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This Week

MAGAZINE

The Salt Lake Tribune



Ancient statue shows influence of mushroom on the Mayans

AN ASTONISHING SCIENTIFIC ADVENTURE IN MEXICO:

"I Ate The Sacred Mushrooms"

By Valentina P. Wasson . . . Page 8

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I Ate



I was lying in my sleeping bag on the damp earthen floor of an adobe hut, my face turned to a crumbling plaster wall. A few minutes before, I had eaten five pairs of the supposedly sacred mushrooms. (They are always spoken of in pairs.) I was struggling to keep control of myself but I knew full well that with every minute I was being pulled deeper into another completely unknown world. I was going to experience a self-induced bout of schizophrenia.

Although my husband had piled every available cover on top of me, I still felt cold. Dreamily I asked myself how they had managed, from one moment to another, to hang that beautiful wallpaper right under my nose. I admired the shimmering silvery green color of its geometric designs. Then it faded away and I was looking at the dirty plaster wall again. Suddenly I was frightened. But it was too late to turn back.

In the past few days my husband and Allan Richardson, our photographer, had participated in the sacred mushroom ceremony under the guidance of a local shaman, who is a combination priest-medicine man, in this case a woman, practicing the ancient cult of the Mixteco people. After taking part in the rites and

The story behind the story:

**"Psychic"
Mushrooms
Open New
Research
Horizons**



SPELL OF THE DRUG: "I was now in Versailles, the fabled court of Louis XV"

By VALENTINA P. WASSON



Allan Richardson

AUTHOR in Mexico

The Sacred Mushrooms

This writer and her husband were the first outsiders to try "the drug of miraculous dreams." Here is the story of a strange experiment in a remote Mexican village

eating the mushrooms, both of them had seen staggering visions, all in 3-D and in fantastic Technicolor. They enjoyed the feelings of supreme happiness and well-being that explain the age-old power these "sacred mushrooms" exercise over this remote and primitive people.

Auto-suggestion Or Hallucination?

What I now wished to know was: Are the mushrooms merely a dramatic "prop" with the vivid mental images really produced by auto-suggestion or some other primitive psychological ruse? Or do the mushrooms themselves contain some powerful hallucinatory drug as yet unknown to science?

As a physician I am usually content to leave this kind of experiment to more adventurous inquirers than myself. You have to be rained-in — in a place like that Indian Mixteco village — to know how desperate you can get for diversion. Our daughter Mary (we call her Masha) and I had arrived six days before for a 24-hour visit to help Gordon and Allan wind up their work in ethnobotanical research.

A wobbly, single-engined plane had dropped us onto a

tiny clearing and promised to come back the next day. No sooner had the plane disappeared than the fog rolled in and it began to rain. The trails were ankle deep in gummy mud. We were marooned with a large family of Mixteco Indians — kindly and courteous, but limited in conversation — in a small adobe hut. Rain leaked constantly through the thatched roof. The dirt floor was full of puddles. There were no windows. Light flickered from a single kerosene lantern. We were damp, chilled through and miserable. We spent most of the time huddled in our sleeping bags. A few hallucinations, we decided, would be a great help. Why not try the mushrooms?

Our hostess, a school teacher, is one of the few educated villagers. She disapproves of the mushroom rites and is frightened of them. We did not tell her what we were going to do. After lunch, my husband obtained nine pairs of the sacred mushrooms, put them into a bowl and served them to us. I took five pair and Masha took four.

It was a revolting dish. They were moist, greenish and very dirty. I bit into one and gagged. It tasted like rancid fat. Masha and I chewed the rest slowly and

swallowed with difficulty. My husband got out his notebook and prepared to record whatever we were about to say or do.

For some queer, obstinate reason I had made up my mind not to give in easily to this seductive alien drug. I strode back and forth vigorously, breathing hard. The early symptoms were mild but not pleasant. Masha complained of a headache. I felt a little unsteady on my feet and muttered that it felt like a champagne hangover. I was seized by a great fit of yawning.

A Glowing Sports Shirt

Masha suddenly declared that she saw a nest of bright blue boxes piled up in the corner of the room. There were none. I looked at her scornfully. After half an hour I took my pulse. It was a slow but regular 65. I lay down on the floor. Masha said she saw hens and chickens. It was true there were several stray fowl running about underfoot in the house, but none were visible at the moment.

I noticed that my husband's red plaid sports shirt was glowing with a peculiar intensity. I stared at the crude wooden furni-

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Not long ago novelist and philosopher Aldous Huxley, in his book, "The Doors of Perception," made startling news by reporting that a drug called *mescaline*, extracted from desert cactus, produced in him a remarkable peace of mind and sharpened perception.

This month even more exciting news is breaking — of certain wild mountain mushrooms that secrete a mysterious drug having similar but perhaps even greater powers than *mescaline*. Eating the mushroom not only produces enchantingly beautiful visions and a thrilling feeling of total happiness, but is also used by Mexican Indians to diagnose illness and to "transmit" messages.

This amazing report comes from Valentina P. Wasson, M.D., a well-known pediatrician, and her husband, R. Gordon Wasson, a prominent New York banker. The Wassons are the authors of "Mushrooms, Russia & History," published May 13 by Pantheon Books. This contains an account of a long-forgotten Mexican Indian rite based on mushroom worship and the strange properties of the "sacred" mushroom. The Wassons' work appears in a two-volume edition limited to 510 copies at \$125 each.

In a current issue of "Life" magazine, Mr. Wasson tells his story of how he took part in a ritual seance of

the mushroom cult in a tiny village high in the mountains of Oaxaca in southern Mexico. The ritual was conducted by a local *shaman*, or wise one. Above, THIS WEEK brings another exciting aspect of the mushroom story, this time told in the words of a woman who is also a doctor.

Mushroom "Postal System"

Dr. Wasson's scientific curiosity was aroused by her husband's experience. She wanted to know if the mushroom would still be effective without the *shaman's* ritual. One rainy afternoon during their stay in a remote mountain community she and her 18-year-old daughter, Mary, obtained a handful of the mushrooms. In the accompanying article Dr. Wasson tells THIS WEEK readers about the exhilarating and fantastic mental experiences that followed.

During their stay in the remote Indian village the Wassons learned more about the powers of the "divine" mushroom. They observed that sometimes the mushrooms serve as a postal system. When a villager wanted to know about the welfare of a friend or relative in a distant area, he might go to a *shaman*, who chewed the mushroom, and then delivered reports which the vil-

lagers accepted as accurate. The Wassons themselves received a detailed description of the activities and state of mind of their son, Peter, thousands of miles away in the States. Although it sounded so outlandish at the time that they smiled tolerantly and dismissed it from their minds, the clairvoyant performance of the mushroom-eating *shaman* later proved true!

The Wasson expedition has turned over its collection of dried and preserved mushrooms to scientific research. An outstanding group of French scientists is now at work on this project.

As for the uses of the mushroom, Dr. Wasson believes that if the active agent can be isolated and a supply assured, it will become a vital tool in the study of psychic processes. Beyond this, Dr. Wasson, with scientific caution, declines to commit herself. But it can hardly be doubted that as the drug becomes better known, uses will be found for it, perhaps in handling alcoholics and narcotic addicts, in treating terminal illness accompanied by acute pain and in mental diseases. The mysterious properties of the "sacred" mushroom open fascinating perspectives, both in medicine and in the realm of extra-sensory perception.

—JHAN and JUNE ROBBINS

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Allan Richardson Photos

RITE: An Indian is about to "consult" a fantasy-inducing mushroom

A Fabulous Dream Slowly Began

ture. The cracks and knotholes were changing shape.

Masha cried suddenly, "I feel like a chicken!" We both burst into peals of laughter. I thought it was a very funny remark. I half closed my eyes. I turned my face to the wall. I had a brief sensation of looking at beautiful wallpaper. Then the walls suddenly receded and I was carried out — out and away — on undulating waves of translucent turquoise green.

I don't know how long I traveled. I arrived in the Caves of Lascaux in the Dordogne, in France. We had visited France before and I immediately recognized the vast vault of stone above me, the early cave dwellers' beautiful primitive paintings of horses, bison and deer on the walls. The paintings were even more beautiful than in real life. They seemed suffused with a crystal light. But I was disappointed. I was born in Russia and I have not seen my native land since 1918. I had hoped to be carried there in my visions.

I now lay limp and warm in my sleeping bag. My mind was floating blissfully. It was as if my very soul had been scooped out and moved to a point in heavenly space, leaving my empty physical husk behind in the mud hut. Yet I was perfectly conscious. I knew now what the *shamans* meant when they said, "The mushroom takes you there to the place where God is."

Mozart and Minuet

I abandoned my visions to sit up and smoke a cigarette while I told Gordon and Allan what I had experienced. Then I returned impatiently to the land of the sacred mushrooms.

I was now in eighteenth century Versailles, the fabled French court of Louis XV. A grand ball was in progress. Hundreds of beautifully gowned couples danced the minuet in train and powdered periwig to the music of Mozart. Overhead glittered a magnificent crystal chandelier. Fiery flashes of green and blue light spat-

tered from its hundreds of prisms.

I was struck again by the magnificence and intensity of the colors. Everything was resplendently rich. I had never imagined such beauty. On a shelf near the door to the ballrooms stood a tiny pair of elegant miniature china figures dressed in eighteenth-century ball gowns. Looking closely I saw they were my sister and myself. We were dancing the minuet, too.

From a distance I heard my daughter Masha say impatiently, "Oh, Father, I'm having too good a time to bother talking to you!"

A Towering Crucifix

But I was aloof. I was now alone in the splendor of a Spanish church. The dark woodwork was elaborately carved. The stained glass windows were showering radiant light. Before me was a towering crucifix. I tilted my head back to see the top but it stretched away into the sky. It was so high I couldn't see the upper part of the figure on the cross. I said aloud, "Am I unworthy to see Him?" Yet doubt and anxiety never crossed my mind. Everything was crystal clear and exquisite.

At a quarter to five — 90 minutes after swallowing the mushrooms — my pulse was 56 but still steady. My temperature was 99.8. I had no feeling of sadness, yet tears rolled from my eyes. My husband recorded that my pupils were extremely dilated and failed to respond to the beam of his flashlight.

Masha and I both heard the call to supper but said impatiently that we didn't wish to be bothered. I was now sitting in a showy box at the Metropolitan Opera House, watching a performance of the ballet, "Les Sylphides." At the end of the program I took off into the skies with several of the dancers. Then I was bending over a huge, deep blue Chinese vase, inspecting several handsome gold dragons crawling around at the bottom. I was not afraid. It was much, much too —

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THE WASSONS: Completing their research on "sacred mushrooms" in Mexico

Time Passed in a Swirl of Dreams

remote. I sat up and told Gordon about it.

Then I was in a strange country. I saw picturesque tiles. "Holland!" I exclaimed to myself. "What nonsense — I wish to be in Russia!"

I was in Russia. The tiles were framed about an old peasant stove. Children in colorful pre-World War I costumes were dancing around the room. Everyone was laughing and gay, singing old songs.

Suddenly I was quite out of the picture. I was looking at a beautiful piece of cabinet jewelry. It was a large, rectangular box, made of black Chinese lacquer. A map of China was outlined on its surface. Cities, rivers and mountains were depicted in rubies, sapphires and emeralds. I seemed to be examining it through a strong magnifying glass. It was breathtakingly beautiful. The vision, like the others, rolled past.

The hours had passed imperceptibly. It was 8 o'clock in the evening when the hallucinations ended. Masha and I both felt hungry. We accepted our hostess' offer of a cup of aromatic hot chocolate and some sweet rolls.

Masha and I exchanged notes. She told

me that her dreams had consisted of all the happy memories of her life, beginning from birth and carrying through in rosy succession to her present freshman year in college. She said she was constantly in the company of relatives and friends and in the places she loved most. "The world was little and beautiful, and I was on top of it," she said. We also agreed on being completely awake during our incredible dreams.

No Aftereffects

Soon I was overcome by the same fit of strong yawning that had preceded my submission to the powers of the potent sacred mushroom. I fell asleep. It was the deepest, soundest, most refreshing sleep of my life.

I awoke clear-headed, alert and happy with no trace of aftereffects. It was raining and bitterly cold. The village was still wrapped in a thick, gray blanket of fog. The Indian children, tightly wrapped in their thin cotton shawls, crowded in at the door, staring at us in wonder. I set about writing down my notes of that weird and wonderful experience. — The End