The Snow Leopard Essay, Research Paper

LSD Induced, Yeti, Euphoric Sojourn

Drugs can clear away the past, enhance the present; toward the inner

garden, they can only point the way. Lacking the temper of ascetic discipline, the drug vision remains a sort of dream

that cannot be brought over into daily life. Old mists may be banished, that is true, but the alien chemical agent forms another mist maintaining the separation of the I from the true experience of the One.1

This passage comes from The Snow Leopard, by Peter Matthiessen. In this passage Matthiessen describes what he has learned from the experiences he had with hallucinogenic drugs, such as ayahuasca, LSD, mescaline, and psilocybin. He is concerned mostly with the spiritual nature of such drugs, and reveals that while drugs are always harmful, they can provide a starting point for spiritual growth.

Hallucinogens clear old mists (47); they let you perceive yourself without any armour. They force you to stand naked and alone, without any defense to your own emotional states. You become very close to the oneness Matthiessen describes, Then I breathe, and the mountain breathes, setting the world in motion once again. (198) Nevertheless this oneness is very hard to achieve in practice and harder still to maintain. Drugs always leave you short of the goal of oneness because the drugs themselves are an obstacle, a mist that will always stop you short of total oneness.

Drugs will always hold you back because they are harmful, and while you are experiencing a drug trip you are doing nothing but experiencing a drug trip; the drugs can do nothing but induce that hallucinogenic state. Also you are unable to do anything other then experience that state. This is also a reason why drugs are able to point the way (47) to spiritual unity, oneness. Drugs force you to live in the present, in the sense that you are totally consumed by the drug and are doing nothing except being high. This is another draw back of the drugged experience you cannot escape you must wait until the drug wears off before you can concentrate on anything else. You are one with the drug and its affects. If you are going to try and concern yourself with something other than the drug experience that you are involved in, you will become very nervous. An anxiety attack will start to creep over you, reminding you to concern yourself with only what is happening now.

Drug trips also help you to escape the fear of death or deepen your fear to an endless abyss. Through dark visions and moments of pure horror and dread you must leave your fear of death or it will dominate you wholly. Hallucinogenic experience can set you free by allowing you to live out the fear death, the demoniac rage at one s own helplessness that drug hallucinations seem to represent, and in that way let go of a life-killing accumulation of defenses. (46) Just the very drug lifestyle that most people experimenting with hallucinogenic substances live confronts death and alleviates the fear of death. Though when one does not overcome this fear of death and still continues to use drugs an overwhelming anxious fear will consume you.

When reaching the most intense levels of hallucination you feel very close to nirvana. This euphoric feeling is very lovely or horrific, but always beautiful. This stillness to which all returns, this is reality, and soul and sanity have no more meaning here than a gust of snow; such transience and insignificance are exalting, terrifying, all at once, like the sudden discovery of one s own transparence. (172) This feeling begs you to return again and again, to be lost in its poisoning experience. It seems somehow familiar. To paraphrase Plato, maybe many lives ago when we followed the gods and stood upon the back of the universe this sensation, euphoria, was present. Our memory recalls this awareness and longs to recapture it.

In conclusion, a hallucinogenic experience will always be harmful and you will realize the desolation of success (244) towards the end of your trip: is this really what [you] came so far to see? (244). This thought will come to you because you will become disappointed in your experience, and lead yourself to doubt the journey s worth. You will most likely have more experiences than one because you will long to regain this feeling:

All sounds, and all one sees and feels, take on imminence, an immanence, as if the Universe were coming to attention, a Universe of which one is in the center, a Universe that is not the same yet not different from oneself, even from a scientific point of view.(210)

End Note

The Snow Leopard, Peter Matthiessen. Penguin Books 1978