

MMYMA4CRÉ

Initiation into the Art of Dying

*Entheogenic plant medicine,
healing journeys,
and transformative learning*

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*“I said to myself, “What is this I am doing,
it certainly is not science, what is it?”*

Then a voice said to me:

“That is art.””

(C.G.Jung¹)

Because healing takes so many forms...

¹ Cited in Jung (2009:199)

Ιερα όδος

Sacred Road². One morning I woke up and said to myself: “I can’t do this anymore. I’m not doing this anymore! I am serving the system that is controlling me, crippling my body and Soul, taking away the last bits of my ‘free choice’, and I am not able to change anything.” I went to work as usual. At around lunchtime I said good-bye to my colleagues, to my boss, God-incarnate, and left. They shouted after me: “You cannot leave like that!” “I can,” I said, “Just like that!” And walked away.

I went on the quest for the life-changing experience that brings about meaning, fulfilment and contentment. Where do I look for one? Doctor Gabor Matè said³: “In our materialistic world that only validates falseness, celebrates all the things that lead away from Truth, moreover, makes Truth hard to live for, the only way is an instant, deep mystical experience.”

How do I achieve it? Moreover, how do I turn this experience into a creative project that I need in order to progress in my academic studies? The majority of my fellow students seemed to make real art. What art can I do? I cannot paint, neither can I play a musical instrument. I felt like I was lagging behind.

As a salvation came Stanislav Grof’s book ‘The Ultimate Journey: Consciousness and the Mystery of Death’. To clarify, I am a Hermes’ apprentice - a novice psychopomp, that is why I am interested in death and dying. Grof tells that they were the ancient mysteries of death and rebirth that represented an important form of experiential training for dying, in which participants visited the Underworld, experienced death while living, and profound psychospiritual transformation. He also claims that among the most powerful technologies of that ultimate sacred experience were various psychedelic plants (2010:35-47).

I chose exploration of my consciousness under the influence of psychedelic substances and reflection on my direct experiences. My main reference is the various stages of the Greek Eleusinian Mysteries. My creative project therefore is my journey into my inner Eleusis, with signposts along the road like: ‘here live dragons’. A journey into incredible inner landscapes, with beautiful and complex patterns, colours and beings which no paintbrush can paint. The more I journey into myself, the more I understand, that *I am* the paintbrush and the inner worlds are real expressions of imaginal art.

As concerns the consciousness itself, my stance backs up the theory of the primordial consciousness and the brain as a filter of sensory experience and information, which is

² Ancient Greek ‘Iera Odos’ - the sacred road to Eleusis. Quoted in Edmonds (2015b:94)

³ Gabor Matè on manifesting the mind. Youtube video. See Reference list

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supported by a number of scholars (Luke 2017:81). If the filter disappeared people would be overwhelmed with perceiving and experiencing everything that has happened and is happening everywhere in the universe.

I have also chosen relevant literature search and correspondence with scholars. Mostly to reassure myself that I can manoeuvre between the *paranormal* and *ordinary worlds* at the same time maintaining *normality*. The stories do slip into the mystical, but believe me, the rational language doesn't do any justice to the experiences. It is like describing the indescribable.

μυστήρια

Mysteries⁴ were celebrated widely in antiquity. From Babylonian Ishtar, to Assyrian Tammuz, Egyptian Isis-Osiris, Mayan and Aztec cults, to later Orphic, Bacchae, Mithraic ritual events - they were all based on mythological stories featuring deities, who died and were brought back to life. They were also mystery schools where initiates would be exposed to powerful consciousness altering procedure which would result in a profound experience (Grof 2010:43-44).

The most important mysteries were celebrated in Eleusis, 18 kilometres from Athens. In a nutshell, they represented the myth of the abduction of Persephone by the king of the underworld Hades, her mother Demeter's *descent* to the Underworld (κατάβασις), the *search*, the *ascent*, and the reunion with her daughter (Ibid). Schmitt (1990:23-94) gives us an overall sequence of the psychospiritual death, after which the participants had the confidence, that the actual death will be like that.

In an immense procession the initiates walked the sacred road (ιερα όδος) from Athens to Eleusis. Three rituals of purification (κάθαρσις) preceded the supreme act - a bath in the sea, the salt lakes along the road, and in the Temple. With the help of the lesser rites they joined the circle with the other participants and made the bond.

Then the initiates entered the Temple, they wore bright white linen clothes. The ritual activities, drinking the mysterious *Kykeon*, the sacred objects, and words, enacted and spoken by priests and the initiates, triggered a state of enthusiasm and ecstasy (έκστασις). Aristotle stated that the initiates were not meant to *learn* anything, but to *suffer an experience* and to *be moved*. The torches were put out, the curtain raised, and the hierophant appeared with a box. He opened it and took out a ripe ear of grain. All these

⁴ 'Misteria' - plural form of *sacred mystery* in Greek. Available: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/μυστήριο> (accessed on 01.07.2020)

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factors lead the initiate upwards, to the highest grade, called εποπτεία, and he became a seer (εποπτης) - the one who “knows the end of life and knows the Zeus-given beginning”.⁵ The ultimate goal (τέλος) was reached. Apuleius sums it up:

“I approached the frontier of death, I set foot on the threshold of Persephone, I journeyed through all the elements and came back, I saw the sun at midnight, *sparkling white light*, I came close to the gods of the upper and nether world, and adored them from near at hand” (Burkert 1987:97).

Modern day mysteries involve to some extent all the elements of the ancient rites. They begin with a strict *dieta* – up to 3 weeks before the ceremony the experiencers are asked to have abstinence from sex, alcohol, coffee, certain food, and entertainments, including watching TV. They are also asked to perform activities, like meditation, breathwork, etc., to get the right mindset for the ceremony. The ceremony leaders and sitters keep in touch with the participants. On the ceremony day, the participants form a sacred circle, with a goal to bond, set an intention, and enter the ceremony - *the closing of the mouth, the closing of the eyes, the closing of the senses in general*⁶. The leader takes a tray with small glasses of the *potion*, delivers them to the participants, and the mysteries begin.

ἐνθεος γενέσθαι

Entheogens⁷. Eleusinian mysteries were celebrated for almost 2000 years (Grof 2010:51). What was it, that made them last that long? Grof supports several scholars (Hoffman, Wasson, Ruck) who came to the conclusion that it was an entheogenic religion. The astonishing visions, profound changes and other characteristics apply to holotropic⁸ states reached under psychedelics and could explain such powerful experience in thousands of people at the same time (Ibid).

There are many speculations as to what the *Kykeon* might have contained – from ergot, to mandragora, magic mushrooms, and poppy, which actually was one of the attributes of Demeter (Burkert 1987:108). I consider it might have been acacia which is widespread in subtropical regions, and its bark and leaves contain high concentration of DMT (Schultes 2001:34). Moreover, a ‘full DMT breakthrough is widely considered as one of the most

⁵ Pindar, as quoted in Kerenyi (1990:39)

⁶ Definition of μυστήρια in Schmitt (1990:94)

⁷ Neologism *entheogen* is derived from the ancient Greek ‘ἐνθεος’ (full of god, inspired, possessed) and ‘γενέσθαι’ (to come into being), hence ‘inducing a mystical or spiritual experience’. Available: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/entheogen> (accessed on 01.07.2020)

⁸ Coined by Stanislav Grof from Greek ὅλος (*hólos* - whole) and τροπή (*tropé* - movement towards something), meaning ‘moving towards wholeness’. Available: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/holotropic> (accessed on 01.07.2020)

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powerful of all visionary experiences' (Johnson 2018:45). "Nature is drenched in DMT," says D.McKenna⁹, "And the acacia is the most potent."

I made a decision to experiment with the DMT-containing Ayahuasca decoction from the Amazonian jungle, often called as vine of the dead, which, according to Luke (2017:86), gives rise to extraordinary human experiences, like OBE's, ESP, mystical experiences, profound changes of consciousness. He continues: "Ayahuasca users report extraordinary visual phenomena including kaleidoscopic patterns, geometric forms, tunnels, animals, mythical creatures, supernatural beings" (Ibid:90).

κάθαρσις

Catharsis¹⁰. I had had a 3-week *diète*, I had fasted for 36 hours, I had arrived at the ceremony hall. I was sitting in the circle, listening to the playlist, designed for the purpose of the event, and praying together with the other experiencers. In the ceremonial setting we learned to surrender to the will of the plant Spirits.

Knowing myself, and my experience with psilocybin-containing magic mushrooms, I asked for 1,5 doses of Ayahuasca to start with. I literally tested the statement that the jungle brew is purgatory both physiologically (effects of harmala alkaloids) and emotionally (Luke 2017:89).

The journey began with a weird high frequency vibration that built up rapidly, quite overwhelmingly. Within a heartbeat it threw me in a bizarre highly complex alien reality. And then She came – Mother Ayahuasca, a huge neon like green Naga from Indian myths. She was smiling. She lay down next to me and looked at me with all-penetrating eyes. She didn't speak but her presence made me *know* she is an intelligent being and is here to protect me. I completely relaxed.

The visual image of the room started to break up in a pixilation pattern until there was a high brick wall in front of me. I touched one brick, it turned over and I saw an animated picture of myself as a little girl. I touched another brick, and they all began flipping over. I went through a complete life review. At the same time it felt like the wall had intelligence and telepathy – it was aware of me, it responded to my feelings and started opening scenes according to what I was thinking about.

⁹ Documentary about DMT on Gaia.TV (see Reference list)

¹⁰ Ancient Greek 'katharsis' means purification, cleansing, purging. Available: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/catharsis> (accessed on 01.07.2020)

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The wall dissolved like after a wizard's touch. I was back in the room with Her still there. She lifted her arm as if she wanted me to sit up. I did. Incredibly strong nausea began building up in my stomach and entire body. I ended up purging my insides out. I had never been so sick in my entire life. The worst of it was the substance that came out of me – thick, black, foul-smelling. I received a message from Mother that my physical body is now healed, strong and can endure any sicknesses.

Back at home I did serious search about the plant combination in the brew and its healing effects in humans. I found hardly any academically credible information simply because there is no serious research done. *Ayahuasqueros* – the Ayahuasca masters of the jungle, on the contrary, use the decoction as the jungle medicine and confirm it has strong antibacterial, antiviral, and detoxing properties. Purging is also the physical outlet for an energetic release and surrender¹¹.

Exhausted, I dropped down on the mattress and went into a weird dream-state. I was in a dark and gloomy place, that looked like a purgatory. There was a long line of big dark boxes with words written on them – attachment, hatred, envy, fear, ego, etc. I looked at Mother – She was there with me. I telepathically received a message to choose a box and bury it. I buried attachment; I really did. I woke up physically and emotionally released.

I tested myself later and it worked. I have no sad emotions towards letting go of what I don't need anymore. We confuse two concepts: things that we want are not the things what we need. We have been given people, things, events for certain time to learn something, and when we don't need them, the Spirit Teachers take them away from us. And replace them with something else that we need more for our personal growth at that moment of time. If we kick and scream and hold on to them, we experience pain and suffering. Non-attachment is the main thing for one's development and ability to live in the present moment, and cross over when the time comes.

ἘΚΣΤΑΣΙΣ

Ecstasy¹². I took the 2nd dose. As the time passed and the medicine spread out, visions began swirling and pulsing everywhere around me, accompanied by that strong vibration. I saw a display of colourful kaleidoscopic incredibly complex fractals and other patterns. Time

¹¹ Winkelman (2016), see Reference list.

¹² Ancient Greek 'ékstasis' derived from 'existēmi' (I displace), 'ek' (out) and 'hístēmi' (I stand), hence 'standing outside of oneself' or 'having displaced one's mind'. Available: https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Ἐκστασις#Ancient_Greek (accessed on 01.07.2020)

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and space dissolved, the visions became the only reality. I saw much the same with my eyes open or shut, except when the visions overlaid the contents of the room, I closed my eyes.

Before getting deeper, Ayahuasca gave me a beautiful jungle of intertwined coiling snakes with near-infinite number of eyes. It was only later when I read about Luke's (2017:103-113) research about the phenomenon, that commonly appears to DMT-containing plant users – a serpent entity covered in multitudinous eyes, forming spiral like shapes. He claims that in many cultures (Islamic, Jewish, Tibetan, Iranian, some African tribes) it is an archetypal symbol of the Angel of Death, the guard of the Underworld. Mother was going to open the Gates for me.

The vibration accompanied by a weird sound increased in intensity which kind of paralleled with a slight anxiety. Luke (2017:78-89) claims that similar sounds and vibrations are common to OBE's. Am I going to experience an OBE? I didn't have time to get answers! My consciousness broke out of my body. It was like when water pressure breaks canal locks and breaks loose. My internal pressure could not be held anymore, and I popped out like a cork. Had I known then that DMT is frequently accompanied by dissociation from the body and OBE's (Ibid), I wouldn't have had anxiety.

I was feeling as if I was bigger than I actually was, I was rising up, above myself. I could suddenly see everything – the whole room, myself, others, I definitely wasn't seeing from my eyes. I was aware of everything. I was lingering there with no gravity feeling, I was outside my body. Pure ecstasy.

My consciousness was vast, it was enormous, it encompassed the Universe (it felt like it did). Does it mean my consciousness is not reduced to the dimensions of my physical brain? Was it me, who broke out and flew up? I still had reasoning, hearing and vision. However, I cannot remember feeling touch or being able to smell or taste. I had a message from Mother, that the synthesis of the primordial consciousness and our human brain, is the key to our self-realisation and transcendence. I don't yet understand how it works.

I wasn't ready for what followed next...

κατάβασις

Descent into Hades¹³. 3rd dose. The vibration was getting stronger, it came in regular ways and like electric shock. I was still hovering quite high up when I saw it - the Tunnel.

¹³ Ancient Greek 'κατά' (down) and 'βαίω' (go), meaning a descent. Here: descent into Hades, the Underworld. Available: https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/καταβαίω#Ancient_Greek (accessed on 01.07.2020)

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Huge, shiny, made of stainless steel, that brownish grey metal colour. I remember the perspective, the vastness of the scenery. The outer layer of it was spinning, I heard the metallic buzz of the vibration. Mother said it was the Death Vibration, the vibration of the Matrix when it calls us back. I didn't understand anything. I got right to the entrance. There, of course, was the light at the end. I put one foot on the Tunnel floor and was immediately brought onto another plane.

I was back in my body lying on the floor. I was so heavy, I could not lift my eyelids, nor could I move. Slight panic started creeping in my head, although I was aware of Mother. I began to melt like metal and soak into the floor. I was part of the floor not being able to move a molecule. I began shaking but couldn't tell whether it was from cold, fear or from the vibration. I couldn't breathe because my chest was flat under the wooden floor. I desperately wanted to drink. I tried to ask for help but could not make a sound.

From that flatness and heaviness 4 pillars arose – white (Air), blue (Water), dark brown (Earth) and red (Fire): they began spinning around. Then 4 dragons of the same colours came, touched the columns and they burst into elements and dissolved. I do not remember the sequence, though – which dragon came first. Then my head went back, and my mouth opened wide. A beam of bright golden glittering light came out of it and a golden dragon appeared above me. The light was shocking but very comfortable, loving and calming. Then all the feelings were gone, I only had awareness. For a split second I didn't know I existed. I was aware of an eagle flying high in the sky and followed the bird. After a while I realized I was looking out through the eyes of the eagle. Complete annihilation.

To die is to be initiated. Plato¹⁴

ἜΝΩΣΙΣ

Oneness¹⁵. Same day. I was slowly returning to the gravitation-space-time limited Earth plane when Mother said it was not over yet. She wanted to show me something else. The invisible Matrix, the fabric of life, and how it works. Life energy flows never-ending through the Matrix like electricity flows through wires and cables. Everything is made up of life energy which has intelligence - the Universal Consciousness. Was my teacher of physics right when he said - the laws of physics tell us that energy cannot be created nor destroyed, but it can transform from one form into another? So, look at yourself as an intelligent loving being

¹⁴ As quoted in Eliade (1975:111)

¹⁵ Classical Greek 'Énosis' - mystical oneness, union or unity. In Platonism and especially Neoplatonism the goal of 'Énosis' is union with what is fundamental in reality: the One, the Source. Available: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henosis> (accessed: 01.07.2020)

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of love energy. And that intelligent being cannot be destroyed. You will transform to another form.

We are all connected to the Matrix with an invisible thread, like a navel-cord. That is why we have the yearning for the divine. This also means that we are all connected within the Matrix – from a one-cell organism, to humans, to stars and galaxies. When you journey, you can see and feel that connection very strongly. The feeling of Oneness. It changes the way you perceive everything. For instance, later when I was walking the dog and saw an oak-tree die in the woods. My heart sank and I could feel the tree. I cannot describe yet how it works, but the connection is permanent.

At the end of life you feel the (Death) vibration of the Matrix and it is pulling you back. Your endogenous¹⁶ DMT is released by the Matrix, your body dissolves into elements, and your consciousness within bright golden loving light (the effects of DMT) merges with the Matrix. Without the limitations of the physical brain the consciousness now has its full potential and it can realize itself. In a way, Death is an escape from all the physical limitations. If only we could grasp this...

ψυχή δηλείν

Soul manifestation¹⁷. Day 2, 2 doses. Psychedelics [really] are the mind manifesting substances that override the reducing valve function of the brain (Luke 2017:82), allowing humans to draw from the Matrix. We call it psychic and mystical experiences. And believe me, I did draw from it, consciously and intentionally. I asked Mother to show me how I can connect to the Soul of the dying if they cannot communicate anymore.

As always, it began with an enormous vibration which was flowing through my body and making a weird buzzing sound. Then all the building began vibrating and shaking, like during an earthquake. It sounded like there was a storm raging. All the windows began shaking and making a dramatic sound. Then the wind blew one of the windows open and blew in. And with each blow I heard somebody say something. I connected telepathically to each and everyone in the ceremony room. I even heard their inner dialogues.

Afterwards, when I talked to the people, they said I couldn't have heard them, they were whispering! Or even better, they were thinking about it! My partner was far away from me. I remember him say to the person lying next to him: "Could you please move away, you are

¹⁶ DMT that originates and lives in the body

¹⁷ 'Psyche-delein' - Greek 'psyche' (soul, mind) and 'delein' (to manifest), hence - soul / mind manifesting.
Available: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/psychedelic> (accessed on 01.07.2020)

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invading my personal space.” It was so loud! I remember thinking to myself – why is he so loud? Later he denied being loud, he insisted he was whispering in that person’s ear. And yes, the music was on, normally I could not have heard anything.

Here I like Lommel’s analogy of the brain as a TV-set, in which the mind is analogous to the TV show, which doesn’t originate within the TV-set but is received by it. Much like the electromagnetic field that carries the TV’s informational signal, mind is not confined to the insides of heads either but *extend outwards in a field like manner*, even communicating directly with other minds and information sources beyond the limitations of space and time (Luke 2017:81).

Huxley’s conclusion, too, was that consciousness is fundamental. Our individual sense of *awareness is the same as the Universal Consciousness*. Under ordinary circumstances, we filter it and narrow our perceptions. Psychedelics smash the filter, draw the thin veil of *normality* open (Luke 2017:xiv; Ram Dass 2000:199). Brain processes do link to consciousness, and modern science has yet to research and define the ways.

I connected to that collective field, the Universal Consciousness. This was my highest achievement as a psychonaut. Funnily, when I came out of my journey, I found out that there had not been any storm, neither had there been any wind. The afternoon had been calm, quiet and warm. Yes, and all the windows were shut. It was only me who was in the middle of a raging storm.

τέλος

Final Result¹⁸. Plato, when asked on his death bed for one final advice, responded: “Practise dying” (Ram Dass 2000:150). It was only after my last ayahuasca experience when I realized, I myself have gone through the stages of initiation into the art of dying. Was it not something I was asking for - to be a tool in God’s hands and help people get ready for the sacred crossing over? But first, I had to experience it myself.

I have described how my self-exploration and mind-manifestation project affected me by ‘blasting open the doors of perception’ (Luke 2017:viii). However, my τέλος is not entirely complete yet – it is waiting for the right time and the right dose of plants of the Gods to let me experience εποπτεία. I do not yet completely identify myself with the part of ourselves that transcends the body, mind, and soul.

¹⁸ Ancient Greek ‘Télos’ - completion, consummation, result, product, end. Available: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/τέλος> (accessed on 01.07.2020)

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However, I know that 'beyond is a place of great knowledge, ...wisdom' (Eliade 1975:64) and freedom, and I can access it whenever I want to. My Spirit Helpers, my Dragons will always be there for me. I am confident, that myths and encounters with mythical beings are not products of my fantasy. They originate in that collective field of knowledge, that I experienced myself and 'are manifestations of the primordial organizing principles of the psyche and the cosmos, which Jung called archetypes' (Grof 2010:44).

Modern-day Jungians call the archetypal beings and realms as 'imaginal' to distinguish them from 'imaginary' products of human mind. 'Archetypes ... operate in the twilight zone between consciousness and matter. This imaginal world **has objective existence**, and those who experience it can **reach consensual agreement** on its various aspects' (Ibid).

Had I not taken these substances, I wouldn't think and write the way I do, I wouldn't understand the myth, cosmology and the sacred the way I do, I wouldn't perceive death and dying the way I do now. I have found a new canvas and completely re-painted my inner landscapes.

When *my actual death* comes, I don't want to have a complex series of adventures in consciousness, without being prepared. I know we can transform ourselves into beings capable of meeting these challenges consciously and without resistance. Like Ram Dass (2000:164) 'I wish to be able to stand aside from the death of the body and view this transition from Awareness'. We *can* enter Universal Consciousness at the time of dying. This knowing gives our practices a completely new importance. We prepare for death by balancing our minds and easing our access to the Universal Consciousness, the life force of everything. And the sacred plants can help. I know.

Because, like Apuleius, I set foot on the threshold of Persephone, I journeyed through all the elements and came back, I saw a bright light at midnight, I came close to the gods of the upper and nether world, and I returned transformed.

I will never be the same again. I don't want to. I don't want to kill my Dragons.

βιβλιοθήκη

The chest of books¹⁹

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¹⁹ Ancient Greek 'biblîon' (book) and 'thékē' (box, chest). Available: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/βιβλιοθήκη> (accessed on 01.07.2020)