

CHAPTER 4

SHAMANIC INDUCTION OF ALTERED STATES FOR SPIRITUAL INSPIRATION

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Shamanism became a common term only after the psychedelic revolution of the 1960s. The word was first recorded in English at the end of the 17th century with specific reference to the religion of the Turks and Mongols. Similar magical-religious practices worldwide and specifically within the European tradition have until only recently gone unnoticed. In fact, they have been repressed from fear of contamination with contemporary irresponsible recreational abuse of psychoactive substances. The practices were derived mainly from ancient Egyptian, Greco-Roman, and Judaic-Christian cultures. These practices were also repressed because of the very real problems of the addictive potentials and the illegal trade in drugs.

Anyone proposing to investigate aspects of this European tradition is likely to face professional shunning and a thwarted academic career. This is particularly ironic since the prohibition of drugs can be traced back to Plato, who recognized the true dangers of altered consciousness for those not sufficiently prepared for the experience. The recreational abuse of a sacred mind-altering sacrament is fully recorded in the great scandal of the Profanation of the Mysteries that occurred in the city of Athens in the year 415 BCE. Indeed, the glorious achievements of the high culture of the Classical Age in Greece, including in particular the Theater of Dionysus, are themselves a reflex of the shamanic induction of altered states of consciousness for spiritual inspiration.

A similar official condemnation is apt to greet anyone investigating the psychoactive nature of the fruit of the Tree in Eden or the initiatory rituals of the long tradition of Western secret societies, tradesmen guilds, and

warrior fraternities, going back to the Mithraism of the Roman Empire and continuing until this day. These include the 19th-century theosophists and occultists, New England transcendentalism, American mysticism, ecstatic Christian bible-camp revivalism, and the origins of several New World thriving religions and science fiction theologies and cults.

This prejudicial denial of the European pagan and Christian heritage has driven the generations after the psychedelic 1960s to seek patterns of interpretation and religious indoctrination in areas far afield from their own indigenous traditions, even though the most perfect paradigms of personal self-discovery are offered by Greek heroes and heroines like Oedipus, Hercules, and Psyche and lie at the heart of European psychoanalysis. The quest for foreign guidance has developed into the thriving market for narco-tourism, which imposes its particular exotic brand upon the encountered mystical experience or spiritual inspiration.

William James, writing at the end of the 19th-century's experimentation with chemical stimulants for visionary experience among the social elite, described the normal waking consciousness as just one special type of consciousness. Meanwhile all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. This concept is now reflected in the most recent theories of the physical universe and popularized in contemporary literature and films as multiple universes, coexistent galaxies, and parallel dimensions.

The scenarios for the experience are the narratives of myth, since a story provides a mode of conceptualizing something inconceivable. The story is the same worldwide, but it should not be accepted as an account of what really happens. It is always the tale of a journey, what is colloquially called a trip.

The story was already old by several decades of millennia when Plato turned it into metaphor as a launching pad for imagining the unimaginable. The Paleolithic record indicates that caves served as religious sanctuaries for a vision that endowed the hominid species with a sense of spirituality, *Homo spiritualis*, not the misnomer *sapiens*, the "tool-maker." The prejudice that the past was primitive has largely been supplanted today by the awareness that mythopoeia encodes fundamental realities verifiable by the most revolutionary advances in modern science. Paintings on the walls of the Paleolithic caves suggest that the enclosed spaces were sanctuaries for initiation, often sexual, and for spiritual communion, and that the depictions served as permeable barriers, the filmiest veil, invoking the outside world in and providing a pathway through to transcendence without. Painting the pictures was the ritual that empowered them with such potential. They were symbols, which in the most basic definition is half of something else, requiring the other missing half to complete its meaning.

Plato described the prisoners in a cave, forced to view only the shadows of objects upon the rock walls projected by the light of a bonfire, which they by force of habit accepted as their comfortable conception of reality. When they reluctantly are dragged from their chains upward to the mouth of the cave to view the light of the sun and the world outside, they at first reject it as too novel and painful to see. Eventually they become accustomed to the brightness and realize that the fire projecting the shadows within the cave was only a dim illumination compared to the radiant brilliance of the sun. The application of the metaphor is to realize that this world outside the cave is another cave with only shadows masquerading as reality. Transcendence requires the former prisoners to pass beyond this illusory appearance of the world to the truer realm beyond. Plato makes clear that this is not an experience available to everybody, only those with souls of a superior quality. Easy access with drugs is forbidden or reserved only for those who have attained the transcendence via a rigorous indoctrination involving intense contemplation of symbolic forms.

Myth has two ways of describing this realm beyond. In one, it is seen as the fiery surround of the cosmos, outer space. The living are defined by the warmth generated by the physical body, the result of a spiritual fire burning within, a chemical or alchemical process. As all sparks fly upward from any burning source, the spiritual fire once released upon death or liberated temporarily by induced altered consciousness would obviously soar to the outermost boundary, which is the limit of the cosmos. There it collects in a surrounding reservoir of eternal burning, which the mythical topography labels as the empyrean or ether. It is the final repository of all consciousness, comparable to the contemporary Ethernet. The former individual consciousnesses merge into this sea of total knowledge called Gnosis.

Everything is defined, however, by antithesis to its dichotomous opposite. Plato's prisoners journeyed upward from the cave, but that journey implies the potential for the opposite direction, descent instead of ascendance. Plato's prisoners are forced to escape against their will from the cave, but caves are also entrances downward into the womb of the universal mother called Gaia. Hence, tiny bits of the fiery surround are enticed downward, yearning to quench their burning thirst in the wetness of matter in the Incarnation. The moving celestial bodies called planets and the imagined configurations presented by the stellar groupings of the constellations trace the pathway for this descent, leaving the imprint of their influence as the astrological signature of the incarnated spiritual spark.

The prime dictum, however, of the alchemical science, which developed into chemistry by shedding its theological contamination, is that the above is the mirror of what is below. It is only the prejudicial rejection of physicality that establishes the coordinates for the journey upward as superior

to plunging still further downward through the shadowy depictions on the walls deeper into the cave, to merge more completely with the great reservoir of material being. There, in a paradisiacal realm mythologized as the blessed fields of Elysium, the joys of physicality can finally quench the burning thirst by merging into the totality of Gaia consciousness, where life as it was, with all its bodily pleasure, stretches on for eternity in a blessed state of narcosis. Since these two scenarios are only mythical, the fallacy of the geocentric model merely requires updating in terms of our evolving concepts of relativity and the nature of the universe.

Inevitably, the driving energy of the immaterial empyrean and the blessed matter of the Elysian paradise suggested a sexual dichotomy. It was not recognized until the 17th century CE that the female contributed anything to the developing fetus except the vessel for gestation, and the new invention of the microscope seemed at first to confirm this notion, making the moving spermatozoon visible as the living creature, the little man or homunculus, seen complete except for further growth within the woman's womb. Conversely, however, it required millennia of prehistoric development and social organization before the male's contribution of the spark of fertilizing sperm was recognized as in any way responsible for the apparently spontaneous pregnancy of the developing child's mother, perhaps even the result of her participation in the rituals of the sisterhood of females, bonded together in sharing a synchronicity of reproductive cycles, in step with the lunar phases.

Women, as represented in mythologized goddesses, traditionally pace their life-span by three periods marked by the onset of menstruation and its cessation at menopause, matching the transformations of the moon, while men divide into two groupings, marked by the change at puberty, matched by the diurnal birth and the death of the sun and the two markers of the solstices. The Paleolithic record also preserves upright phallic stones, sometimes within the subterranean enclosure, as the masculine counterpart to the receptive vulva of the cave sanctuaries. Every 19 years the solar calendar coincides with the lunar, giving rise to the concept of the greater period of cosmic renewal, when everything will end and begin again.

Dichotomies, however, whether sexual or topographical, are merely conceptual tools, forcing meaning upon the inconceivable. Energy is a reflex of matter; linear time is relevant only to the biological clock that charts it. Beyond the dichotomies is the experience of Oneness, the Monad definable only by zero. As Oedipus approached the end of his troubled existence, he stood on the threshold of the sacred cave. Those watching from a distance saw only a blinding flash of light, a bolt of lightning uniting the empyreal realm with its chthonic nadir. Only those who had been privileged to know the mystery knew whether some escort received him upward into the celestial fire or he descended upon the holy steps that lay before him. All that can be sure is that

what was left was a blinding pillar of illumination transfixing the upper and lower worlds.

Fire is the essence of this mythical scenario. Its discovery and mastery worldwide are the essential event of the awakening of the spiritual hominid some 100,000 years ago. The two natural sources of fire would be the fall of the lightning bolt from the empyrean and the caldera burning at the base of the volcano, beyond which stretches the fields of Elysium. The first mode of generating fire by friction with the twirling fire-stick drilling into the receptive vulva of the tinder would suggest the inevitable sexual metaphor. The hollow mountain with the fiery crucible penetrated by the thunderbolt represents the same metaphor, and the craftsman of Gaia is the agent who ministers the metallurgical transformation at the alchemical forge, rendering the mountain into the holy pillar of illumination for the ascent and descent of the unifying Mystery.

Less known is the activity of the fire thief in discovering the spark also resident in the magical plants that triggered the sudden awakening, in what has been termed the First Supper, of which the Last is merely a commemoration explicitly labeling the meal as the substance of a Eucharist, the body and blood of a redeeming deity. This Eucharist is termed an entheogen, a substance that is consubstantial with deity and that offers the potential of a shared or consubstantial experience of spirituality to whoever, with all due reverence and respect, ingests it. The First Supper was the origin of primordial religion, after which humankind experienced a rapid evolution. It induced the altered state of consciousness ascribed to the gift of the fire thief, who also created the first man and established the coordinates that identified the tribal group by its covenant with the beings of the other realm, delineating the terms of reciprocal obligations. From the very beginning of this relationship, the culture founder who was the aboriginal shaman priest endured the rigors of the consubstantial Eucharist on behalf of the commonality, sharing the experience only with those deemed worthy and prohibiting it from profane use, for the fear of angering the indwelling spirits.

As organized religions developed, the prohibition became institutionalized, empowering its ministers as the necessary intercessors, who promulgated diverse other modes for accessing the mystical experience, such as music, dance, drumming, meditation, sensory deprivation, breathing techniques, physical torment, extreme fatigue, all of which might approximate the visionary state with a symbolic substitute magically transubstantiated with the spirit of the divine. The most elite reserved the consubstantial sacrament as their secret privilege, something to be shared only with those correctly programmed and indoctrinated for initiation into the Mystery.

The prohibition, however, is not a trivial matter. María Sabina, the Mazatec shaman who divulged her knowledge of the sacred mushroom to the

outside world and made her remote Oaxacan village of Hualta de Jiménez a tourist destination of the psychedelic revolution, lamented that the little children, the holy saints had lost their voice and no longer spoke. Today, anyone can find a shaman there to perform what is called the ceremony for a couple of hundred dollars.

The same is true of the Amazon jungle, but accessing the full shamanic potential is not a matter of simply drinking a potion. The adepts at *vegetalismo* follow a strenuous and often physically debilitating diet of plants over a prolonged period of indoctrination. This vegetarian regime includes many plants that are symbolic, rather than chemically active, and the purpose is to induce a bouquet of consubstantiality, replacing the individual human persona more completely with a full entheogenic spectrum of the spirits of the plants, and the plants must be gathered with proper reverence for their indwelling deities, while making symbolic restitution with offering of substitutes to the botanical realm from which they are extracted. Informants report that often abstinence from alcohol and sex is required both before and after the shamanic experience, admitting that the prohibition as a prerequisite is perhaps understandable as a preparatory purification, but that contravening it after the experience bears no rational explanation but nevertheless results in dire physical consequences. Visionary sects in the ancient world, like the Pythagoreans and the Orphic initiates, followed similar dietary regimes, and the Eleusinian Mystery required at least a half year of preparation between the Lesser and Greater initiations.

The Eleusinian Mysteries were considered the defining experience of a lifetime. It was a covenant with Gaia, comparable to the contemporary awareness of our long disregard of our obligations and duties to our planet Earth. The scandal of the Profanation threatened to undo the accord with the natural world upon which all humankind and civilized life depended for continued existence and sustenance upon the planet. The sanctuary was an architectural similitude of a subterranean cavern, from which the initiates accessed a journey via a sacred potion downward to Elysium to establish a contract of reciprocal visitation rights with the netherworld, being received there as guests and offering similar hospitality to visitors from there welcomed into their own homes in this world above the ground. They arrived in Elysium at a critical moment of cosmic significance, since the goddess, abducted from the celestial realm, had conceived a son and was about to give him birth. They resurfaced in the cavernous hall of initiation along with her infant son, the child of death who was also their savior. For them, death now held no sting, for they could live their lives in peace and die eventually with full confidence of their continuance among the blessed deceased.

As a heresy or innovation within this tradition, traceable back perhaps to the eighth century, if not earlier, the mythical shaman who bore the name

of Orpheus satisfied a yearning for escape from the cycles of reincarnation. Plato recorded the religion as the myth of Er in his *Republic*, a man who had died upon the battlefield, but came back to life to report upon what he had witnessed. Eleusis made no demands of ethical morality upon its initiates, other than being free of bloodguilt from the crime of murder. Orpheus taught that maintaining purity of spirit and abhorring all wrong doing in both this world and the next could eventually after many cycles of reincarnation free the spirit to ascend to the empyrean. The corpse was buried with instructions engraved on leaves of gold, cautioning the newly arrived spirits in the netherworld to avoid quenching their thirst in the fountain of forgetfulness and to identify themselves to the guardians confidently as children from the empyrean.

The Eleusinian Mystery is generally accepted as derived from Egyptian religion, via the intermediary of Minoan Crete in the second millennium BCE. In the expanded world left by the conquests of Alexander the Great, the Mystery of Isis and Osiris was redefined in a Hellenized mode and spread as a major spiritual experience in the European empire controlled by Rome. It continued after the Conversion of the Empire as the occult scenario for many theosophist and alchemical secret societies.

Judaism had no eschatology or scenario for the end game until the rabbinical exegesis known as the Torah, which supposedly went back to Abraham but wasn't committed to writing until the 13th century CE. It is essentially an assimilation of ideas current in the Neo-Platonic Gnosticism of Hellenistic Greco-Roman paganism. Christianity further elaborated the scenario in the medieval period, largely also as an assimilation of the Greco-Roman myth. There was no need for an eschatological theology in the first years of Christianity since the second Coming of the Savior with the ascent to the heavens was expected within the life-span of the first disciples. Paul is responsible for the myth of the Rapture, which he taught as the Christian Mystery, an imminent event that inevitably received repeated disappointed postponements, until the millennium or some subsequently significant marker. The Pauline Rapture is the Orphic scenario with the end time ushered in by the sacrifice of a Savior, born analogous to the child of the Eleusinian Mystery. Paul as a philhellene redefined Judaic Christianity for the gentiles, incorporating elements from his former Mithraism and Neo-Platonic Gnosticism.

The religion of Mithraism was an importation of Persian Zoroastrianism into Rome in the first century BCE, whence it spread throughout Europe in its developing empire. It admitted only male candidates and its seven grades of ascending initiation programmed the reversal of the incarnation of birth by the progressive divestiture of physical materialism to achieve a union with the solar principle as adoptive son, to rise to the empyreal rim of the cosmos for a vision of the final conflagration that would usher in a renewal of time by

his self sacrifice in the fiery ride as the solar charioteer. Christianity copied Mithraism with its seven sacraments and the redemptive self-sacrifice of the Son as mediator with the divine Father.

Although all of these spiritual traditions involved the induction of altered states with entheogens, specific drugs are usually not recorded, because they were not drugs per se, but sacred sacraments, defined by ritual and metaphor, and the exact formula was often a mixture of various substances. A distinction must also be clarified as to whether the experience was offered to a community of participants or was something private like the prophetic voice of the Delphic oracle or the inspired utterances of the poets, who Plato testified were not in their right minds when they performed, but their wits had been replaced by the gods. Drug use for recreational purposes, moreover, was common in antiquity, with fresco depictions of opium parties and testimony about people wandering drunk on arrow poisons and lethal potions, which correctly compounded offered the obviously dangerous potential for extreme modes of intoxication.

Most often, however, the drug use goes unnoticed by modern scholars because it masquerades as wine, the drink of choice in ancient society. The most common way of ingesting drugs in the Greco-Roman world was as additives to wine. Such doctored wine was the normal drink both socially and in ritual contexts. Similarly, the ecstatic rapture of the bacchanalian devotees of the god of wine is mistakenly ascribed to wine, whereas there is no evidence that they drank wine in their mountain revels, and the extreme state of derangement they experienced went far beyond anything that could be ascribed to alcoholism. On one occasion, the women wandered into a town that was at war, and the townspeople formed a protective circle around the women to shield them from molestation from the soldiers. The women fell unconscious into a narcosis that lasted until dawn.

One of the earliest documents in Latin is a decree of the Roman Senate in the year 186 BCE concerning the dangerous intoxication of the bacchanalian rituals, which had spread from the Greek settlements in the south of the Italian peninsula and had even reached the city of Rome. Promiscuous sex was prevalent in the ceremonies, more commonly men with men than with women. In their extreme intoxication, they danced wildly. Young men were dragged to caves to be initiated, while cymbals and tambourines drowned out their shrieks as the priests sodomized them. Some were even offered as sacrificial victims. Originally, women had performed the rites, but it had spread to the men as well. It was seen as something that undermined the very foundation of the republic, leading the youth to perdition.

The events were seen as a threat to the state, potentially rendering the legions effeminate, and the senate passed a decree severely limiting the practices and requiring the issuance of a special license. Many perpetrators were

thrown into prison; even more were put to death. We know of the event both from historical accounts and because the decree of the senate survived, engraved on a bronze tablet, the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*. This is not mythologized history; there is no doubt that the events took place. It is probably significant that so ancient a document demonstrates the Roman Senate struggling to regulate a problem that still plagues the modern world. The rites were not prohibited outright, but restricted and controlled by licensing. Rome reacted similarly to the ecstatic cult of the goddess Cybele, which was imported from Anatolia into Rome as a divine ally to the city during the Second Punic War (218 to 201 BCE) and established on the Palatine Hill, but subsequently walled off and prohibited until the reign of Claudius for Roman participants when it was discovered that the full extent of the religious frenzy could lead to self-castration.

The wine drunk socially at the symposia or drinking parties in ancient Greece was customarily diluted with three or four parts water, but it was still potent enough to induce extreme drunkenness after only a couple of rounds, often resulting in rowdiness and intoxicated brawls, because of the potency of the psychoactive substances added to it from botanical and venomous animal sources. The symposia were celebrated only by males or by female sexual companions, called hetaerae, who were not considered proper women of the citizenry and mimicked the male symposia in private parties among themselves. The mountain bacchanalia, which in Classical Greece was exclusively celebrated by females, are best interpreted as rituals of plant-gathering or herbal pharmacopoeia, in which the indwelling spirits of the wild plants were addressed as appropriate for their status as entheogens. This involved fantasies of zoomorphism and botanical anthropomorphism and the visualizing of the materialized spiritual apparitions as hybrid creatures engaged in a communal sexual orgy. The god actually has two names, although often interchangeable. As the son of Zeus he was called Dionysus, but he was also known as Bacchus. The women of the plant-gathering frenzy were termed mad-women or maenads and bacchantes, but they are never referred to as Dionysian.

Most of this European plant lore survives only in prosecutorial accusations against medieval witchcraft and in the colloquial nomenclature, which preserves indications of mythologized botanical personae and suggestions of ritualized employment, both pagan and Christian.

Although casual recreational abuse might result only in temporary beatific narcosis, the full immersion in the ritualized diet of sacred herbs and animal venoms could be expected to summon the material presence of saints and deities, mystical transport, and other paranormal phenomena such as distant visioning, astral projection, prophetic clairvoyance, prebirth remembrances, animal transmogrification, miraculous healing, and cognition of the

language of plants and animals, all of which are documented for shamans of the ancient European world, as well as the shamanism still practiced in contemporary times. Some informants testify to experiencing cosmic resonance, a vibratory consubstantial oneness with the entire universe, down to the molecular structure of the plants that induced the rapture.