

Triggers for Enlightenment

For many centuries, people have searched for ways of triggering enlightenment. Methods have been developed which induce altered states of mind, and many of these methods are still in common use: mantra meditation, severe restrictions on eating and drinking, intense prolonged physical activity to the point of exhaustion, control of the breath, the use of psychedelics. But do these altered states of mind lead to enlightenment? In this paper, we will focus mainly on psychedelics as they have become increasingly popular among spiritual seekers.

One of the common barriers to the recognition of our true nature is the belief that what we are is limited and that consciousness is dependent on the body and mind. As the following dialogue illustrates, the use of psychedelics can trigger a sense of oneness and thereby disrupt our previous belief system. But it doesn't necessarily result in a permanent change in understanding:

Q: Can you speak of the role of psychedelics for some willing body-mind individuals in grasping oneness and helping dissolve duality, as well as discovering consciousness in and around the self? As I am a product of the sixties, I have experimented carefully with such states. And I have existed in a state that enabled me to experience reality beyond the human experience. To say the least, it was a remarkable time.

This experience has truly helped me expand my knowledge of the unfathomable limitless intelligence and grace of universal consciousness. I suspect a preference to indulge in such inner space experience is elective to the individual. I also sense that much respect must be given to what could be called a sacred experience. Does this possibility resonate with your idea about such backdoors to perception?

FL: Yes. Several comments. I have a friend. He had 100 LSD trips in his life. And the reason why is that the first time he had an LSD trip, he had this spiritual awakening experience. And then he had 99 more. And after 100, he decided, I'll stop.

These trips can be somehow revelatory of a different dimension. And the truth can reveal itself through all kinds of ways. And a psychedelic experience can be such a way. The question then is, can the repetition of psychedelic experiences, assuming that one of them was an enlightening one, help us getting established in our true nature?

I have some doubts about that. And the reason why I have some doubt about that is that the use of those substances doesn't give us a clear road-map to where we want to go. It's a little bit as if you are hijacked somewhere, blindfolded, and driven to this Shangri-La place. Then you are blindfolded again and driven back to Main Street. You have no way to know where you went, how you went there. So, it could be good if you could call the hijacker on your cell phone, which is what you do by calling your local purveyor. And then they come with a car, blindfold you, and take you back there again. But where is the map? Where is the map that you can live there? That you can buy a house there and live there in Shangri-La?

So that's the reason why I'm not challenging at all that enlightening experience may have been experienced while under the influence of some psychedelic substance. But also some enlightening experience may have been triggered by being hit by a truck. No, I'm not making fun of it. I agree with you that there is some... I've had myself some experience with a big dose of hashish that has revealed to me that there are other dimensions than the one that normal scientific mind is open to.

But I'm not going to recommend that as a path to get established in inner peace. Also, it's hard to function in that state. For instance, it's very hard to drive if all of a sudden you realize that as you turn the wheel, you are in fact turning the road and not the car.

[Francis Lucille, 6/10/2018 Temecula dialogue-0]

It is important to understand that blissful states of oneness and love which arise and then disappear are not what is meant by enlightenment or awakening. Awakening is not the permanent presence of such states of mind, which in any case is unachievable. So using drugs or engaging in any other kind of spiritual practices in order to experience such states over and over again, is not going to bring liberation. In the following dialogue, Francis explains why this is so:

Q: One of my personal experiences where I feel like I have experienced consciousness or consciousness that's experienced it itself within me is through the use of psychedelics where I've felt like I was everything but nothing, I felt I was loved, that I was connected with the universe. And I know that currently there's a lot of research on psychedelics for treating trauma and so forth. So one question is what is your feeling, your opinion of psychedelics?

FL: The experience of consciousness, the real experience of consciousness, is not necessarily what we experience during the psychedelic experience, which is an altered content of consciousness, an altered state. This state has a beginning and has an end. This state has its own qualities. You may drive your car for five minutes by your watch, but for you, it's like six hours. And also, you may be under the impression that, you are not turning your car with your steering-wheel, but you are turning the road. It is very difficult because the road turns in the opposite direction from your wheel. ...

But all of that is about content. It's a different state, just as when we go to sleep, we experience an altered state. It's different, but that's the content of consciousness. Actually, differences are always about content. Consciousness itself is always the same. It's like a mirror. The mirror is always the same. The objects reflected in the mirror change depending on what is in front of the mirror. The mirror has no colour, no shape of its own. That's why it is, in a sense, invisible. In fact, a good mirror, when we look into it, we don't think about the mirror. It is the invisibility of the mirror that makes it a perfect mirror. If it is visible because it has scratches or stains, it's not a good mirror. A good mirror is perfectly invisible. Consciousness is perfect. It's a perfectly invisible mirror of its content.

Now to pinpoint the difference between *[mental states and]* the experience of consciousness. I said the experience of consciousness is invisible. It doesn't mean it doesn't have qualities. Because for instance, let's talk about one quality of the experience of consciousness, which is truth or, if you will, self-evidence. Something which is self-evident is something which doesn't require an external object for its existence to be proven.

To establish a fact, to establish a truth, we need external elements. So these truths are not self-evident, but consciousness has a quality of truth and of self-evidence in the sense that we don't need anything to establish that there is consciousness. It establishes itself. It is its own proof.

So in other words, what I have just described is that the experience of consciousness has a perfume of truth or of certainty, if you will. It has also a perfume of being, of existence. It's a fact, it exists, it is. You cannot deny the existence of consciousness, it exists. So there are other qualities that may be discovered, but these qualities are not qualities that can be attributed to objects, to thoughts, to perceptions.

OK, so that's about the experience of consciousness. The question about psychedelic experiences is that any experience in our life, when we are ready for it, can be a trigger that begins, that initiates, if you will, the process of recovering the lost kingdom of our true nature. It could be an accident, it could be being hit by a two-by-four, it could be a bankruptcy, it could be a happy event, it could be a big joint. ...

So anything can be a trigger, but it doesn't mean that it is a usable tool. For instance, is that which triggered if grace in your life showed up as, let's say, a bankruptcy plus a divorce, usually it's first the divorce, then the bankruptcy, but a bankruptcy plus a divorce, and then if you want to help someone on the path, you are not telling him, OK, first get a divorce, and then whatever money you have left, just give it away. It's not a good tool to enlightenment. In other words, the instruments of grace are not very predictable.

[Francis Lucille, 28/9/2019 [The 3 Steps to Self-Realization & Psychedelics](#)]

I once asked Francis about whether drugs such as LSD or ayahuasca had the potential to induce an experience that could lead on to a genuine liberating glimpse of our true nature. He agreed it was possible, but it could not be regarded as a reliable approach:

FL: There are many events that can apparently trigger a glimpse. Could be an accident, a sudden illness, a breakup, something suddenly happened in the world in front of your eyes. I read a story of this guy who falls asleep in the woods. When he woke up, he saw two long trunks of fallen trees right in line with both of his legs. And then he looked at his legs and at the trunk and the thought came, why do I think that this is me, my body, and these trunks are not my extended legs? Or something like that.

Right there he had the glimpse that his real body was the universe. So why not? That cannot be excluded. The question is, now that Francis has told me this story, can I go to the woods, organize to have two trunks lined up with my legs, go back, take some sleeping aid, have a siesta, and see what happens when I wake up?

[Francis Lucille, 1/8/2024, Retreat at Weyarn]

Here is a further explanation, and a suggestion for an alternative approach:

FL: Ultimately, whatever is perceived phenomenally is not important. That which is important is that which is non-phenomenal in our experience. And since the mind can only have access to the phenomenal part of our experience, the mind never has access to the most important element, which is in fact the real object of our desire.

So trying to figure out states of mind is a waste of time. Instead, the real questions are: What am I in this moment, experientially? Where am I in this moment, experientially? What do I know for sure that I am in this moment, experientially? These types of questions lead to very deep experience.

We have to be careful about anything which is phenomenal. For instance, one can smoke a big joint of pot and then it seems that everything slows down and it may seem that if we are in front of a beautiful landscape or whatever, beautiful levellers on the window playing with the light. And it may seem that we have this experience of beauty, of splendour. And then we try to reproduce it either using the same substance or we believe that the goal of spiritual experience is to reach this type of perception in a stable manner. But that's not the case because that was still a phenomenon.

This phenomenon was brought about by the fact that this drug was slowing down the activity of the mind, so it was not able to think in a coherent fashion. As a result, the mechanisms of ignorance, at least the ones that were running through the left brain, through the rational aspect, were temporarily switched off. The other part of ignorance, which is the deep suffering, was not switched off in fact. It remained in the background. No matter how we try to reproduce it or to visualise the solution as a different phenomenal experience, we are barking up the wrong tree.

We have to see that clearly. Because this tendency is big in us, especially if we have had some mystical experience without such a chemical in which a similar experience was achieved as the one which was induced by a psychedelic chemical, and which occurred as a result of a glimpse of our true nature.

The natural state is just to be without a sense of lack. It's that simple. Without any impairment of the mind, the mind can work in a very natural fashion. We can think, we can work, we can have conversations, we can be cogent, and at the same time, peace. It's important to understand this, not to seek anything special.

[Francis Lucille, 12/2/2022 *Trying to Attain Altered States of Consciousness is a Waste of Time*]

There seems to be some evidence that psychedelics can be effective as a form of healing, especially in cases of trauma or addiction. But as Francis says, psychedelic experiences are not related to enlightenment:

Q: I am around a lot of people that take all kinds of substances, and I don't know how to talk to them about how there is no need to do that if they would only realize who they really are. My son has a healing centre in the middle of the Amazon jungle where they do ceremonies with ayahuasca. I'm not happy about it, but people that go there seem to find solace in their conflicting lives, and the ones that are drug addicts quit their drug abuse.

FL: I don't know how to comment on that. I agree with you that we cannot smoke our way or inject our way or eat our way – mushroom-eat our way – to enlightenment. That's a big misunderstanding. Psychedelic or hallucinatory experiences are not at all related with enlightenment.

[Francis Lucille, 25/3/2017, Dialogue at Temecula]

Contemplation

We cannot order a gift. We can only accept it. But we can also reject it. So our freedom is to accept the gifts from grace. These are of two kinds. There are the internal gifts in the form of understanding, joy, love, peace, beauty. But there are also external gifts from the universe in the form of serendipitous events, miracles. And they reveal to us the universality of consciousness

[Francis Lucille, 24/11/2014]