

VIEWS AND REVIEWS:
“*Drugs and Buddhism*”—*A Symposium*

Religion and Drugs

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I

STRANGELY, religion and drugs are closely associated. Karl Marx who founded the “School of Communism” called religion an opiate, but for that matter the communism which he advocated is also a kind of religion and is therefore a drug, no doubt. Those who become caught up or possessed by anything usually lose their equilibrium and peace of mind—a form of insanity. In fact, whether “ism” or “religion,” there is a fanatical side to be found, and once one is addicted the effect is that of being drugged by opium or its like. Madness of a sort is also to be evidenced in those who are called genius. It would seem that man by nature was made to be one-sided.

Be that as it may, what I intend to touch upon here is the practical connection between drugs and religion. By “drugs” I mean a few particular kinds which lead the taker into a world of illusions, or into what he takes for a mystical state; it excludes such anesthetics as applied for surgical purposes. I wish to include any of the usual varieties of opium, alcoholic drink, and those drugs used for religious reasons, especially the ones regarded as mystical drugs.

By mystical drugs I refer to soma used in Vedic India, hasheesh among the Arabs, peyote among the American Indians, and so on. Alcohol may be included among these, but aside from its occasionally giving rise to artistic inspiration, its usual effects are quite unfavorable and undesirable. In Japan, *sake* is offered to

* The following two short essays have been translated from the author’s *Tsurezuregusa* (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbunsha, 1966).

the gods. This may have roots in the notion that its inebriating effects, which cause one to speak strange, wonderous words and dance around, are in some way connected with the world of gods (*kami*). However it has yet to produce the sort of hallucinatory images induced by taking peyote, hasheesh, etc. It is to peyote and other related mystical (that is, psychedelic) drugs that I want to give close attention.

Peyote is a drug extracted from a variety of the cactus plant, and is taken by American Indian shamans when performing religious rites. It carries them away into a mystical world of illusions, and this unworldly experience is considered as their initiation into the rank of gods. Chemical analysis of peyote has recently led to the development of various drugs in the United States, among which the most well known is LSD, frequently discussed in books and periodicals.

In his book *The Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley described his own experience with the drug [mescaline]. He saw a hitherto unknown world upon opening this "door." He then tried to relate this experience with that of Zen. Though Mr. Huxley had taken an interest in Zen, he did not have the guidance of a Zen teacher. He thus sets forth to writing a detailed description of the world of illusory vision brought on by mescaline.

Zen experience is quite often confused, even by some so called Zen people, with the hallucinatory state (*makyō*) experienced by Hindu saints as is described in the *Surangama Sutra*. It is of little wonder, therefore, that an outsider is prone to making similar mistakes.

On the east coast of the United States, however, it seems this misconception has been accepted as a genuine truth. Its popularity has reached a point where university professors organize groups of mystical drug takers with the intention of forming an international society of those who seek "internal freedom." They believe they can escape the bondages of this drab world and attain another world of freedom by means of repeated use of the drug. All this sounds dreamy indeed, yet they are so serious in their intention that Zen people cannot simply ignore their movements.

The wish to transcend worries of this earthly life, that is to say, the wish to overcome this unfree state of being bound to relative conditions—this is a common ground upon which the mystical drug users and religious people both stand. But the former resort to the power of drugs for their instant effect, as they are too weary to train their minds and bodies through practical procedures. On the

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other hand, genuine religious people are not attracted by such shallow means and superficial way of thinking. Where serious and honest effort is required they do not grudge it. What is to be paid must be paid, after all, and with this they go all the way. Herein lies the distinction that must be noted.

At any rate, the point that must be made is that the *raison d'être* of religion is to have man realize his genuine being. Its aim is not in allowing him to lead a vague, irresponsible existence. With each increase of scientific progress and technological capabilities, man's efforts and wisdom must keep pace and be equal to them. One loose screw can be the cause of a disaster; the slightest negligence has an inevitable outcome. Take the airplane that is capable of circling the earth. There must be, each to its last detail, a carefully concentrated working together of both the pilot and the plane. Not the slightest misrepresentation or deceitfulness is permissible. All the more so when it has to do with religion, which deals with man's innermost life; he must approach the problem of facing himself with the utmost honesty and sincerity of mind. Religion produces the true man. Therefore, no drug induced from without or apparition seen externally will ever penetrate the depths of religion.

Deep in the inner recesses of religion is the *true man*. To be fully human means to become the *true man*. However much one may see before him, externally and objectively, a god-like world of wonder, and "expanding his mind" induce a state of holy trance, such phenomena are all spurious and imaginary. They have nothing whatever to do with religion. This is because the *true man* is not present. It is not a question of what is seen or how it is being seen, but of the *true man* who is doing the seeing. Only when one becomes this *man* himself does one enter the realm of religion. Countless episodes and stories highly interesting in this regard can be found in the East from ancient times.

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In the above essay dealing with the problem of religion and psychedelic drugs, I explained that the aim of religion has to do with the *true man* himself, and not with the phenomenal world which is objectively experienced by the *man*. This difference must be most clearly and thoroughly understood, otherwise, religion will end in being mere superstition. The recent popularity in the United States

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of what may be a mystical drug, LSD, among scholars, researchers, or laymen stems from the opinions of all those who foolishly fail to see this point of difference. What is crucial is not the experiences themselves but *the one* who does the experiencing, or what Rinzai calls “the master” behind all the experiences. I give an example from a Zen Buddhist record:

Rinzai Gigen (Lin-chi I-hsüan) was a Chinese Zen master of the T'ang dynasty who died in 867. A collection of his sermons is extant and well read by the followers of his school. His sermons are brief but clear, driving his point directly home—so sharp and alive. Even after a thousand years his words grip us in a most effective and stimulating manner:

One day Rinzai gave his sermon: “There is the true man of no rank in the mass of naked flesh, who goes in and out from your facial gates [*i.e.*, sense organs]. Those who have not yet testified [to the fact], look, look!”

A monk came forward and asked, “Who is the true man of no rank?” Rinzai came down from his chair, and taking hold of the monk by the throat, said, “Speak! speak!” The monk hesitated. Rinzai let go his hold and said, “What a worthless dirt-stick this true man of no rank is!” and returned to the residence quarters immediately.

So ended the sermon. No word or movement wasted. Every word, every action hits a vital spot. Let me add a few explanations:

The *mass of naked flesh* means this body of ours. The *true man of no rank* has a deep significance. That he is of no rank means that no class or grade can be attached to him, that he cannot be measured in number, that he is above and free of all dualities or relative conditions and comparisons. The expression the *true man* is tinged with Taoistic thought but is often employed by Buddhists as well.

The *true man* refers not to a man in the ordinary sense. Rather it points to the subject or the “master” of all that is experienced—the very reason for man being truly himself. It is also the *mind* in its deepest sense, or mind-activity. It has no tangible form of its own, yet it penetratingly reaches every corner of the universe; it sees with our eyes, hears with our ears, walks with our feet, and grasps with our hand.

It corresponds to the suffixes -er, and -or in the English, which when attached to a verb signify the doer or the actor. This is what Rinzai calls the *true man*.

This *man* expresses itself, or makes itself known to the objective world, through our various sense organs, our four limbs, and bodies. To those who have not yet seen this for themselves, that is, *testified* to the fact of this, Rinzai calls out, "Look! look!"—a significant and interesting instruction.

The manner in which Rinzai closes in, his whole being openly exposed, is no less than a life-or-death challenge. One can ill afford a moment's hesitation. Not even a crack has been left by which to escape. Therefore, when a monk appears out of the assembly to ask, "What is the true man of no rank?" no time can be lost. Rinzai comes straight down from his seat, grabs the questioner by the collar and demands, "Speak! speak!"

The *true man* is not a product of the conceptual world; it is not to be captured by words and letters. Rinzai can hardly bear to see the questioner at a loss. He pushes him away as if in utter disgust and says, "What a worthless dirt-stick [this true man of no rank is]!" Rough and foul-mouthed, you may say. But from Rinzai's standpoint, it is his entire being which is vividly demonstrated—the *true man* revealed through and through. How refreshing! This type of sermon is unlike anything that can be found anywhere else—past or present, East or West. It has been a unique role played solo by Zen masters. The sermon ends with Rinzai's returning to the residence quarters—like the passing of a typhoon!

What have we to gather from all this? Let us compare the above with those psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, "Zen scholars," and others who hang idly about the world of drugs wandering in and out of a hallucinatory state. Aren't they like sleepwalkers? There is no comparing the fresh and alive with the limp and dead.

What religion demands of us is this *true man*. What use is there in sitting back and regarding objective visions which however beautiful they may seem are unreal; a doll is lifeless after all. Only the *true man* full of vim and vigor will do. The world induced by LSD is false or unreal. Victims of dotting Zen teachers and addicts of one kind or another—how the place swarms with such people—like those fish stretched out in the fish market, no sign of life at all.

When we read such Zen expressions as "An aristocrat is he who is a man of *buji*"¹ we are quite liable to picture to ourselves such lifeless existences. But

¹ Lit., "one who has no business," or "one to whom no events happen," but these do*

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Rinzai's *true man* belongs nowhere in this category; that it is above all vitally alive should be kept well ingrained in our minds!

Again, we have the expression "The great activity taking place knows no rules." "The great activity" means activity which is freely and nakedly at work. Since this refers to the *true man* himself seen in action, no rules or regulations mechanically applied from the outside can ever bind him. On the contrary, rules and regulations originate from the *true man* and his behavior. Herein is the ground upon which religion has its firm footing.

*not give any hint of the deeper meaning underlying this term which is one of the most important in Rinzai's thought. According to Dr. Suzuki: "When the Dharma, or Reality, is truly, fully, existentially (experientially) understood, we find that there is nothing wanting in this life as we live it. Everything and anything we need is here with us and in us. One who has actually experienced this is called a man of *buji*—he is the one who being free from externalities is master of himself—" Ed.