

## Journey to Awakening

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**In early Spring of 1994**, while barely a teenager, I was living with my family in a tent on the outskirts of Bosnia. A violent siege the previous year had left the city in ruins. All that remained were bombed out silhouettes of a once robust community. The atmosphere was bleak and fog blanketed most of the valley.

I awoke one morning, just before sunrise, and sought out my older brother, Dmitri. “Come, let us walk,” Dmitri said. So I took my first steps into the unknown. A little ways down the path, Dmitri pulled out a leather bag and removed six dried, golden-brown mushroom caps. They were relatively large and the scent hinted at the Divinity they contained. “These are for you,” he said, his hand outstretched. “This is where you will see EVERYTHING! I hesitated, scared—not of going crazy, but of REALLY waking up! Before I could utter any objections, the mushrooms were already stuffed inside my mouth, inching their way toward my stomach, dissolving into Liquid Magic.

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**By the time** the last bite had been swallowed, we were venturing deeper into the woods. At some point I foolishly believed that the experiment wasn’t working. But later, while walking, I noticed my feet were not touching the ground! I smiled and kept walking, keeping my observation to myself. Music began to play not only in my head, but in the forest. It wasn’t normal “nature music,” those sounds orchestrated by birds or trees. I could only describe it as “psychedelic.”

At some point during my enjoyment of the colorful scenery and introspective mind-diving, I became separated from my guide. My heart, which was already racing from the extreme joy of really being ALIVE, slowly turned to fear. My universe came trickling down as I found myself alone in a strange country, tripping on mushrooms.

As I walked, the forest grew more dense. It seemed that nobody had traveled down this path for quite a while. I came upon a thick column of trees and a fence. I stopped and began to listen attentively to the sounds of

rushing water from beyond the fence. There was a stream nearby. Climbing was easy while on mushrooms, but landing back on the ground proved to be harder. I lost my footing and before I knew it, was tumbling down the hill, the rushing sound of water becoming more intense and louder as I rolled toward it. Time stopped. When I at last reached bottom, I opened my eyes. My journey had led me to the arena of Death.

My eyes widened as I gazed upon the battered buildings and raging fires. Grey figures were hanging on wires, and others were piled in heaps. There were mounds of dead people. Some were slumped over barrels, with their hands tied together and barren expressions on their faces, echoing the last seconds of their fate. The odors were unbearable. Coppery and flesh-rotting scents filled my nostrils, causing me to heave. The images inside my mind kept expanding, engaging every sense. My mind filled with sounds of screaming and agony. On that day, I discovered the madness and cruelty that the human race can produce, a factory of selfless pain and rot—all because one group of people on a particular side of the globe developed xenophobia and conned themselves into believing that they had special entitlements.

The metallic taste of blood filled my throat as the darkness invaded my senses, dulling each of them. My body ached. I mustered what strength I had left, picked myself off the jungle floor and began walking into the killing fields. I could feel a lingering, uneasy presence. Eyes watched me. Eyes that were either half or fully open still kept me company long after their energy had passed. Watching...

The sun was setting and the trip was dissolving my preadolescent self, transforming me into something completely different, something eternal. Realizations kept popping up inside my head. I felt connected to everything around me and wondered, how can I not feel hatred with such hatred around me? Thoughts rocketed through my synapses, exploding with mass amounts of information, and it became too much to handle. I was dying. Are these mushrooms poisonous? I asked myself in distress. I thought of those I loved, that they would miss me, and I would miss them. I wanted to grow up, be wise and know everything. I wanted to laugh and experience love. But throughout my panic and struggling, while curled up in a ditch, I let go of existence and my sense of "self." I was saved. To experience God I had to let go of every notion of who I was, and who I wanted to be—a challenging experience at any age. I felt the radiant glow of not just a being outside of myself, but of a being that coexisted inside of me, that was a part of me just as much as I was a part of it.

The universe detonated magnificent fireworks inside this perception, one after the other, causing body spasms. Stripped of thoughts, conditioning, and my ways—I was naked. I was a raw consciousness, taking in more information than I could process. It was within this setting God became demystified. The noises intensified into one resounding voice, I could now hear a chorus of words. A mantra had entered my mind—I am every thing that ever is, was, and shall be. Everything and everyone are a part of me. I felt in that timeless moment nothing but absolute truth. It was deep-seated knowledge, past any ego-formed sense of doubt or suspicion. I tried to crawl, but that became futile. I welcomed

the rapture; it embraced me with open arms, coddling my prepubescent psyche, careful not to fully wreck the ship before it returned home. During the night, my mind surrendered to the wonders that my unconsciousness produced. I became a disembodied observer of a psychedelic visual storm. I slowly faded out into Existence.

The sun peeked through the morning clouds to wake, not only me, but Nature. The sounds of familiar reality came as a huge relief. The birds chirping, the nearby stream. Everything was ALIVE! and NEW, transformed into something wonderful. But at the same time the environment remained the same. I couldn't help but laugh. Thoughts were popping up with such clarity. I remembered my father telling me that Alan Watts said that, just as a microscope can sharpen your physical sight, psychedelics can sharpen your ability to look inward. I certainly had more insight coming out of the trip than going in. Funny, how things work out like that. Now that the sun was out, it was time for me to find my bearings and continue home. I was off on no particular course.

As I tramped through fields, nature's essences caught me off-guard and I became absorbed in my surroundings and newly discovered beauty. I could hear the sounds of camp in the distance. It gave me relief to hear the frenetic humming of a harmonica with gospel singing mixed in. As I proceeded, I was amazed at how many people there were, families that lived with ours, traveling in the camps. Passing by pop-up home shops and bonfires cooking morning feasts. I discovered Dmitri finally. He looked surprised, yet relieved to see me. We embraced. "You look like hell," he said while holding back a chuckle. I said nothing. I thought of the whole process and smiled. In time I would tell him. But at that moment I just felt that there were no words that could describe my experience. My time in Hell was over, and at last, I was back to being a kid, back to my Garden—back to my Kingdom. •

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