# YOUR EXTRAORDINARY MIND

## Psychedelics in the 21st Century and How to Use Them

ZACH LEARY

sounds true
BOULDER, COLORADO

# Contents

# Introduction

Every psychedelic trip has its beginnings. For some people, it's setting an intention for what they hope to contemplate during their experience—that thirst for a transcendental connection that may appear, however fleeting. For those suffering from mental health disorders, their journey may begin with the suggestion that there is another route to ease their suffering. For the mystically inclined, it may be that warm hug when the medicine starts to kick in and the unsettling satisfaction of knowing that, for the next few hours, they will be greeted with insight into the idea that whatever they think reality is, it's not. There are so many unique and varied reasons why someone might want to set forth on the ancient yet modernly relevant practice of using psychedelic plants and medicines.

Just as there are many reasons why people may want to use psychedelics today, there are many origins and histories of these substances and their culture. As we explore the colorful tapestries within these mind-expanding plants and chemicals, we begin to see some historical commonalities that anyone interested in using psychedelics should take the time to understand before embarking on their discovery of their mind's inner workings.

My life is a living example of this sequence of events. I grew up in a household so full of psychedelic lore that my childhood mind vibrated with an unwavering curiosity about what these drugs were all about and why the man who was raising me was so famous. Contrary to popular opinion, when I first considered the idea of using

psychedelics at age fifteen, my parents were not okay with me becoming a teenage psychonaut, aka a psychedelic explorer. I was following the Grateful Dead around the country, and there was no way I could "just say no." My father sat me down and said plainly, "Zach, LSD is a very powerful tool, and you have to know that your brain is not fully developed yet. I strongly encourage you to wait until you're older before taking it."

Of course I didn't. Even so, my father's cautionary advice took hold in my mind, and I became a very cautious and deliberate young acid head who tried to make sure the principles of "set and setting" were adhered to for every trip I went on. "Set" is the voyager's mindset and inner condition, and "setting" is the environment in which you surround yourself while on the drug.

Looking back on those days, now thirty-five years ago, a huge part of my curiosity was rooted in the cultural tradition I was surrounded by. Twentieth-century psychedelic luminaries like Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, John C. Lilly, Terence McKenna, and Dr. Oz Janiger were all fixtures in my home, and that, combined with the seductive power of the Dead's scene, made me feel like I was being lured into a hero's journey that I was yet to fully understand, but I sure as hell was going to try.

The tales of the modern explorers of consciousness have taken on an almost folklorish status: wild-eyed modern mystics trekking into the jungles of South America seeking the elusive Ayahuasca vine, brilliant yet prickly Harvard professors challenging the very institutions that they are part of by preaching the power of LSD to a younger generation, or a young psychology student so enamored with the therapeutic potential of MDMA that he set forth on a thirty-year odyssey to tell the world all about it.

These are great stories to tell and for you to understand. It's important to understand the history of psychedelics in America because it can help make you more cautious and knowledgeable on the quest that you may or may not undertake. This book is not solely about psychedelic culture and its storied history. It's also about creating an instructional road map that allows the end user to find a symbiotic

relationship with psychedelic drugs that has long-lasting, positive effects on their life, both spiritually and psychologically. This is accomplished through becoming educated about the specific compounds, having a very solid plan for set and setting, and paying extra care to what we now refer to simply as "integration," or the work that comes after the journey.

Over the course of the last several years, as psychedelics have become more palatable within our culture and accepted within therapeutic circles, I've started to notice a need to create an accessible resource for safe and effective psychedelic use that is appropriate for all variations of seekers, ranging from the spiritually curious to the therapist who is planning on introducing them as a healing method into their client-centered practice.

Being Timothy Leary's son and Ram Dass's student makes for strange bedfellows. I've been able to find a union of Timothy's passion for the individual mandate to control one's mind and to "trust one's nervous system." Ram Dass's path of cultivating the heart into a wellspring of unconditional love and compassion may seem like a very different path than Leary's, and perhaps it is, but I find there to be a synergistic relationship that is necessary to go forth on the spiritual path. Through the work I've done on myself and in formal study with Ram Dass in America and around the world (India mostly), I've come to learn that there is a deep hunger for a new approach to set and setting, and for young people who are new to this method to get acquainted with the histories of these compounds. And finally, there is a dire need for helping people get more clarity about what to do after the journey, aka "integration."

Turning insight into action that results in these drugs having a more sustained effect on one's life rather than feeling the need to keep chasing the peak experience is something I'm very passionate about. Later on in the book, you'll find some question sets and recommendations on how this can be achieved.

When I started working with others as their psychedelic guide and coach, I began to notice a constant reoccurring sentiment: growth

isn't about becoming someone new; it's about uncovering the authenticity of one's inner self that's been there all along. For many reasons, getting in touch with the most authentic expression of our truest selves gets lost. Psychedelic exploration and the integration process that comes afterward are a wonderful acceleration for that rediscovery. Your extraordinary mind can get burst wide open. There you can discover unknown parts of yourself that can lead to a better understanding of who you are and perhaps even a deeper connection to the entirety of your humanity—namely, the cultivation of the heart.

In the 1960s, as fantastic as they were, psychedelics ultimately fell into a pattern of reckless use. It's important that we recognize where the road map for psychedelic use in the '60s went wrong and how we can learn from those mistakes to make a better future for the current psychedelic movement. By educating our culture about the profound power and potential risks of psychedelics, we can help reduce the number of bad trips and psychotic breaks and present the public with the cold, hard fact that not all psychedelics are for all people. Not everyone is cut out to be an explorer of their minds in this way. Those who are, however, are better served if they are equipped with a solid methodology on how to use psychedelic drugs successfully, which includes safety protocols, spiritual guidelines, risk-versus-reward assessment, and access to pure chemical compounds that won't damage their bodies. Essentially, this is a harm-reduction approach to psychedelic use.

We are at a fantastic crossroads filled with great promise, but we are also at risk of keeping the movement in the hands of labs and medical professionals. I don't condone indiscriminate use of any drug, especially in the hands of young people who are at risk of using powerful mind/soul-altering psychotropics in an unstructured and dangerous way. Because of this, it's important that we continue to learn from the medical research about the safe use of psychedelics to treat mental health conditions. That does not mean that we can altogether abandon the notion of cognitive liberty, aka the freedom to change one's consciousness as they see fit.

I've become fixated on the reasons why people want to use psychedelic drugs and, subsequently, how they might take that experience and integrate it into their lives for years to come. Some say the psychedelic experience is too vast and unconventional to be reduced into language that can affect its daily relationship with consciousness. While I do resonate with Terence McKenna's chestnut, "There is a space beyond language, it's just so damn hard to talk about," I also subscribe to the idea that the psychedelic experience can be woven into one's heart, soul, healing, and thus daily living practice. I believe we can distill the mind-blowing, previously indescribable psychedelic experience, into a focused spiritual method that can help people in their daily lives.

This book explores what that method looks like and shares stories around my life, my personal psychedelic experiences, my observations as a psychedelic facilitator, and commentaries on the current psychedelic renaissance. There are also elements that serve as a guide manual (of sorts) for the individual who wants to plot their own course for successful healing, growth, and self-inquiry. This book is just the beginning of a larger conversation that I hope will extend into the psychedelic community at large and to whoever is seeking the promise of a better quality of life.

So before we get into the meat and potatoes of how psychedelics can be used safely, effectively, and with a purpose that goes beyond the limitations of the human condition and our so-called medical establishment, I want to briefly recount some of the history of how we got to this moment in time—a place that is now fondly referred to as the psychedelic renaissance.

Technically speaking, the word "renaissance" is defined as "a revival or renewed interest in something." While it's true that the current fervor of interest in psychedelics is the most active that it's ever been since the 1960s, it is also vital to point out that psychedelics have never been adopted in the West as a method for serious healing and spiritual growth without ambiguity, controversy, and propaganda. The '60s were a blip that showed us what's possible, but sadly it didn't last.

However, Indigenous cultures have long been incorporating psychedelic use as a core part of their cultures and healing paradigms.

It's my deepest wish that today's world continues to investigate the vast potential of psychedelic drugs and medicines, and lands on the conclusion that they are just as valid a methodology for the betterment of human evolution as anything else we've tried.

## The History of Psychedelics: The Twentieth-Century Rebirth

In May 1961, after embarking on his first psilocybin journey, my father Timothy Leary proclaimed with an awestruck sense of transformation, "I learned more about psychology in the five hours after taking these mushrooms than in the preceding fifteen years of studying and doing research in psychology."

Leary's colleague and psychonautic cohort Richard Alpert (later known as Ram Dass), mesmerized after hearing of Timothy's mushroom experience, decided to go on his own inaugural psilocybin journey a few months later. He recalled "the first encounter" with poetic reflection: "I knew myself was gone, still there was something in me that was watching this whole process disappear. There was what I at the time was calling a scanning device or a point of awareness; something in there that had no reference to body; no reference to personality; no reference to any of my social roles, and yet there it was, clear and lucid and watching the whole thing and just, you know, watching it all happen."

Leary's and Alpert's journeys happened in the context of a perfect storm of cultural, political, and scientific advancement that became one of the great cultural revolutions in mankind's history: the 1960s. Some may look back on them now as just thoughtful neo-spiritual recollections of a psychedelic experience, but in 1961, this was a very big deal for two Harvard professors to proclaim. Everything about Western culture and society was about to change.

Not only did the Western world become aware of the profound power of psychedelic drugs thanks to research at Harvard and Ken

Kesey's now legendary "Acid Tests," but simultaneously our day-to-day life as a society was being led by a youth-driven kaleidoscope of social activism, avant-garde rock music, daring fashions, civil and women's rights, and countless other movements that would have been unrecognizable to the 1950s establishment. As wise old Timothy once said, "In order to understand the 1960s, you first must understand the 1950s."

It suddenly became permissible to question the draconian restrictions of your parents' generation by expanding your field of vision to think for yourself, worship new gods or no gods at all, study new fields of artistic expression, have premarital sex, try new fashion, and follow your heart instead of following the worker bee tradition. This scared the establishment because it laid the foundation for the introduction of non-Christian values into the Western zeitgeist that began the process of piercing the veil of the patriarchal and capitalist systems that ruled the day. The very concept of perceiving your consciousness in an entirely new way as a result of using newfound drugs like LSD and smoking cannabis couldn't help but create a subculture of millions who were quick to question authority and give rise to an Aquarian Age.

Even though psychedelic drugs felt new to people trying them for the first time in the 1960s, the reality is they weren't actually new at all. The practice of gathering as a community in ceremony around a psychedelic sacrament can be found in Indigenous cultures dating back thousands of years through the present. There is strong archeological evidence that places the use of magic mushrooms as far away as ancient Siberia and the use of ergot in the ritual celebrations of ancient Greece, known as the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Prior to 1961 (when Leary and Alpert did their first mushroom trip) the proliferation of psychedelics gained a lot of traction in the 1950s, as icons like Aldous Huxley encountered the magical properties of mescaline thanks to Dr. Humphry Osmond, the great psychotherapist who coined the term "psychedelic," which translates to "mind manifesting."

Still, before the counterculture of the '60s took hold, the acceptance of psychedelics on a wide level could only be seen within the traditions of Indigenous cultures that used them (and still do) as methods for healing, celebration, and deep inner knowing. Notably, the Shipibo people of Peru and their healers use Ayahuasca to induce mystical revelations, and the Aztecs found magic mushrooms to be so spiritually potent that they named them Teonanácatl, aka "the flesh of the Gods." The use of psilocybin mushrooms within regions of Mexico, like Cuernavaca, revolve around tribal rituals infused with hints of Catholic saints and local traditions—both of which center around the understanding that mysticism is not separate from our waking reality, that it is merely another layer of one persistent reality. These wisdom seekers know that God is everywhere and in everything, and that in order to lead a more holistic life, you must recognize this non-duality.

In the modern Western world, these practices of entheogenic celebrations and ritual became all but lost. There are some accounts of colonists coming across Indigenous use of Ayahuasca and magic mushrooms, but it seems none of those sightings struck enough curiosity to bring them back to their homelands.

It wasn't until 1954 that the book *The Doors of Perception* by Aldous Huxley became the first "mainstream" account of how psychedelics can offer a different relationship to one's own mystical landscape found within the heart and mind. Huxley became acutely aware that humans didn't have to search for external doorways to achieve spiritual enlightenment, instead suggesting it was within us all along.

He reflects on his own use of mescaline by writing, "The man who comes back through the Door in the Wall will never be quite the same as the man who went out. He will be wiser but less sure, happier but less self-satisfied, humbler in acknowledging his ignorance yet better equipped to understand the relationship of words to things . . ."

At that time, most of the Western world didn't know much about how Indigenous cultures were using mind-altering plants as sacraments in their rituals. But in 1956, the magazine that was on every

coffee table in the '40s and '50s, *LIFE*, ran a story called "Seeking the Magic Mushroom." It's safe to say that R. Gordon Wasson's *LIFE Magazine* account of his travels in Mexico and encounter with curandera María Sabina brought sacred mushroom use into the American household almost overnight. Wasson, with his wife, took *LIFE* readers on a trip to the remote mountains of Mexico, where they spent years documenting the ceremonial use of mushrooms that had "vision giving powers." This was strong stuff for the pages of *LIFE* in the 1950s. The article is incredibly objective and full of rich and curious insights into the potential of these wild fungi and the people who were using them. It's far less full of fear-based propaganda than you might expect considering it was published in 1956.

When Leary and Alpert began their work at Harvard in 1961, there was some cultural precedent, thanks to Huxley and Wasson, and some documented therapeutic use, thanks to Osmond, Janiger, and Hartman. But that didn't mean a major Ivy League institution was ready to blow the doors off traditional psychology just yet. These two outliers, in the role of dutiful Harvard professors, began conducting research into the very nature of consciousness, divinity, cognitive liberty, and the social constructs that flew in the face of conventional society.

The problem was that the Harvard elite had very different ideas for how the departmental rules and regulations for an ethical and responsible psychology department should be run. Those rules, of which many were indeed broken, ultimately appeared to be holding Leary and Alpert back from forging on to the lofty goals they had for revolutionizing the human condition. Sure enough, they both got fired from Harvard in 1963—not for shoddy research but for tales of faculty-student fraternization exposed by an undergraduate reporter for the local Harvard newspaper. They were looking for any reason to fire Leary and Alpert, and that was just a convenient excuse. The impact they were having was simply too much for a very conservative Ivy League institution.

Not to be deterred, they continued their work at Millbrook, an upstate New York estate that was extended to them by the

Mellon-Hitchcock family. What happened there (and at Harvard) set the psychedelic research movement on fire, and the various results have been hotly debated over the last fifty years. Setting aside how you may feel about Timothy Leary personally, his and Alpert's contribution to the early psychedelic canon was one of the elements that spawned the huge cultural changes of the 1960s.

Still, many modern psychedelic voices who are popular in today's movement like to say they are "cleaning up the mess that Leary made" by getting psychedelic research back on track due to Leary's court-jester-like antics. Questions have also been raised on the validity of the research data in his projects, such as the Good Friday and Concord Prison experiments. No matter how good the data was or wasn't, or the profound impact LSD use had on popular culture, the 1960s use of psychedelics helped spawn an unwelcome war on drugs that took down legitimate psychedelic research with it. Timothy Leary became more of a symbol of antidrug hysteria created by Richard Nixon's administration than anything else. He was persecuted and put in prison, escaped from prison, and was locked up again, and through all of that, he held his head high as he continued to live by the mantra "think for yourself and question authority."

## Revisiting the War on Drugs

This is true: Leary's antics led him to become a political figure more than anything else, and that took away from the serious work that psychedelics were gaining traction on. What many anti-Leary soldiers conveniently forget is that there is no way any one of us could know what it was like to be in Leary's shoes. More to the point, it's impossible to believe that Richard Nixon would have set aside a place for psychedelics in a research setting had he been given a different data set when he launched the modern War on Drugs. Not a chance.

The War on Drugs was a war against people he didn't like (more on that later), and the counterculture hippy kids who were doing LSD were no exception. Nixon noticed that those kids were the ones burning