture is given prolonged and careful scrutiny.) During the experience, I was identical with the giver, the receiver and the incredible bliss given and received. There is nothing sexual about this union; it is formless, the bliss is all-pervading, and giver and receiver, giving and receiving are not two but one. It is only in attempting to convey the experience that the imagery of sexual joy suggests itself as perhaps coming a little closer than other imagery to the idea of an ecstatic union in which two are one.

Some of the conclusions I drew from the whole experience are as follows:

a. Fear and anxiety as to our ultimate destiny are needless self-inflicted torments. By energetically breaking down the karmic propensities which give rise to the illusion of an ego and of individual separateness, we shall hasten the time when Reality is revealed and all hindrances to ecstatic bliss removed—unless Bodhisatva-wise, we compassionately prolong our wanderings in Samsara so as to lead other beings to that goal.

b. The world around us—so often gray—is the product of our own distorted vision, of our ego-consciousness and ego-clinging. By casting away our selves together with all longings, desires, qualities and properties that pertain to them, we can utterly destroy the illusory egos which alone bar us from the ecstatic bliss of universal consciousness. The key is total renunciation; but this, alas, cannot often be achieved by a single effort of will because each of us is hemmed in by a hard shell of karmic propensities, the fruit of many, many misspent lives. The three fires of desire, passion and ignorance are hard to quench—and yet they would be quenched in an instant could we but make and sustain an act of total renunciation. Such an act cannot result from effort or longing, because these would involve our egos and thus actually strengthen them. Thus, in the ultimate stage, even effort and longing for Nirvana must be abandoned together with everything else. This is a truth hard to understand.

c. The Buddha's experience indicates that, when Enlighten-

ment (i.e., full awareness of that blissful Reality whose attributes include inconceivable wisdom, compassion, light, beauty, energy and gaiety) is obtained in this life, it is possible to continue carrying out human responsibilities, behaving as required, responding to circumstances as they arise and yet be free of them all. So it is with a talented actor who, in the part of Romeo, weeps real tears; when his grief for Juliet threatens to overwhelm him, he can withdraw inwardly from his role long enough to recollect the unreality of Juliet and her death, and yet continue to give the same fine performance as before.

d. A single glimpse of what I saw should be enough to call forth unbounded affection for all living beings; for, however ugly, smelly or tiresome they may seem, all that is real about them is that gloriously blissful shining consciousness which formed the center of my experience. Hatred, dislike, disdain, aversion for any being sharing that Consciousness (i.e., any being at all) must amount to blasphemy in one who has seen Being itself.

It may be objected that my description of the experience is too closely reminiscent of Vajrayana imagery and that what I perceived was not Reality at all, but a mere subjective illusion based on the content of my previous studies and practices. The answer to this objection is that, as Aldous Huxley brought out so well in his "Perennial Philosophy," in all ages and all countries everyone who has undergone a profound mystical experience—even though in essence its content is apparently the same in every case—has been compelled to fall back on the imagery of his co-religionists or of those for whom he writes; the experience itself is so unlike anything known to us in ordinary states of consciousness there are no words to describe it. Moreover, while my own experience fully confirmed what my Vajrayana teachers had taught me, it was much too foreign to my previous understanding of those teachings to have been a subjective illusion based on them.

As to how it happens that a dose of mescaline can make such an experience possible to someone who has not yet attained it by the profound and prolonged practice of yogic meditation—I just do not know. The way I explain it to my own satisfaction is that the effect of mescaline is to free the consciousness temporarily from the obstacles to true realization of universal unity normally imposed by that karmic structure which each of us takes to be his "individual self." I believe that psychologists of C. G. Jung's school would have no difficulty in expressing this idea in terms more scientifically acceptable. Indeed, if one of them chances to read this article, I shall be grateful if he will elucidate my mescaline experience in scientific terms for the sake of those not prepared to accept my mystical and perhaps quasi-religious explanation of its content.