

In Appreciation for **Dr. Ronald Sandison** and His Pioneering Practice

By Scott J. Hill, Ph.D.

WHILE WRITING my dissertation on a Jungian framework for understanding psychedelic experiences, I discovered Dr. Ronald Sandison's early articles on LSD therapy and realized that his Jungian orientation provided excellent clinical support for the theoretical framework I was developing. A few months later, I was delighted to find in the *MAPS Bulletin* (Winter 2008-2009) Ben Sessa's report on his visit with Dr. Sandison. And soon thereafter Dr. Sandison and I started to correspond and talk on the phone about his practice of LSD therapy. Despite his failing health at the age of 93, he graciously welcomed and thoughtfully answered my many questions regarding his pioneering practice and its relationship to Jung's psychology.

Reflecting his goal to ally the use of LSD with Jungian therapy, Dr. Sandison coined the term psycholytic therapy in the early 1960s to describe what became known as the "low- and medium-dose model" of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy. *Lytic*, which is derived from the Greek *lysis* (meaning "loosening, breaking down"), indicated for Dr. Sandison the ability that these substances have to loosen unconscious mechanisms and thereby release unconscious content. He had found that LSD opened greater psychotherapeutic opportunities than were available to him through conventional means.

Dr. Sandison was the head psychiatrist

at Powick Mental Hospital at Worcester, England in 1952 when he joined a tour of mental hospitals in Switzerland. Besides visiting Burghölzli Hospital in Zurich, where Jung's career started, Sandison had the opportunity to visit Sandoz Pharmaceutical Laboratories in Basel. He was fascinated to learn of the work being done there with LSD, and he returned to Sandoz laboratories a few months later. This time he left with several psychedelic-related publications and a box with 100 ampoules of LSD, with which he began his groundbreaking and successful practice of LSD therapy at Powick Hospital. Between 1952 and 1963, Dr. Sandison and his colleagues treated approximately 500 patients with LSD and psychotherapy, and they observed that the quality of life for the majority of their patients had been enhanced. Dr. Sandison also saw that patients' symptoms were resolved more successfully with LSD-enhanced psychotherapy than with conventional therapies, especially for patients suffering from obsessional neuroses.

In addition to having visited Albert Hofmann, Dr. Sandison also visited the C. G. Jung Institute in Zürich in 1952 and several years later, hoping to meet Carl Jung, for whom he had the greatest respect. Jung was away both times, and on his second visit, Dr. Sandison was warned by the institute's director not to talk to Jung about LSD-enhanced therapy because Jung was greatly opposed to it. Despite Jung's limited knowledge of the responsible therapeutic use of psychedelic substances, Dr. Sandison understood that Jung's psychology paradoxically provides penetrating insights into the nature of psychedelic experiences and the practice of psychedelic psychotherapy. However, in his own clinical work, Dr. Sandison developed a reverence for LSD, which he likened to the regard held by shamans of old for their "magical" plants.

Working with patients who took between 20 and 100 micrograms of LSD, Dr. Sandison identified three distinct types of psychedelic experience: dream-like hallucinations, reliving of forgotten personal memories, and imagery from the collective unconscious. He described the



Scott J. Hill, Ph.D.

hill@sonic.net

third category of experience as "archaic, impersonal images... exactly similar in nature to those experiences of the collective unconscious which patients undergoing deep analysis experience in their dreams... Furthermore, these more primitive LSD experiences are accompanied by a sense of their agelessness and timeless quality which is the hallmark of the great archetypes of the collective unconscious" ("Psychological Aspects of the LSD Treatment of the Neuroses." *Journal of Mental Science*, 1954, p. 508).

When I visited Dr. Sandison in his home last year, he talked of the invaluable understanding that a Jungian approach to therapy had lent his practice. Although his deep respect for Jung continued (he delighted in reading Jung's *Red Book* during the last year of his life.), he regretted that the Jungian community had not been more supportive of the early therapeutic use of psychedelic substances. Support from the Jungians, he felt, would have significantly enhanced the precious understanding of the human psyche that the true therapeutic use of LSD can give.

Dr. Sandison was understandably heartened by the resurgence of sanctioned research into the therapeutic potential of psychedelic substances, and he hoped for the eventual renewal of psychedelic psychotherapy. I have found, looking back at his original and innovative work, that we have much to learn from him even today. •