

Using LSD to Imprint the Tibetan-Buddhist Experience

A Guide to Successful Psychedelic Experience

by Dr. Timothy Leary, PhD

Having read this preparatory manual one can immediately recognize symptoms and experiences that might otherwise be terrifying, only because of lack of understanding. Recognition is the key word. Recognizing and locating the level of consciousness. This guidebook may also be used to avoid paranoid trips or to regain transcendence if it has been lost. If the experience starts with light, peace, mystic unity, understanding, and continues along this path, then there is no need to remember the manual or have it reread to you. Like a road map, consult it only when lost, or when you wish to change course.

Planning a Session

What is the goal? Classic Hinduism suggests four possibilities:

1. Increased personal power, intellectual understanding, sharpened insight into self and culture, improvement of life situation, accelerated learning, professional growth.
2. Duty, help of others, providing care, rehabilitation, rebirth for fellow men.
3. Fun, sensuous enjoyment, esthetic pleasure, interpersonal closeness, pure experience.
4. Transcendence, liberation from ego and space-time limits; attainment of mystical union.

The manual's primary emphasis on the last goal does not preclude other goals - in fact, it guarantees their attainment because illumination requires that the person be able to step out beyond problems of personality, role, and professional status. The initiate can decide before hand to devote their psychedelic experience to any of the four goals.

In the extroverted transcendent experience, the self is ecstatically fused with external objects (e.g., flowers, other people). In the introverted state, the self is ecstatically fused with internal life processes (lights, energy waves, bodily events, biological forms, etc.). Either state may be negative rather than positive, depending on the voyager's set and setting. For the extroverted mystic experience, one would bring to the session candles, pictures, books, incense, music, or recorded passages to guide the awareness in the desired direction. An introverted experience requires eliminating all stimulation: no light, no sound, no smell, no movement.

The mode of communication with other participants should also be agreed on beforehand, to avoid misinterpretations during the heightened sensitivity of ego transcendence.

If several people are having a session together, they should at least be aware of each other's goals. Unexpected or undesired manipulations can easily "trap" the other voyagers into paranoid delusions.

Preparation

Psychedelic chemicals are not drugs in the usual sense of the word. There is no specific somatic or psychological reaction. The better the preparation, the more ecstatic and relevatory the session. In initial sessions with unprepared persons, set and setting - particularly the actions of others - are most important. Long-range set refers to personal history, enduring personality, the kind of person you are. Your fears, desires, conflicts, guilts, secret passions, determine how you interpret and manage any psychedelic session. Perhaps more important are the reflex mechanisms, defenses, protective maneuvers, typically employed when dealing with anxiety. Flexibility, basic trust, philosophic faith, human openness, courage, interpersonal warmth, creativity, allow for fun and easy learning. Rigidity, desire to control, distrust, cynicism, narrowness, cowardice, coldness, make any new situation threatening. Most important is insight. The person who has some understanding of his own machinery, who can recognize when he is not functioning as he would wish, is better able to adapt to any challenge - even the sudden collapse of his ego.

Immediate set refers to expectations about the session itself. People naturally tend to impose personal and social perspectives on any new situation. For example, some ill-prepared subjects unconsciously impose a medical model on the experience. They look for symptoms, interpret each new sensation in terms of sickness/health, and, if anxiety develops, demand tranquilizers. Occasionally, ill-planned sessions end in the subject demanding to see a doctor.

Rebellion against convention may motivate some people who take the drug. The naive idea of doing something "far out" or vaguely naughty can cloud the experience.

LSD offers vast possibilities of accelerated learning and scientific- scholarly research, but for initial sessions, intellectual reactions can become traps. "Turn your mind off" is the best advice for novitiates. After you have learned how to move your consciousness around - into ego loss and back, at will - then intellectual exercises can be incorporated into the psychedelic experience. The objective is to free you from your verbal mind for as long as possible.

Religious expectations invite the same advice. Again, the subject in early sessions is best advised to float with the stream, stay "up" as long as possible, and postpone theological interpretations.

Recreational and esthetic expectations are natural. The psychedelic experience provides ecstatic moments that dwarf any personal or cultural game. Pure sensation can capture awareness. Interpersonal intimacy reaches Himalayan heights. Esthetic delights - musical, artistic, botanical, natural - are raised to the millionth power. But ego-game reactions - "I am having this ecstasy. How lucky I am!" - can prevent the subject from reaching pure ego loss.

Some Practical Recommendations:

The subject should set aside at least three days: a day before the experience, the session day, and a follow-up day. This scheduling guarantees a reduction in external pressure and a more sober commitment. Talking to others who have taken the voyage is excellent preparation, although the hallucinatory quality of all descriptions should be recognized. Observing a session is another valuable preliminary.

Reading books about mystical experience and of others' experiences is another possibility (Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, and Gordon Wasson have written powerful accounts). Meditation is probably the best preparation. Those who have spent time in a solitary attempt to manage the mind, to eliminate thought and reach higher stages of concentration, are the best candidates for a psychedelic session. When the ego loss occurs, they recognize the process as an eagerly awaited end.

The Setting

First and most important, provide a setting removed from one's usual interpersonal games, and as free as possible from unforeseen distractions and intrusions. The voyager should make sure that he will not be disturbed; visitors or a phone call will often jar him into hallucinatory activity. Trust in the surroundings and privacy are necessary.

The day after the session should be set aside to let the experience run its natural course and allow time for reflection and meditation. A too-hasty return to game involvements will blur the clarity and reduce the potential for learning. It is very useful for a group to stay together after the session to share and exchange experiences.

Many people are more comfortable in the evening, and consequently their experiences are deeper and richer. The person should choose the time of day that seems right. Later, he may wish to experience the difference between night and day sessions. Similarly, gardens, beaches, forests, and

open country have specific influences that one may or may not wish. The essential thing is to feel as comfortable as possible, whether in one's living room or under the night sky. Familiar surroundings may help one feel confident in hallucinatory periods. If the session is held indoors, music, lighting, the availability of food and drink, should be considered beforehand. Most people report no hunger during the height of the experience, then later on prefer simple ancient foods like bread, cheese, wine, and fresh fruit. The senses are wide open, and the taste and smell of a fresh orange are unforgettable.

In group sessions, people usually will not feel like walking or moving very much for long periods, and either beds or mattresses should be provided. One suggestion is to place the heads of the beds together to form a star pattern. Perhaps one may want to place a few beds together and keep one or two some distance apart for anyone who wishes to remain aside for some time. The availability of an extra room is desirable for someone who wishes to be in seclusion.

The Psychedelic Guide

With the cognitive mind suspended, the subject is in a heightened state of suggestibility. For initial sessions, the guide possesses enormous power to move consciousness with the slightest gesture or reaction.

The key here is the guide's ability to turn off his own ego and social games, power needs, and fears - to be there, relaxed, solid, accepting, secure, to sense all and do nothing except let the subject know his wise presence.

A psychedelic session lasts up to twelve hours and produces moments of intense, intense, INTENSE reactivity. The guide must never be bored, talkative, intellectualizing. He must remain calm during long periods of swirling mindlessness. He is the ground control, always there to receive messages and queries from high-flying aircraft, ready to help negotiate their course and reach their destination. The guide does not impose his own games on the voyager. Pilots who have their own flight plan, their own goals, are reassured to know that an expert is down there, available for help. But if ground control is harboring his own motives, manipulating the plane towards selfish goals, the bond of security and confidence crumbles.

To administer psychedelics without personal experience is unethical and dangerous. Our studies concluded that almost every negative LSD reaction has been caused by the guide's fear, which augmented the transient fear of the subject. When the guide acts to protect himself, he communicates his concern. If momentary discomfort or confusion happens, others present should not be sympathetic or show alarm but stay calm and restrain their "helping games." In particular, the "doctor" role should be avoided.

The guide must remain passively sensitive and intuitively relaxed for several

hours - a difficult assignment for most Westerners. The most certain way to maintain a state of alert quietism, poised in ready flexibility, is for the guide to take a low dose of the psychedelic with the subject. Routine procedure is to have one trained person participating in the experience, and one staff member present without psychedelic aid. The knowledge that one experienced guide is "up" and keeping the subject company is of inestimable value: the security of a trained pilot flying at your wingtip; the scuba diver's security in the presence of an expert companion.

The less experienced subject will more likely impose hallucinations. The guide, likely to be in a state of mindless, blissful flow, is then pulled into the subject's hallucinatory field and may have difficulty orienting himself. There are no familiar fixed landmarks, no place to put your foot, no solid concept upon which to base your thinking. All is flux. Decisive action by the subject can structure the guide's flow if he has taken a heavy dose.

The psychedelic guide is literally a neurological liberator, who provides illumination, who frees men from their lifelong internal bondage. To be present at the moment of awakening, to share the ecstatic revelation when the voyager discovers the wonder and awe of the divine life-process, far outstrips earthly game ambitions. Awe and gratitude -rather than pride- are the rewards of this new profession.

The Period of Ego Loss or Non-Game Ecstasy

Success implies very unusual preparation in consciousness expansion, as well as much calm, compassionate game playing (good karma) on the part of the participant. If the participant can see and grasp the idea of the empty mind as soon as the guide reveals it -that is to say, if he has the power to die consciously- and, at the supreme moment of quitting the ego, can recognize the ecstasy that will dawn upon him and become one with it, then all bonds of illusion are broken asunder immediately: the dreamer is awakened into reality simultaneously with the mighty achievement of recognition.

It is best if the guru from whom the participant received guiding instructions is present. But if the guru cannot be present, then another experienced person, or a person the participant trusts, should be available to read this manual without imposing any of his own games. Thereby the participant will be put in mind of what he had previously heard of the experience.

Liberation is the nervous system devoid of mental-conceptual redundancy. The mind in its conditioned state, limited to words and ego games, is continuously in thought-formation activity. The nervous system in a state of quiescence, alert, awake but not active, is comparable to what Buddhists call the highest state of dhyana (deep meditation). The conscious recognition of the Clear Light induces an ecstatic condition of consciousness such as saints and mystics of the West have called illumination.

The first sign is the glimpsing of the "Clear Light of Reality, the infallible mind of the pure mystic state" - an awareness of energy transformations with no imposition of mental categories.

The duration of this state varies, depending on the individual's experience, security, trust, preparation, and the surroundings. In those who have a little practical experience of the tranquil state of non-game awareness, this state can last from 30 minutes to several hours. Realization of what mystics call the "Ultimate Truth" is possible, provided that the person has made sufficient preparation beforehand. Otherwise he cannot benefit now, and must wander into lower and lower conditions of hallucinations until he drops back to routine reality.

It is important to remember that the consciousness-expansion is the reverse of the birth process, the ego-loss experience being a temporary ending of game life, a passing from one state of consciousness into another. Just as an infant must wake up and learn from experience the nature of this world, so a person must wake up in this new brilliant world of consciousness expansion and become familiar with its own peculiar conditions.

In those heavily dependant on ego games, who dread giving up control, the illuminated state endures only for a split second. In some, it lasts as long as the time taken for eating a meal. If the subject is prepared to diagnose the symptoms of ego-loss, he needs no outside help at this point. The person about to give up his ego should be able to recognize the Clear Light. If the person fails to recognize the onset of ego-loss, he may complain of strange bodily symptoms that show he has not reached a liberated state:

1. Bodily pressure
2. Clammy coldness followed by feverish heat
3. Body disintegrating or blown to atoms
4. Pressure on head and ears
5. Tingling in extremities
6. Feelings of body melting or flowing like wax
7. Nausea
8. Trembling or shaking, beginning in pelvic region and spreading up torso.

The guide or friend should explain that the symptoms indicate the onset of ego-loss. These physical reactions are signs heralding transcendence: avoid treating them as symptoms of illness. The subject should hail stomach messages as a sign that consciousness is moving around in the body. Experience the sensation fully, and let consciousness flow on to the next phase. It is usually more natural to let the subject's attention move from the stomach and concentrate on breathing and heartbeat. If this does not free him from nausea, the guide should move the consciousness to external events - music, walking in the garden, etc. As a last resort, heave.

The physical symptoms of ego-loss, recognized and understood, should result in peaceful attainment of illumination. The simile of a needle balanced and set rolling on a thread is used by the lamas to elucidate this condition. So long as the needle retains its balance, it remains on the thread. Eventually, however, the pull of the ego or external stimulation affects it, and it falls. In the realm of the Clear Light, similarly, a person in the ego-transcendent state momentarily enjoys a condition of perfect equilibrium and oneness. Unfamiliar with such an ecstatic non-ego state, the average consciousness lacks the power to function in it. Thoughts of personality, individualized being, dualism, prevent the realization of nirvana (the "blowing out of the flame" of fear or selfishness). When the voyager is clearly in a profound ego-transcendent ecstasy, the wise guide remains silent.