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The role of psychedelics in supernatural experience formation

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Abstract---The use of psychedelics to form supernatural experiences has been and is common. Because such substances cause changes in states of consciousness and create a state similar to trance and the departure of the soul from the body or a kind of altered perception of facts. But in some cases, some additional facts are perceived. The question is, to what extent can the use of these materials be a way to perceive a supernatural understanding of reality? And by what mechanism does this happen? The fact is that experience and experimental methods and philosophical analysis show that these materials can have such a result in very controlled and exceptional or accidental cases; But in general and in most cases, the use of these substances for these purposes is not recommended and not only does not have the desired result, but also has unintended consequences and many harms.

Keywords---psychedelics, ecstasy, supernatural experiences.

Introduction

In some cultures, and some religions and schools, the use of psychedelics to achieve enlightenment has been common. In Mexico, Indians use LSD-contained fungi or a type of cactus called Peyote, which contains mescaline, and in Latin America, a drink made from DMT*-contained plant extracts are used in religious ceremonies to communicate with the higher worlds. In ancient Tibet, shamans used to perform rituals through drumming, singing, running, and intense body movements, and sometimes consuming cannabis (or similar drugs) into a state of ecstasy (Sergeevna, S. M., et. al., 2020; Efimovna, L. E., et. al., 2020). It was as if their souls were leaving the form of the body. They were able to see the other

* DMT: N,N-Dimethyltryptamine is a psychedelic chemical found in the structure of some plants and animals and is both a derivative and a structural analogue of tryptamine. Ayahuasca bitter potion and coffee in Latin America is a combination of the two plants Ayahuasca and Chakrona, and has been used by Amazon tribes for centuries for medicinal purposes or mystical ecstasy. Some seem to have experienced a "fountain of death" or life after death by consuming it.

world and make predictions (Anzali, 2007, pp. 79 and 80 and Jahanpour, 2015, p. 82).

Among the magus of Iran, there was a ritual called "Avanmehr" to go on heavenly journeys, in which the Kartir Priest went on a transcendental journey. (Tafazli, 2012, pp. 91-93) It seems that at a historical point in this ceremony, a substance called "Homeh" or "holy Hom"[†] was used. Zoroastrians allowed the consumption of Hom juice (Home or Someh) mixed with milk and water. Of course, what Hom exactly is a controversial topic in Iranian studies. It seems to be a kind of plant with sharp leaves that could be found in the mountains of Iran. It was even mentioned in Avesta (Yasnah, 10:8).

As can be seen in the report of Ardaviraf Nameh, he is sent to heaven in the same way while sleeping for a few days. It seems that this type of psychedelic was considered a sacred drink for Zoroastrians in the past. But for a spiritual person who is fully spiritually prepared to go to heaven after his soul is separated from his body. In the case of Ardaviraf, this may have been due to the care of the priests and the examinations that took place before the ceremony to select the best person. His opium use is so great that her sisters feel threatened and likely he will not wake up. The composition and amount of these substances is such that it puts him to sleep seven days and nights (Ginio, 2013, pp. 7-15).

In fact, in these fields, the use of plant extracts that were considered sacred, was a means to go into ecstasy or a shortcut to the heavens. Although such a method is common in some schools as a prelude to various spiritual practices, it remains to be seen to what extent the states and perceptions obtained with these precepts can be worthy and acceptable?

The effect of psychedelics

Sedatives such as endorphins or cortisol are usually produced and consumed in very small amounts in the human brain with the same function as some drugs. The production of these substances in the brain occurs in difficult and stressful conditions or after severe injury and pain and affects certain neurotransmitters and causes physical and mental relaxation. In sports and long walks, there is a secretion of these substances in the brain, which makes such activities tolerable or even enjoyable. In fact, the secretion of these substances in the brain causes a kind of natural and useful and harmless relaxation and happiness.

Drugs are divided into different groups in terms of function. It seems that the materials used in such rituals are mainly illusory. Cannabis is the main hallucinogenic plant which Hashish is extracted from its gum and Marijuana from its stem and leaves. Its short-term effects are discoloration and activation of auditory and visual hallucinations, and long-term use of these compounds can lead to depression or schizophrenia. Another important hallucinogenic compound is LSD.

[†] Haoma

The immediate effects of its use are the flight mode, which appears within one hour after consumption and lasts for 8 to 12 hours. The person is not able to end this mode, the colors are brighter, newer sounds and movements and time it turns slower or faster. Other effects of its use are the integration of the senses (colors are heard and sounds are seen), it also reduces appetite, hot flashes, paranoid, chills, palpitations, dizziness and rapid breathing. (Kakhki, 2017) Such substances damage the brain's communication system and alter the way neurons send, receive, and process information. The effects of different drugs are not the same due to different chemical structures. Drugs affect the brain in at least two ways: 1. Imitation of the brain's natural chemical messengers. 2. Overstimulation of the reward circuit in the brain.

The chemical structure of some drugs, such as Marijuana and Heroin, is similar to the neurotransmitters that are naturally present in the body. In fact, these drugs trick the brain into serotonin receptors, attach to them, and activate nerve cells. However, drugs do not work as well as natural neurotransmitters, so neurons carry abnormal messages in the brain. Other drugs, such as Cocaine and Methamphetamine, cause nerve cells to produce large amounts of dopamine (a natural neurotransmitter) or prevent normal dopamine recycling. As a result, exaggerated messages are transmitted in the brain and problems arise in communication channels (Atkinson et al., 2006, vol. 1, pp. 233-240).

Calling such substances "Intoxicants", "Narcotics", "Psychoactive", "Dissociative‡", "Psychedelic§", "Hallucinogens" or "Psychosis" are related to their effects. In cases where a combination of these substances is used, it is very difficult to determine the type of effect. (Atkinson Ibid. P. 382 and, Brahini et al., 2006 The following psychedelic substance)

It seems that the combination of substances used in religious ceremonies, on the one hand, has a calming role and causes drowsiness, and on the other hand, intensifies the hallucinogenic power of the mind. Although there are natural ways to go into a state of semi-consciousness and trance, the use of psychedelics is actually an aggressive way to achieve relaxation or trance and the activity of the imagination. From the effects of using these psychotropic substances that are related to our discussion, four points are clear: 1- loss of personal identity and not feeling one's self. 2- feeling out of the body. 3- loss of time perception. 4- hallucination. 5. decreased concentration due to confusion. (Atkinson, *ibid.*, P. 383 and Spray et al., 1987, p. 93)

DMT, Mescaline, LSD, and Psilocybin are commonly considered psychedelics because of the changes they make to a person's identity and consciousness. Some, like Aldous Huxley, call them "Doors of Perception" which he thinks expands consciousness and reveals one's own mental or spiritual contents. Huxley sees it

‡ Effects of dissociative psychoactives: hallucinations, detachment from the environment, decreased sensory perception, and experience of dreamlike state. Many Dissociatives have sedative effects and can have sedative, analgesic, anesthetic, ataxic, slow-breathing, and amnesic effects. (Snyder, Solomon H. (1980).

"Phencyclidine". *Nature*. 285 (5764): 355–6.)

§ Psychedelic. A combination of "Psyche" meaning "mind" and "soul" and "de" meaning "facade" in Latin. Some people think that these materials reveal the content inside the soul.

as a means to break perceptual and mental constraints that the mind only needs them to understand this world. (Huxley, 2002 p. 23)

What is the mechanism and role of these substances in the possible creation of some supernatural perceptions?

The role of the human brain and mind cannot be ignored in supernatural perceptions. According to mystics, the brain is the means of domination of the soul over the body (Ebn Alarabi, No date, vol. 2, p. 337). The fact that the imagination pours meanings into the form of sensations is because the raw material of the imagination is the same as sensory data (Ibid, vol. 1, p. 14). This can show why the mystics have the same opinion as Ebn Sina in the role of imagination in revelation. Naturally, here is the mechanism of the intervention of the imagination and mental transfers, as stated by Ebn Sina. Because after receiving the spiritual truth by the soul from the unseen worlds and delivering it to the mind and specifically the imagination, it is time to formulate it using the occasions between each meaning with a mental form. These occasions are related to the human mental symbols and the mental contexts of the individual. (Ebn sina, 2007, PP. 460 - 462)

Therefore, it should be said that part of the mechanism of transcendental perceptions is related to the central nervous system and brain and the activity of mental powers, especially the power of imagination. That is, when a transcendental experience is to be reflected in the mind, the activity of the imagination is necessary to form a dream or a formal revelation (not a spiritual revelation and without a form). To experience the Exit of the soul, it is also necessary to disconnect from the external senses and not pay attention to the body. Also, having mind and psychological peace is one of the essential preconditions for soul-leaving experiences and other supernatural experiences. This is why -statistically- those who have gone through periods of relaxation are more likely to have voluntary experiences of the soul leaving the body. (Green, 1998, pp. 142 - 143)

Therefore, it can be said that substances that cause personality rupture and hallucinogenic substances or substances that cause relaxation, in short and in certain cases, can lead to some transcendental experiences in awakening. This means that consuming a mixture of sedatives, dissociative and hallucinogens can put a person in a state of severe lethargy, awakening and relative awareness. It separates him from the data of the senses and on the other hand activates the parts of the brain that are related to the imagination and increases the possibility of creating mental images by activating these parts and reducing natural consciousness and self-awareness and dreaming wide awake, the same mechanism that occurs in sleep that makes True Dream. A dream that is sometimes somehow in tune with reality. That is, by consuming these substances, a person is in a state between waking and sleeping, which may begin to see and hear things that are made by her own mind, but based on reality. The facts that the human soul understands, and its formulation is designed by his mind. This is similar to what is called "ecstasy" in mystical schools.

In mystical methods, in order for the soul to leave the body and to have supernatural perceptions, the brain and mind are first silenced by some means so that the soul can be separated from its mental world in the first stage after distancing itself from paying attention to the material world and then by repeating the Dhikr, its attention will draw to the transcendental worlds. Some psychedelics help the first part; It means peace of mind and separation from the senses. Therefore, in some very special cases and in very controlled situations and under the supervision of a master, these materials may be the basis for understanding the soul of the person to the transcendental worlds, but to the primitive stages of these worlds. As for the priests in Latin America, the use of Peyote mushroom (which contains Mescaline) is usually only the basis for drawing attention to the dimension of Jinns and wandering spirits. (Castaneda, 1986, p. 7)

The depth of sleep or ecstasy, the degree of intellectual and philosophical thinking of the individual, the degree of "negation of thoughts" and other factors like these in the experiencer, affect how the transcendental experience is formed. In fact, the main condition for achieving supernatural states is that the attention of the mind and soul and other inner layers of the individual, distance themselves from material and immoral belongings, and austerity to detach the world, he/she will cut off from material realm and realizes the conscience and holy place of the world. Such a person realizes the spiritual and sacred worlds by distancing himself from the external senses. Any factor that separates such a person from the external senses can connect him to the higher worlds. Hearing a pleasant spiritual song or pleasant music or attending a heartfelt prayer ceremony and even the beautiful song of a bird can have the same effect, without the harm of psychotropic substances.

As a result, having this kind of revelation and intuition requires sensory deprivation and distance from sensory data. Therefore, it can be said that any factor that distances the brain and the external senses can be a prelude to supernatural perceptions. Even in different people, based on physical and mental characteristics and habit or conditioning, a particular method is more effective. Relaxing and meditating, or conversely, spinning and gesturing, listening to music, repeating a word over and over (dhikr), being in a state of intense emotional arousal (such as conditions of sacred places and religious ceremonies), being in a dark and quiet place and the like can only provide the ground for the interruption of the external senses.

Problems using psychedelics in order to achieve supernatural perceptions

Imagination instead of increasing knowledge

As numerous experiments have shown, the main effect of consuming substances that are brain stimulating and psychoactive, is the intensification of thoughts, changing and exaggerations in the mental imaginations and beliefs of the individual. In fact, the type of effect of such substances on a person's perceptions is completely related to the mental and personality fields of the person and the rituals and environment in which it is consumed. And there is no conclusive evidence that these substances necessarily lead to the expansion of individual consciousness or the achievement of supernatural perceptions (Anzali, 2007, pp.

103-105). The use of these substances in religious ceremonies with specific religious purposes can intensify one's spiritual imagination and, conversely, in unfavorable mental conditions and in the absence of a spiritual guide can lead to a "Bad Trip"^{**}.

In any case, there is no guarantee of achieving transcendental realities. For example, by losing the concept of time, it cannot be said that the person is ontologically above the time limit. Because the real departure from time causes one to look at the past and the future and become aware of it, which usually does not happen with the use of these substances. Also, confusion and loss of personal identity does not mean that a person has gone beyond the place or out of her limited existence and has joined the infinite truth of existence, because each of these cases has signs and evidence that can be traced and investigated.

As psychedelics are not exactly the natural substances that should be consumed in the brain, the use of such substances, whether organic or synthetic, would be a completely riskful and reckless behavior. Because it disturbs the physical and mental balance, and by manipulating the brain, the natural activities of the mind, logic, and rationality are altered. Especially if the use of these substances becomes a habit. These substances are usually both enjoyable and addictive. Prolonged use of these substances can cause irreversible damage to the brain. Impairments such as slowness of thinking, delirium, and persistent perceptual disorders. (See Atkinson et al., 2006, vol. 1, p. 382)

In fact, in most cases, these substances do not separate the person from mental constraints, but a delusion, leads the person to the world of illusions or, in Don Juan's words, to the world of demons (Castaneda, 1986, pp. 7 and 8). Even if it is a prelude to a kind of dream or formal revelation directed towards reality, the revelations while using these materials are only related to the initial stages of revelation and intuition. In fact, the more complete stages of revelation, called "spiritual revelation" do not require the imagination of the imagination at all; But here the imagination is disturbing and must be completely disabled.^{††} This is why mystics insist that a person who has no control over his/her imagination should not be engaged in solitude, seclusion and forty^{‡‡} (Ebn Arabi, 2019, pp. 159 and 160). In fact, unbridled imagination not only has no epistemic benefit, but usually completely distorts the path of intuition. So in order to achieve revelation and intuition, more than anything, it is necessary to "negation of thoughts" and eliminate mental images, not to strengthen the power of illusion and imagination (Ibn Arabi, *ibid.*, P. 49). As the scholars have stated, the balance of temperament and mental health of the individual has the greatest impact on achieving enlightenment and intuition (Ebn Arabi, No date, vol. 1, pp. 16 and 167). The nature of the imagination is to transfer from one meaning and to another form

^{**} Bad trip: Temporary psychosis due to drugs and psychotropic substances is a distressing experience that is usually caused in high doses by psychotropic substances such as LSD, Mescaline, Psilocybin and DMT. The experience of a bad trip can take many forms and can range from a mild feeling of anxiety to severe panic seeing terrifying scenes and a complete loss of self-awareness (Wikipedia Stanislav Grof, LSD Psychotherapy).

^{††} Zen Buddhists do the same by disrupting the reasoning part of the brain by posing "quans," that is, irrelevant and unanswered questions, and ultimately achieving mindlessness (D.T. Suzuki, 1988, pp. 165-185)

^{‡‡} Forty-day ceremony related to Sofia, which is held with forty days of silence, seclusion and worship

and excessive activity of the imagination distorts the mental expression of the meaning revealed by the soul. Therefore, in cases where the imagination is too active, what is reflected in the common sense in exchange for the content of revelation will not be interpretable and recyclable. In this way, the problems that arise with the involvement of the imagination in the mental retelling of revelation are inevitable.

The experiment of putting a person in a state of sensory deprivation has also shown that any factor that causes sensory deprivation usually leads to the activation of the imagination. As proven in psychological experiments, living in silence and monotonous environmental conditions and sensory deprivation causes changes in perception of time and place and may cause delusions and hallucinations (Sotoudeh, 2002: 99). There exists a method, which is used by Sofia is called "solitude" and "seclusion", that is a less dangerous method. This method is done by placing the person in a small, quiet and dark environment with saying dhikr and worship for forty days. But there, too, this is done in a completely controlled way, and a skilled master, who even oversees the mind and thoughts of the person from afar, monitors the correct performance of the course, and if he sees that the illusion of the person is out of his control, the procedure will be terminated . (Kobra, 1989, 110 and 111)

The problem of lost identity

As mentioned, another consequence of using these substances, which is similar to mystical states, is the loss of personal identity. Many consumers believe that after consuming these substances, they lose their identity in such a way that they can not distinguish between themselves, the world and the environment. They sometimes feel one with another, nature or even an object (Huxley, 1986, p. 24). Those who are not familiar with the characteristics of supernatural states consider this state and feeling to be comparable to mystical or supernatural states. The fact that the person who uses psychedelics sometimes understands himself as one with objects or does not find an identity for himself apart from the environment is only caused by inactivation of the cortex or temporal loop, resulting in the temporary loss of personal identity.

This state is very different from the state of ecstasy or mystical annihilation. Because, first of all, the feeling of selflessness has no epistemic value in itself. That is, it does not add anything to one's knowledge and awareness. And secondly, the confusion and mental images after consuming these substances are usually not real and do not contain real data. This is while the feeling of oneness with the environment or the expansion of existence that occurs in near-death experiences (NDEs) or mystical states is real. Because it is related to the release of the soul from the shackles of the body, mind and brain, which makes a person become extremely aware of existence and even all around him. Therefore, mere loss of personal identity or immersion in ecstasy and semi-consciousness or feeling like hanging in the air is not the reason for achieving mystical ecstasy or causing higher levels of consciousness.

Leaving the soul without gaining knowledge

As mentioned, in order to depart the soul from the body, it would be useful to separate one with his/her senses. But with the actual departure of the soul from the body, one can understand the minds and thoughts of all the people who are there or see those who want to know about their situation and are not there or see everything while in complete darkness (Green, 1998, pp. 88-96). Even someone who has been born blind, has experienced complete vision in the experience of leaving the body, and has obtained complete information in the form of vision of his body and the environment, which the reason is that these situations are real (Documentary interview, *Life After Life*, April 28, 2021). In some cases, the use of psychotropic substances - due to its deterrent and inhibitory effect on the body - actually causes an autoscopic experience (OBE) and a feeling of leaving the body (Spray et al, 1987, p. 93), but usually this experience does not contain an increased knowledge and according to some reports, an untimely and unprepared departure will cause psychological damage. Separation from the body for the mystics, if accompanied by a journey to the spiritual heavens, was considered a positive behavior, but if it led to the seeker walking around the city and visiting people's homes, he/she would be severely punished by his/her master (Ebn Arabi, 1989, pp. 159-161).

Distortion of the intellect

Another drawback of such methods is that by destroying the power of thought and reasoning, at least temporarily, one becomes a psychopath who can make no connection between events, or distinguish between illusion and reality. Such a person, even if he has reached enlightenment and understood the true face of things, his daily life and social relations are disrupted, and he has no choice but to take refuge in a monastery in the mountains and live alone.

In fact, the main problem of such methods, especially the use of psychotropic substances, is that in these methods, as Huxley came to be, the path of perception changes and does not pass through the path of analysis and "Aristotelian Categories" and "Kant's Categories of comprehension", and in practice it falls into the well of illusions. This well is more dangerous than the pit of sensible and mental concepts, and it is more difficult to get rid of this well. The kinds of false beliefs and superstitions that exist between the small and large sects of the East and the West, and even the sanctity of idols or knowing God and the goddess of some people, come from here. It seems that a person intentionally suffers from mental imbalance and enjoys it and is so confident in it that sometimes he considers himself wise and others disturbed by reason. Even in the best of circumstances, these methods are very risky, that is, even with controlled consumption and under the supervision of someone who has a lot of experience in this field, with the loss of the power of logic and reasoning, in most cases, these people become isolated and mentally unbalanced people, with changed states of consciousness and with radical behavior that is not beneficial for themselves and society. Thus, although the human mind has limitations and can have constraints that make it impossible to stay in understanding the higher levels of existence, but these constraints are in harmony with life at this level of existence, and as long as man is at this level, he needs these constraints, and their

disappearance disrupts life at this level. Eliminating them with aggressive and shortcut methods causes many problems and does not necessarily lead to superior cognitions and perceptions.

Other problems

Other risks include "Bad Trip", loss of willpower, addiction, various sexual and mental disorders, digestive problems, liver and kidney problems, and damage to the heart, arteries and brain, as well as overdose of these substances. The last problem with the use of psychotropic substances is that with the weakening of the power of will and reasoning and the activation of the power of illusion, it is possible for the human mind to become a place of subtle creatures that can penetrate the human mind (and this article is not discussed).

Result

Only someone who is prepared to connect to the afterlife may understand a portion of the world of meaning by using certain psychotropic substances (depending on the type of effect). That is, substances that are lethal and hallucinogenic can be the ultimate factor for such a person to go to a state such as sleep or trance and at the same time realize the transcendental worlds and at the same time wake up to the truths of those worlds in the form of seeing or hearing or cause facts in the form of familiar mental symbols to be created and processed by his imagination and represented for him.

But in any case, being transferred to the transcendental worlds using these substances is only a possibility, and one will certainly not be safe from the harms of these substances. The least of these harms is the excessive activity of the imagination, which makes it impossible to control it from the subconscious mind of the person, and if the correct information is produced in the illusion, it will be mixed with unrealistic visual and auditory perceptions, etc.

The secretion of a certain amount of a substance like DMT and the like into a specific part of the human brain is a physiological precondition, and part of the natural mechanism for achieving ecstasy and transcendental perceptions. However, using substances for which neither the dosage nor the method of consumption and its short-term and long-term effects are known is a risky method. The mental and psychological contexts of the consumer are also quite effective in the type of impact, and therefore it is not possible to make a general comment about the correctness of perceptions while consuming these substances. In fact, religious practices, Forty, dhikr, etc. are a natural and low-risk way to reach revelation and spiritual experiences.

The natural and non-invasive way to depart the soul from the body and to reach the exodus of the body, and thus to attain superior and metaphysical consciousness, is to weaken the relationship between soul and body. This decrease in the relationship between the soul and the body must go through a natural path, and first with austerity, attention and interest in the body will gradually decrease, and with it, through prayer and repetition of holy names, the soul will reach the kingdom. With the "negation of thoughts" and attention to the

sanctity of the universe, the physiology of the brain changes in a long process, and a person can be voluntarily cut off from the external senses. In this case, the superior senses are activated by the will of the person. He gradually becomes accustomed to understanding transcendental truths and beyond time and space, and becomes accustomed to spiritual life in other worlds, without being disturbed by life in his world; Or she distances herself from society for a while and seeks solitude under the supervision of a perfect master, and returns to society after completing her perceptual and spiritual powers. Here the presence of an experienced teacher comes first. In fact, this is the shortcut, not the use of psychotropic substances.

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