

Pasatiempo



PSYCHEDELIC PRAYER

Do not assume that, just because he edited a popular volume on the connections between the states of consciousness achieved through Buddhist meditation and psychedelic drug use, writer and editor Allan Badiner is an advocate of using chemicals as a path to experiencing altered states. Badiner's book *Zig Zag Zen*, recently released in a new edition, is full of testimonials that describe psychedelic experiences, but the book is not the final word on the topic. It was written in recognition of the commonalities between Buddhism and psychedelics that bear further exploration. Badiner, now sixty-four, had his first acid trip only two years ago, and his first experience with a psychoactive substance (psilocybin) came years after his discovery of Buddhism. "In most cases," he told *Pasatiempo*, "it would come the other way around."

First published 15 years ago, *Zig Zag Zen* arose from a group discussion after a dharma talk at Plum Village Mindfulness Practice Centre in southern France, a retreat center founded by Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, teacher, and author Thich Nhat Hanh. Badiner has been a student of Thich Nhat Hanh's for close to 30 years. "The subject that day was drugs and intoxicants, presumably so everybody could talk about how bad they were," Badiner said. "What was interesting was that, among the 18 or so students that were there, everyone had a very fascinating story to tell. It ranged from hallucinatory experiences all the way to life-changing events. [Psychedelic drugs] had, in most cases, some role to play in their coming to Buddhism."

But what exactly is it that draws people who have used mind-altering chemicals like psilocybin, a naturally occurring substance in several species of mushroom, or lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) to Buddhism? It is not because Buddhists, in general, use these substances regularly. In fact, most don't. The answers come from a variety of sources, all authorities in their chosen fields. Badiner selected a number of essays and interviews by well-known authors and Buddhist practitioners, such as visionary artist Alex Grey (who edited the art for the book), spiritual teacher and author Ram Dass, who participated in a round-table discussion with Badiner and others (a transcript of which is published in the book), poet Rick Fields, and author Jack Kornfield. In his discussion with Robert Forte of the California Institute of

Integral Studies, Kornfield states that "psychedelics are found rarely, if at all, in the Buddhist tradition, and generally would be lumped in the precepts under 'intoxicants.'" But in describing his own experience with psychoactive substances, Kornfield says, "I took LSD and other psychedelics at Dartmouth after I started studying Eastern religion. They came hand-in-hand, as they did for many people."

One of the experiences common to Buddhism and psychedelic states is the sense of at-one-ness with

others and with the world around you. With psychoactive substances, the experience comes on suddenly; in Buddhist practice, this sense of harmony, of connectedness, comes through disciplined meditation. "One of the contributors to the new edition is a fully ordained Zen monk, Kokyo Henkel," Badiner said. "He has a conversation with James Fadiman, who's an academic who has been around the [psychedelic research] scene for a long time. I only learned of it later, but Kokyo had reached some pretty high states in Buddhism and then explored psychedelics as a way to revisit them. You sense from what he has to say that he treats it with respect and cautions people on making sure they're supported afterwards so they can integrate the experience." Experimenting with psychedelics may have peaked among young people in the 1960s and '70s, but drug use in rituals and religious practices goes back thousands of years. One difference between casual use of LSD in order to get high and more traditional, ritualized use is that the former doesn't necessarily have the societal support mechanisms in place to help a person integrate the experience into their worldview. But the effects are powerful. People taking LSD or psilocybin might not ever look at the world in quite the same way as they did before. "My own experience was very limited,"

Badiner said. "I was suspicious. I lived through the '60s, and all of my friends were on acid half the time and I was not. I was as wild as they were, but decided against taking this stuff from a lab I knew nothing about, that didn't have a history of use. When I finally did explore psychedelics, it was in the form of psilocybin in mushrooms. It felt safer that way. There was this real sense of belonging to the earth and not feeling like some kind independent body bag roaming around on it, but actually a part of it. It was a profound sense of integration."

Badiner drew a parallel between his mushroom use and his early experiences with Buddhist meditation. "My first experience with Buddhism was at a retreat in Sri Lanka at a Theravadan monastery. It was a miserable experience. Every bone in my body ached forever. We ate stewed greens at six in the morning and the same stewed greens for lunch, and no food until the next morning. It was a severe experience. Toward the end, though, all the pain just disappeared, and I had this realization that I was connected to everything and I felt so peaceful and happy. Other people were responding



Sukhi Barber: *Ebb and Flow*, 2014, bronze; opposite page, Android Jones: *Dharma Dragon*, 2012, digital print

continued on Page 24

REFLECTIVE IMAGES
JEWELRY
DESIGNER • ETHICAL SOURCES • HANDMADE

1-888-733-5238
912 BACA ST. M-F: 9-5:30 SAT: 10-5:30

Need an Audiologist? We hear you!

- Only locally owned and operated Audiology practice in the Santa Fe area
- Full audiology services from diagnostic hearing testing to hearing aid sales and service
- Offering hearing screening, tinnitus evaluation and hearing aid repair
- Lowest prices – we'll beat any price in town, guaranteed!

Kelly Heyman, AuD

Call **505-466-7526**
for an appointment
www.eldoaudiology.com
5 Caliente Rd. #5 • In Village Office Condominiums
Next To La Tienda Mall

Eldorado
AUDIOLOGY & HEARING CENTER

Joe's
dining

Chill...
with Joe's
Homemade
Campari
Grapefruit
Sorbet

471-3800
joesdining.com
Rodeo Rd at Zia
Open 7 days a week all day
7:30am - 9:00pm

Locally-Sourced,
European-Influenced
and
Utterly Delicious
American Comfort Food

JEWELS FOR
THE KING AND QUEEN
IN ALL OF US...

The Golden Eye
SINCE 1977

115 DON GASPAR - BETWEEN SAN FRANCISCO & WATER ST.
505.984.0040 • 800.784.0038 • WWW.GOLDENEYESANTAFE.COM

Zig Zag Zen, continued from Page 23

to me differently in the sense that they wanted to engage me a lot more. I thought, 'There's something going on here.' This meditative glow lasted for a while. After my first mushroom experience, I had a similar experience. The heartfulness was more pronounced in the result from the retreat, I think."

Badiner wasn't alone. Many of the same people who talked about Buddhism, Eastern philosophy, and meditation were also discussing psychedelics, including *The Way of Zen* author Alan Watts and poet Allen Ginsberg. "In terms of the original book where I was talking to all these significant writers and personalities, this was the first time these two subjects were considered together in a single book, which I thought was curious even then." Badiner's title came from a drawing of a pack of Zig Zag cigarette papers he saw in a guest book at California's Tassajara Zen Mountain Center. "There's definitely commonalities at various levels between exploring the path of Buddhism as a way of cultivating oneself and using psychedelics with the intention of having an experience that's positive and beneficial and not just entertaining. But, ironically, a lot of

Allan Badiner's book *Zig Zag Zen*, recently released in a new edition, is full of testimonials that describe psychedelic experiences.

people have had very powerful, life-changing experiences, even though they first took it for entertainment reasons; they just thought they'd get high or have a trip and they didn't have the intention to reach higher states of consciousness, but that's what manifested. I hear that a lot."

A psychedelic experience, like a religious experience, can be difficult to describe in words. Even such concepts as being at one with the world exist, perhaps for most, only as an intellectual idea until one has the experience. "If it takes you to a meaningful place of awareness, a place where you have an extraordinary vision of yourself in the world and the world itself, you're experiencing a great deal of insight and connection to life; you're experiencing what a lot of people would call 'a vision from the mountaintop.' This was quite common in the '60s and '70s." The art selected for the book is intended to show the similarities between Buddhism and psychedelics. Alex Grey's *Tears of Joy*, for instance, depicts a face whose third eye is open, and a sense of full awareness of being is symbolized by numerous eyes covering the entire face and expanding into the space the central figure inhabits. The symmetrical appearance of many of the works of visionary art Grey selected for inclusion mirror traditional depictions of Buddhist art in their compositions. "Aside from trying to convey information in a non-verbal way, it was to show the connection viscerally," Badiner said.

So far, *Zig Zag Zen* has managed to avoid controversy regarding the links the book draws between religious practice and illicit drug use. "I was hoping the book would be lambasted from right to left and all the more conservative Buddhists with a capital B would be screaming from the top of their altar about what a transgression this is, because all of that would be good for book sales. None of that transpired. Instead, the Buddhist community went 'Yep. Uh-huh. What else?'" If many Buddhist practitioners in the West came to the tradition as an outgrowth of psychedelic drug use, this casual acceptance makes sense. Badiner related to *Pasatiempo* a story about Zen teacher Robert Aiken. "People would experiment with psychedelics and then try to find a more sustainable, practical way to get to those high places without taking anything. In the '60s, they were crowding into his zendo in Maui. Half of them were high and half of them weren't. They had to make a rule, finally, that you had to be straight to come into the zendo. But people were playing with those edges. 'Can I get there by a disciplined practice of sitting meditation?' They'd had a vision of what it might be like to get to the top of the mountain. They had a sense of this is where we want to go, this is something to work for, this is something that, if we have to sit on the cushion for years practicing mindfulness, if it gets us there, it is worth it." ◀

The new edition of "*Zig Zag Zen: Buddhism and Psychedelics*," edited by Allan Badiner and Alex Grey, was published in May 2015 by Synergetic Press.