

Celebrate LSD and Albert Hofmann in January

MAPS President Rick Doblin Interviews Conference Organizer Dieter Hagenbach

This January, MAPS will be sending a crew of researchers to Basel, Switzerland for a symposium on LSD to celebrate the 100th birthday of Albert Hofmann. The conference hosts an amazing lineup of over 50 speakers including Stanislav Grof Ph.D., Ram Dass, the Shulgin's, Alex Grey and Albert Hofmann himself. MAPS President Rick Doblin will be speaking, as will researchers Michael Mithoefer M.D., John Halpern M.D., Charles Grob M.D. and Valerie Mojeiko. The symposium will present an in-depth review of all aspects of LSD: informing and discussing history, experiences, implications, and assessing risks and benefits.

Following is an interview with the conference's organizer, Dieter Hagenbach conducted by MAPS President Rick Doblin. Doblin and Hagenbach discuss the conference, Hofmann, and thoughts on the future of psychedelics.

Hagenbach, born in 1943, studied architecture and art before beginning a career as a bookseller and publisher, and later as a literary agent and publicist. He is director of the Gaia Media Foundation, a non-profit organization which strives to convey a holistic and up-to-date understanding of the potential of the human consciousness using electronic media, lectures, exhibitions, and symposiums.

Rick Doblin: What do you hope to accomplish with the conference?

Dieter Hagenbach: A much-needed broader understanding about what LSD is, what it did, and what it did not, what it influenced, and the impact it has made—in the arts, in music, society, science, politics, etc—All this for the benefit of both the audience (experts and interested lay persons) and the media.

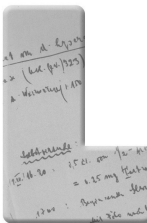

RD: What motivated you personally to undertake the major amount of work that a conference of this magnitude will require?

DH: As mentioned in our announcement, LSD has been, still is, and will always be a challenge. The reasons and explanations why are so manifold that I can't name them all.

On a professional level, as a publisher and as the founder of the Gaia Media Foundation, the human consciousness and evolution have always fascinated me. That's one motivation for the symposium we are staging. It's also certainly the personal experiences with LSD, which eventually led me to a much better understanding of myself and the rest of the world and the universe. Experiences which gave me, along with meditation, yoga, and other practices, unique and incomparably deep insights, which only to outline would take much more time and space; especially the notorious, but after all life-changing, "religious" experience. So that's another motivation.

Last but not least, it's my long friendship with Albert Hofmann, and the countless wonderful and rewarding conversations we had from back in the 1970s up to now, as well as the editing and publishing his book "Insights—Outlooks". Or the many occasions when I saw him at his home with people

THE SPIRIT OF BASEL





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like William S. Burroughs, R. Gordon Wasson, Ann and Sasha Shulgin, to name just a few. Of course, this has been shaping my life and my work, and is still another motivation to organize a symposium about LSD, something which, quite naturally, leads far beyond those 3 letters . . .

RD: What do you think it is about Albert that he has inspired so many people?

DH: I don't think that I am the right person to answer this question. I would say it's his really big heart, his curiosity for life and the universe in general, the way he went from a scientist, i.e. a chemist at Sandoz, to a philosophically inspiring person, a wise human being, another "Old Man from the Mountain" . . .

RD: Assuming you could conduct any sort of research you wanted to with LSD and with psilocybin, what would it be?

DH: I would want an increase of, and the appropriate support on all levels and from all sides for the research which has started (and subsequently been suppressed) since the discovery of LSD. From the early experiments and studies in Canada, at Harvard, and in Prague, to the present-day research and studies planned in Switzerland and the US. As to private "research" I'd wish for more—and much needed—competent information, education, and guidance, which would finally allow safety and legal use of this most potent of all psychoactive substances.

RD: Basically, Western culture stomped on mystery ceremonies with psychedelics about 1600 years ago when the Eleusinian Mysteries were shut down by the Catholic Church. Ever since, psychedelics have been kept underground, except for a brief period in the 20th century when psychedelic research flowered before being shut down again. Do you think that we really have a good chance now of integrating these experiences and substances into legal frameworks, or is the human species still not ready?

DH: I would say that the human species always used and was always ready for psychedelics. There's clear evidence in almost every culture throughout human history, and this is mentioned and outlined in hundreds of books and papers. But humanity and culture has always been the subject of manipulation and thus suppression. So we always have a good chance, again and again!



Albert Hofmann and conference organizer Dieter Hagenbach pose in Albert's garden.

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