

PSYCHOACTIVE SACRAMENTALS: WHAT MUST BE SAID

Charles T. Tart

I have had a very hard time deciding what to talk about here, and the more I've heard various people speak, the harder this has become. This is particularly true when I hear people speaking from their heart about experiences that are deep and real and vital to them. And I think, "What do I have to say that is appropriate to this level of heart?" My head says, "Well, there's a simple intellectual explanation for that. You're in the wrong state of consciousness to speak about matters of the heart, or perhaps the wrong state of being." I've already thought about an answer for that in proposing state specific sciences many years ago: an idea still, unfortunately, too far ahead of its time in most fields (Tart 1972a, 1972b, 1975a).

I've also had a hard time figuring out what to speak on simply because some of the things talked about here are too profound for me. I don't understand them that well. But my salvation in figuring out what to say was the realization that we are supposed to take a long term view of psychoactive sacramentals and their implications, so I'm going to reflect on a synthesis of some ideas I have about this area – "Things That Ought To Be Said," to use that wonderful title I got from Tom Roberts. I will try to speak from both my heart and my head and try to synthesize these things.

I'm going to introduce two main themes. The first one I will begin by saying something about my background with the entheogens.

THEME ONE: THE VALUE OF ENTHEOGENS

As Huston Smith said in his talk, I can say that my encounter with the entheogens has not fundamentally changed my worldview. I was already thinking, believing in that direction. Of course it made me realize how incredibly shallow my worldview was.

When I was an undergraduate student I came across Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception* shortly after it was published, and I thought it was a fabulous book. It made perfect sense to me. So I read Huxley's book, intellectually agreed with it, thought it was very interesting, and put it aside. It was like science fiction, one of those strange things that happens somewhere else. Then, in 1960 I met Ivo Kohler, an Austrian psychologist who was spending his sabbatical leave at Duke University and who had done experiments with mescaline in Europe in the 1930s. As we got to talking, he stated that he had never heard of any experiments in which Americans had taken mescaline. He wondered if their reactions would be different from Europeans. So, being a patriotic, red-blooded American boy, I volunteered to represent my country!

On the morning of 14 May 1960, I made the sacrifice of not eating breakfast (which was quite a sacrifice at that time!) and showed up in the laboratory, and he gave me some mescaline sulfate in warm water. It was like drinking vomit, but I figured it was for science, and it was a noble cause, so "Okay." In retrospect, I realized that he gave me a pretty hefty dose, viz. four hundred milligrams.

We sat around and waited for the drug to take effect. A couple of hours later he said, "Do you want to go home, or should I give you some more?" because, basically, nothing had happened. If I pressed on my eyeballs, I could say, "Well the phosphenes are maybe ten percent brighter than normal." I didn't see why people would write a book about this. It wasn't at all interesting. Fortunately, I chose to take some more, and I learned a great deal from that, because about half an hour later I went from being perfectly "normal" to the peak of the experience within a minute or so. The experience is more fully described elsewhere (Tart 1983).

One of the things I learned was that for all my intellectual openness, I was a "control freak," and my psychological processes were more than sufficient to wipe out the biochemical effects of the drug until I was absolutely overwhelmed by it. That was a very important thing to learn.

This initial experience was profound. My worldview wasn't fundamentally changed, but it became alive. I realized, for instance that I had used the word "beauty" all my life, yet I had never known before what "beauty" meant. I hadn't had the slightest idea! Over the following years I had quite a few other

experiences in experimental settings with psilocybin and LSD. I later found out that this research was sponsored by one of the front foundations set up by the CIA. So I want to thank the CIA for giving me these powerful drugs when I was young and impressionable. I'm not sure the experiment turned out quite the way they would have liked, but I'm very grateful to them!

What did I learn from these early experiences? Well, of course, I learned a great deal about the nature of the human mind, things that had been just odd bits of intellectual knowledge before. For example, I realized that a psychoactive drug could destabilize some processes, but that psychological stabilization mechanisms might still be more than sufficient at stabilizing the overall pattern of conscious functioning, such that there is no change in state of consciousness. Much of this has been reflected in my more systematic work on understanding altered states (Tart, see works from 1969–94). In particular, my systems approach (see *States of Consciousness*, Tart 1975c) recounts a lot of my early experiences in a more professional and scientific framework.

The entheogens were also important for me because my orientation has always been spiritual, even though I am very heavily involved in the scientific side of things. I'm not going to say too much about what I have learned in the entheogenic sense, though, partially because I'm still digesting it. I really can't figure out a lot of what I've learned yet. Also, some of it was, frankly, too sacred to let my ordinary mind even think about it much. It's in there for when it's necessary.

I also realized that I needed entheogens badly. There are some people who get five minutes of meditation instruction, and five minutes later they have a profound metaphysical experience. And there are some people, like me, who have very stubborn minds, who need, as it were, to be kicked very hard in the head in order to notice anything different. The entheogenic "kick in the head" has been extremely valuable to me. What I didn't get from entheogens is what the more neurotic and immature parts of my mind wanted, and I'm glad I never got it. I basically wanted God to show up, in a gentle way that wouldn't startle me, and hand me a certificate of guaranteed safety and surety forever, probably one I could show to my friends! Fortunately, that hasn't happened. Instead, I've been challenged, which I think is what's really important.

I eventually stopped personal involvement with the substances. I think stopping was right for me, although that may change someday; I don't know. After Huston's talk, where he mentioned stopping, I wondered why I stopped. One of the first reasons I thought of was "Well, I'm getting old and I'm not very curious anymore." Then I looked at the elder statesmen at this conference, people like Huston and Myron and Sasha, and thought, "That excuse is not going to fly. It doesn't cut any ice with me, because I'm kind of a kid like they are, really."

Partly, I stopped because I already had plenty to work with. I didn't need new insights and new information. There's a wonderful old Sufi teaching story in one of Idries Shah's books about a man walking along the road who sees a flat rock. Painted on it are the words, "Turn me over and read." He turns it over, and it says, "Why do you seek more knowledge when you make so little use of what you already have?" That story gets to me. Partly, I stopped out of fear. The experiences with the entheogens were overwhelming in some cases. Partly, I stopped out of other interests and also out of satisfaction in a sense. The work that I do in life turns out to be helpful to some people, and I'm very glad to be in such a position. But the main reason I stopped was a realization of how much work I needed to do on my ordinary self.

We've talked a little bit about the need to integrate the insight from entheogen sessions with ordinary life. If I can grossly overgeneralize for a minute, I would say that after having watched the "psychedelic scene" for thirty-five years, there are two kinds of people who have gone through it. One of these types is a person who took the drugs, had some wonderful insights, and then took them again – and again and again and again. Most of these people basically remained the same neurotic people they ever were, but instead of talking about office politics, they talked about bad vibes in the cosmos. That is, I saw the example that lots of experience doesn't necessarily make anyone more mature. As to the second type: I saw some people who used the substances infrequently, but who worked a great deal on integrating the experiences into their lives, usually found some spiritual path within life as part of a daily practice and became very mature.

Now, this is a gross overgeneralization and particularly inapplicable to a third category of people represented at this meeting, people I have not known before, such as those involved in the União do Vegetal or the Santo Daime, who have a consistent social framework for working with the substances as sacramentals, as entheogens. But I personally needed to work on everyday life. It was clear to me that entheogenic experience was not enough. I could have a profound experience, and in a short time my intellect took it over and made it "clever" – and shallow. I can get drunk on ideas. That's very easy for me, and the idea replaces the reality. The result is that I've always been a nice guy, but shallow. You wouldn't come to me if you were really in trouble and needed a friend who could help you on a deep level. So, I needed to work on life practices. I needed to work on what you might call "emotional purification and growth," and more specifically, what I want to emphasize today because it's relevant to integrating these experiences into life, I needed to work on mindfulness.

This is what my focus has been for the last two decades. Mindfulness of each little moment in life, to penetrate below the surface, because it is quite

clear to me that ordinary consciousness is an ongoing soap opera. It's a daydream that takes us away from contact with the moment to moment realities of life, both the mundane and the spiritual realities. So I've worked on trying to develop some degree of mindfulness. The ways I did this may not necessarily be the ways for people in general, but I did things like formal mindfulness meditation, Buddhist vipassana. At first I was not very good at it, but eventually, I learned to sit and develop some degree of mindfulness. I did it in terms of Aikido, a body discipline that emphasizes constantly paying attention to what is really happening. It was always wonderful discipline for me to find that I'd been out on the mat having a daydream about, "Hey, I'm a martial artist. I'm really with it! Oops, how did this fist get in my face all of a sudden?" whereas if I actually paid attention to mundane reality, there was time to be loving and blending with my partner as well as effective in self defense.

But the mindfulness work that most affected me was discovering the works of G. I. Gurdjieff and his emphasis on developing mindfulness as part of everyday life (see Ouspensky 1949, or my two books about Gurdjieff, *Waking Up*, Tart 1986a, and *Living the Mindful Life*, Tart 1994d). This is not necessarily mindfulness about grand ideas and visions and insights. These heady concepts are the things that are dangerous for me. As I say, I can get intellectually drunk on ideas. It's the moment by moment things like, "Gee, feel my body sensations, I must be afraid, or I must be sad to notice things like that," or noticing enough about the moment to realize "Yes this person's saying something interesting, but listen to their tone of voice. They are asking for help. There is something there deeper to pay attention to." So, I have been focusing on mindfulness as a way of trying to take what vision I've had from the entheogenic experiences and bring it back into life. And, mindfulness also goes hand in hand with developing a little bit of compassion. I'm not very good at it, but I'm not the emotional cripple that I once was.

This is the first theme: that the entheogens have been very important in my life, and there has been a need to be mindful. Now let me introduce a second theme that came to me as I was sitting here listening to these wonderful stories and ideas.

THEME 2: THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF ENTHEOGENS

Some years ago, approximately two hundred feet to the left of the room we are sitting in at this conference, when the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology was located on this campus, I heard another story from a friend and colleague who got it from the man who played the central role in the story, who I'll call Dr. M. It's supposedly a true story.

Dr. M was a psychotherapist. Before the Second World War, he had been, among other things, a diver, back in the days of the big brass helmets and inflated suits. He was doing some rescue diving in a flooded valley and somehow got trapped underwater. For what seemed hours he couldn't move and couldn't see because the water was so muddy. It was a time of great terror for him. He'd been trapped when the current entangled him in the branches of a drowned tree. He was actually there for only five minutes before being freed, but he learned something about the effects of sensory deprivation and disorientation when you are under stress!

Dr. M. became a member of the O.S.S. during the Second World War and, according to him, the O.S.S. knew about LSD and used it as a key ingredient in an interrogation technique. The technique they used was as follows:

They would take a German prisoner who was likely to know things that were valuable, be friendly with him, but with a little hidden edge, and at one point slip him a big dose of LSD and a fast-acting barbiturate in his coffee, such that it would knock him out before the LSD really came on. With little grins of triumph, I suppose, "We've poisoned you, you bastard!" While the prisoner was unconscious, they would put him in a diving suit filled with padding so that he couldn't move, but without any obvious restraints that would give a body sense. The interrogators would put the diving suit on a rack in a tank, then fill the tank with ink so that the prisoner was in total blackness and silence. The barbiturate would wear off. The prisoner, who had almost certainly never heard of a hallucinogenic drug, much less had any experience with it, regained consciousness at the peak of a hallucinogenic experience.

Torture is an old fashioned term for this. But it got more sophisticated than that. The air supply coming in had a smell of sulfur with it, and two voices were piped in. One was an evil sounding voice, that of an actor playing the role of the Devil, saying, "This man's soul is mine!" The second actor, with a wonderfully sweet voice, played the role of Jesus, arguing to give the prisoner a chance. If only he would cooperate, there was a chance for the prisoner to redeem himself. It was supposedly a very effective interrogation technique.

I don't know that this story is factually true, that it really happened, but from all we know about set and setting, quite clearly this could work as an interrogation technique. It would not work well on anybody in this conference because we would recognize, "Oh, somebody slipped me a drug, and there is something funny going on here." But for somebody who didn't even know what hallucinogens were, whose only previous belief system to account for strange experiences was that they had gone insane or died, who thought they had been poisoned, who smelled the fires of Hell... very, very powerful. I'll leave it to the philosophers as to whether this is more or less humane than thumb screws and hot irons and that kind of thing.

But this story illustrates a point – that entheogens don't automatically guarantee an entheogenic experience. They don't automatically guarantee growth or love or light or revelation. They can be used in the service of other belief systems, and used in a very nasty kind of way. So, this is the thing that ought to be said, the thing that is really one of the main things on my mind after thirty-five or so years of thinking about this: Simply because you are involved with entheogens, just because you are using them in a spiritual context, does not guarantee truth and growth and compassion's light. Entheogens are powerful helpers, but they don't guarantee these outcomes. Our dignity, our humanity in a sense, is that we are challenged to use these entheogens properly and to grow with them. The growth is not simply given to us. We have to use our head as well as our heart to really make the best use of entheogens.

I mentioned that the mindfulness work of G. I. Gurdjieff has always been very helpful to me. He made a wonderful, apparently paradoxical little saying once that I think summarizes my feelings on the need to use both heart and head here. "Work as if everything depends on work, and pray as if everything depends on prayer." Work as if everything depends on work: nobody's going to give you anything. If you don't make the effort, if you don't get things straight, if you don't get your house in order, you are going to get nothing. You must give it all you can and do your very best. Pray as if everything depends on prayer: understand that we are such tiny creatures in a vast universe, and yet there is Grace. There are gifts that can be given. Both these things are true simultaneously, and in the paradox of these – of being open, receptive, and humble, yet doing the best we can at all times, using our gifts – something can be found.

I have tremendous respect for the revelations, visions, whatever you want to call them, that can occur with the use of the entheogens. I also feel it's essential to practice humility about them. Revelation may come from the highest possible source, but I'm the one hearing it, I'm the one putting it into my memory, I'm the one unknowingly working it over with my belief system. Particularly, my feeling after years of working in this and related areas is that we have to develop mindfulness about the way we live our everyday life. Even if we have had a transcendent experience, our ordinary mind, our ordinary personality ("false personality" as Gurdjieff so nicely called it) is going to work that stuff over. It's going to take living processes and concretize them, turn them into fixed truths somehow, instead of allowing us to incorporate knowledge and grace into our daily lives. Our ordinary mind is going to develop emotional attachment of some sort to what we've learned, and once we've developed the emotional attachment, we are going to start defending that attachment.

I'm pretty good at defending my attachments while appearing open, and appearing open makes for a much more offensive kind of defense – ah, I meant to say “effective,” not “offensive,” but that's an excellent and revealing slip of the tongue! Effective also. And when we become defensive, of course, we begin to attack subtly, or not so subtly, things that we don't agree with, and we develop a certain kind of arrogance. Mindfulness – learning to tune in on a moment by moment basis to what am I thinking, what am I feeling, what am I sensing, what's the state of the world around me, what's my state and so forth – helps to point out how these things occur. This is usually quite disgusting when you see how your mind works, but eventually, you start to develop a little space to catch these things before they manifest. I've talked about this mindfulness in my two recent books, *Waking Up* (Tart 1986a) and *Living the Mindful Life* (Tart 1994d). This pursuit and investigation of mindfulness will probably continue to be the main focus of my personal and professional efforts for some time to come. I'm a long way from being good at it!

We should always try to learn from each other about the entheogens, about the way we are using them in our life, because that's part of practicing humility and mindfulness. In this room, for instance, we have a tremendous amount of accumulated wisdom and experience to share. So, my advice to your heads: Work as if everything depends on work. Let's do those scientific experiments, let's use our intellectual knowledge, and let's examine things. How do our findings connect? Are there contradictions? Are there illogicalities? How can we make more effective efforts? And so forth.

We should pray as if everything depends on prayer – use science and intellect in the service of the heart. And we should also use our intellect to purify the heart. Just because I feel something deeply doesn't mean I am correct. Just because I feel certain of something doesn't mean I am right. A constant openness, coupled with the discipline of being mindful about what we are actually doing, can make a difference as to whether the substances are used as entheogens or as ways of manipulating belief, emotions, and behavior. Drugs can be very effective brainwashing tools. It's quite frightening to think about that.

I pray that what I've said may be helpful to people. I will now try to take my own advice and be quiet and listen and learn from what other people have to say.

References

Note: Many of these articles are available online at www.paradigm-sys.com/cttart

- Ouspensky, P. D. 1949. *In Search of the Miraculous*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Tart, C., ed. 1969. *Altered States of Consciousness: A Book of Readings*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Tart, C. 1970. Marijuana intoxication: Common experiences. *Nature*, 226: 701–704.
- Tart, C. 1972. Scientific foundations for the study of altered states of consciousness. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 3: 93–124. (a)
- Tart, C. 1972. States of consciousness and state-specific sciences. *Science*, 176: 1203–1210. (b)
- Tart, C. 1974. On the nature of altered states of consciousness, with special reference to parapsychological phenomena. In W. Roll, R. Morris, & J. Morris, eds., *Research in Parapsychology*, 1973. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, pp. 163–218.
- Tart, C. 1975. Science, states of consciousness, and spiritual experiences: The need for state-specific sciences. In C. Tart, ed., *Transpersonal Psychologies*. New York: Harper & Row, pp. 11–58. (a)
- Tart, C. 1975. Some assumptions of orthodox, Western Psychology. In C. Tart, ed., *Transpersonal Psychologies*. New York: Harper & Row, pp. 61–111. (b)
- Tart, C. 1975. *States of Consciousness*. New York: E. P. Dutton. (c)
- Tart, C. 1977. Drug-induced states of consciousness. In B. Wolman et al., eds., *Handbook of Parapsychology*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, pp. 500–525.
- Tart, C. 1978. Altered states of consciousness: Putting the pieces together. In A. Sugarman & R. Tarter, eds., *Expanding Dimensions of Consciousness*. New York: Springer/Verlag, pp. 58–78. (a)
- Tart, C. 1978. Psi functioning and altered states of consciousness: A perspective. In B. Shapin & L. Coly, eds., *Psi and States of Awareness*. New York: Parapsychology Foundation, pp. 180–210. (b)
- Tart, C. 1979. Science and the sources of value. *Phoenix: New Directions in the Study of Man*, 3: 25–29.
- Tart, C. 1980. A systems approach to altered states of consciousness. In J. Davidson & R. Davidson, eds., *The Psychobiology of Consciousness*. New York: Plenum, pp. 243–269.
- Tart, C. 1981. Transpersonal realities or neurophysiological illusions? Toward a dualistic theory of consciousness. In R. Valle & R. von Eckartsberg, eds., *The Metaphors of Consciousness*. New York: Plenum, pp. 199–222.
- Tart, C. 1983. Initial integrations of some psychedelic understandings into everyday life. In L. Grinspoon & J. Bakalar, eds., *Psychedelic Reflections*. New York: Human Sciences Press, pp. 223–233.
- Tart, C. 1986. *Waking Up: Overcoming the Obstacles to Human Potential*. Boston: New Science Library. (a)

- Tart, C. 1986. Consciousness, altered states, and worlds of experience. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 18: 159–170. (b)
- Tart, C. 1987. The world simulation process in waking and dreaming: A systems analysis of structure. *Journal of Mental Imagery*, 11: 145–158. (a)
- Tart, C. 1987. Altered states of consciousness and the possibility of survival of death. In J. Spong, ed., *Consciousness and Survival: An Interdisciplinary Inquiry into the Possibility of Life Beyond Biological Death*. Sausalito, CA: Institute of Noetic Sciences, pp. 27–56. (b)
- Tart, C. T. 1988. From spontaneous event to lucidity: A review of attempts to consciously control nocturnal dreaming. In J. Gackenbach & S. LaBerge, eds., *Conscious Mind, Sleeping Brain: Perspectives on Lucid Dreaming*. New York: Plenum, pp. 67–103.
- Tart, C. 1989. *Open Mind, Discriminating Mind: Reflections on Human Possibilities*. San Francisco: Harper & Row. (a)
- Tart, C. 1989. Enlightenment, altered states of consciousness and parapsychology. In B. Shapin & L. Coly, eds., *Parapsychology and Human Nature*. New York: Parapsychology Foundation, pp. 150–169. (b)
- Tart, C. 1989. Extending mindfulness to everyday life. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 30: 81–106. (c)
- Tart, C. T. 1990. Psi-meditated emergent interactionism and the nature of consciousness. In R. Kunzendorf & A. Sheikh, eds., *The Psychophysiology of Mental Imagery: Theory, Research and Application*. Amityville, New York: Baywood, pp. 37–63. (a)
- Tart, C. T. 1990. Mindlessness and mindfulness in daytime and nighttime dreaming. *Lucidity Letter*, 9(1): 49–81. (b)
- Tart, C. 1991. Multiple personality, altered states and virtual reality: The world simulation process approach. *Dissociation*, 3: 222–233. (a)
- Tart, C. 1991. Influence of previous psychedelic drug experiences on students of Tibetan Buddhism: A preliminary exploration. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 23(2): 139–173. (b)
- Tart, C. 1993. Marijuana intoxication, psi, and spiritual experiences. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 87: 149–170. (a)
- Tart, C. 1993. Drugs and the path. *Gnosis*, 26(Winter 1993): 23. (b)
- Tart, C. 1993. Mind embodied: Computer-generated virtual reality as a new dualistic-interactive model for transpersonal psychology. In K. Rao, ed., *Cultivating Consciousness: Enhancing Human Potential, Wellness and Healing*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, pp. 123–137. (c)
- Tart, C. 1994. The human mind: Survival after death. In L. Bessette, ed., *Le Processes de Guerison: Par de la Souffrance ou la Mort (Healing: Beyond Suffering or Death)*. Montreal, Quebec: Publications MNH, pp. 305–316. (a)
- Tart, C. 1994. The structure and dynamics of waking sleep. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 25(2): 141–168. (b)
- Tart, C. 1994. Compassion, science and consciousness survival. *Noetic Sciences Review*, 29(Spring 1994): 9–15. (c)
- Tart, C. 1994. *Living the Mindful Life*. Boston: Shambhala. (d)