

# Why Do I Take Psychedelics?

**Daniel Elder**

A FEW MONTHS AGO, I had a moment of terrifying doubt that was in turn part of a turbulent sequence in my life. Every moment found me asking myself that most eternal question, “Who am I?” For so long, I had used psychedelics as a guiding tool, a way of defragmenting my overloaded mental hard drive in order to gain a clarity of perspective on myself in the larger scheme of things. But now, disconnected from my love who was halfway across the world on her own adventure, and from my father who had supported me for so long, in a moment when guidance was my greatest need, I began to doubt whether anything could help me, even psychedelics. I thought of them often, and I began to ask myself, “*Why do I take psychedelics at all?*”

I have always found it beneficial to go into any psychedelic experience with a focused question on the mind.

I took out my few remaining psilocybin-containing mushrooms and pondered them. Though it may seem counter-intuitive, I soon came to understand that the clearest way to ask that question and receive an answer was to ingest them. I have always found it beneficial to go into any psychedelic experience with a focused question on the mind. While I never receive an answer in clear plain English, in the days following the experience I come to understand how the experience held relevance to the question in my mind. Sometimes I forget the question once the trip takes hold, but then the next morning I realize that the hours spent contemplating a penny did indeed show me how to understand and come to terms with the dualities of our human existence, for example.

For all that I had asked these substances in the past—and I am indeed a well-traveled psychonaut—it had never occurred to me before to ask them of themselves. But now, in my darkest moment, it was all that I could think to ask. I set a kettle to boil and arranged my apartment for the trip with low lights and

calming music. I sat and cleared my mind of all but the question at hand. The kettle whistled and I brewed the mushrooms into a tea, sipping it slowly.



The question slipped slowly out of my mind as the sensory aspects of the experience became gradually overwhelming. I slowed my breath to calm my quickening heartbeat and tried not to let myself become too distracted by the visual flurries that began to permeate the physical world around me. I grew heavier, and, completely overwhelmed, sank to the floor. I

My experiences have  
taught me that  
psychedelics can be  
important tools,  
and that—  
like any tools—  
your intentions  
affect the outcome  
of your using  
them.

lay there, staring at the ceiling for an eternity, feeling a gentle yet pressing urgency grow. I knew I had to close my eyes, and did.

I had asked the mushrooms why I ever took them. In the confusion surrounding that question, I hadn't stopped to consider that it was the mushrooms who would take me.

With eyes closed, I set out upon a journey. From a first-person perspective, I zoomed throughout my own body. There were the insides of my hands, there was my thumping heart. There, my stomach, churning. There, my lungs, rhythmic. And there, the base of my spine, like the foot of some great Incan temple.

**I began to ascend.**

I climbed the steps of my spine, and on either side I saw my life. The faces of my family encouraged me, as did friends both current and long lost. Work, love, longing, despair, every emotion I experienced and every facet of my life expressed itself in the manifestation of shapes and colors. The staircase shook as I climbed higher and higher, and bursting fireworks of color exploded up beyond the peak like some chemical volcano. At the center of these explosions, some glowing thing was spinning gyroscopically. The object grew until finally I was before it and it was as if I had fallen to my knees on the mountaintop. There at last.

Upon lifting my eyes I saw that the glowing object was a molecule. It did not matter which one it was. It was not any molecule; it was every molecule. I watched it for what felt like a lifetime, rotating and glowing, and felt as if I was looking upon the face of the godhead. I rose, and turned to let my eyes follow the tendrils I saw running away from it. They ran like a web and bonded to all the things I had passed on my journey to this altar inside my mind. Ropes of energy connected all the aspects of my life, each to the molecule, and each to one another, and I saw that one of them ran directly to me as well.

I had been so alone, so lost, when I embarked on the journey. And yet here was the answer to my lonely question.

The experience reminded me that all things are connected, and that sometimes loneliness and despair can be a sort of hubris. To think one is alone, at any point, is an affront to the interconnected nature of all things. It was humbling and gratifying to see and understand that the smallest of things, this psilocybin molecule ingested into my body, could reveal to me the connections that were always there but that I had somehow forgotten.

When I finally opened my eyes, I could not for the life of me remember what loneliness felt like. The world around me, which I had felt so withdrawn from, seemed now to be connected to every fiber of my being. My sleep that night was among the most peaceful that I have ever known.

Yet, it has taken time for me to learn the true lesson imparted to me by this experience. It has been eight months since that night. In that time, I have become a voracious reader of drug- and drug policy-related literature. I am coming to understand that, as Terence McKenna once said,

“The mind rests upon a foundation of chemical machinery. This is not to say that the mind is chemical machinery.”

I find myself feeling more strongly now about the need for drug law and policy reform than I have ever felt a drive for before. It has become my life's passion to work toward educating society at large about the safe and responsible manner in which psychedelics can be ingested to gain insight into ourselves and our relationship with the world around us, and about the difference between drug use and drug abuse. My experiences have taught me that psychedelics can be important tools, and that—like any tools—your intentions affect the outcome of your using them. I can only hope and strive toward my goal: that in my lifetime, I will see the stigma against these substances torn down so that people may gain both medicinal and spiritual benefits from these powerful molecules that have been unfairly demonized for so long.

Why do I take psychedelics? It turned out that the answer is in the question, and I will never cease to ask it. •