

# AT THE EDGE OF INFINITY

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*This paper is dedicated to all mindful mavericks.*

ABSTRACT. Psilocybin-containing fungi can confer profound and enduring revelations that lead to an understanding of the self, the mind, consciousness, and even reality en masse. These outcomes are often contingent on considerable forethought in order to promote a safe and meaningful voyage. Presently, there is a psychedelic renaissance occurring within the sciences after nearly half a century of suppressed research—a hiatus of inquiry understandably due to the unknown ramifications and other sensible concerns regarding these substances. This mushrooming body of information coupled with the nimety of sincere personal accounts from prudent advocates are both important testaments to the overwhelming merit of mindful consumption of psychedelics. In an effort to express the significance of so-called *magic mushrooms* in particular—and, by extension, related classical serotonergic psychedelics/5-HT<sub>2A</sub> receptor agonists—this report documents the experience of a virgin drug user. This paper, therefore, functions as a personal log of a momentous journey and serves as a resource for both the inexperienced yet curious individual and seasoned psychonaut alike. Moreover, it is the author's utmost aspiration to further eradicate the misinformation and concomitant stigma that these substances have unduly acquired through decades of efficacious social conditioning.

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*Date:* 13 May 2016 and, in revised form, 3 June 2017.

*Key words and phrases.* Psilocybe cubensis, psilocybin, magic mushrooms, shrooms, cubes, gold caps, self, mind, consciousness, reality, entheogens, hallucinogens, psychedelics, trip, log, testimony, report.

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## DISCLAIMER

An important goal of this paper is to minimize harm and encourage responsible behavior should an individual choose to consume a classical serotonergic psychedelic. It is illegal to possess, manufacture, and distribute psilocybin and psilocin—the main compounds responsible for the high attributed to many magic mushroom species—in various parts of the world; in the United States, psilocybin is placed in the most severe drug category according to Nixon's Controlled Substances Act of 1970: Schedule I<sup>1</sup>. Any decision made by the reader is their responsibility and it is their task to fully understand the legal and personal risks associated with illicit substances.

## BACKGROUND

How does one begin to delineate the ineffable? This is precisely the task at hand as I set out to type up this account of an experience I will not soon forget: my first magic mushroom expedition. To put this venture into perspective, I will describe a little bit about myself, the intention behind the journey, the species and dosage consumed, and the *set* and *setting* of the emprise. From here, a chronological approach will be employed to recount as many details as I can about the incredible happenings of the day. I will additionally explain the many thoughts and sensations that I felt after it was all said and done. Thereafter, an in-depth review of the procured insights as well as general trip advice will be provided. This paper will close with a synopsis of the grand event.

**About Me.** I have always had a keen interest in the mind and its constituents. I am an inordinately observant and curious individual by nature; this has led me to explore a handful of activities dedicated towards understanding my own mind and perhaps reality itself. For example, I have tried various flavors of yoga, some forms of fasting, different styles of meditation, and I have gone on at-home and distant retreats. These experiences had inspired a morning ritual that I had maintained for the past three years in which I had practised meditation with a mala<sup>2</sup> and the mantra from the Heart Sūtra<sup>3</sup>. These days, my practice runs from 04:00 to about

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<sup>1</sup>A Schedule I substance 1) has high potential for abuse, 2) has no accepted medicinal value, and 3) is not safe even under medical supervision. It should be noted that heroin, e.g., is also a Schedule I substance. Current investigations are providing mounting evidence that psilocybin and psilocin, as well as other psychedelics, have been erroneously classified as Schedule I drugs. For instance, Amsterdam, Opperhuizen, and van den Brink concluded in their 2011 paper, *Harm potential of magic mushroom use: A review*, "... that the use of magic mushrooms rarely (if ever) leads to physical or psychological dependence, that acute and chronic adverse effects are relatively infrequent and generally mild, that public health and public order effects are very limited and that criminality related to the use, production and trafficking of magic mushrooms is almost non-existent."

<sup>2</sup>A string of beads—often 108 or some factor thereof—that is used in this meditation style as a focus tool and an instrument to keep track of the number of repetitions of a mantra or prayer, the name of a god or deity, or even simply one's breath.

<sup>3</sup>*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya—The Heart of the Perfection of Understanding*—a popular and concise Buddhist text whose concluding mantra reads, "Gate, gate, pāragate, pārasaṃgate, bodhi svāhā." This mantra has been considered a linguistic anomaly of sorts even in the original language, and it has been said to be virtually untranslatable; however, many attempts have been

06:00 and is composed of three sections: 45 minutes of open meditation<sup>4</sup>, then three rounds of mala meditation, followed by some light yoga<sup>5</sup>.

Before this voyage, I had not consumed any *real* drugs in my entire 21 years of life; I believe caffeine and alcohol do not count. What drew me to magic mushrooms were both the fascinating anecdotes and research<sup>6</sup> I had devoured over the span of three years. Both the austere science and the burgeoning praise from loved ones and insightful individuals had piqued my interest.

The tipping point in my deliberation regarding actually doing shrooms occurred when I came across a podcast by Sam Harris entitled *Drugs and the Meaning of Life* (2011). Harris is a man I revere for his views on the mind, consciousness, and self through the lens of neuroscience and philosophy; in these respects, I believe he is as erudite as they come. During this podcast, one bit in particular stood out to me and was puissantly etched into my mind:

I have two daughters who will one day take drugs. Of course, I will do everything in my power to see that they choose their drugs wisely, but a life lived entirely without drugs is neither foreseeable nor, I think, desirable. I hope they someday enjoy a morning cup of tea or coffee as much as I do. If they drink alcohol as adults, as they probably will, I will encourage them to do it safely. If they choose to smoke marijuana, I will urge moderation. Tobacco should be shunned, and I will do everything within the bounds of decent parenting to steer them away from it. Needless to say, if I knew that either of my daughters would eventually develop a fondness for methamphetamine or crack cocaine, I might never sleep again. But if they don't try a psychedelic<sup>7</sup> like psilocybin or LSD at least once in their adult lives, I would wonder whether they had missed one of the most important rights of passage a human being can experience.

This sealed the deal for me. I decided thenceforth that magic mushrooms were worth investigating directly.

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made. My favorite of these is the following: “Going, going, going beyond, always going beyond... arrived at the other shore having never left.”

<sup>4</sup>Specifically, *shikantaza*, which means *just-sitting*.

<sup>5</sup>Three A and three B sun salutations.

<sup>6</sup>A great—dare I say *groundbreaking?*—*gateway* paper was published by the team of Griffiths et al. in 2006: *Psilocybin can occasion mystical-type experiences having substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance*. One takeaway from this remarkable study is “. . . that 67% of the [36] volunteers rated the experience with psilocybin to be either the single most meaningful experience of [their] life or among the top five most meaningful experiences of [their] life,” in the same league as “. . . birth of a first child or death of a parent.”

<sup>7</sup>Harris is likely referring to classical psychedelics that primarily affect serotonin receptors (otherwise known as 5-hydroxytryptamine receptors, which are otherwise known as 5-HT receptors)—in particular, 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> agonists. Aside from psilocybin and lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), some other classical serotonergic psychedelics include dimethyltryptamine (DMT, commonly known as *the spirit molecule*), mescaline (found in some species of cacti—e.g., peyote), and 2-CB (a synthetic drug).

Their negligible biological toxicity<sup>8</sup> and practically nonexistent addictive nature<sup>9</sup> in conjunction with the abundance of positive inferences from scientists, study participants, respectable friends, and reputable learned individuals such as Harris made it incredibly easy to conclude that I would soon understand their experiences firsthand by responsibly consuming magic mushrooms.

If you, dear reader, decide to disregard this paper altogether and instead opt to simply listen to Harris' thought-provoking podcast, do so by all means<sup>10</sup>.

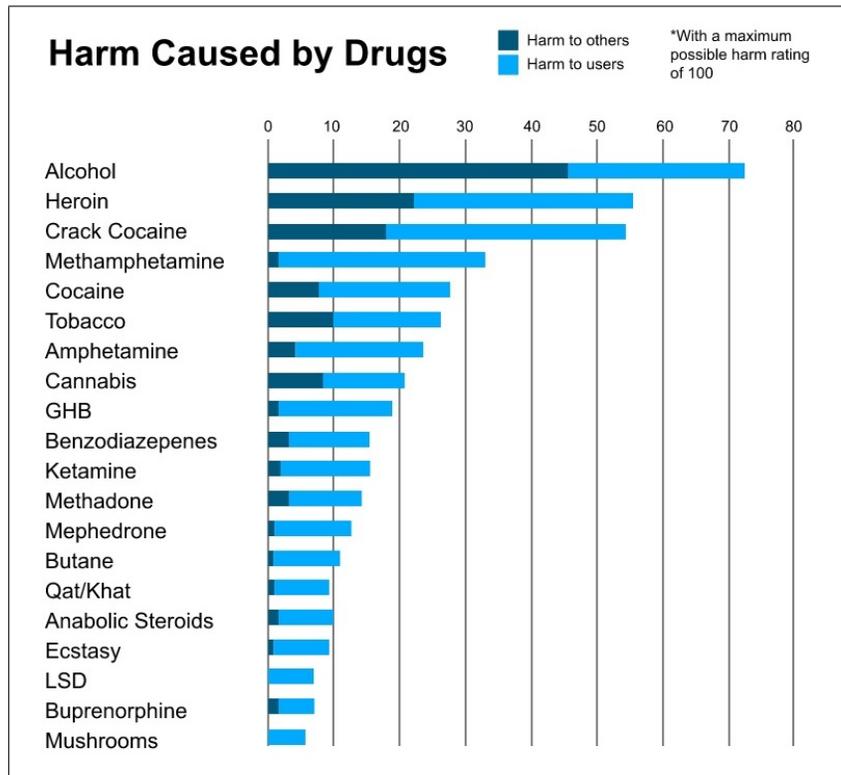
**The Intention.** I was not looking for a party drug or feel-good substance; I was not seeking an ephemeral escape. Above all else, I wanted to assist myself in the serious exploration of the mind, self, and reality—to take the plunge and kamikaze into the unknown, both for my own sake and to share any revolutionary insights. Psilocybin-containing mushrooms seemed to promise this as a bare minimum.

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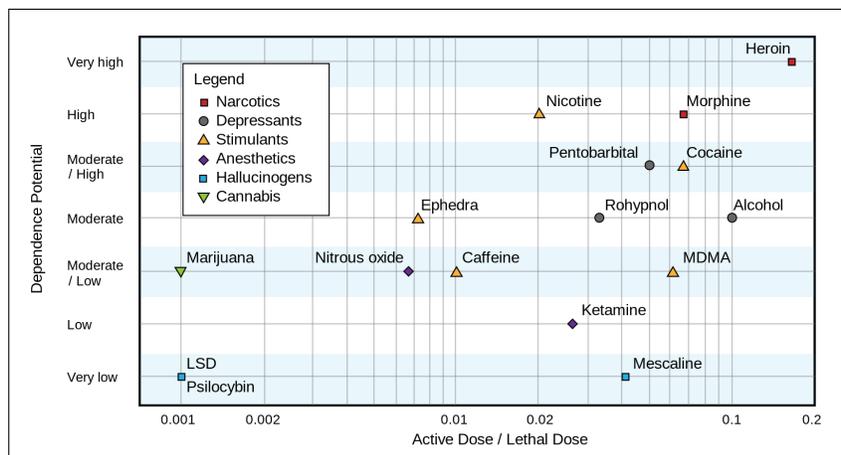
<sup>8</sup>Amsterdam, Opperhuizen, and van den Brink point out in *Harm potential of magic mushroom use: A review* (2011) that, “As the oral LD<sub>50</sub> value of psilocybin in the rat is 280 mg/kg, 17 kg of fresh mushrooms must be consumed to reach this rate in an adult human subject.” 17 kilograms is close to 40 pounds, which is more or less the weight of a full five-gallon water jug. The researchers add that, “Indeed, only two fatal cases. . . have been described in literature which are due to overdosing with magic mushrooms (no concomitant use of other drugs). Normally, people do not die from a magic mushroom overdose, because they are not very toxic [and] the potential victim will spontaneously vomit keeping the final dose low.” Even these two aberrant fatalities are generally contested: Gartz, Samorini, and Festi (1996), for example, argue in *On the presumed French case of fatality caused by ingestion of liberty caps* that one cannot rule out the possibility of inadvertent death—e.g., wandering onto a highway—as opposed to death resulting directly from the fungi, per se.

<sup>9</sup>Au contraire: psilocybin is currently being studied as a promising vehicle to *end* alcohol and tobacco addiction. Bogenschutz et al. completed a pilot study in 2015 regarding alcohol addiction and its response to magic mushrooms in *Psilocybin-assisted treatment for alcohol dependence: A proof-of-concept study*. Although there were only ten participants, alcohol abstinence patently increased during the week in which volunteers received psilocybin; “Gains were largely maintained at follow-up to 36 weeks,” according to the researchers. The team also concluded that decreased alcohol dependence was proportional to the intensity of the individual's magic mushroom experience. In addition, they noted that “. . . no significant treatment-related adverse events” were reported from any of the ten participants. Meanwhile, with respect to tobacco addiction, Johnson et al. sought to investigate psilocybin as an adjunct to existing models of dependency cessation treatment in their *Pilot study of the 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> agonist psilocybin in the treatment of tobacco addiction* (2014). The 15 individuals in this investigation all had, on average, been lifelong smokers for 31 years, attempted to quit smoking 6 distinct times throughout their lives, and consumed 19 cigarettes a day. Remarkably, 80% of the participants had not smoked in a seven-day point prevalence abstinence follow-up after six months. These results are unprecedented in the literature; “The observed smoking cessation rate substantially exceeds rates commonly reported for other behavioral and/or pharmacological therapies (typically <35%).” It should be nearly axiomatic at this point that, at the very least, psilocybin has shown great potential so far as a tool to eradicate substance dependency, in many cases after a single dose in an appropriate environment in the presence of an experienced support group. The natural question to ask is: why? Although we can only speculate at this point, the consensus among recreational psychedelic consumers and the literati spearheading research is that these substances often force the individual to confront the root causes of their addiction. Combining the insight obtained after such extraordinary experiences with skillful (psycho)therapy drives yet another nail in addiction's coffin.

<sup>10</sup>And if that whets your appetite for psychedelic knowledge, check out *A New Understanding: The Science of Psilocybin*, a documentary that reduced me to tears after seeing how psilocybin profoundly eased the end-of-life anxiety that had tenaciously loomed over terminal cancer patients.



Infographic from *Drug harms in the UK: A multi-criteria decision analysis* authored by Nutt et al. on behalf of the Independent Scientific Committee on Drugs, 2010.



Infographic from *Acute Toxicity of Drugs versus Regulatory Status* authored by Gable, 2006.

**The Species and Dosage.** My *tour guide* on this adventure would be *Psilocybe cubensis*, more commonly known as *gold caps* or *cubes*—a celebrated species of magic mushroom. According to my friend and purveyor, whom I'll refer to as Light hereafter, these were “stronger than usual.” I obtained an eighth (of an ounce) or 3.5 grams<sup>11</sup> of dried *P. cubensis*.



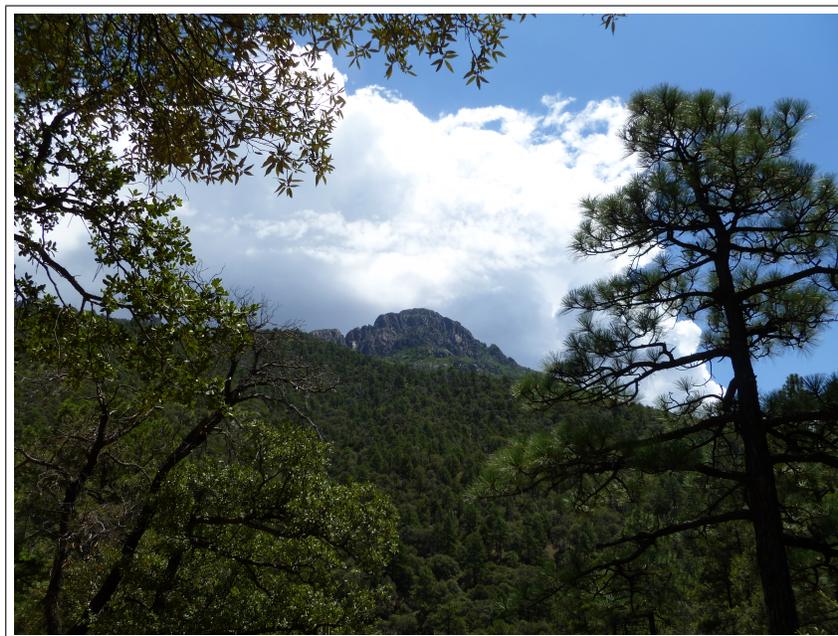
**The Set and Setting.** I had just finished enduring a particularly difficult semester as an undergraduate. I had never worked so hard, weathered so many personal complications, and performed so poorly as a student in my life. Although I was nonetheless in good spirits and satisfied with my life on the whole, this perhaps wasn't an ideal (mind)set in which to experience psychedelics for the first time. But I only had a few days between the end of the spring semester and the start of the summer semester to try the magic mushrooms at my disposal. It was now or never.

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<sup>11</sup>Experienced individuals might recommend a dosage of between 0.75 to 1.5 grams for one's first magic mushroom experience. Anything above 2 grams, according to them, is “asking for trouble.”

I elected to trip by myself in nature. Light had encouraged me to go this route; this close friend had known me sufficiently well to deem that I was spiritually mature enough—that I had explored and understood my mind adequately through other means—for this otherwise parlous first time. I trusted Light’s candid judgment without reservation.

I was extremely familiar with a popular network of hiking trails in the nearby mountains, so I figured that that location would be both adequately familiar and beautiful enough to see how far the rabbit hole goes<sup>12</sup>. Light had apprised me that I would retain sufficient control over myself to both hike safely and interact with fellow hikers without drawing too much attention and suspicion to myself. The fact that there were always kind-hearted, wonderful folk on these trails ready to alacritously assist other hikers also eased my anxieties lest I become trapped in a nightmarish trip.



#### THE JOURNEY

Having established this background, I will now chronologically describe the experience as I remember it. Of course, I will not be able to recall exact details, but I will do my best to at least convey the general sensations, thoughts, and events that transpired throughout this voyage.

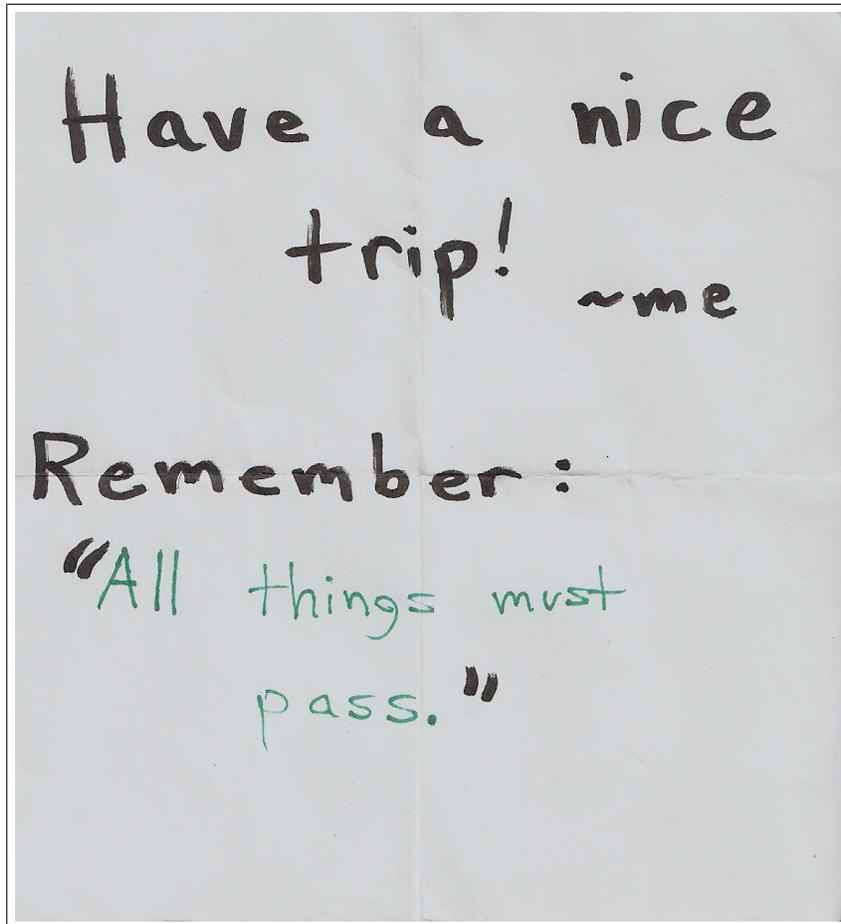
While driving up to the hiking locale, I decided that I would eat the cubes in the parking lot bathroom. Light had informed me that the effects would mostly wear

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<sup>12</sup>*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll, 1865.

off by the time I completed the six- to eight-hour hike, leaving me fully capable of safely driving home.

I gathered my equipment like I would on any other hike upon arriving and parking the car; the only difference this time around was that, in my left pocket, I had a baggie of gold caps. My right pocket, meanwhile, contained a note that I wrote to myself.



I had read somewhere that a magic mushroom neophyte had inscribed a laconic and straightforward message on the palm of his hand, something along the lines of "You are going to be okay." He explained that this simple reminder became an important anchor when the experience got to be too much for him. Inspired by this idea, I decided to do something similar by writing this note-to-self, hoping that this ebullient behest along with one of my favorite quotes—this one attributed to George Harrison<sup>13</sup>—would come in handy should I ever need it.

It was now the moment of truth. I walked to the nearby one-person restroom. Once inside, I did not hesitate: I ate half of the shrooms—half of an eighth or 1.75

<sup>13</sup>*All Things Must Pass*, George Harrison, 1970.

grams—as Light had recommended. To my surprise, I found the taste of the cubes to be not only tolerable but curiously agreeable. If I had to describe the flavor, I would liken it to sour dark chocolate with earthy undertones.

I will mention here that I consumed this initial dose almost on an empty stomach in hopes that the experience would be hastened and magnified. Furthermore, I chewed them thoroughly in that noisome pit latrine in order to curtail the risk of digestive complications. I had had one terrible incident with undercooked shiitake<sup>14</sup> in the past, so I definitely wanted to promote ease-of-body after consuming a novel species of mushroom.

**0:00.** Immediately after eating the cubes, I started a stopwatch. Previous resources indicated that the trip should last between four to six hours.

*Will I even be able to read my watch?*

I then headed towards the start of my favorite trail, one that I had heretofore hiked at least ten times, and began the ascent.

**0:10.** The totality of my decision suddenly hit me like a tsunami. There was no turning back, come what may.

I felt a little peace of mind knowing that the trails should have a paucity of hikers on this day; it was a summer weekday in May, after all—Friday the 13th, in fact—and this was also opportunely the first day of ceremonies for graduates at my local university. If there was anyone hiking today, they would probably be old-timers who would not be able to complete the formidable hike to the crest.

Although it felt good to know I would probably enjoy some moments of solitude on this sylvan mountain during my trip, I couldn't help but wonder at the same time if I might end up needing succor later on.

**0:20.** *Well, this is boring.*

I couldn't tell at this point if anything out of the ordinary was happening, but I began to feel rather tired and heavy. I attributed this not to the shrooms but to waking up much earlier than I had intended in my avidity to finally try magic mushrooms.

*So far, nothing, no effects. Low dose?*

**0:30.** I finally began to notice something strange but not exceedingly odd: I was more clumsy than usual.

*Maybe you're just always this clumsy. No surprises there!*

Then, I observed myself becoming repeatedly weak-kneed for split-second intervals; it was as if my brain was no longer continuously sending my leg muscles all the necessary signals required to put one foot in front of the other consistently.

*Heh, and that's why it's called trippin'!*

I staggered onwards, starting to suspect that the cubes might finally be affecting me.

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<sup>14</sup>A popular mushroom species native to East Asia that may or may not have inspired the Super Mario Goomba.

**0:40.** *Shouldn't colors be more vivid or something? That's what's supposed to happen first, right?*

I stood and stared for a moment at a young tree conspicuously displaying fall colors amid the vast verdure. I continued to wonder whether or not the gold caps were actually taking effect or if I was just imagining things.

**0:50.** *Well, if you don't trip, at least you'll get a great hike outta this. That's not too bad. Yeah, enjoy this day. At least do that.*

*I am definitely eating the other half once it hits an hour.*

**1:00.** *Alright, then... bottoms up.*

**1:10.** *I don't get it. I'm looking at the peak, the trees and all, and—but nothing, still nothing. Maybe, what if your body's immune? What luck... lucky you.*

**1:20.** *Here we go: the first major saddle... almost there. Still nothing. Were those real? What did I just eat? Did Light get scammed or? Oh, well. Whatever. Enjoy the hike...*

**1:30.** *What the hell, I should feel something—anything—definitely should feel something by now. Hmm... I don't get it.*

*Here's the saddle... made it. Rest? Water, eat something? Sure... why not?*

I was sat on a log, getting ready to take a break.

*Wait, hold on—closed-eye visuals—didn't you read that those happen, the first thing that happens, usually? Well, let's see...*

This is when it all went wrong/right.

*... My god... holy shit.*

I was startled by what materialized within a couple of seconds, and I instantly opened my eyes. In that fleeting moment, I glimpsed visuals that were beyond words. These symmetric shapes and variations thereof seemed to be alive—seemed to be *breathing*. The towering ponderosa pines all around me were slow-dancing in the morning breeze; my eyelids, consequently, fluctuated between being bathed in sunlight or kissed by shade according to nature's perpetual symphony. The subtle variations of warm red and cool blue hues that I saw through closed eyes had a profound effect on the kaleidoscope of geometric figures I had seen. I also noticed that my eyes were twitching ever-so-slightly, prompting the forms to further morph into increasingly intricate, boundlessly beautiful, and unbelievable structures.

A grin bloomed on my face. I closed my eyes again—more awe-inspiring, organic geometry. I understood during this moment what others were trying to express when they would describe these visuals as sneak-peeks into the fourth dimension. My background in higher mathematics made me wary of this grand claim, but I understood the intention behind it: this realm, it would seem, was well beyond standard comprehension.

I could not endure observing these visuals for too long since it felt like I was being gradually devoured by them; with each passing moment, I was slowly evaporating and exiting what I had previously known and clung to as *reality* and entering the infinite.

*Well, guess this is what you signed up for... sin llorar<sup>15</sup> now.*

I was now becoming convinced that this journey would indeed be something else. However, one glaring concern emerged as a result.

*What's everyone gonna think? What if they find out? I'm sitting here with my eyes closed...how long have I been here? Is it...normal to sit this long? Does anyone care, really? Wait...am I sitting still? My jaw, it's dropping...why is it dropping? When did this happen? Okay, calm down...easy...*

In my efforts to feign normal behavior, I decided that it would probably be best to resume hiking. I tried standing up; this was a terrible mistake. To my absolute surprise, this proved to be uncharacteristically difficult. I can only imagine that I looked like someone who tried to rise while his two legs had completely fallen asleep. Immediately after trying to get up, I fell and caught myself on the log upon which I had been sitting. I quickly looked around to see if anyone saw that.

*Nobody...haha, that was weird. Alright, take two.*

Success: I managed to stand up.

*Good. Now...back to the trail...*

The journey I had impatiently anticipated had begun at last: I could no longer effortlessly walk. Imagine trying to walk when you don't even know where your legs are in time and space. I relied on my eyes to confirm that my legs were indeed still below me. I struggled to command my body to execute the necessary steps in order to move myself forward.

*Okay, no doubt about it: you are on shrooms. You are high on shrooms right now—definitely, no question, trippin'...this should be interesting.*

**1:3?** *Alright, you found the sign, trail sign...let's...I know: pretend to read it. Is there anyone watching? No, wait, don't check; that's weird. That'll look...weird, suspicious.*

*Wait, no...what? What is...this sign, what is it saying? I can see words, but...stop, stop moving...English, is this—it is? Yes, there are letters, but...what? What does it say? You've seen this sign before. Why can't I read this now? What is...just st—*

*“Mornin’.”*

Out of the blue, a much older hiker suddenly burst my confused thought bubble with his casual, cordial greeting.

*Oh, no...shit. Uh, what do I say? Hello—say, you say hello. No, too...cold, not like you. How are you, you doing?*

*“Good morning! How...are you?”*

I remember that this gentleman seemed to offer an intelligible response, but I could not make sense of it in the least in my confused state.

*Oh, man, this'll be fun, real fun. Focus...act natural...come on.*

I completely ignored whatever he said and instead asked him where the trail sign was; keep in mind that it was a few feet in front of me during this entire conversation, if it could even be called that.

*“It's right there. You're looking at it.”*

*“Oh, yeah...hey, thanks!”*

By some miracle, I found the trail I was looking for at last and hurried along it, dismayed by this encounter.

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<sup>15</sup>A jocular Spanish phrase meaning to get through vicissitudes sans tears.

*God, damn it, that was real bad. Okay, it's okay... just keep swimming, just keep swimming*<sup>16</sup>...

The man murmured something in my direction as I was walking away from him. At least, I *thought* he did.

My disquietude had been amplified; I worried more and more that I would be caught red-handed in the act of consuming illicit substances.

I tried nonchalantly to pull out my little note from my right pocket and read it.

*All things must pass... all things must pass... heh, what a nice note. Thanks, me.*

*... Why are these letters crawling?*

Alarmed at how alive the letters had become, I stopped dead in my tracks and stared at them in revulsed awe. They were worms writhing on the paper.

*How... am—wait, no! Don't stand—move! Don't stand on the trail! Stupid! Not normal at all... that's not normal.*

I still don't understand why, but I turned around and hurried back to the trail sign to look at it one more time. I was sure that the older man hadn't moved an inch and had constantly been staring at me and my antics the whole time, but I was too scared to confirm this surmise with my eyes.

*Don't look at him; he'll see your pupils. They get bigger, I think. They're supposed to get bigger, right? Careful... focus...*

After trying and failing to ignore this man's presumed unbroken gaze, an unimpressed stare that I was sure could see right through my hopeless ruse, I turned once more to resume my hike.

*Great. Fuck, he's here. You'll see him; you have to bump into him again. He's not going anywhere. No escape... hike. Hike to the top, fast.*

**1:??** *Oh, man, bad idea, such a bad idea. Why? Why did I do this? Never, never never never again, no. They're gonna find you; they will find you. It's over... they know! Only a matter of time... they'll know, they'll know the truth. Normal. No jail... don't go to jail, do not go to jail. All your hard work? Gone. No, don't go to jail. Please, focus... come on, now...*

*Fuck, my lip, lower lip, numb? Where is it? Left hand, too: numb... pinkie? No, no, what? What is this? What's even happening? Fuck...*

I started to vigorously rub my left-hand ring- and pinkie-fingers with my thumb to make sure they were still there. I rubbed them with such intensity that I was sure that they would snap off like crisp baby carrots breaking in two if I wasn't careful. Sometime after the effects of the mushrooms had long worn off, I would blame the watch on my left wrist for the profound numbness in these two fingers—perhaps it was buckled too tight. This thought didn't occur to me at the time.

*Where are they? My lips, hands... legs? And my eyes?*

*... Haha... congratulations! This is it: you're on shrooms. You did it. Isn't this what you were looking for, looking forward to?*

From here on out, I decided that the best way out of this self-induced mess was to continue to hike until I would reach the summit. I suddenly had one mission and one mission alone: to absolutely conquer the mountain. Nothing else in my life mattered. I realized, however, that tripping on the trail would be the same as tripping on the summit, but I managed to convince myself anyway that reaching

<sup>16</sup>*Finding Nemo*, Andrew Stanton, 2003.

the peak would magically ax the ordeal. I was filled with fervor the likes of which I had seldom experienced in my life, invigorated by my sole objective of ending this dumb experience, thereby not getting in trouble.

*So stupid. Never do this again, no. What were you thinking? Idiot. Stop... stop hating. Get through this, focus... you will, yes, you will get through this! Do it.*

Those last two words echoed in my mind in Shia LaBeouf's voice<sup>17</sup>. His command catapulted me into action. I definitely owe him one for that former meme du jour. I miraculously regained full control of my body; I could suddenly hike properly and maintain a swift tempo. Hopefully, this would allow me to outpace the older man. I could not entertain the idea of having a conversation with him or anyone else ever again. In my mind, I was sure that he already knew everything about me and my heart would instantaneously give out—that I would *die*—from the arrant distress if I heard him say anything to me.

I had become afraid of everything. The visuals now appeared with my eyes wide open, noises were amplified, and the sunlight became mercilessly bright. Everything knew the truth about me; everything was against me.

*Friends... do I, did I have friends? I need someone, need help... man, why? Why alone? What were you thinking? What a fool. Good going... just great.*

*Why, sweat? Why am I sweating this much? This is crazy! My left hand is still—ah, my feet, that must hurt. Why don't I feel hurt, pain? Bones will break; that should be hurting. Are they already broken? Why isn't this hurting?*

I was plodding along in such a way that I was practically begging for a sprained ankle at every footstep. It was as if my ankle muscles temporarily shut down, yet I persisted in my trek.

It dawned on me that my body had become entirely numb to pain. I realized in that moment what Pink Floyd meant in *Comfortably Numb*<sup>18</sup>; the only difference here was that I was far from comfortable: I was wholly terrified.

*This is dangerous; this is bad. I can't feel... pain. Heh, hurt myself? I could die. You could... die... holy shit.*

It then became crystal clear: my life was now in grave danger. This thought troubled me deeply. I could not stop hiking, however; my body seemed to be on permanent autopilot, maneuvering through the rocky trail against my will. I had hoped that I at least looked like an obsessed, absent-minded hiker trying to set a new personal best time on this trail or something—i.e., not someone progressively losing his mind and body.

Every other second, I would miss a step entirely, barely catching myself from falling with the other precariously placed foot. I imagined that, surely, anyone watching me stagger along the path would know at once that I was high on shrooms.

*Keep cool... steady... keep hike, hiking. Keep hiking. Act... normal. Focus, focus, watch the trail.*

*Why am I so damn thirsty? Ah... holy shit, wait, do I have water?*

*This bandanna, it's choking! I can't breathe!*

Without hesitation, I sat down in the middle of the trail, flung my sweat-drenched forehead bandanna off to the side, and made an attempt to get my water jug out of my backpack.

*Ah, wait, no, what the hell—get off the trail! Come on... fuck. Think.*

<sup>17</sup>*Just Do It*, Shia LaBeouf, 2015.

<sup>18</sup>*Comfortably Numb*, Pink Floyd, 1979.

I picked up my bandanna and moved to the side of the trail, trying once more to sit down and free the water jug from my backpack.

*Oh, my god, where is the zipper? Where are you? Stop...moving! My hands, they're so numb. Where are they? Stop...relax...act normal...breathe...just get your water. Why does it keep moving? Stop! I need...zipper...can't breathe, need water...come on...*

I finally did it. The cooling sensation of the water felt so good when everything was going so wrong. I almost drank the entire gallon.

*Wait...no? It's not time. Save it, you're gonna run out! Damn it. Stop...relax. Act normal. Damn it, I'm out of water...just about. What now? Oh, great, just great.*

Luckily, I still had half a gallon of a sports drink left. I was going to be more abstemious with it, however; I was not even a quarter of the way done with this hike, and I had drank nearly all of my liquids. I usually complete this hike with half a gallon of water and half of the sports drink left. At this rate, I would certainly become dehydrated during this torrid May day.

*Could you tell? If you ran out...would you, would you feel...death? Dehydration? What is it, that like? Try...to remember...what does thirst feel like?*

*Oh, your heart, it's fast. Why is it beating like that? And sweat, so much sweat! Please stop! Please...no more...stop.*

*Well...congrats. Really, congratulations. This is it: magic mushrooms. Is this not expected, Sunshine<sup>19</sup>?*

*Fuck...I'm done. No more, please...no more. Oh, yes, done, completely done. Never doing this again. Have to warn others...heh, if I survive...oh, man. Survive. Why, why, why did I do this again?*

I checked my watch to see how much time had passed, hoping that the psilocybin-induced effects were due to wear off soon. No avail: I could not comprehend the mélange of lines and dots that were frolicking on the face of my watch.

*...Right...there goes time.*

?:?? The notion of time is meaningless now. All I can do here is recall significant events in the order that they happened.

Happily, my fragmented thoughts were starting to make some sense again.

This relief was short-lived: I saw an elderly couple up ahead on the trail.

*No no no no no, shit. What do I do? Should I turn around? But then there's the other man...should I just end this hike? How? God, damn it, look what you've gotten yourself into...no, returning to the car is pointless. Then what? You sit there, confused? You'd wanna drive it; maybe you'll drive it. You can't, don't do that...don't. No, fuck.*

*Suck it up, just talk to them. What do you say? What's your story? Student, university...tutor...math...Mexican? No...yes? Gah, remember your home, your parents...who are they? What language did they speak? What language do you speak? You know all of them: English, math, Chinese, Spanish, French, German...there's no such thing as language. No languages...but they don't know that...or do they? Can they see that? Ah, stop...get it together. Your story—who are you? Elvis, Einstein, maybe, but now? Jesus? No, Socrates...Hesse, Gandhi,*

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<sup>19</sup>*In the Flesh?*, Pink Floyd, 1979.

and Muhammad. John Lennon and the Beatles, Dostoyevsky, Al Pacino? Who? And what's—

“Good morning.”

No. . . *no, fuck, I'm not ready.*

I have no detailed recollection of this exchange. I can only remember that there were two inquisitive, floating heads looking at me—looking *through* me—picking me apart, dissecting me, judging me for my bad decisions. This was not congruent with the beautiful, loving, faintly concerned faces that I saw looking at me. Maybe they asked me how things were going; I know I said the words *good, summer, break, university, enjoying, and hike* in some kind of order, but I can't remember much else beyond that. Additionally, my legs refused to come to a halt once I caught up with the pair; my body was oblivious to their existence, it seemed.

*Shit! What was that? No, wrong, all wrong. . . stupid! Ah, fuck this, I can't do this. I'm done. Stop. Please, just stop. . . no more.*

After some gray silence, I heard murmurs directed at me once again, just as I did with the first gentleman I bumped into.

*What if it's all in your head? At this point, anything goes. They did it, he did. . . how can I be sure of anything?*

*They know. They know. . . that's it, they know you took shrooms, you're ignoring your school, you're a bad student, a terrible friend, liar, a fake, fraud, loser. They know. Fuck. Everyone knows. No, somebody loves you. . . right? No. Maybe someone? Your parents. . . who? Parents. . . house, Spanish? Who are they? Ah, who am I? Who the hell was I? Fuck. Fuck this. Fuck this shit, all of it.*

My attention then turned to my mortal requisites, augmenting my worry.

*You know you need water. . . but you're not thirsty. But you're hiking so fast, sweating like crazy. Slow down! Stop. Let's get some water. . . wait, you drank your water. . . no more. But you need water. And still numb, still. . . fuck.*

I placed a hand over my heart to make sure it was still beating.

*Fast, why is it going so fast? It'll explode! No! Stop. Please, no more. Stop. And my skin is so thin! I could pull my heart out! So fragile. . . careful. You have limits. . . mortal, mortal. . . body bag.*

I had to remind myself frequently to breathe.

*Oh, so dizzy. . . breathe. Deep. . . inhale, deep. . . exhale. . . wait, no! That's not normal! Nobody breathes like that! And why am I yawning so much, so deeply? Isn't normal, is it? Normal, normal normal. . . what is it, what is that? What does that mean? Normal. . .*

I burped.

*Heh. . . is that normal?*

I looked at my inebriated feet; they were still stepping haphazardly, yet somehow, my ankles remained unspained. Or perhaps I couldn't feel it if they were. With every graceless step forward, I could feel growing cramps in my legs, at least; whether or not regaining the ability to feel physical discomfort was a good thing, I wasn't sure.

*Man, this can't be good. . . are those. . . cramps? Yes. . . strange. I need water. No, save it. Stop stepping like that! Stop! Normal. . . just be normal, already. . .*

As you can see, dear reader, my capacity to conduct myself in a *normal* manner, whatever *that* meant, was receding; and with it, my grip on the lifeline secured to *reality*—or what I had conjured reality to be—was also loosening.

?:¿? Sometime after my encounter with the old couple, I noticed that my sense of hearing had become uncomfortably heightened while the ubiquitous visuals made it difficult to differentiate between ground and not-ground. Sounds were louder and would resonate through me, my footsteps echoed eternally across the wilderness, and my breath was an omnipresent, primordial sound reverberating throughout the cosmos. Sound affected time: low-pitched sounds slowed down time and vice versa. The sound of my footsteps, in particular, instantly caused the perceived passage of time to retard or accelerate in accordance with the frequency.

*That's it: time travel must exist.*

What happened next has been etched in my memory ever since; I can still recall this scene one year later in vivid detail in my mind's eye. It pains me that I am not an artist in the traditional sense of the word. If I had the talent, I would become a recluse and dedicate my waking hours to transferring this memory onto some tangible medium. Unfortunately, words are the only tools at my disposal for now. This scene occurred when I looked up and stared at the distant summit. Now . . . this is no hyperbole: I felt like I had glimpsed *the source*, that I had seen infinity tucked away in the sky just above the mountaintop. I can't fully explain it, but what I saw seemed to consist of that limitless potential on par with the singularity during the genesis of the observable universe. The mountain, meanwhile, stretched towards the heavens until it merged with the ineffable energy above. Surrounding altocumulus clouds arranged themselves into intricate snowflakes while nearby wind-caressed trees nodded their silent jubilation.

A town could be seen in the distance from this mountainside. As I was staring at it, I discovered that I could instantaneously teleport to any location—the swimming pool of a stranger's picketed house in the far city, for example, or even back home where my family received me with smiles and open arms. I teleported to the summit as well without any difficulty. *I* could materialize anywhere. However, when I was on the summit, I looked down and saw the speck that was my body still hiking on the trail; I understood right then and there that I was still bound to my physical form to an extent. Consequently, I lost interest in teleporting altogether and came back to my body to resume hiking as one.

I came across a clearing in the woods and decided to rest. Here, I drank all of my water. During this respite, I distinctly remember that I struggled to eat a meal bar, fumbling to open and tear the packaging, break a piece off, transport it to my mouth, chew adequately, and swallow, all in that order. Every stage of this hitherto simple algorithm was now foreign to me. To make matters worse, I worried that my teeth would escape and ascend into space if I opened my mouth for too long.

Convinced that I had attracted a crowd at this rate, I worried that my inability to eat the meal bar with ease would make everyone around me instantly sure that I had consumed magic mushrooms while hiking this mountain. It was a downward spiral: the more my frustration with this bar grew, the more difficult this task became. This was a blessing in disguise. My exasperation exhausted me to the point where I stopped caring about being found out.

*Heh. . . well, looks like you're screwed either way. . . might as well enjoy what you can.*

After gathering the courage to look around me and realize that, in fact, there was no angry mob ready to drag me to the stoney lonesome, I went up to the first nearby tree I saw and slowly placed my hand on its trunk. I felt an incredible yet

gentle shock throughout my entire body; I felt like the tree was communicating to me through my antenna hand. I hugged it.

*Heh... now you're a tree-hugger. Of course. It was only a matter of time.*

I felt so loved by this newfound amicus. I thanked my dear friend and mentioned aloud that I had to be on my way.

*Well, that's definitely normal... eh, who cares? They know, your secret's out. Who cares? Do you? Do they, really? They cling to normal. Who are you? Heh, what's your identity again? You don't even know. You really think you're in control? Well... I think you're craazy<sup>20</sup>!*

Nature began communicating to me in more explicit ways. A fern touching my cheek would be a merry greeting. An attractive—yes, even *sexy*—fallen log in the middle of the trail would offer itself to me. The birds were whispering in my older brother's voice, saying that everything was going to be okay.

I suddenly noticed the scores of buzzing insects all around me. Their incessant noise had a dispiriting effect. They were not only buzzing outside of my body, but they were buzzing *through* me as well. I could hear them directly in my ear, within my skull, within my whole body. There was no escaping their persistent cacophony. In addition to these creatures, there was a plethora of small blue-black moths of some sort. They, too, went right through my body as if I were not corporeal, as if I were some ghost, tickling my insides unabatingly. I had a whole new understanding of the phrase *butterflies in my stomach*.

To further complicate matters, plants and rocks constantly morphed into animals and vice versa. I can't recall exactly how many snakes/tree roots I stepped on or how many squirrels/trees I bumped into.

At some point, I leaned onto a large rock on the side of the trail to support myself. To my surprise, I instantly cannonballed into the earth. Imagine walking blithely and then suddenly falling into an ocean. I was swimming beneath the ground, and all below me was darkness as though I had discovered some glitch in reality. The ground seemed to cradle me in its arms and welcome me home, which was more disturbing than comforting. I swam back to the *surface* and continued on the path.

*Hmmm... home. What is that? You had a home once... back then... parents, too... family, friends... what is home? Well... this is home. This has always been home. You know that. Why did you forget?*

I can't explain when, why, or how it happened, but all of my disquietude melted away at once. It was at this moment that my magic mushroom journey took a welcome turn for the better.

*¿?;?? I am immortal. There is no such thing as death. There never has been.*

I persisted in my efforts to continue hiking, but I questioned whether or not I was even on the right trail anymore. It felt like I should have reached the crest eons ago. Concepts like *up* and *down*, *near* and *far* no longer made sense, so it was impossible to tell if I was hiking uphill or downhill, getting closer or farther to the summit.

*It's okay. You know one thing: this is a trail. It leads somewhere. It has to. Keep following it. You'll be okay. Don't look up; don't do that again. Keep on the path. You'll find something. You have to.*

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<sup>20</sup>*Crazy*, Gnarl's Barkley, 2006.

I was certain that a bear and a mountain lion were following me at this point and that they were fully aware of my vulnerable state.

*No problem, I'll talk to them. They'll understand. I'm on a quest, the impossible quest<sup>21</sup>. They'll understand. They must.*

I was in no position to defend myself against the duo if they suddenly attacked. I didn't worry at all since I was sure that I would not need to resort to violence anyway. Everything could be sorted out through wordless communication.

*I know they're watching me. I know they're following me. They're confused; I understand their confusion. I was once confused.*

Still alive somehow, I finally reached the last saddle on this hike before the short ascent to the summit. I rested here, enjoying what remained of the sports drink. As I was soaking in the scenery at this high elevation, I could tell that the effects of the psilocybin were subsiding at last.

I felt gratitude the likes of which no words could sufficiently describe. It was hard to believe that I had somehow made it this far in one piece, alone and high as a kite. On some level, memories of friends and family contributed to this happy consequence, and I was thankful that I could hold on to them in my darkest hours. I could not endure this hardship without drawing on this wealth of love and without the realization that these same people would be devastated to find out that I had died in some fatuous magic mushroom misadventure.

I understood then and there with arrant conviction that I was in charge of the course of my life and what meaning I choose to ascribe to it. I was reminded that I had much to offer myself and others and that I was being foolish to ever doubt that. However, after this incredible experience, it was impossible to feel proud; I was just another drop in the ocean. This thought was actually reassuring—empowering, even—and it brought a smile to my face.

*Heh... oh, you really gotta stop taking yourself so seriously!*

Although I had already known this at the intellectual level—that love says, “I am everything” and wisdom says, “I am nothing;” between the two, my life flows<sup>22</sup>—it wasn't until this moment that I fully *understood* it. During this juncture in my life, consolidating this truth meant the world to me. I cannot thank my magic tour guide enough for intimating this revelation alone.

I unceremoniously arrived at the summit. I was alone, yet this did not make me sad. How *could* I be sad? I was just reminded that I deserve my own love, respect, and trust just as much as everyone else. This was the most traumatizing and liberating experience that I'll probably ever know; I toured the hell within my mind and emerged with a new understanding of the totality of who I am.

I am capable of great things. But first, I have to stop being so damn hard on myself 24/7. This eternal voyage showed me that self-castigation was doing me no favors in the long haul. Yes, I'm aware that this *insight* is nothing new, that this is yet another species of those interminable platitudes that have percolated into social media in the form of pretty and vapid *inspirational* quotes set against some natural backdrop, but hear me out on this: clichés exist for a reason.

*Let it go. You are amazing. You are enough.*

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<sup>21</sup>*The Impossible Dream (The Quest)* from *Man of la Mancha*, Brian Stokes Mitchell and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, 2003.

<sup>22</sup>*I Am That*, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, 1973.

**4:00.** The concept of time finally made sense again. About four hours had passed, apparently. I laughed aloud and thanked my fast metabolism for saving the day.

After enjoying the well-earned 360-degree view for some time, I headed straight for my favorite summit rock, a welcome stone in the shape of a bean bag. Supine atop it, I let go at last: I relaxed like I had never relaxed before in my life. I truly dropped all of my worries, all my clinging to labels and identities, all concerns about my solitude atop the lofty, cloud-graced mountain replete with discordant flies and adorably aggressive ladybugs.

I let go at last.

There is a notebook housed in a special, metal box on the summit in which hikers can write anything they desire after conquering this arduous hike. I opened it up and wrote the first thing that came to mind:

“The beauty of life is seeing with new eyes.”

For the remainder of the hike, I can only recall feeling extremely at peace with the world. I found it laughably easy to really connect with fellow hikers on the descent. Meaningful exchanges came naturally all of a sudden; it was all surreal and sublime. It’s my sincere belief that the suffering I withstood combined with the consequential self-reflection and -acceptance contributed substantially to this grand outcome.

#### THE AFTERMATH

Although this experience was phenomenal in its own right, there were many remarkable results that would gradually unfold long after the psilocybin and psilocin had left my system. Individuals who consume psychedelics to *go within* and to understand themselves better often express that the real fruits of the journey develop over the course of months after an intense trip. A life mentor of mine, in fact, suggested that I consume psychedelics no more than twice a year in order to maximize their transformative potential. Now that a year has transpired since I ate an eighth of magic mushrooms for the first time, I completely understand where he’s coming from. It’s true: with psychedelics, it seems that less is more in terms of consumptive frequency<sup>23</sup>.

In this section, I will document anecdotes and general personal changes regarding my behavior, thoughts, outlook, and so on post-trip. This journalesque component, in theory, can be as long as I like, but I will only include one year’s worth of entries from 13 May 2016 to 13 May 2017.

**6 Hours Later.** I completed the hike and approached an older man in the parking lot who, I learned, no longer had functional right fingers. He was busy trying to

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<sup>23</sup>Not to mention that tolerance to psychedelics develops quickly: Amsterdam, Opperhuizen, and van den Brink (*Harm potential of magic mushroom use: A review*, 2011) mention that “Tolerance to the psychedelic effects of psilocybin develops rapidly...” while Studerus et al. (*Acute, subacute and long-term subjective effects of psilocybin in healthy humans: A pooled analysis of experimental studies*, 2011) add that “Regular use of classical hallucinogens is unlikely, because tolerance to the effects rapidly develops after three to four daily doses...”

figure out how to snap pictures of the forest wildlife. I noticed he was completely alone.

“Would you like some amazing trail mix?” I enquired. “Take it, please; it’s delicious. I don’t need it anymore.”

“You sure? Mmm, thank you—made my day!”

**12 Hours Later.** I am home at last. My left ring- and pinkie-fingers are concerning me since they are still extraordinarily numb. Additionally, I continue to faintly hear the swarm of flies I encountered on the mountain; I am also still hearing the forest birds singing beautifully in the dead of night. I’m exhausted.

**1 Day Later.** The flies have stopped buzzing and the birds have stopped chirping at last. I have gained practically all feeling in my left fingers as well.

A few hours later, I experience an overwhelming and gentle sense of peace both within me and within the world at large.

I have also noticed that my ability to connect with others is still enhanced and that my focus has improved tremendously. Furthermore, I find it easy to stay in the present moment and not dawdle in the distant past or future.

There is nothing better in this world right now than listening to my favorite music and singing along with reckless abandon—atypical behavior coming from me. Life is amazing. I am grateful.

I notice that my usual morning meditation practice has been engendered, and here is the perfect word to describe how it now feels: *ahhh*. Imagine the satisfying sound of opening a can of soda or beer; my practice this morning felt like that transient contentment, only prolonged throughout the whole session. Meditation practice hasn’t been quite this delicious in a long while.

Every waking moment, I feel like I am giving myself the warmest of self-hugs. Words cannot completely describe how right the world feels right now.

**2 Days Later.** I have just returned from an easy group hike with friends. It seems that my peace of mind is imperturbable. I had next to no difficulty connecting with everyone on the hike and having wonderful conversations, even with complete strangers. Although, at times, we hiked in complete silence, it was definitely not awkward—for me, at least—since my perception of *normal* social mannerisms has been all but shattered. The thought of *acting normal* is ludicrous to me now.

I am truly at peace with the world. I am not trying to change the present moment or otherwise flee from it. Here I am; here I will always exist.

After this gentle hike, I concluded once again that music is indeed the best thing in the world.

I am convinced that I have been born again. There seems to be no other way to really express it in words: the day I took shrooms was definitely a *second birthday* of sorts. Everything is familiar yet feels so brand new. When I hear music, I am able to absorb it in its entirety; I can become consumed by the music. When I eat some food or drink some tea, I can even taste their personality and mood. When I ride my bike, it’s as if I have become the living embodiment of freedom—weightless, eternal, soaring.

I have lost count of how many times I have mirthfully sighed since the cubes wore off—sighs of utter, joyous disbelief and wonder. I gainsaid that the world I had returned to after my trip was the same world I had left behind. All evidence

would seem to indicate that this is indeed that same world, so perhaps I am truly seeing with new eyes.

I found myself effortlessly inspiring genuine laughter and smiles from anyone I encountered. It is incredibly easy to brighten someone else's day when there's absolutely nothing weighing you down.

Curiously, I feel in complete control when it comes to thinking about the past, the future, or simply hanging out in the present. In fact, I haven't thought about any plans beyond tomorrow. I am, by virtue of typing right now, forcing myself to recount past events. Aside from this, though, I have stayed grounded in the present and I cannot recall deviating from it against my own volition.

The world seems to me as if it were one giant perpetual hug. The wind is hugging me, the sun is embracing me, even gravity is caressing me. It is quite a strange sensation to feel nature supporting me to this degree.

I feel like I have aged ten years.

A series of knocks on my bedroom's window immediately followed by shouting woke me up in the dead of night. My parents had returned from a weekend trip, apparently, and they had forgotten to take the key to our home's gate with them; thus, my dad jumped over the fence, rapped on my window, and yelled to wake me up so that I could open the gate with my own key.

Normally, I would have been at least slightly irritated after being forcibly woken up, but all I felt at that moment was sheer gratitude and joy due to my folks arriving safe and sound from their trip. Moreover, I was completely awake and brimming with energy even though I had previously been sound asleep.

This must be what being a dog feels like: I am content without having any rhyme or reason. If I had a tail, it would have fallen off by now due to all the interminable, joyous wagging.

**3 Days Later.** Today marked the first day of a three-week, fast-paced summer school course. Although I did experience the usual worries and anxieties attributed to the start of classes, I found myself quickly dismissing these concerns as completely paltry, and I instead moved through the motions of the day virtually unflustered. It was simple: why was I going to waste time worrying about failure when I could instead focus on learning, growing, and redefining my preconceived limits? Even though this realization is straightforward enough to the point of being totally banal, how many times do we find ourselves being dismayed or even paralyzed by fear anyway? It is one thing to agree with something that makes sense; it is quite another thing altogether to internalize this understanding and its implications, to fully realize it in one's life and put it into practice.

**4 Days Later.** Without a doubt in my mind, I submit that my creativity has ballooned to an appreciable degree post-cubes. Years of linear thinking due to my schooling had reduced my ability to really think outside the box. I can't explain why or how it happens, but I can definitely notice that, e.g., music-making comes more naturally now, among other *right-brained* endeavors.

**5 Days Later.** Ahhh.

**1 Week Later.** It's hard to believe that a whole week has gone by since my magic hike. It all feels like a dream.

All I can say at this point in time is that I am amazed at how simple it has become to live my life the way I want to. This is not to say that I have become lax and insouciant; rather, I am now extraordinarily fearless. There will be many hurdles ahead of me, and I feel completely ready to test myself over and over again—sometimes falling on my face, I'm sure, but always getting right back up. I feel ready to face life's myriad, creative challenges head-on.

**2 Weeks Later.** It has all become so simple. I have never really understood *effortless effort* until now<sup>24</sup>. Day by day, it seems that I am truly internalizing this phrase without consciously trying to; I believe this is the (he)art of it.

Ahhh... "arrived at the other shore having never left..." could *this* be it?

Now, one fortnight later, it's as if I have become the sun in the sense that I am sempiternally radiating energy in all directions. I am *sunning* and sunning mercilessly. Limitless and free, I am in charge of my life; I am levitating.

La vie est belle.

**3 Weeks Later.** I was sat in my study when I suddenly noticed a curious vermilion flycatcher loitering about outside on the window stool. I whistled an impromptu air in its direction. Within moments, I caught its attention; it was likely bewildered yet interested to ascertain the unseen source of my playful melody. Then, as it scanned the window surface with enthusiasm, a friend joined and followed suit, settling beside the first to try to locate the origin of the sudden song, then another, and still one more. I soon had a fine-feathered, crimson audience twisting their heads in their collective confusion and wonderment. I couldn't help but think of a famous Bob Marley tune<sup>25</sup> during this moment. A few minutes later, I stopped whistling and took a moment to appreciate what had just happened. I softly smiled. Eventually, the once-inquisitive crowd lost interest and scattered. Sheer gratitude flowed through me. This simple event perfectly metaphorizes how my life has been ever since my psychedelic hike.

**1 Month Later.** A whole month—it's altogether unbelievable.

I'd like to point out here that the *afterglow*—the euphoric residuum imparted after an influential psilocybin experience—has decrescendoeed into calm exultation. These wanning qualities have not made me sad, and I have not felt so inspired as to revisit shrooms posthaste to rekindle these sensations.

Although the effortless bliss is fading away, the lessons I have learned have taken root within my heart and mind, and their import wax daily. Indeed, I am coming to understand that the significance of these enduring insights trump that of the acute psychedelic impartments, however novel and amazing they may be. This is probably due to the substantial pain and patience required to observe and then incorporate them into my life.

All in all, here are some ways in which my life has changed recently:

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<sup>24</sup>Otherwise known as *wéi wú wéi* in Taoism. It has been said that this is the beauty of water, that it is perhaps the epitome of *soft*—i.e., yielding—thus being able to assume any shape or form and cut through even seemingly adamant boulders in time.

<sup>25</sup>*Three Little Birds*, Bob Marley and the Wailers, 1977.

↓ stress, ↑ productivity,  
 ↓ anxiety, ↑ effort,  
 ↓ worrying, ↑ doing,  
 ↓ concern, ↑ action,  
 ↓ trepidation, ↑ confidence,  
 ↓ procrastination, ↑ focus,  
 ↓ judgment, ↑ laughs,  
 ↓ no, ↑ whoa,  
 ↓ ego, ↑ self-deprecation,  
 ↓ me, ↑ we,  
 ↓ bitterness, ↑ acceptance,  
 ↓ tedium, ↑ wonder,  
 ↓ confusion, ↑ awe, and  
 ↓ trees, ↑ forest.

**2 Months Later.** Well, I've recently plunged into an existential crisis; I'm pretty sure I'm a nihilist<sup>26</sup> now.

Essentially, I have come to a stark realization: we are all so alone and afraid. It is a sobering epiphany, however, as I have come to terms with our inherent meaninglessness. This isn't to say that nothing matters at all; rather, it is up to us to author the poetry that is our ephemeral existence on this little blue orb.

I am grateful even for this period of turbulence in my life, for I have come to terms with the absurd. I have simply been reminded of something that I believe now more than ever: knowledge is dangerous.

**6 Months Later.** A dear friend recently brewed a mean ayahuasca<sup>27</sup> and was kind enough to offer me some. During the *Devil's hour*—03:00 to 04:00—on 31 October 2016, I drank half of the bottle he gave me. Long story short, I had a wonderful time. I was initially inspired to write a report about this as well and indeed wrote seven pages, but I lost interest altogether when I realized there wasn't anything really new to recount that hadn't been covered already herein.

During the height of the aya trip, I remember creating nebulae upon nebulae by gently blowing into the palms of my hands. At another point, I looked up and saw a shaman riding through space on a reindeer, rhythmically shaking his rattle along the way in time with the traditional medicine music (*icaro*) that was playing in the background—and in so doing, creating entire galaxies each time. This being glanced at me and smiled ever-so-slightly, as if seeing an old friend again, and I immediately understood his wordless message: he'd always been doing this; I just hadn't bothered to notice. I chuckled and cordially waved at this cosmic nomad and let him continue in his eternal endeavors.

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<sup>26</sup>Basically, nihilism contends that life has no objective and inherent meaning, value, purpose, and truth. Absolute morality does not, therefore, exist to the nihilist; questions of *right* and *wrong* are amusing at best according to this philosophical viewpoint. Nowadays, I subscribe to and appreciate existential nihilism, which also maintains what has been previously mentioned about nihilism in general but offers this as an addendum: it is up to the individual to decide what matters in this evanescent lifetime.

<sup>27</sup>A *psychedelic tea* of sorts used in traditional medicine ceremonies in the Amazon basin. Like psilocybin, one of the active compounds in ayahuasca is a tryptamine that agonizes serotonin receptors.

I would visit a Zen monastery sometime after this ayahuasca journey. Therein, I became friends with an individual whose breadth of experience involving drugs was equally impressive and concerning. When I told him about my first experience with ayahuasca, he was instantly surprised. I remember he asked, “Did you see your demons?” or something to that effect. In response, I said that I had not—that, in fact, I had quite the pleasant experience. This flummoxed him further. It seemed to me that his understanding of the aya experience was one where the individual would be shaken to the core, that imbibing ayahuasca was anything but a walk in the park. I would hear ayahuasca discussed in this light as well by other friends over time. My conversation with this Zen friend prompted me to reflect on the possibility that I had confronted and made peace with most of my demons already via shrooms, allowing this aya journey to be nothing short of lovely.

The one thing, perhaps the *only* thing, I know for sure after drinking the trippy brew is this: I didn’t learn a thing. As a result, I am not interested in consuming psychedelics again anytime soon; I feel that I have already learned what I truly *need* to know from these magnificent teachers. In fact, I threw out the remaining half of my ayahuasca since I hadn’t used it in months, and I was not too keen on drinking potentially moldy tea. Maybe someday, I’ll have a great reason to consult a psychedelic again; until then, I am exceedingly satisfied with the fruits I have obtained from my two psychedelic journeys with magic mushrooms and ayahuasca.

**1 Year Later.** There is not much left to say. The Earth has made yet another round, and I still believe this much regarding psychedelics: given to the right individual in the right context for the right reasons, psychedelics can be catalysts for unprecedented self-discovery and -transformation; they can exponentially increase open-mindedness and creativity; and they can help us to develop a greater appreciation of it all, among a plethora of other interesting and/or *romantic*<sup>28</sup> consequences.

On a side note, I have decided to finally take action and pursue a dream I’d had for nearly a decade but was too afraid to actually undertake: becoming a Zen monk at a monastery in some faraway cloud-shrouded mountains in order to better benefit all beings in all directions across all times.

#### INSIGHTS

As incredible as this pilot experience with magic mushrooms has been, I feel that this paper would be quite lacking without considering the changes in my understanding and perspective in appropriate detail. This section serves to consolidate the journey I have undertaken by providing an overview of the concrete lessons I learned with the assistance of the enigmatic golden teachers.

**Compassion towards Those with Mental Complications.** One of my main concerns before embarking on this journey was the possibility that I may find myself in a state of temporary psychosis. My understanding was that a perfunctory or unpropitious trip could lead to terrible mental states that would make the archetypal notion of Hell seem like a luxury vacation getaway. To make matters worse,

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<sup>28</sup>In the classic sense of the word—i.e., idealistic, perchance impracticably so.

since shrooms could affect the perceived passage of time at higher doses, a bad trip could very well feel like an inescapable nightmare of indissoluble dread.

This, unfortunately—*and* fortunately, as I'll later explain—was exactly what happened: I lost my mind. If a so-called *bad trip* is crudely defined as one that the individual would rather abort, given the chance, then I would have to admit that my first psychedelic experience was a failed mission by this meager criterion. However, I don't believe that there can ever truly be a *good* or *bad* trip, at least according to my goals apropos psychedelics. No matter what, I feel that a consumer of a given entheogen will likely learn *something* post-factum. It doesn't matter too much to me whether the trip was mostly pleasant or awful since a priority of mine is obtaining insight; if the individual gained clarity and perspective in some way, shape, or form, then I would say that that was a successful and laudable essay.

Spending what felt like eternity in a terrible frame of mind was beneficial for me in that my sympathy, love, and respect for those suffering from mental complications grew exponentially. Even beyond this demographic, I found it much easier to connect with others having better understood the depths of suffering and confusion a human being is capable of experiencing. In fact, the most memorable parts of my trip were not the interesting visuals or warm thrill of confusion<sup>29</sup> that the cubes effected. What I will remember and treasure most is how simple and enjoyable it became as I was *coming down* to communicate with other hikers and really connect on a deeper level. It has been said that the kindest of hearts are often those that have felt the greatest pain. Having come out of this mad, seemingly never-ending debacle, I better understand why that might be so.

**The Value of Relationships.** Excepting misanthropes, it is fair to posit that we all have a number of people we deeply care about and that we know we ourselves are loved by others. While it's true that these relationships are beautiful beyond measure, I had never appreciated them to this degree prior to consuming magic mushrooms. It was so easy, even imperative, to draw upon the love of my true heroes during this torturous yet eye-opening experience; although they were not physically present when I needed them most, the act of simply reminding myself that I love them and that I am loved in turn truly kept me from plunging into an abyss of fathomless desperation.

As independent as we sometimes would like to fancy ourselves, it would seem that we cannot simultaneously endure *and* enjoy life on our own. Those near and dear to us may not know exactly the right things to say or the right way to assist us when we need it most, but simply having someone care enough to try is a miracle of life in itself.

I can't recall how many times I had to remind myself that Light fully trusted in my ability to handle the experience. If I had not had this support in addition to that of dear family and friends, I am not so sure that I would have emerged from this experience with my sanity intact—or even with my life, for that matter.

**Shrooms Are Amplifiers.** Although I was slightly looking forward to observing the stereotypical and often overblown visuals associated with psychedelics, I discovered firsthand that shrooms simply heighten sensations in actuality and that they don't cause the individual to perceive phenomena that aren't there, at least at *this*

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<sup>29</sup>*In the Flesh?*, Pink Floyd, 1979.

dosage. E.g., sounds became so strident that they would reverberate across the whole universe: my breathing, footsteps, the sounds of birds chirping and insects buzzing. It was never the case that I heard sounds with no apparent provenance.

I propose that magic mushrooms, especially in higher doses, amplify one's powers of perception to an exceptional and often uncomfortable degree. As you are reading this sentence, it is likely that you are not paying too much attention to the sound and quality of your breathing, the rate at which you're blinking, the cadence of your heart's rhythmia, digestive processes at work, tension in the body, the distribution of weight in your body, what's going on a few feet around you or outside or inside, the surrounding objects, colors, and shapes of whatever is around this sentence, the paragraphs above and below it, and so on. After introducing psilocybin-containing fungi into one's system, however, I believe that the individual becomes hyperaware of everything insofar as focusing on one thing in particular becomes nigh on impossible. This might be what it's like to momentarily become a non-human animal—to wit, fully cognizant of one's state and surroundings yet not able to make sense of what's really going on.

Aside from intensifying the senses, however, I discovered that magic mushrooms also amplify the perception of self—insecurities, doubts, strengths, hopes—the whole gamut. It's as if one can step outside of their own ego for a moment and lay its nude entirety on an operating table to be seen in stark, fluorescently unremitting clarity. Here, it's quite easy to discard unfounded, toxic, and superfluous intrapersonal *dirt* that has somehow accumulated throughout years of unchecked, subliminal assimilation.

**Respecting Mortal Limits.** This realization came to me after the cubes imparted a false sense of invincibility. I recognized even then that this was all an illusion, yet—in an interesting way—it forced me to be fully aware of all that's required to keep a person alive. Had I not brought myself to focus on these sine quibus non of mortality, it is completely possible that I could have died.

For example, I lost count of how many times I had to remind myself to breathe; I had to remember while eating solid food that I would choke if I did not drink water with it given my desert-dry throat; I needed to advise myself to eat food not because I was ever hungry but because that's just something that humans *do*, as far as I could recall—and even more so during what was supposed to feel like grueling exercise; I had to also remember that drinking water was something humans were supposed to do and that this was not at all optional; I had to remind myself that chewing comes first and swallowing second and that this order was absolutely *not* commutative and that asphyxiation is not fun; I had to guess more or less when to take breaks because I had no indication as to whether or not my body was tired from hiking, but I knew that my celeritous pace was borderline superhuman and, therefore, dangerous.

Overall, I gained a greater appreciation of the desiderata of the human body and the simple miracle of just existing in this mortal form. This has inspired me to take greater care of this one-person spaceship that I refer to as my body even amid life's mounting responsibilities.

**Accepting Death.** While we're on this subject of mortal constraints, I learned to accept and appreciate death as a perfectly natural process that needn't be feared. It no longer made sense to be afraid of something so inevitable and characteristic

of the human experience. Although I can't completely explain why this now seems so painfully obvious to me, the fact remains that I am now very comfortable with the idea of *the great gig in the sky*<sup>30</sup>.

It could be that this epiphany was considerably motivated by my sudden inability to recall who or what I was before taking the magic mushrooms—*ego death*, if you will. While I was losing my moorings that had tethered me to this idea of a separate self—a self, I learned, that I clung to as if it were a matter of life or death—I concluded that this probably is what death must really be like. Paul ceased to exist for a moment, and something—I can only speculate as to what that mysterious *something* is—was still left that transcended the solid ground we often seek through self-identification.

Paul's death was not disconcerting in the least, however; after all, the more *I* died, the more my true self returned to the ultimate abode. I could not worry about death even if I tried at that moment. Now that this whole adventure is just a fading memory, I still have not found a good reason to worry about when I will breathe my last breath. There is no escaping death, and that's okay.

Part of me yearns to say a certain powerful statement that I have realized months after this journey, but I hold my tongue because I'm confident that these words will be quite misunderstood—and it's clear to see why that is. I implore you, anyway, to consider this kōan<sup>31</sup> carefully: “Kill yourself.” This is one of the most important ideas that I can ever attempt to ensnare in words.

**You Don't Need to Have All the Answers.** Before the trip, I was thrilled at the prospect of obtaining the answers to life's myriad mysteries; during and especially after the trip, however, I suddenly did not care so much. I discovered that the answers were all around me. For instance, I felt that staring at the surreal summit during the climax of the experience would reveal to me all that I needed to know directly from that ineffable *source* I glimpsed hovering above the mountaintop. However, I was not bothered to download all of that information for two reasons: I was afraid to take my gaze off of the trail and risk tripping figuratively *and* literally, and I wasn't sure if I could handle the implications of all that knowledge. I did not feel ready to accept these insights at that moment, and I didn't care too much, anyway. I had only one item on my to-do list: to finish the hike and live to tell the tale.

During the magic hike, the present moment was far more satisfying and fascinating than any philosophizing about the purpose and genesis of our existence or our postmortem destination, etc. Pondering the unknown was no longer appealing; all that mattered to me was the known. This, I concluded, was fulfilling enough for me. The now is all that really matters; it's all that's ever mattered.

**Nature Is Wise.** Nature is more sapient than I could have ever imagined; its perspicaciousness was readily apparent through the vehicle of *Psilocybe cubensis*. I now firmly believe that reconnecting with this humble, silent sage is vital if one so wishes to make sense of the world at large or at least appreciate it and our species' place therein more fully.

<sup>30</sup>*The Great Gig in the Sky*, Pink Floyd, 1973.

<sup>31</sup>A hallmark of Zen, kōans serve to playfully yet skillfully bamboozle the student into developing wisdom. These often paradoxical sayings and stories seek to demonstrate the inadequacy of mere reason and logic when it comes to cultivating insight and realizing enlightenment.

I am grateful that I decided to try a psychedelic for the first time in nature because I do not believe that I would have learned as much in some other setting. The energy I felt from a single tree was so profound, e.g., that I can only imagine that there are omnipresent yet unseen powerful forces at work that we may never be able to fully understand but that we might at least be able to perceive with proper training.

**The Beauty of Sobriety.** Post-cubes, I gained a deeper appreciation for sobriety. The human body is an amazing organic machine; it's mind-boggling to fathom all that it must do even to just keep an individual alive. I additionally have grown to value how the human mind seems to filter out the perpetual influx of stimuli with great efficacy, allowing for quasiquotidian tasks such as brushing teeth or driving a car to be possible. If we all were in a constant state of hyperawareness, I can only imagine that the world would be turned completely upside-down within minutes.

Although shrooms provided me with a brief opportunity to observe the world with enhanced powers of perception, I now heavily respect *normal* reality to a greater degree. The tall grasses swaying in the gentle breeze outside as I type this have become nothing short of a miracle of life.

**No Mud, No Lotus.** I have come to realize that even a harsh winter can beget a lush spring; i.e., being broken can be a golden opportunity—that is, *if handled right*. That's the rub. Per se, I don't mean that being in a seemingly hopeless state of mind is desirable or that we should deliberately and/or masochistically seek it out posthaste. What I *do* mean is that being in this heavy place rife with confusion can be one of the greatest opportunities that we may ever know in this entire human experience for developing clarity and consequently growing as individuals.

When the story we have fabricated and guarded obsessively regarding ourselves is threatened by life's many vicissitudes, I believe there are really only two ways of reacting:

- (1) become bitter: learn nothing, stay stuck, blame extranealities, traipse forward, fall again, or
- (2) become better: (re)evaluate, change, adapt, grow, rise.

Sometimes, humans just have to be broken in order to put the pieces back together in a better, more creative arrangement.

**There Is a Time to Work and a Time to Chill.** Aside from seeking an enlightening experience, I also wanted to go on a solo, psychedelic hike to take a much-needed break from school; I had been desiccated due to years of constant commitments. Reflecting on this journey, it's hard to believe that it really only lasted four hours; it feels like I've taken a month-long vacation. Both body and mind are indeed tired—but in that sort of refreshing exhaustion that accompanies a successful pursuit, such as winning first place in a sports competition or acing an important final exam.

One of the hardest things for someone like me to accept is that there is no shame in pacing myself and taking breaks. As obvious as this may seem, I nonetheless find it difficult to allow myself to fully let go and unwind when necessary; my thoughts seem to gravitate eventually to ways in which I could more productively use my

respite. However, dedicated R&R has its place. Skillful chillaxation can, in fact, be one of the most productive things a person can do if it is truly needed.

Now that I have treated myself to this memorable voyage, I've picked up a tenacious bring-it-on attitude as a souvenir. I'm excited to put my best foot forward and test myself against the many obstacles on my path to becoming the best *whatever* I can possibly be.

**Everyone Will Judge You, and That's Okay.** At all times, in all places, you will be judged. There's no escaping this. However, one need not be disquieted by what others think. After consuming the magic mushrooms, it was eye-opening to see how often even *I* judge myself, let alone the sub rosa repressed judgments from strangers, acquaintances, friends, and family.

Being discouraged by said judgments, however, is a choice. It seems silly to write this now, but prior to this journey, I thought I honestly didn't care too much about others' judgments. I soon realized, however, that I had indeed taken others' opinions quite seriously, at least at the subconscious level. Thanks to the gold caps, I now understand the futility of obsessing over others' thoughts and (mis)perceptions. It is deeply liberating to truly let go of what others think and to instead move through life loving myself enough to focus on what I believe is worthwhile.

**Any Mindfulness-Promoting Activity Is Sacred.** A few days have passed since the magic hike. I have returned to my morning meditation practice with greater verve. The value of mindfulness-promoting exercises has become more apparent now after obtaining a sneak-peek of what the mind can truly do. On reflection, the insight derived from three years' worth of meditation practice had produced astoundingly similar benefits vis-à-vis this single magic mushroom experience. I am now confident that if a person were to diligently and earnestly pursue a lifelong practice of meditation—or any similar mindfulness-building discipline, for that matter—incredible results would be inevitable.

**The Journey Within.** Now that some time has passed, I have become convinced that one of the greatest journeys in life is the journey within. Voyaging through deep space or ocean, I believe, pale in comparison to exploring the innerverse. If reality were likened to an egg, I believe that most of us will only be able to come to an eggshell-level understanding of it all. There is so much more out there playfully goading us—day in, day out—into full-steam-ahead exploration.

**There Is No Attainment.** There is no attainment<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup>There is no attainment.

## WORD TO THE WISE

This experience was, on the whole, undoubtedly fruitful and memorable; that being said, I would like to mention some important admonitions herein. Although a psychedelic journey is subject to divers variables, certain basic yet significant precautions should be observed in order to increase the possibility of both a safe and insightful voyage. The psychedelic experience has been likened to “strapping oneself to a rocket without a guidance system<sup>33</sup>,” one may as well do their best to maximize the chances of landing in deep, rockless waters.

**Note to Self.** I cannot vouch enough for how invaluable my little note-to-self proved to be. Should a person’s psychedelic odyssey suddenly find itself in murky waters, having this anchor at-the-ready can make all the difference.

I suggest keeping the message short, sweet, and to the point. Recall that, during my psychehike, I couldn’t even read my watch anymore. Likewise, printing out, say, Ehrmann’s *Desiderata*<sup>34</sup> may initially seem like a great idea, but good luck trying to make sense of more than the first four words during the trip. Strive to be pithy. Above all else, make sure that the message really speaks to you; this may be the only thing keeping you from curling up into a lachrymose ball when things go all catawampus or wholly orthogonal.

**Beware Lone Ventures.** Although everything turned out okay in the end in my solitary trip, I would definitely recommend having a *sitter*, ideally sober, during one’s first magic mushroom adventure who has considerable experience with shrooms especially or psychedelics in general. From what I have gathered, magic mushrooms tend to be seen as one of the most confusing highs in the psychedelic genre; i.e., this would be all-the-more disorienting for the psychedelic arriviste.

If I could, I am not sure whether or not I would have changed anything at all re my own first experience. While the idea of having an experienced and dependable chaperone by my side throughout the journey seems sensible, I don’t believe that I would have learned as much as I did by facing the music unaccompanied. I propound once again that being broken and lost in the experience might lay the fertile ground for unprecedented growth and understanding, and it seems to me that a sitter might be adept at preventing this outcome. The nectar of such an otherwise transformative experience may be inadvertently diluted in the presence of a psychedelic Sherpa.

**The Importance of Setting.** Were I to change something about my first time, I might not have tried magic mushrooms on a popular hiking trail—i.e., where I’m likely to be among others. An entirely private niche in nature seems ideal, but I don’t as of yet own a forest. There is a sweet spot to be found here. Personally, I would opt to trip in nature again on the least popular trail I could find.

In addition, just as it is not advised to trip in the company of untrustworthy people the first time around, it would behoove the psychedelic beginner to select a setting with minimal danger and variability. In other words, tripping in an unfamiliar and bad part of town with sketchy strangers would seem like a terrible idea. Furthermore, what may seem insignificant while sober can come to matter

<sup>33</sup>*Drugs and the Meaning of Life*, Sam Harris, 2011.

<sup>34</sup>*Desiderata*, Max Ehrmann, 1927.

greatly while under the influence. Sunlight, for example, may become unbearable; sounds might seem piercing and ineludible.

In summary, an excellent setting is one that the individual considers to be safe, familiar, and predictable; if one's first entheogen-based trip is in a group setting, then these individuals should ideally be experienced, affable, and responsible, true-blue companions.

**Anticipate How Your Body May React.** What I definitely learned the hard way is that the human body can react in curious ways to magic mushrooms.

For example, if I were to do this all over again, I would bring a stupid amount of water along. It was not the brightest idea to hike in the desert's summer heat to begin with, I admit, but I have learned my lesson: water is paramount since the shrooms induce more sweat, ergo exacerbating dehydration. Your throat will likely become very dry during the trip. Additionally, it may be wise to have extra-strength lip balm handy during one's trip. My lips were not able to recover even five days after the hike was said and done.

One thing that was particularly worrisome was that I could not really tell if I was choking on my snacks. As a rule of thumb, I would recommend having a sip of water with every piece of solid food; do your best to remember this as you will likely have to remind yourself often.

Constrictive clothing, shoes, or accessories are not advised. As I mentioned earlier, I could no longer tolerate the bandanna wrapped around my forehead, I wanted to tear the watch off of my wrist, and my shoes felt so tight that I was considering hiking barefoot. In addition, if you are out in nature, perhaps elect to hike on a trail with minimal overgrowth, especially if you're claustrophobic; everything seemed to be folding in on itself near the apex of my trip.

Here's something else I didn't expect: my body went numb in places and was completely desensitized at times. Although this is totally bizarre at first, just know that it will soon wear off. Do not try to remove your own limbs; you may succeed.

Lastly, your stomach might not find the mushrooms to be agreeable. I found it interesting that I had no issues with the gold caps given that undercooked shiitake once had me bent over and writhing on the floor in pain for two weeks. Stranger still, I had eaten the cubes almost on an empty stomach. I believe that my stomach seriously appreciated the fact that I chewed them thoroughly like some absent-minded cow. To further mitigate digestive issues, consider brewing magic mushroom tea. I have read that this, in addition to being easier on the stomach, leads to a quicker onset of effects and a shorter yet more intense experience. I can't say much else beyond that as I've never tried it myself.

**Trust Your Gut.** This applies both on and off shrooms. I would not have tried a psychedelic if I didn't feel in my heart of hearts that it was something worth doing.

Deciding when to trip should also be contingent on when it *feels* right. I like to plan things out in advance, but when it comes to these experiences, I think it's best to wait until a felicitous opportunity comes up. If there are substantial reservations before embarking on a grand psychedelic journey, it's not the right day. Wait until some other time; it's worth it.

When that day comes, your body will likely be crystal clear with you about what it wants, what you should start doing, and what you should stop doing. Just make sure that a good idea during a trip will also be an acceptable action to those around

you and that it certainly won't cause you or others harm. For example, as much as I would have preferred to take off all of my clothes and leave all my belongings behind, I knew better. Be sensible, though that might not make sense at times.

**Let Go.** Psychedelics, on the whole, tend to give you what you *need*, not necessarily what you *want*. With this in mind, there comes a point in the trip where you must finally let go and surrender to the experience. This is where the *magic* begins.

**Psychedelics Are Not for Everyone.** This bears repeating:

psychedelics are not for everyone.

Studerus et al. (*Acute, subacute and long-term subjective effects of psilocybin in healthy humans: A pooled analysis of experimental studies*, 2011) discourage individuals with "... personal or family (first-degree relatives) histories of schizophrenia, major depression, bipolar disorders, borderline personality disorder, neurological disorders, or regular alcohol or substance abuse..." from consuming magic mushrooms in particular, adding that "... psilocybin administration to healthy, high-functioning, and well-prepared subjects in a responsible clinical or research setting is generally well tolerated..."

I can only add that a psychonaut-to-be should also demonstrate the following, at the very least:

- (1) respect bordering on reverence towards the substance,
- (2) a general sense of life satisfaction,
- (3) a willingness to take a serious look in the mirror, and
- (4) healthy confidence in oneself and in the ancient teachers.

## CONCLUSION

Taking an eighth of magic mushrooms has been the best decision I have made during my entire 21 years of life, bar none. I cannot recall a single event that has even come close to being as meaningful as this magic hike. Although there are many factors to consider in order to encourage a stellar journey, there is no doubt in my mind that it is totally worth it.

If you, dear reader, can afford this opportunity for yourself, then I say go for it with gusto. Keep in mind that I mean a couple of things when I say *afford*: on a basic level, I do mean having sufficient funds, but I also mean that you should be in a place in your life where you feel considerably ready to explore these uncharted territories through the vehicle of psychedelics. Please take your time with these substances; it took me three years of careful research to 1) realize that psychedelics are not relatively dangerous when used appropriately and 2) feel ready enough to experience them firsthand.

Even if the mere thought of drugs and their possible repercussions are enough to keep you away from them at all costs, let this be the only thing you take from this entire paper: not all drugs are equal. This is precisely the problem with this feeble, lazy word—*drug*—and its usage in the vernacular. Perhaps it is easier for us humans to adopt fear- and anger-based *modi operandi* when it comes to making

sense of things we don't really understand. In any case, I challenge you to *find the black swans*, as Nassim Nicholas Taleb might say, and at least consider that maybe, just maybe, we were all raised to vilify illicit substances and their aficionados in a chiefly paranoia-fueled bid to keep the populace safe—a valiant effort that, despite its good intentions, has failed miserably, perhaps and perversely due in large part to all-out prohibition and draconian enclassification of misunderstood, perchance benign and even beneficial substances. I understand that this notion might not be easy to entertain. What I know for sure is that these jejune approaches have not targeted the root of the problem regarding drugs and society. It would seem to me that cleaning up this panoramic mess necessarily entails going to great lengths to precipitate a more educated and accountable society.

With all this to consider, if you someday truly understand both the rewards and especially the risks associated with earnest exploration of the self, the mind, consciousness, and perhaps reality through the vehicle of magic mushrooms—or some other classical serotonergic psychedelic—and you decide to respectfully and responsibly utilize them, then I have only two things left to mention:



“Have a nice trip! ~me”



The beauty of life is seeing with new eyes.