

Bodhi Leaf Publication No. 62

Drugs or Meditation?

**Consciousness Expansion and
Disintegration vs. Concentration
and Spiritual Regeneration**

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BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY



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by

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**Buddhist Publication Society
Kandy • Sri Lanka**

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(1973)

BPS Online Edition © (2009)

Digital Transcription Source: Buddhist Publication Society

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Drugs or Meditation?

Consciousness Expansion and Disintegration versus Concentration and Spiritual Regeneration

When people nowadays recommend “consciousness-expanding” drugs as a substitute or an incentive for meditation, they start from the naive preconception that expansion is synonymous with the attainment of higher values. But the mere expansion of a muddled consciousness, in which the faculties of discrimination, mental balance and understanding have not yet been developed, does not constitute an improvement and will not lead to the attainment or the realisation of a higher dimension of consciousness. Instead, it will lead to a worse confusion, to an expansion of ignorance and an indiscriminate involvement in irrelevant impressions and emotions. A wise person will follow the advice of the great spiritual leaders and benefactors of humanity by concentrating his mind and improving its quality, instead of trying to expand it without rhyme or reason, i.e., without having

developed the faculty of understanding or discrimination.

The main medium of this so-called consciousness-expansion is LSD. Its prophets who propagate it as a substitute for meditation are characteristically only those who have neither experience nor qualification in the field of meditation, because they have never gone through any serious spiritual training or *sādhana*, based on millennia of experience and psychological exploration, as handed down and taught by many of the great spiritual traditions of humanity.

In the process of meditation, i.e., in the gradual achievement of integration, we are not concerned with an expansion of consciousness, but as Jean Gebser, one of the most incisive thinkers of our time, rightly says, with an intensification of consciousness: “The mistake that is made nowadays and which has its reason in the quantitatively accentuated rational attitudes is that a material ‘more’ must correspond to a ‘more’ in the realm of consciousness. This ‘more,’ however, concerns only the reflecting knowledge, which has quantitative character. For this reason alone we have to insist that we must not fall into the error of striving after consciousness-expansion, but that what matters is a consciousness-intensification. A mere consciousness-expansion leads as much to destruction as the material atomization, which to some extent has

already taken shape (or rather *Ungestalt*, i.e. its misshapen form).” [1]

We need only look at modern paintings and drawings of so-called psychedelic art, which appear to be composed of thousands of fragments, like a smashed and splintered mirror, in which the world is reflected and broken up into a chaos of disconnected details, and we shall understand what this process of atomization is leading to. However, the main difference between the states of consciousness caused by LSD and those created by meditation—and here I am not speaking theoretically, but from my own experience—is the fact that LSD totally deprives us of any control, so that we are helplessly tossed about by our emotions and deceived by hallucinations or creations of chaotic imagination; that our attention is scattered and confused by thousands of fragmentary images and sense-impressions. While meditation is a creative process, which converts the chaos of upsurging feelings, thoughts, uncontrolled volitions and contending inner forces into a meaningful cosmos (a harmonised universe) in which all psychic faculties are centred and integrated in the depth of our consciousness.

It is only the creation of this inner centre that makes us into consciously spiritual beings and lifts us beyond the blind drives of our animal nature, which bind us to

the chaos of *samsara* (the world of delusion). LSD, on the other hand, leads away from the centre into an ever more fragmentizing multiplicity of unrelated, eternally changing projections of subconscious thought-contents which, though momentarily capturing our attention, leaves us as completely passive spectators of a psychic film-show, in which, the longer we devote ourselves to its contemplation, the surer it will suffocate all creative impulses and all individual effort towards their realisation.

In this connection we may remember the words of Goethe: *Was du ererbt von deinen Vaetern hast, erwirb es, um es zu besitzen* — “What you have inherited from your forefathers, you must earn by your own effort, if you wish to make it your own”. The “inheritance of our forefathers” is in a wider sense the inheritance of our own past and ultimately of the whole universe from which we have emerged, or as Zen Buddhists would have it, “our original face which existed before our parents were born.”

This “original face”, however, is far from being the face of our already completed or immanent Buddhahood, though it may contain all the potentialities of an enlightened mind. I would rather define it as the reflection of the universal depth-consciousness. In Buddhist terminology, the store consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*), which contains the

accumulated experiences of all forms of existence, the experiences of an infinite past, in which all possibilities of life are contained, from the lowest to the highest states of consciousness (or, from the most primitive to the most universal dimensions of consciousness), from the blind urges of brutish or demoniacal drives and cruel passions to the most beneficial activities of divine or enlightened beings, in whom the unconscious forces and blind passions have been sublimated into clear knowledge, love and compassion.

To equate this *ālaya-vijñāna* with the Buddha Nature, and to believe that by merely suppressing or eliminating our thoughts and aspirations, our volition and discrimination, in short, our whole individuality and our intellectual qualities, we could attain the enlightenment of a Buddha, is a naive belief and an unfounded hypothesis, unsupported by experience and contradicting the entire Buddhist tradition that is concerned with the sublimation, harmonisation and integration of all human qualities and capabilities—a tradition that emphasises the importance of individual effort (*vīrya* and *vyāyāma*), consequent religious practise (*sādhana*), cultivation of creative spiritual qualities (*bhāvana*), discriminative thought (*dharmavīcāya*), clear knowledge and wisdom (*prajñā*), conscious awareness and remembrance (*smṛti*), perfect

aspirations (*samyak-saṃkalpa*), consciously directed concentrative meditation (*ekāgratā*), love and compassion towards all beings (*maitri* and *karuṇa*), and faith (*śraddhā*) towards the enlightened teachers of humanity.

Enlightenment can neither be gained by passively sitting or by violence in the endeavour to suppress human feelings and thoughts or in the disparate struggle for the solution of some paradox problem. The key to enlightenment can neither be found in rigid concentration nor in an expansion of consciousness through artificial means.

The mere reduction of the field of spiritual vision to a single point, a single subject, concept or thought-sequence to the exclusion of all other thoughts or sense-impressions—corresponding to the exclusiveness of a perspective view-point, in which only a one-sided, foreshortened observation of the object is possible—prevents us from observing the organic relationship of our subject with its background as well as with ourselves. This kind of concentration, which is practised in science and discursive thought, based on strict logical laws, is as little suitable to lead to enlightenment as the indiscriminate expansion of consciousness of an untrained, inexperienced person, who has neither the knowledge nor the judgement to enable him to

understand or to make use of the phenomena of this expanded consciousness. He is in the same position as a scientifically unprepared and inexperienced person who is sent into space in a rocket or spacecraft. Though he goes through the same experiences as an astronaut, he would return to earth as ignorant as he left it, because whatever he has seen and experienced, could not convey any meaning to him, but would only leave him confused, bewildered and terrified.

Even if the experiences caused by drugs were similar to those experienced in meditation or mystic visions (for which there is not the slightest evidence, because those who are using drugs have no knowledge of real meditation), they would not convey to the spiritually untrained person anything of the deeper meaning of those visions and experiences, because of his inability to interpret the language of psychic symbols and phenomena. He would not be able to establish meaningful relations between himself (as an observer) and the observed phenomena, in other words between the universal depth consciousness and his individual (peripheral) surface consciousness, because he skipped the way leading from the periphery of the normal waking consciousness to the depth consciousness or his inner centre. The experience of this way, which leads step by step from our surface consciousness into the depth of

our mind in the process of meditative absorption, is of paramount importance, because it employs and stimulates all our faculties of thinking, feeling and intuition. Those who believe that they can rely on mere intuition before they have developed the control over the basic functions of their intellect on the level of everyday life's experience, will never be able to discern between truth and self-deception.

The mere expansion of consciousness, therefore, has no value unless we have found our inner centre in which all the faculties of mind and psyche are integrated and to which all our experiences are referred as their ultimate judge and arbiter. This inner centre is situated between the poles of the individual peripheral consciousness of the intellect and the non-individual depth consciousness in which we partake of the greater life of the universe. When this centre functions rightly the whole impression is one of evident harmony with inner life. The inner and the outer exist not against but for each other.

Always then, the presence of the basic vital centre is expressed in the easy equilibrium of the two poles and if one preponderates over the other the result is a wrong relation to heaven and earth, to the world and to the self. Just as failure to achieve the right centre always implies a disturbance of the living whole, so the achievement of it demonstrates nothing less than

that state in which the whole is kept alive in the right tension between the two poles. [2]

The tendency towards centralisation is not only a biological and psychological necessity, but a law of universal dynamics pervading the entire cosmos irrespective of whether applied to spiral nebulae or solar systems, planets or electrons. Every movement has a tendency to create its own centre or its own axis as the only possible form of stability within the infinite movement of all that lives.

Where, however, life becomes conscious of itself, there a new, subtler centralisation takes place in a consciousness that creates its own focus, moving as if it were on an infinite axis from distant past towards an equally distant future (as it appears to us), or more correctly that moves towards a present that (to us) is in a state of continual transformation.

The universal depth consciousness is common to us all, but it depends on the individual what he makes out of it or what he extracts or distills from it and brings to the surface. Just as the waters of the ocean contain all kinds of substances in a state of dissolution, in a similar way the universal depth consciousness contains potentially all the psychic qualities. From the waters of the ocean we can extract gold as well as ordinary kitchen salt, depending on the degree of

(chemical) concentration and the method employed. In a similar way it is possible to extract from the universal depth consciousness either divine or demoniacal forces, life-promoting or life-destroying powers, powers of darkness or of light.

Those who descend into the depth of this universal consciousness without having found their inner centre, will be swallowed by it or will be swept away to their doom, like a rudderless ship that is lost in the immensity of the ocean. Only to the wise the depth will reveal its treasures. Knowledge and wisdom however, are founded on the patient observation of the laws of existence in the mirror of the stilled mind, in which the inner relations of all things become apparent and our intuitive awareness is brought to fruition.

If, however, intuition does not find also a clear expression in our thoughts, it can have no effective influence on our life, but is dissipated in the fog of vague feelings and dream-like fantasy and visions; because no force can be effective if it is not formed, i.e., concentrated and directed. On the other hand, thoughts and items of knowledge or truths that have been developed only on the intellectual level, have to be verified in life by direct experience in order to become living reality. Only then they will have the power to transform our life and to influence our

deepest nature.

People who cling only to their thoughts, remain prisoners of thoughts, just as those who live only in vague forms of intuition become prisoners of their momentary moods and impressions.

Those, however, who are able to harmonise the faculties of clear thought and intuition, make the best use of both. They will enjoy the freedom of intuition, and at the same time they will be capable of utilising its results in the creation of a spiritual universe or *Weltanschauung*, whose structure will be an ever-growing edifice of sublime beauty and transparency, and whose crowning pinnacle will be the radiating jewel of enlightenment, in which the structure will find its completion.

Notes

1. Jean Gebser: *Ursprung und Gegenwart*, p. 156. Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966, 2nd ed. (Translated as *The Ever-Present Origin*, Ohio University Press, 1985.) [\[Back\]](#)
2. *Hara, the Vital Centre of Man*, by Karlfried Graf von Dürckheim, London, 1982; p. 83. [\[Back\]](#)

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