

## PERSPECTIVE ON BURNING MAN

# BEYOND BELIEF — EXACTLY!

*By "Sam", an underground psychedelic therapist*

This year's Burning Man theme, *Beyond Belief*, asks us to enter a new and larger vision. This larger vision should address the individual, the Burning Man community, and the culture at large. I'd like to share a few of my observations regarding Burning Man, and the visions that came out of that.

I just loved Burning Man, and I have great respect and admiration for the way Burning Man was organized and the way ALL the different helpers worked, by themselves and as a group. I also see that it would be the perfect place to do more "hands on" psychedelic therapy, and to move beyond the beliefs of the larger culture. For this reason, I really think MAPS should be more visible.

I'd like to illustrate my points by sharing this story with you. When I came home from Burning Man, my son and his friends told me about a high school buddy of theirs who had been to Burning Man and had a very bad experience. This friend, who's 25 years old and a very experienced tripper, had taken liquid acid. His trip developed into a two-day, two-night nightmare. He was terrified of the Rangers, medics, cops, and other authorities. He had strange physical symptoms, hellish visions, and feelings of paranoia for 48 hours. He's now back home in North Carolina, but according to his high school buddies, he's "weird." He's not like he used to be, and still afraid for no apparent (to him and his friends) reason. Now, if he had heard of MAPS, and known that trained and experienced people were available in a very safe space, he or his friends might have searched us out. I'm absolutely certain that in this situation we could have been of great help.

Our way of working with psychedelic emergencies is, in most cases, almost the opposite of what the very talented and caring helpers are doing at Burning Man. We see a powerful, mindblowing, crazy experience as an opening, an invitation to go in and work with the material that emerges. It's not something people need to be talked out of, or assured that it's just a short episode that will fade away and be gone forever.

After over 30 years of working with psychedelics, I engage the person having the emergency, welcoming the situation as an opportunity to do needed investigations, expressions, and healings. So the situation gets turned around and we can guide people, educate them, and point them in a direction that's empowering. Then they can take this experience from Burning Man and bring it back into their lives.

At Burning Man and the other two events where I've worked with MAPS, even the promoters have tried to downplay, discount, and/or discredit the use of psychedelics. By doing that they also feed the War on Drugs. Therefore, our other goal must be a re-education towards a holistic understanding regarding the use of all psychedelics. We must educate people at these events about the ancient healing, visionary, initiatory, and ritualistic use of psychedelics. Our education would also draw on modern consciousness research and the psychedelic therapies that have been established during the last 40 years.

"Beyond Belief" was this year's theme of Burning Man. I understand that as a call not just to re-examine our own myths, stories, and beliefs, but also to help transform the beliefs, myths, and old stories of our culture. Many of these outdated stories and beliefs are based on relentless propaganda telling us the psychedelic experience is evil or simply useless.

There is a critical need for more and better education, research, and visibility. MAPS is doing a great service in these areas, so keep up the good work. ■