

Entheogens in the Himalayan Foothills

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Abstract

Reporting a miraculous week of entheogens and sadhus in a temple in the montane jungle of the Himalayan foothills in 1972.

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1. Introduction

In the Fall of 1968 I arrived in Santa Cruz, California, to begin a tenured position as Associate Professor of Mathematics at the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC). My first three years there were dominated by two opposite programs: political actions regarding academic freedom and civil rights at UCSC, and the hip cultural (and psychedelic) revolution in downtown Santa Cruz. During this time I lived in a twenty-four room Victorian mansion with an extended family. As hippies, we were very involved with spiritual and mystical ideas and literature, such as the books of Gurdjieff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* and *In Search of the Miraculous*. We hosted many short term visitors with similar interests, such as Baba Ram Dass. I then found it convenient to go on extended leave for two and a half years. During the 1971/72 academic year I was living in Amsterdam, teaching catastrophe theory in the university. As the school year came to a close, I decided to go to India for the Summer of 1972, despite the monsoon season, to seek out gurus and ashrams. I happened across Ram Dass in the basement of the Kosmos (a center for spiritual seekers), who gave me instructions for finding his guru, Neem Karoli Baba in India. I was to find my way to the Evelyn Hotel in Nainital, and await a contact. Nainital is a Himalayan resort town surrounding a small lake, at an altitude of 6.500 feet, somewhat like Lake Tahoe in California. It is part of the Kumaon region of Uttar Pradesh (present day Uttarakhand), a region of montane jungle, famous for man-eating tigers.

Thus, the evening of Tuesday, June 20, found me in Old Delhi, at the train station, seeking transportation to Nainital, A third class train departing at 4 am would get me to Moradabad for four and a half Rupees (about 50 US cents). A distance of 100 miles, it took 9 hours, and immersed me in Indian culture for the first time: medieval desert villages, animals. families, local food, all seen through the open window of a tightly packed third class train. After a bus for a few miles to Haldwani in the Nainital district bordering the Kumaon hills, a collective taxi 20 miles to Nainital village, and a short hike, I arrived at the Evelyn Hotel around 9 pm. From Delhi it had taken 17 hours and about \$2. Thus, on Wednesday, June 21, I arrived at the hotel, seeking a guru called Neem Karoli Baba, awaiting a miracle. Soon I was contacted by some of his devotees, and it was arranged that I could visit the temple the next day. Early in the morning on Thursday, June 22, I went with a group by taxi the 25 miles to his secluded ashram and temple in Kainchi.¹

Here I remained for most of the second half of 1972, as the story is told in *Love Everyone*.² The first two weeks were full of miracles,. I disappeared from the ashram scene for a stay in the jungle near Dinapani, a village near Almora, 40 miles from Nainital, then returned to Kainchi. After returning, Neem Karoli set me on a study project on the Sanskrit literature on vibrations in cosmic consciousness, a theory of the interconnections of the several planes of individual and collective mind, which has occupied me ever since, resulting in some twenty papers and a book. Here I write the story for the first time of

¹See Kainchi Aashram website.

²Markus, 2015; pp. 204–205)

the week from Thursday, June 22, through Friday, June 30, inclusive, based on my aging hand-written journal of that time.

2. Dinapani

Following my first day at the Kainchi ashram, June 22, I felt that I should move on. The scene of the devotees and devotions made me uncomfortable. I did not understand at first that some kind of telepathic conversation connected the people seated in a circle around Neem Karoli. I yearned for something more solitary. some direct inspiration along the lines of my readings and psychedelic trips in Santa Cruz.

After returning from that first day in Kainchi to the Evelyn Hotel, a jungle yogi approached me. He was drinking tea, dressed in a simple, clay-stained robe, A 23-year old Canadian called Sambhu, he had been living in a cave in the jungle near Almora for two years but had to leave it. The villagers living nearby supported him and three other jungle babas as it was believed they brought prosperity to the village, which consisted of just a few houses and two tea shops. He said that I had been chosen to replace him, and gave me instructions for traveling to his cave. I was to take the bus to Almora, then walk 3 miles through the jungle to Dinapani, and seek out the head man, Prem Singh, at his tea house. Following Sambhu's instructions, I transformed myself into a jungle yogi look-alike. I gave away all my possessions, bought a brown robe, a blanket, and a small shoulder bag for my journal, pen, sewing kit, tooth brush, and LSD stash, ready to set off on the bus to Almora.

The monsoon was raging, roads were flooded, and there were many mudslides. Every day I would go to the bus terminal, only to find out that there was no bus, the road was closed. Finally, on Sunday, June 25, I got a bus in Nainital for Almora via Ranikhet, but after a short ride it halted as there had been a new mud slide. We all stepped off the bus, and I was amazed to see that we were at the entrance to Neem Karoli's temple. I went inside, and Neem Karoli asked Jai, one of the devotees, to guide me to Almora. He gave me a large plastic bag of cracked wheat gruel for my trip.

Jai took me on a hike through the jungle circumnavigating the mudslide, and we boarded a bus to Almora on the other side. He left the bus at Ranikhet. Due to the delay, I arrived in Almora late, around 7 pm. Several people left the bus there. One, carrying a long rifle, said he was a disciple of Jim Corbett, the author of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*. A local person had been killed by a tiger, and this man had been called to sit in a tree over the corpse hoping to shoot the tiger.

In the light of a full moon, I followed two men along a path into the jungle. Soon they disappeared into a side path, and I carried straight on, hoping for good luck. I could not stop to rest for fear of the man-eating tiger. Eventually the path branched, and I hesitated, trying to decide which way to go. At once, a man popped out from behind a tree. Telling me that he was from the Wisdom Garden School, he said *This way sahib. This way to*

Dinapani. Following his pointing hand, I walked on.

Around 10 pm I heard very soft voices. Following the sound, I found three English freaks in a tea house. They took me home for the night. On the porch of their large stone house, I mused on the concert of birdsong and crickets, and the occurrence of synchronicity in their symphony and in all that had happened to me since leaving Amsterdam. I slept well on the porch in my new blanket.

In the morning, Monday, June 26, I walked on a short way and arrived at the village of Dinapani. The local people seemed to be expecting me, and took me to Prem Singh's tea shop. He asked me some penetrating questions about my motivation, then directed his son Aram to guide me to my cave. After a two mile walk he left me at the side of a small river.

3. The cave

Soon I was approached by Cornelio, a scantily dressed jungle yogi who seemed to be expecting me. Sambhu had told me there were four caves and a small temple under construction at this location, known as Ganga Sagar Mandir. The other yogis, Cornelio, Alessandro, and Len, were muni, that is, practicing non-speaking yoga. Cornelio silently led me to a very small open cave. I spread my blanket, and fell asleep.

In the morning, Tuesday, June 27, I awoke to voices that seemed to sound inside my head. There was nobody nearby. I was told that food had arrived, and I should come to the duni, a small stone fire pit and platform near the river. Two men from the village had brought food. I learned that each morning they brought food and charas (hashish). Our job was to eat, smoke, and perform puja to Siva every day. In fact, smoking charas was considered there as a form of Siva worship. Under the full moon this night, Cornelio, Alessandro, and I dropped acid by the fire. I awoke the next morning with my bare legs covered by leeches.

Every day began with a wash in the river including clothing, a cup of tea in the cave before sunrise, then to the temple around 9 am. Puja included swimming in the river, in which there was an underwater lingam, a sacred object of Siva. I kept the fire going and smoked hash in my chillum, while the yogis marched about in the jungle performing puja. From the duni I could see that they moved in perfect synchrony, although that could not see each other. I had never smoked much cannabis, but in these few days I inhaled enough for a lifetime. Three days passed in this pattern, June 27, 28, and 29.

Meanwhile I was receiving instructions experientially in mathematical models of consciousness. The central ideas were of vibrations and resonance between parallel levels. Years later I learned that these ideas had been studied extensively in a branch of medieval Sanskrit philosophy called Kashmiri Shaivism, and I devoted a book to this philosophy, written jointly with quantum theorist Sisir Roy.

My personal course in miracles soon came to an end. Voices in my head every night

demanded that I leave my cave and return to Kainchi. There were also some physical discomforts. Only when I promised to leave next morning would the voices and pains stop, and I could sleep. But in the morning I would change my mind, and the cycle would repeat.

But on Friday, June 30, while my two companions were away and I was working at my job with my fire and chillum, I saw a small figure in the distance. As it came closer, I saw it was a fierce looking jungle yogi in rags and dreads, carrying a brass bucket. This turned out to be Durga Chaitanya, from California, whom I had met in Nainital. Silently he sat next to me at the duni, sharing the chillum. After some time he turned to me and explained he had been sent on a journey by Neem Karoli, and had a message for me. I was to return to Kainchi. He said he was going to leave at once, and I was to follow him. Which I did. With my little bag and my blanket, we strode off into the jungle. Eventually the path branched, he pointed to the right, and turned to the left. After some hours, I found myself in a village, where i could catch a bus to Nainital. I arrived home around 3 pm.

4. Back at the ashram and the aftermath

On Saturday, July 1, I returned to the ashram. Neem Karoli was calling for the professor from California. He then gave me some texts on vibrations and consciousness. These included the Bhagavad Gita, the Mahabaratha, the four Vedas, and Yoga Vasistha. I was given the name Vasishtha, and later renamed Veda Vyasa.

For the next five months I studied these texts, and tried to conform the mystical writings with my own transcendental experiences. With the aid of Kedarnath and (so it seemed) instructions from Neem Karoli delivered in my dreams, I retranslated some of the Sanskrit proper nouns. One of these terms, *akasha*, I interpreted as an immaterial field connecting all of the 36 tattvas (levels) of the Kashmiri model of cosmic consciousness.

Returning to California in 1973, I continued these studies, and my proper mathematical research turned into new directions. In 1974 I created a fluid dynamics lab to study chaotic vibrations, including an instrument for the visualization of vibrations in transparent fluids called the macroscope.

It was not until 2006 when I returned to India on a Fulbright grant and stopped at the Ramakrisna Mission in Kolkata that I discovered the Sanskrit literature of Kashmiri Shivaism on spanda (vibrations) and models of consciousness. Amazingly, my Siva puja (hashish smoking) in a cave in 1972 had given me a precognition of my study of shaivism in 2006, and a book on the akashic vibrations in 2010.

Neem Karoli had brilliantly prescribed the information that I needed for a new direction in my mathematical work. And also, he correctly predicted that I would propagate these ideas, higher consciousness and vibrations according to the yogis, in the West.

5. Conclusion: cannabis as entheogen

In the Himalayan foothills, jungle babas harvest charas in the wild. They rub cannabis plants with their palms, and roll the oil into a ball called a guli. Sadhus sometimes wear these gulis in their hair. A bit of the charas is pulled from the guli and put into a ritual pipe, called a chillum. Inhaling the smoke may be preceded by an invocation, such as *Ba Boom, Siva, Boom Shankar*. To this day, smoking the chilum is regarded in India as puja to Siva. It is possible that Gordon Wasson was wrong, and Soma is actually cannabis.³ In any case, properly used, it is an effective entheogen in my experience.

My casual smoking of cannabis in California had never provided me with a spiritual experience, as I had discovered with LSD. But given the set and setting of a Siva temple in the Himalayas, steeped for centuries in the ritual use of the chillum with local charas, cannabis is indeed entheogenic. In these sacred sessions, the spiritual wisdom of the ages descends down the great chain of being from the akasha to us.

³An exhaustive case for this thesis, comparable in scope to that of Gordon Wasson, is presented in (Bennett, 2010).

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Photos and Maps



Figure 1: Nainital, 1972.



Figure 2: Santa Cruz, 1974. My Nainital outfit.



Figure 3: Santa Cruz, 1974. Tabla study.



Figure 4: Santa Cruz, 1974. Macroscope Lab at UCSC.



Figure 5: Santa Cruz, 1975. Visual Math Lab at UCSC.



Figure 6: My chillum, 43 years later.



Figure 7: India, with circle about Uttarakhand.