

CHAPTER 9

STAIRWAYS TO HEAVEN: DRUGS IN AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY

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Long before humans first roamed the wilderness of North America, the plant kingdom laid the foundation for future evolutionary developments. Plants emerged about 3.2 billion years ago and quickly covered the earth. The chlorophyll contained in plants enabled them to absorb and store the energy radiating from the sun. For this reason, plants became the basic building blocks necessary for the emergence of the animal kingdom. Plants supply animals with energy, vitamins, and minerals. Some plants even perform medicinal functions, helping to fight off infection, subdue pain, and stimulate the body's own regenerative processes. Plants thus form the biological substratum of all complex life, including the human species.

There are approximately 180,000 species of plants in North America alone. A few of these display the ability to provide animals with benefits other than energy, minerals, and therapeutic relief. These select plants, the "plants of the gods," exhibit the further ability to provide animals—especially humans—with the experience of ecstasy (Schultes and Hofmann, 1979; Fuller, 2000). Ecstasy-producing plants contain a number of psychoactive chemical substances. These chemicals act on the central nervous system in such a way as to produce a variety of unusual symptoms. Not all of these symptoms are pleasant. Dizziness, disorientation, and nausea are common. Yet some of these unusual symptoms have a curious attraction to humans. The vision of colorful lights, feelings of enhanced bodily energy, spontaneous laughter, and heightened sensory experience are among the many plant-induced sensations that humans find pleasurable. Even dizziness and disorientation

prove strangely appealing to persons wanting to transcend their common experience of the world.

Many species use botanical substances to produce intoxication. The quest for intoxication might even be considered one of the fundamental drives motivating animal behavior. Ronald Siegel argues that there is a natural force motivating animals to pursue intoxication, sometimes to the point of overshadowing all other activities in life (1989). Humans are no exception. The drive for ecstatic intoxication is a near-universal trait of the human species. Humans have not only learned to maximize the ecstasy-producing potentials of the plant kingdom, but have also developed elaborate cultural explanations for the significance of these intoxicates states, frequently utilizing religious myth to associate these ecstasies with the gods themselves.

The story of Americans' pursuit of ecstasy is by no means limited to the quest for simple intoxication. It is also a story about the different ways in which American culture has transformed plants and chemicals into entheogens. An entheogen (literally, to generate god or spirit within) is a botanical or chemical substance taken to occasion spiritual or mystical experience (Forte, 1997). Some plants have the ability to foster experiences of having momentarily transcended our normal range of mental and emotional powers. Humans often understand these experiences as affording them direct contact with a "higher" spiritual reality. The use of mood-altering or mind-altering substances is thus often about the quest for ecstasy rather than the quest for intoxication per se. Ecstasy, after all, means "to stand out or go beyond" one's normal state of being. Certain plants have been valued by humans precisely for their ability to afford this sensation of stepping outside the confines of our physical senses. The quest for ecstasy is thus the quest to penetrate mystery. The history of religion in the United States is, at least in part, linked with the history of the ecstatic experiences whereby Americans have ascended botanical stairways to heaven.

The United States, though not particularly blessed with indigenous species of psychoactive plants, nonetheless has a lengthy history of entheogen use. *Datura* (jimson weed), the red bean or mescal bean, and potent strains of tobacco have historically been the most prevalent of these indigenous psychoactive plants. The mescaline-containing peyote cactus and mushrooms containing psilocybin or psilocin have also served as elixirs of ecstasy in various parts of what is now the United States. Over time, a host of new drugs found their way into American life. Alcohol, marijuana, LSD, coffee, and potent "pure forms" of both mescaline and psilocybin eventually came to supplement the botanical substances indigenous to the United States. It seems appropriate to refer to all these psychoactive substances as "drugs" and to refer to them as coffee, tobacco, wine, or peyote rather than specific chemical agents such as caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, or mescaline. After all, people drink

cups of coffee, not caffeine; smoke tobacco mixtures, not nicotine; ingest peyote, not mescaline; and sip glasses of wine, not alcohol.

Referring to the actual substances that people consume, for example, wine, coffee, marijuana, and tobacco, thus draws attention to the broader cultural context that influence their meaning and significance. It is also important to realize that the term "drug" is deliberately being used in a way that makes no distinction between substances that can be used legally and those that are currently illegal in the United States. These legal distinctions are arbitrary from a historical point of view. We might note, for example, that many Christian churches currently utilize wine in their rituals and have a coffee hour as the end of their worship service. Yet, at other times in history, Christian officials have sought to have both of these substances legally banned. Peyote was used for centuries before predominantly Euro-American legislatures first tried to make its use illegal. Now, both state and federal legislatures seem to be arguing that its use for spiritual purposes should be legal for Native Americans but not for other Americans. The story of the relationship between drugs and American religiosity cannot be reduced to any single historical period's legal distinctions.

DRUGS AND TWO SACRED WORLDS

What makes humans so fascinating is that we are both material and spiritual beings. We go through life alternating between the worldly and the heavenly, the profane and the sacred. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade explained how "the sacred and the profane are two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by humans in the course of history" (1959, p. 14). The profane is a stance toward life focusing on the material (economic and political) dimensions of life. To be profane is to be secular, eschewing the validity or importance of religious outlooks on life. It is worth noting in this context that the vast majority of drug-induced states of intoxication are motivated by decidedly profane, nonspiritual factors. Many use drugs to induce physical pleasure, provide short episodes of bliss, and create momentary retreats from the stress social existence. Consider, too, how a great deal of coffee consumption is motivated by a desire to be sharper and more productive at work. The consumption of alcoholic beverages, on the other hand, is often motivated by the desire to wind down from a day's activities, to reduce stress, and to rejuvenate oneself for the next day's work. In a similar way, patterns of drug use (especially alcoholic beverages) seem to siphon off political dissent, keeping the working classes content with their lives and uninterested in political rebellion.

Humans also live with an awareness of, and desire for, the sacred. The sacred orientation to life acknowledges a divine or holy reality that stands over

and against the everyday, commonsense world of experience. Eliade followed Rudolf Otto's classic analysis of the "holy" as a distinct reality that confronts humans as awe-inspiring mystery. The holy has a numinous or mystical quality that appeals to our aesthetic senses. The holy also confronts us as an overwhelming, superior power. Whoever adopts the sacred approach to life lives with an overriding awareness of a sacred reality that in some mysterious way surrounds the world of everyday experience. To live religiously is to yearn for special communion with this sacred reality.

There are two distinct ways in which a person can be introduced to a sacred perception of reality (Shinn, 1977). The first of these consists of immediate personal experiences of a sacred power or reality interpreted as existing beyond the sphere of the physical senses. Such an experience is life transforming. It introduces individuals to an entirely different order of existence. Experiences of the sacred change our understanding of the causes or forces that operate in the universe and therefore simultaneously changes our understanding of what is "real" and what affects our mental and physical well-being. In short, ecstatic experience is the first stairway affording individuals access to a sacred world.

The second way people enter into a sacred world is by living in a religious community. Religious communities create a variety of methods for socializing newcomers into a sacred way of life. Myths, rituals, doctrines, and moral teachings all bind individuals into a common way of life predicated on the existence of a sacred reality from which human life derives its principal meaning. Social relationships in the home, places of worship, and intimate modes of communal interaction provide opportunities for initiating people into a felt sense of living in harmony with a sacred reality.

The major thesis of this chapter is that throughout American history drugs have factored significantly in both the sacred worlds of personal experience and religious community. There is, perhaps, a tendency to focus on the role that drugs play in eliciting personal religious experiences. Anthropologist Felicitas Goodman (1988) has written that the common neurophysical basis of all religious experience is a particular kind of brain "tuning," creating altered states of consciousness that facilitate contact with an alternate reality. Societies have utilized fasting practices, ritual dancing, rhythmic music, and various breathing exercises to alter consciousness in ways deemed to have spiritual significance. Not surprisingly, drugs have also proven to be highly effective means for altering an individual's state of consciousness in such a way as to "tune" individuals into an alternate reality. Drug-induced ecstasies provide vivid experiences that religious communities interpret as connection with a sacred reality. As Goodman notes in her cross-cultural analyses of ecstatic states, "religious communities that use drugs to [induce ecstasy] teach their members how to switch from intoxication to religious trance" (1988, p. 41).

The second sacred world is the orientation to life transmitted through socialization into a religious community. Worship services integrating shared ritual behavior and formal preaching serve to bond individuals together into an intact community of believers. Drugs, too, facilitate the adjustments in mood and thought needed to broaden people's sense of identity and belonging. The use of peyote on Native American reservations, for example, forged communal solidarity over and against the more dominant white culture even while it affirmed links with native religious precepts. The sharing of marijuana by members of the 1960s and 1970s counterculture both enabled people to experience alternate realities and to bond with fellow spiritual seekers. Coffeehouses provide physiological exhilaration even while they create settings for people to gather and discuss novel philosophical and theological ideas. These examples illustrate the great extent to which drugs are not only associated with the sacred world of private religious experience, but are also vehicles for communal bonding and communal affirmation.

NATIVE AMERICAN PURSUIT OF ECSTASY

It is difficult to make generalizations about Native American religion. The main reason for this is that the terms "Native American religion" and "Native American culture" imply some kind of unity among the thousands of ethnic group that inhabited North America prior to European settlement. In reality, however, these groups were separate and distinct societies. They used hundreds of different languages. They were geographically separated, occupying quite different climatic regions. Some were hunting and gathering societies, whereas others developed fairly advanced agricultural economies. We are also dealing with traditions that developed over the 15,000–20,000 years since these various peoples first arrived on the North American continent. Few statements apply to all of these cultures. There is, therefore, no such thing as the Native American religious tradition.

Decades of research into the many societies that predated European colonization permit a few cautious generalizations about Native American religion. Ake Hultkrantz succinctly summarizes this research by suggesting that

The Indian religious perspective centers around the supernatural world, populated by gods and spirits but also by human beings, animals, plants, and inanimate objects, for the supernatural breaks through into the everyday world. Its foremost means of expression is supernatural power, at times perceived as a specific, defined potency, at times merely experienced as a psychological reality underlying supernatural occurrences. (1967, p. 15)

Hultkrantz points out two important features of Native American religion: belief in the existence of a supernatural world and belief that this

supernatural world expresses itself in various forms of supernatural power. These two beliefs provide a helpful starting point for understanding why most Native American societies valued ecstatic states of consciousness and, in turn, why some of these societies valued certain rituals that employed drugs for religious purposes.

Native American belief that the world is surrounded by unseen spirits and powers implied that these powers were capable of affecting events in the everyday world. It was thus important for humans to establish harmonious relationship and connection with this unseen realm of power. This connection might provide insight into the intentions of these unseen powers (divination) or even promise some means of propitiating or even controlling these spiritual agencies. Native Americans needed to discern the disposition of particular spirits or powers before hunting, going into battle, or entering into an important agreement. The desire to exert control over the weather or to influence agricultural cycles also gave urgency to the quest for establishing special connection with supernatural agents.

One of the most important Native American rituals for heightening one's relationship to supernatural power was the "vision quest." Visions were especially significant for seeking help with curing sick friends and relatives or gaining wisdom when faced with significant personal or tribal decisions. Hultkrantz notes that there were two basic types of visions: spontaneous and solicited. The spontaneous vision appeared suddenly and unexpectedly (often in a dream). Such visions were most likely to come to the tribal shamans, those individuals with particularly close relationship with the spirit world. Solicited visions were more common. Various ascetic practices such as dancing, singing, fasting, isolation, steam baths, and even self-torture aided those seeking enhanced connection with supernatural forces.

Drugs were yet another instrument for soliciting connection with sacred powers. It should be emphasized, however, that the use of potent psychoactive substances to induce visionary states was not common. Indeed, a great deal of Native American religion was not particularly ecstatic. Yet, nearly all Native American societies used at least some mind-altering or mood-altering substances to evoke the two sacred worlds of experience and community. Virtually all, for example, used intoxicating beverages. The Apache of Arizona and New Mexico fasted to enhance the intoxicating effects of *tulpi* (a beer made of the maguey plant). Other Apache tribes used yucca to make intoxicating beverages, often mixed with the roots of datura. Not only did drinking these alcoholic beverages help forge social solidarity, but it also incited emotion in ceremonies before battle or to commemorate rites of passages such as puberty, weddings, and funerals. Alcoholic beverages were also consumed in ceremonies related to vision quests. The Commanche, Oto, and Tonkawa tribes mixed peyote and the mescal bean to create an extraordinarily potent

drink that found its greatest use just prior to the rise of the peyote-using Native American church and thus possibly constitutes a transitional link between pre- and postreservation uses of botanical substances in Native American religion.

Datura (frequently referred to as jimson weed) was particularly valued by tribes throughout the Southwest for its vision-giving powers. *Datura* contains a large amount of tropane alkaloids that are highly toxic and include atropine, hyposcyamine, and scopolamine. These alkaloids produce weariness and listlessness. A short time later, *datura* tends to produce visionary experiences that might be involved in divination procedures, sometimes followed by vivid hallucinations. These symptoms are typically followed by the loss of consciousness and deep sleep. Death or permanent insanity may result from excessive doses, further contributing to the awesome reverence with which this drug is regarded.

Datura's psychoactive potency has prompted people around the world to view it as a plant of the gods. While some Native American tribes used *datura* to bring purely secular pleasures, tribes across the continent relied on *datura* for divination purposes. *Datura*-induced states made it possible to locate deer, reveal the identity of someone who had stolen property, or to locate lost articles. The Navajo not only used *datura* to aid in medical diagnosis and healing, but they also believed that it could be sprinkled on objects so that they might magically help bring about desired results. The Mountain Cahuilla of California were typical of tribal societies that made use of *datura's* potent powers for male puberty ceremonies. *Datura* produced initial excitation followed by a total loss of consciousness thereby providing a physiological substrate to the death/rebirth features of the ceremony demarcating their new status as men and full-fledged members of the clan.

Psychoactive mushrooms, mescal beans, and peyote were also important elements in what Weston La Barre (1964) calls the "narcotic complex" whereby widespread belief in ecstatic-visionary shamanism culturally programmed Native Americans for an interest in psychoactive drugs. Evidence suggests, however, that tobacco was the supernatural plant par excellence of Native American societies (Linton, 1924). The tobacco used by Native Americans varied from region to region since there were at least nine species of *Nicotiana* indigenous to North America. The most widely used species, *Nicotiana rustica* is much stronger than the *Nicotiana attenuata* used commercially today and was used in mixtures with many other ingredients such as the kinnikinnick used by the Ogala Sioux. Some occasions called for mixing even more powerful substances such as *datura* to ensure an especially potent smoke. It is thus impossible to be absolutely certain about the precise botanical and pharmacological properties of Indian tobacco mixtures. We can safely conclude they contained large amounts of the harmala alkaloids,

which can severely alter neural transmission in the visual system and have pronounced hallucinogenic effects. The nicotine in native tobaccos was also a powerful stimulant. It acts through specialized cell formations in the brain and muscle tissues to produce changes in heart rate, alter brain wave patterns, elevate blood pressure, and release hormones affecting the central nervous system. It is thus not surprising that the exhilaration and euphoria caused by native tobacco prompted Native Americans to see it as a means of connecting with supernatural power.

It is important to note that Native Americans historically used tobacco in sacred rather than secular contexts. Tobacco was thought to be a gift from the gods and as pleasing to them as it is to humans. For this reason, it was present in almost every ceremony designed to communicate with spiritual powers. Sacred smoking accompanied quests for visions of guardian spirits, divination rituals, healing rituals, and rites of passage. Ritual use of tobacco was used to solemnize oaths. The potent spiritual power of tobacco was first summoned and then infused into the bonds established by the oath. Breaking the oath would therefore unleash disastrous consequences upon the guilty party. Among the Woodlands and Plains Indians, chiefs met solemnized agreements by smoking the sacred calumet or peace pipe. The calumet was an elaborately decorated shaft that might reach four feet in length. It was used in rituals involving dances and chants referred to with names meaning "to make a sacred kinship." Performing these rituals was thus understood to be forging intimate social relationships. Custom dictated that if the calumet was offered and accepted, the act of smoking made oaths sacred and inviolable. The pipe, no less than the potent tobacco it contained, was considered a tool for accessing supernatural power. Together they invoked supernatural forces for protection and prosperity. Symbolizing humanity's connection with sacred realities, the tobacco pipe was present in virtually all Native American rituals—rituals for purifying the souls of the dead, the Sun Dance, rites of purification, shamanic ecstasies, healing rituals, vision quests, and all rites of passage. It is thus not surprising that the sacred pipe also factored—as with the ritual patterns originating with the sacred use of mescal beans—into the peyote cult that grew in popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

PSYCHEDELICS AND METAPHYSICAL ILLUMINATION

In 1882, Harvard psychologist William James reported his personal experience with nitrous oxide gas. He had become interested in the use of nitrous oxide while reviewing a book titled *The Anesthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy*. The book recounted the amateur philosopher Paul Blood's claim that after breathing nitrous oxide, he had been afforded an "insight of immemorial

Mystery." Blood was convinced that he had stumbled upon a pharmaceutical pathway to cosmic wisdom. The gist of James's mystical awakening was quite simple: "The kingdom of God is . . . within you; it is the Soul."

James considered himself a thoroughgoing empiricist. This meant that all ideas must be tested by experience. So, with respect to Blood's mystical claims, he decided to experiment for himself and inhaled some nitrous oxide gas. The results were impressive. The intoxication proved so enjoyable that James was moved to "urge others to repeat the experiment, which with pure gas is short and harmless enough." He informed his readers that although the effects will vary from person to person, there is nonetheless a general pattern to the subjective effects of nitrous oxide: "With me, as with every other person of whom I have heard, the keynote of the experience is the tremendously exciting sense of an intense metaphysical illumination" (James, 1882, p. 188).

This "metaphysical illumination" was to become a signal event in James's personal and professional life. For one thing, nitrous oxide enabled him to view religion from the "inside." More importantly, nitrous oxide provided the experiential template for what would become his original contributions to philosophy known as "pluralism" and "radical empiricism." The term "pluralism" captured his belief that there are alternative points of view and that no one point of view is inherently privileged over others. This was more than a simple statement of philosophical tolerance. Pluralism was instead a full-fledged commitment to the possibility that there is no single, absolute truth. In this sense, he was repudiating the modern world's preoccupation with the physical sciences as the sole method for arriving at fixed, stable truths. He was instead an early advocate of what came to be known as the "postmodern" viewpoint that science is but one of many equally valid ways humans might construct conceptions of truth. His radical empiricism in many ways grew directly from his drug-induced metaphysical illumination. He was convinced that experiences like his and Blood's deserved to be considered authentic perceptions of reality. He reasoned that what the natural sciences ordinarily mean by empiricism is not fully empirical at all; instead, the natural sciences restrict their understanding of experience to the normal waking state of consciousness and the range of information supplied by the five physical senses. A radical empiricism is one that includes the full range of human experience, including the kinds of mystical and religious experience that occur at the margins of waking consciousness.

The developed fruits of James's metaphysical illumination can be seen in his epochal *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. First published in 1902, *The Varieties* argues that personal, mystical experience is the core of authentic religion. All of the various creeds and rituals associated with the world's organized religions are, in his view, but secondhand translations of the original

experiences from which they first arise. Authentic spirituality, in his view, is anchored in firsthand experiences illuminating the facts that (1) the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance and that (2) union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end. It is telling that James directly linked his understanding of authentic spirituality originated with his earlier experiment with nitrous oxide:

Some years ago I myself made some observations on this aspect of nitrous oxide intoxication, and reported them in print. One conclusion was forced upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. (1902, p. 307)

As a psychologist, James knew that our normal waking state of consciousness has tremendous utility in helping us adapt to the physical and social environments. But as a psychologist, he also knew that many other states of consciousness (e.g., dreaming, hypnosis, and mysticism) exist as well. It struck him that these other states of consciousness must have their own utilities. He concluded that

The whole drift of my education goes to persuade me that the world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist, and the those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for our life also; and that although in the main their experiences and those of this world keep discrete, yet the two become continuous at certain points, and higher energies filter in. (1902, p. 308)

James, who was a philosopher as well as a psychologist, insisted that mystical states of consciousness reveal the universe to be more extensive than the physical sciences have ever imagined. He explained that mystical states suggest that our normal waking state of consciousness is shut off from wider spiritual environments. His point was that mystical experiences, such as his own nitrous oxide experience, open consciousness to a range of sensations that we would ordinarily ignore. Future progress in science, philosophy, and religion alike requires that we more fully open ourselves to these other "worlds of consciousness."

Whether he knew it or not, James was advancing a mode of spirituality that might be considered quintessentially American. Historian William Clebsch (1973) calls this an esthetic spirituality. He states notes that beginning with the Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards and continuing through the

transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, there had already been a tendency for creative American thinkers to view God as an impersonal spiritual power diffusely present throughout the natural universe. What James did was to divorce esthetic spirituality from any remaining connection with biblical religion and instead give it a new psychological vocabulary. This is why Clebsch identifies James as the individual most responsible for setting the agenda for 20th-century religious "seekers." By the mid-20th century, a significant number of Americans openly pursued spiritual interests that took them far from the nation's established churches. Their spiritual journeys have variously been described as quest religion, seeker spirituality, New Age, or the path of being "spiritual, but not religious." What they all share is a spiritual outlook that can be described as pluralistic, postmodern, and eclectic. And, following James's own trail-blazing metaphysical illumination, they were especially interested in exploring cosmic mysteries through drug-induced altered states of consciousness.

An important new chapter in Americans' quest for metaphysical illumination began on a sunny morning in Los Angeles. It was May 4, 1953, and Humphry Osmond was eager to share 300 milligrams of mescaline with the British writer and intellectual Aldous Huxley (Stevens, 1988). Osmond was a psychiatrist visiting Los Angeles to attend the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association. He had recently become interested in how mescaline and a newly synthesized substance known as LSD-25 might aid researchers exploring poorly understood mental disorders such as schizophrenia. It was Osmond who coined the term psychedelic from the Greek words for "mind" and "to manifest." Osmond was curious about what Huxley might think about mescaline's mind-manifesting capacities.

The psychedelic movement's historian, Jay Stevens, has pointed out that there was no mind residing in California in 1953 that would have been more interesting to "manifest" than that of Huxley. Huxley was an intellectual par excellence. Equally versed in the sciences and humanities, he was also a visionary and cultural critic as evidenced in his best-selling *Brave New World*. He was particularly interested in philosophy and religion, having studied Vedanta Hinduism under Swami Prabhavananda in the 1940s. Vedanta provided Huxley a model for explaining common themes found in all mystical literature. Huxley's well-known *The Perennial Philosophy* argued that despite their seeming cultural differences, the world's major religions share a mystical core. The secret to all religious awakening is learning to push beyond the world of sensory appearances to a direct experience of an ineffable, timeless, spiritual reality.

Huxley's eloquent description of his first experience with mescaline not only chronicled his own metaphysical illumination, but, in turn, also provided a vocabulary and interpretive structure that shaped other Americans'

experiences with psychedelics for the next several decades. A half hour after ingesting mescaline, Huxley realized that his visual perceptions were intensifying. Colors became brighter and more vivid. He began to see things in novel ways. A vase of flowers, for example, could suddenly be seen as slow dance of bright, vibrating energies. He believed that mescaline had somehow dismantled the mind's ordinary functions for filtering experience through preformed filters. He was thus for the first time beholding the universe in its original, indescribable glory. It was like "seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation—the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence" (Huxley, 1954, p. 19). This mescaline-induced epiphany reminded him of a line from William Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it really is, infinite." Huxley proclaimed that mescaline had cleansed his doors of perception. He found himself staring directly at "a world where everything shone with Inner Light, and was infinite in its significance" (Huxley, 1954, p. 19).

Huxley proposed a reconsideration of the French philosopher Henri Bergson's concept of Mind at Large. In Bergson's view, each of us is potentially Mind at Large, meaning that we are potentially capable of perceiving everything that is transpiring anywhere in the universe. However, because we are biological animals, our brains must act as reducing valves. That is, they screen out all perceptions and forms of knowledge that are not directly relevant to biological survival. Although humans are potentially capable of infinite awareness, our brains reduce this potentially unlimited flow of consciousness down to a measly trickle. In Huxley's view, mescaline temporarily deactivated the cerebral reducing valve. Ranges of experience ordinarily screened off from awareness suddenly come flooding into consciousness. We come face to face with a world of visionary beauty.

Huxley did not consider psychedelic experience to be the ultimate purpose of life. He compared mescaline-induced experience to what Catholic theologians call "a gratuitous grace." It shakes us out of the ruts of ordinary perception and allows us to see life as it is apprehended by Mind at Large. It was clear that Huxley didn't think that institutional Christianity had much of value to offer to those interested in pursuing metaphysical illumination. He conceded that certain Christian mystics had slipped past the doors of ordinary perception and gained insight. But by embracing the doctrine of the Fall, Christianity long ago adopted a deprecatory attitude toward nature that jams the doors of perception shut. Christianity's insistence that the Absolute was incarnate only in Christ and Christ's church makes it difficult to see that the Absolute is actually incarnated in the whole of Being. Huxley believed that we might better turn to the counsel of the Romantic poets and Eastern religious philosophies. In fact, he believed that mescaline had ushered him directly into the realms of Eastern enlightenment. He had read about Eastern

experiences of enlightenment for years, but it was only now that he had an experiential understanding of these essentially ineffable insights.

Others soon traveled Huxley's psychedelic pathway. Albert Hofmann's accidental discovery of LSD while conducting research for a Swiss pharmaceutical company launched the quest for metaphysical illumination directly into the 1960s' experimental spirituality. He described his discovery as "a sacred drug." He knew from personal experience that even a minuscule dose can forge a mystical union between self and world:

This condition of cosmic consciousness, which under favorable conditions can be evoked by LSD or by another hallucinogen from the group of Mexican sacred drugs, is analogous to spontaneous religious enlightenment, with the *unio mystica*. In both conditions, which often last only for a timeless moment, a reality is experienced that exposes a gleam of the transcendental reality, in which universe and self, sender and receiver, are one. (Hofmann, 1980, p. 198)

Hofmann tried to appease his potential critics by suggesting that LSD reaffirmed the "heart of my Christian beliefs." His psychedelic sacrament illuminated the very words of Jesus recorded in John 14:20: "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." But the religious beliefs he was evoking were clearly not those held by most church-going Christians. He complained that institutional Christianity espoused a "nature-alienated religiosity" that corrupted what he took to be the pure insights of such great Christian mystics as Jakob Boehme, Meister Eckhart, Angelus Silesius, Thomas Traherne, William Blake, and others. For this reason, he counseled fellow citizens of "Western industrial societies who are sickened by a one-sided, rational, materialistic world view" to look to Eastern religions such as Zen Buddhism (Hofmann, 1980, p. 209).

The early 1960s witnessed a host of new publications extolling LSD's utopian potentials. Nutrition author Adelle Davis, using the pseudonym Jane Dunlap, wrote *Exploring Inner Space: Personal Experiences under LSD-25* (1961). Davis recounted how in 1959 she took 110 micrograms of LSD only to find herself instantaneously aware of the limitations of "God-denying scientific materialism." Fantastic visions followed one after another. In one instant, she found herself at the library in ancient Alexandria and, in the next, conversing with the Buddha. As the panorama of biological and historical evolution flashed before her mind, she realized that the entire universe is animated by an underlying "urge to reach God." Alan Watts's *The Joyous Cosmology* appeared in 1962, promising that just one session with LSD was sufficient to evoke "cosmic consciousness." His book provided a verbal and visual tour of the world as experienced through cosmic consciousness—a

world in which matter dissolves into patterns of energy and which reveals "a cosmology not only unified but also joyous." Thelma Moss's *My Self and I* (released pseudonymously under the name Constance Newland) also appeared in 1962, offering an exciting account of how LSD can purge the unconscious of all impediments to personal fulfillment. Sidney Cohen, eager to inform readers how LSD occasions "superlative knowing," published *The Beyond Within: The LSD Story* in 1965. And, in 1964, there was even a new academic journal titled *Psychodelic Review* devoted publishing all things mind-manifesting.

By the mid-1960s, there was a sizeable reading audience eager to learn about alternate realities. The newly emerging literature on LSD ushered them through the doors of perception into a realm of metaphysical discovery. Yet, for psychedelic gospel to attract a broad cultural audience would need a charismatic champion. And as fate was to have it, the movement gained its own self-appointed "high priest" in the form of Harvard psychologist Timothy Leary.

As early as 1960, Leary tried some psilocybin mushrooms on a whim. "The journey lasted a little over four hours," he wrote. "Like almost everyone who had the veil drawn, I came back a changed man" (Fields, 1996, p. 47; see also Leary, 1968, 1983). A few months later, he and his colleague Richard Alpert (aka Ram Dass) opened the Harvard Psychedelic Drug Research Project. Over the next four years, they arranged "transcendent experiences" for over 1,000 subjects including students, writers, artists, convicts, and 69 members of their clergy. Notable among their participants were Huxley, Allen Ginsberg, Watts, and Huston Smith. Leary was, moreover, an encouraging advisor for what to this day is the most famous experimental study of psychoactive sacraments. With his advice and encouragement, Walter Pahnke enlisted the help of 20 theology students who gathered on Good Friday at Boston University's Marsh Chapel. The test was a controlled, double-blind experiment in which he divided the 20 subjects into five groups of 4 students each. Ninety minutes before the Good Friday service began, Pahnke administered identical capsules to each test subject. Half of the capsules contained 30 milligrams of psilocybin; the other half contained 200 milligrams of a vitamin that causes feelings of warmth and tingling but that has no effect on the mind. The subjects then attended a two-and-a-half-hour religious service consisting of organ music, prayers, and personal meditation. Only one of the subjects who had been given a placebo reported any pronounced religious experience. Yet, 9 of the 10 who had taken the psilocybin reported the classic characteristics of mystical experience (e.g., sense of unity, transcendence of space and time, alleged ineffability, and subsequent elevation of mood). One of Pahnke's group leaders, Walter Clark, surmised that the miracle of Marsh Chapel was "the most cogent single piece of evidence that psychedelic

chemicals do, under certain circumstances, release profound religious experience" (Clark, 1969, p. 77).

Leary believed that discoveries such as these were inaugurating a new era in human spiritual consciousness. He was on the verge of reducing centuries of theological abstractions down to a simple chemical formula. He was convinced that if proper training and a proper setting could be provided, everyone is capable of achieving a sense of mystical oneness with God. Yet, much to his surprise and dismay, the world didn't flock to his psychedelic gospel. Part of the cultural resistance to psychedelic spirituality was theological. Clergy and academic scholars alike viewed the "nature mysticism" engendered by LSD as spiritually suspect. More damaging, however, was the bacchanalian debauchery that surrounded Leary's personal and professional lives. Reports of excessive partying and sexual improprieties among Leary's associates and student subjects swept across Harvard's campus. At last, Harvard officials thought they had no option but to dismiss Leary and Alpert from the faculty. Leary then relocated his research institute to an estate in Millbrook, New York, where he further blurred any distinction between serious scientific investigation and hedonistic orgies. For about four years, Millbrook served as a monastery, school, research laboratory, religious commune, and opium den all rolled into one. Yet, all the while Leary took notes on his and others' drug-induced experiences in an attempt to map the previously unexplored regions of the mind.

Leary joined others such as Huxley and Watts in popularizing the link between psychedelic research and Eastern mystical religion. He even hoped that Eastern texts might be of great value in his attempt to create a cartography of inner space. He began by adapting verses from the *Dao de Jing* in a book he called *Psychedelic Prayers*. Then, in 1962, he, Ralph Metzner, and Alpert wrote a psychedelic adaptation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is an ancient Buddhist meditation manual that purports to explain where our soul travels at the moment of physical death. Leary, Metzner, and Alpert were convinced that LSD permitted entry into the very realms of consciousness described in this esoteric Buddhist text. Their book, *The Psychedelic Experience*, encouraged readers to think that psychedelics give Westerners access to the very regions of the mind/universe that practitioners of Eastern meditation systems had known for centuries. This volume eventually went through 16 editions and was translated into seven languages, giving it a long-lasting influence on subsequent understandings of psychedelics' religious significance.

Part of Leary's genius was that he was able to condense his message into a crisp, catchy slogan: "Turn on, tune in, and drop out." *Turning on* was the enjoyable part, the fun. His research institute at Millbrook was host to what historian Stevens describes as an ongoing "house party of unparalleled

dimensions" (Stevens, 1988, p. 208). Leary defended the weekend marathons of drugs and sex by arguing that psychedelics release the sacred sensations found in our own natural constitution. In his view, humans have a moral duty to seek pleasures intrinsic to existence. Leary went even further, insisting that the experience of bodily ecstasy and the message of spiritual ecstasy were one and the same: "Listen! Wake up! You are God! You have the Divine plan engraved in cellular script within you! Listen! Take this sacrament! You'll see! You'll get the revelation! It will change your life! You'll be reborn!" (1968, p. 285)

Tuning in had slightly more nuanced implications. Humanistic psychologists of the era taught that the human mind has unlimited energies or potentials waiting to be tapped. Psychedelics were championed as a technology for tuning in to these higher energies. Indeed, researchers R. E. Masters and Jean Houston hinted that psychedelics were capable of releasing our unexplored potentials for telepathy, ESP, and other paranormal phenomena. Leary, however, stated that he was far less interested in the secular benefits of drugs such as enhanced creativity or psychiatric treatment as he was in their "religious-ontological" implications. To Leary, they revealed that the Kingdom of God resides deep within us. We simply need to remove the veil of ignorance and tune in to progressively more profound levels of experience. One of Leary's protégés, scholar Smith, articulated this vision of drugs' sacramental potential in his *Forgotten Truth: The Common Vision of the World's Religions* (1992). Smith appended a brief essay titled "The Psychedelic Evidence," claiming that Leary and other researchers such as Stanislav Grof have produced empirical evidence confirming the basic teachings of the "perennial philosophy": The self exists on many levels; the levels of self (or consciousness) correspond to levels of the cosmos that are ordinarily obscured from human view; enlightenment is reached by finding a means of circumventing the ego and having a direct experience of the deeper levels of the cosmos.

A little problem faced psychedelic researchers like Leary, Watts, Huxley, and Smith. The data didn't fully support their metaphysical claims. Only about 3 percent of Alpert's and Leary's subjects ever "tuned in" to the kinds of metaphysical realities that most interested the reading public. Masters and Houston put the figure at about 5 percent. Leary and Alpert emphasized that the full results could not be achieved if the set (the subject's personality and belief system) and setting (supportive environment) weren't properly attended to. And, too, it is always possible that the dose might not have been high enough or the subject might have clung too rigidly to his or her ego rather than letting the experience unfold on its own. But it was probably Smith who most clearly voiced researchers' views about the discrepancy between their data and theories: metaphysical illumination isn't for the masses;

most people need the exoteric teachings of organized religion and only an elite few are really ready to be initiated into the esoteric teachings of the perennial philosophy.

Dropping out also had multiple meanings. Some were political; others were social. And still others were religious. When Huxley first opened the doors of perception in 1953, most Americans were too busy building a brave new world to step back and evaluate it. Supermarkets, affordable automobiles, and an expanding freeway system symbolized a nation in hot pursuit of material paradise. Only a few Americans seemed interested in questioning, let alone dropping out of, the American way of life. But by the mid-1960s, things had obviously changed. Racial unrest broke out from Harlem to Watts. Yet, the biggest source of discontent was to be found in America's youth. Seemingly poised to inherit an economic paradise, college-age youth seemed restless, yearning for something that was somehow more authentic, freer, more pure. People were balking at regimentation, the loss of individuality in a world of mass merchandising. There was something more at work, however. This was an age of what religious historian Robert Ellwood called a "New Romanticism" (1994). The cultural mood swung toward a celebration of childhood, an endorsement of individuality, and an embracing of the "new epistemology" of the supernatural, as found in ESP, astrology, and Eastern meditation. As Ellwood aptly puts it, the 1960s witnessed a dramatic shift from modernism (i.e., belief in universal truths, the unity of the self, and the inevitability of material progress) toward postmodernism (i.e., belief in multiple perspectives, suspicion of scientific rationality, seeing the self as plural, and renewed appreciation of the "proximity senses" of touching, tasting, or—in the words of the 1960s—just happening). The psychedelic movement was both a contributing cause and a symptomatic effect of this cultural shift.

Dropping out became a slogan for the era's reappraisal of middle-class values. It meant attempting to stand back and undo one's social conditioning, to reassess the value of almost everything that 1950s America assumed it fully understood. Stevens suggests that drugs provided the emerging counterculture with a "deconditioning agent." In a matter of mere seconds, psychedelics could dismantle the whole cognitive repertoire that society had programmed into individuals. In their foreword to Watt's *The Joyous Cosmology*, Leary and Alpert argued that the freedom to use drugs in order to liberate our minds from the tyranny of social conditions is a basic American freedom: "Thus appears the fifth freedom—freedom from the learned, cultural mind. The freedom to expand one's consciousness beyond artificial cultural knowledge. The freedom to move from constant preoccupation with the verbal games—the social games, the game of self—to the joyous unity of what exists beyond" (Watts, 1965, p. x). Drugs, in short, were thought to restore the true, culturally uncontaminated self.

Dropping out was also an act of religious affirmation. Watts, Smith, Ginsberg, and Alpert/Ram Dass were all more capable religious thinkers than Leary. Whereas Leary mostly contented himself with encouraging people to drop out, they provided at least some broad hints about where seekers might drop "in." All four turned Americans' attention to Asian mysticism and the perennial philosophy long connected with the Western occult tradition. It was Leary, however, who made the clearest case for not needing to be attached to any kind of formal religion at all. A real religious experience, according to Leary, is "the ecstatic, incontrovertibly certain subjective discovery of answers to four basic spiritual questions" (1967, p. 7). The four basic spiritual questions, according to Leary, are the power question ("What is the ultimate power of the universe?"), the life question ("Why and where did life start?"), the human destiny question ("Whence did humans come and where are we going?"), and the ego question ("What is my place in the grander plan?"). Everything outside of these questions—rituals, theological dogmas, and liturgical practices—is irrelevant to the spiritual quest. The implication is that true spirituality is inward and personal. Authentic spirituality thus necessitates dropping out of institutional religion. This logic, whether expressly stated or not, permeated psychedelic literature. A sizable number of baby boomers followed the logic to its conclusion and drifted away from the churches. And most never came back. This is not to say, however, that they had turned their backs on religion altogether. Instead, they had arrived at an alternative, and more personally compelling, spiritual awakening.

TWO "MINOR" DRUGS: WINE AND COFFEE

Historians have paid great attention to the larger institutional structures of American religion. They have, however, paid much less attention to the mechanisms that sustain religion within personal subjectivity and small groups—whether within, on the fringes, or wholly outside formal religious institutions. Overlooked are the important roles that wine and coffee have played in sustaining less formal, yet subjectively rich, forms of spirituality. Both are frequently used in ways that open up an esthetic or nonrational way of perceiving the universe. Although alcohol undoubtedly impairs our logical faculties, it (along with caffeine) simulates the senses and seemingly awakens us to ranges of experience that are normally pushed to the fringes of waking consciousness. Thus, even "minor" intoxicants such as wine and coffee provide experiences that address modern individuals' hunger for a felt sense of participation in a wider spiritual reality. They reinforce our belief that we have the potential to open ourselves up in ways that yield greater happiness and vital connection with our surrounding world. And, too, using

wine, coffee, and marijuana also helps bond individuals into a community of fellow seekers.

Religious uses of wine stretch far back into antiquity. Egyptians, for example, honored Hathor, patron god of wine, on a monthly "Day of Intoxication." The Greeks similarly hailed Dionysus as the giver of all good gifts and believed he grants ecstasy to his devotees. Hebrew scripture depicts wine as a sign of God's blessing (Deuteronomy 7:13, Amos 9:24). An extraordinary abundance of wine was interpreted as a harbinger of the Messianic Age (Amos 9:14, Joel 3:18). What most commended wine to biblical writers is its ability to alter moods and to raise a person's spirits (2 Samuel 13:28, Ester 1:10, Psalm 104:15, Ecclesiastes 9:7). Christians proclaim that Christ's first public miracle entailed turning water into wine (John 2:1-11).

Wine is to this day a central element in Jewish worship, a fact evidenced by its central presence in the weekly Sabbath meal or the Seder dinner commemorating Passover. Wine is present at almost every Jewish celebration that cherishes a memory or observes a significant rite of passage. The classical Jewish toast before drinking wine is "To Life," expressing the highly esthetic appreciation for the sanctity of our physical universe. Christians inherited this long association of wine with the inherent sanctity of life. The Christian sacrament of communion illustrates how fully the subtle pleasures of wine drinking became associated with the religious urge to find both union with God and fellowship in a community of love. Sharing wine has not only been an important part of communal life for Catholic priests over the century, but it was also highly instrumental in forging both ecstasy and camaraderie in many 19th-century experimental religions that flourished across the United States such as the Amana Colonies, New Harmony, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Fuller, 1996).

The major allure of wine drinking is the way that it nourishes our esthetic sensibilities. At the very least, wine tasting allows individuals the opportunity to suspend utilitarian thinking and appreciate natural pleasures. In the contemplation of an elegant wine, people are free to play with their imaginations and to exercise their capacities to delight in beauty for its own sake. It was in this context that the journalist and man of letters George Saintsbury recollected that when the wines he drank "were good they pleased my senses, cheered my spirits, improved my moral and intellectual powers, besides enabling me to confer the same benefits on other people" (1933, p. xvii).

These esthetic qualities provide even further clues about why so many of our contemporaries find wine drinking to be an implicitly spiritual activity. Enjoying wine is itself a ritual. It provides an opportunity for individuals to suspend their secular identities and to create an awareness of levels of natural beauty that exist at a level too subtle to be appreciated by the calculating ego. In his masterpiece on humanity's propensity for religion, *The Varieties*

of *Religious Experience*, James noted that alcohol produces a distinct altered state of consciousness that should be considered "one bit of the mystic consciousness, and our total opinion of it must find its place in our opinion of that larger whole" (1902, p. 307). He believed that "the sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature. . . . It is in fact the great exciter of the *Yes* function in man. It brings its votary from the chill periphery of things to the radiant core. It makes him one for the moment with the truth" (James, 1902, p. 307). Contemporary enthusiasm for wine, then, has a decidedly spiritual element even if it expresses itself well outside our established churches. As a form of what might be called "popular religion," the enjoyment of wine makes it possible both to open ourselves to a flood of novel sensation and to share these inner experiences in a communal context.

Wine is not the only beverage celebrated in myth, ritual, and sacred speculation. Milk, for example, is depicted in Hebrew scripture as a paradisiacal fluid and Israel is even referred to as "the land of milk and honey." The Japanese reverence for tea reminds us that some forms of spirituality cherish the sacredness of the here-and-now of everyday life. It is reputed that Zen monks brought heavily caffeinated tea with them from China for the purpose of staying awake for extended periods of meditation. Hours into their immersion in tea and meditation, Zen monks experienced the flash of insight that Zen terms *satori*. Zen *satori* has nothing to do with hallucination or seeing supernatural entities. It is, instead, an experience of radically opening up to the world of immediate experience. Zen claims that if we can momentarily suspend the mind's habitual focus on life's surface appearance, we can at last awaken to the deeper sacredness of everyday life.

Westerners are also familiar with caffeine's potential for jarring us out of mental ruts and stimulating new spiritual insights. What we know today as the hot beverage coffee first emerged in the Middle East around 1000 CE as a means of softening the hard caffeine-containing beans whose stimulating effects had only recently been discovered. The very word "coffee" comes from the Arabic *qahwah* (meaning "spirit drink"). Claudia Roden observes that one reason for this poetic name "is that coffee, first inaugurated in Sufi mystic circles, had come to replace the forbidden wine as a drink during religious ceremonies. Delighted by the wakefulness the new drink produced and the help I gave them in their nightly prayers, the early Muslims honored it by giving it the poetic endearment with which they had sung the praise of wine" (1994, p. 12). The first coffeehouses, known as *cafenets*, emerged in Constantinople and Damascus, providing distinct social settings where people might gather to buoy their spirits and engage in spirited discussion about business, politics, and religion. Coffeehouses spread throughout Europe including 18th-century London where they became known as "penny

universities," since men from all walks of life gathered to debate the most controversial issues of the day.

The rise of a distinct counterculture among American youth in the 1960s dovetailed almost perfectly with the renaissance of American coffeehouses. As early as the late 1950s, coffeehouses began appearing in New York's Greenwich Village. Artists, musicians, poets, and others living on a shoe-string gathered to pronounce their disdain for bourgeoisie culture and learn about new philosophical perspectives ranging from existentialism to Zen Buddhism. San Francisco's emergence as epicenter of a major cultural shift was aided by such early coffeehouses as Caffè Trieste and Malvina Caffè. In the mid-1960s, the Blue Unicorn opened up in the Haight-Ashbury district and was soon stimulating the hippie movement with heavy doses of caffeine. Bookshelves along the walls made it palpably clear that awakened sensitivities are best understood through philosophical insights emanating from Hindu mysticism, Zen Buddhism, the *Dao de Jing*, or the writings of such purveyors of alternative wisdom as Watts or Carl Jung.

Coffee generated community among hippies in a way that hallucinogens never could. A typical cup of coffee delivers about 100 milligrams of caffeine to the central nervous system. Such doses of caffeine increase alertness, improve motor performance, enhance sensory activity, and decrease fatigue. All of these yield a sense of elation, mild euphoria, and interest in engaging life more energetically. True, caffeine has no hallucinatory properties. But it allows the brain's neurotransmitters to pulse through our system in ways that enhance our esthetic rapport with our surroundings and allow to see common things in a new and more vibrant way. In short, sharing coffee in the right social setting allows many to make what philosopher Martin Buber (1923) called the transition from an I-It to an I-Thou orientation to life.

Many churches across America openly valued coffee's mood-elevating properties. Mainline Protestant churches have been especially prone to organizing after-service "coffee hours" where church members can gather and bond together while consuming caffeine and build friendships. It is probably not inconsequential that they exit the building and return home feeling especially exhilarated after their weekly attendance. We should not overlook, however, the even greater role that coffeehouses have had in expanding Americans' esthetic engagement with life. The aromas and tastes often border on the exotic beckoning us to develop whole new repertoires of "sensing" ability. The arrangement of tables and chairs sets up a social space outside of work or home where we can simply chat with friends or share the most intimate of feelings. And yet, it is finally the caffeine itself that is most responsible for catapulting people to new and more intense enjoyment of life's simple pleasures such as conversation, reading, or listening to music. Sharing coffee becomes a sacrament enabling humans to discover and celebrate the divine

already implanted in the natural order. Although existing well outside the doors of our institutional churches, drinking coffee is for many Americans a form of spirituality that flourishes in subjectivity and informal social groups.

ECSTASY AND SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

It is fairly easy to understand how many Native American societies historically attributed religious significance to drug-induced ecstasy. They had ritual structures capable of teaching their members how to switch from intoxication to religious trance. It is a little more difficult to see how Americans in the mid-20th century were also able to associate psychoactive substances with their quests for metaphysical illumination. Yet, in retrospect, it is apparent that the 1960s' counterculture also prepared its adherents to find religious significance in altered states of consciousness.

Historian William McLoughlin (1978) views the 1960s a "fourth great awakening" in American religious life. By the term "awakening," he means "periods of cultural revitalization that begin in a general crisis of beliefs and values and extend over a period of a generation or so, during which time a profound reorientation in beliefs and values takes place" (McLoughlin, 1978, p. xiii). Such reorientations had happened three previous times in American history: one just prior to the Revolutionary War, a second during rapid Western expansion in the early 19th century, and a third during rapid urbanization in the late 19th century. Each of these, however, revitalized commitment to existing churches. And each encouraged subordinating both the intellect and the will to biblical authority.

Unlike previous awakenings of American spirituality, the awakening that began in the early 1960s occurred largely among those opting for an unchurched or alternative form of spirituality. Ellwood suggests that the major themes of this reorientation were (1) a shift from mainline to nonconformist religion, (2) a rediscovery of natural rather than revealed religion, (3) a new appreciation for Eastern religious thought, and (4) a New Romanticism that accords spiritual importance to certain nonrational modes of thought and perception (1994, pp. 326–336). This fourth awakening thus represented a shift from seeking God in the church to seeking God in the depths of nature (including the depths of our own psychological nature). The essence of personal spirituality, in this view, is to seek out new avenues for discovering the point of connection with this immanent divinity. American authors such as Emerson, Whitman, and James surely provided clues. So, too, did the mystical writings of Hinduism and Buddhism. And not to be overlooked were the kinds of metaphysical illumination made possible with the help of mind-manifesting drugs.

For those who used them, psychedelics provided an experience-based rite of passage into this fourth great awakening. They elicited an emotional ecstasy based not on the "distance senses" of reading and hearing, but rather on the "proximity senses" of touch, taste, and bodily sensation. Psychedelics provided new configuration of the world based on dreamlike free association and idiosyncratic impressions. This new way of understanding the world was charged with excitement, mystery, and intrigue. And although its insights were largely lost when returning to the normal waking state, it nonetheless left the lasting impression that the world is surrounded by a higher order of Being. In this way, the use of psychedelics—and the literature describing their use—meshed perfectly with the era's growing interest in writers such as Robert Heinlein, Hermann Hesse, Eliade, Jung, and Joseph Campbell. All reinforced American reading audiences' desire to imagine new ways of thinking about their relationship to nonvisible realities.

Psychedelics went hand in hand with newfound interest in Eastern religions. The statistics are staggering. A poll of over 1,300 Americans engaged in Buddhist practice showed that 83 percent had taken psychedelics (*Tricycle*, 1996 p. 44). Some, of course, had eventually decided that the two were incompatible. But 59 percent responded that psychedelics and Buddhism do mix, and 71 percent believe that psychedelics can provide a glimpse of the reality to which Buddhist practice points. Ram Dass was interviewed as a part of this study and stated that he still took drugs as a supplement to his other spiritual practices. He offered that "from my point of view, Buddhism is the closest to the psychedelic experience, at least in terms of LSD. LSD catapults you beyond conceptual structures. It extricates you. It overrides your habit of identifying with thought and puts you in a nonconceptual mode very fast" (*Tricycle*, 1994, p. 102). Drug-induced states of consciousness appealed to many baby boomers who yearned for an experientially based spirituality. Conventional American religions taught that there is an infinite gulf separating fallen humanity from God. It further taught that humans on their own cannot bridge this gulf but must instead await God's action (in some traditions thought to be made available through rituals performed by church officials). Prophets of the psychedelic gospel countered that it is within our own power to overcome our separation from God. Cultural anthropologist Marlene Dobkin de Rios has pointed out that drugs are considered with awe and respect in cultures that value humanity's own efforts to connect with the divine: "In those societies where plant hallucinogens play a central role, one learns that the drug user believes that he or she can see, feel, touch, and experience the unknown" (1984, p. 203). Baby boomers used drugs in settings that encouraged them to believe they were having firsthand experiences of a metaphysical reality. There was, of course, an implied recognition that

established religious institutions are a secondhand or less authentic form of spirituality.

The psychedelic movement also influenced the spirituality of millions who never used drugs at all. Psychedelics were a cultural icon; they symbolized an orientation to the world that was embraced by those who never even saw a mushroom or tab of LSD. The books and public lectures by the major gurus of the psychedelic revolution spread their message to almost every bookstore and college campus in the nation. Rock music, too, carried the major themes of this movement into American life and thought. The multisensory nature of the psychedelic experience was replicated on album covers, in lyrics, and in the light shows that accompanied live concerts. It shocked no one to learn that Paul McCartney, John Lennon, and George Harrison of the Beatles had all tried LSD. Their albums, particularly "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," exuded the exotic and alluring qualities of altered states of mind. And when they explored Hinduism and Eastern metaphysics, the world obligingly recognized this as a normative spiritual quest.

All in all, then, psychedelics opened the doors to a more romantic, post-modern, and unchurched form of spiritual thinking. Even among those who didn't use them, psychedelics were a symbol of the metaphysical illumination available to all who venture past the narrow confines of consensus religion. They demonstrated in the most vivid of ways that normal waking consciousness is but one special type of consciousness, parted by filmiest of screens from unsuspected worlds. This illumination has, moreover, provided the key symbols and metaphors for the unchurched spirituality that has flourished into the early 21st century.

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