

THE IT'S OKAY PSYCHEDELIC HARM REDUCTION SERIES

Volume 2

Psychedelic Integration

Returning from a Profound
Experience

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DISCLAIMER: The information in this booklet is not meant to encourage or discourage the use of psychedelics. The basis of this writing is that regardless of legal status, individuals may choose to ingest an illegal substance. The intention of the writer is to reduce potential risks that can come from the ingestion of a psychedelic substance. The ideas and opinions provided in this booklet are that of the author alone and do not represent those of other organizations and people cited.

IMPORTANT: MENTAL HEALTH DISCLAIMER

Psychedelics are powerful tools for opening the psyche up to our unconscious world as well as many other inner landscapes. In some circumstances, a person can activate lasting mental health issues such as psychosis, bipolar disorder, or mania following an experience. Professional care is of high importance if such issues arise. The methods described in this booklet do not claim to be a replacement or treatment for serious mental health issues.

Introduction

You have experienced, and are possibly still experiencing, something profound. Perhaps it was an experience you cannot describe. Perhaps you sense that things will never be the same now. Perhaps you have experienced a level of bliss, joy, freedom, and belonging you hadn't thought possible, yet felt all too familiar. Or, perhaps you experienced a depth of fear, confusion, and loneliness that leaves you with a lingering feeling of disconnection. You may feel as though no one could possibly understand. You may not know what to do with this newfound experience, recognizing that it doesn't fit into your old worldview or that you might not be the person you once were. You are now beginning the next phase of a psychedelic process called Integration.

“Integration is an intentional process of creating space for the body, heart, mind, and psyche to reorganize after an impactful experience. Integration invites a conscious adjustment of perspectives and habits, to incorporate new knowledge and ideas in favor of promoting growth and wellbeing.”

–www.InnerSpaceIntegration.com

Integration

There are 3 phases to a psychedelic experience: Preparation, The Journey, and Integration. The information in this document is meant to be a companion towards understanding what is happening after the substance’s effects have worn off, and how to navigate re-entry into “the world.” Integration, as the term suggests, is about creating a bridge between the new experiences, content, insights, and realizations had during a non-ordinary state of consciousness and those of our baseline state. It is a reconciling and processing of new understandings with our old structures of knowing. The intention of this document is to assist in getting the most out of the experience you have just had as well as addressing challenges that can arise after a profound psychedelic experience. It is a consolidation of research from books, workshops, personal experiences, and professional experiences working as a psychedelic crisis care provider.

Intuition

While a portion of this booklet focuses on practices and techniques, the unfolding process is very much an intuitive one. Certain methods will connect with you and others may not. Listen to your own guidance; trust your gut. You may find and create your own ways to move with the inner content arising for you. Intuition can be defined as that initial gut feeling or hunch one might get prior to analyzing and rationalizing. Our intuition guides us from an inner wisdom. Trusting this inner guidance can be experienced as doing what “feels” right.

What to Do?

Practice Slowing Down (Take Your Time)

Returning to your life and the world may seem exciting and/or daunting. All of your “to-do” lists, work, and chores were put on hold for a brief time and are waiting for you to return to them. Meanwhile, your inner landscape is likely still reorganizing. It is recommended to give yourself spaciousness and allow for your body and mind to recalibrate. More clarity and insights will continue to arise for you in the following days and weeks if you keep your attention inwards rather than rush back into the games of society. It is wise to take a position of “wait and see” before making any major life changes during this time. Trust the process; don’t rush the process.

Strategies for Slowing Down:

- meditation
- time in nature
- simple meditative activities for processing (gardening/weeding, house cleaning)
- sun bathing
- taking a bath, soaking in hot water, spa, isolation tank, hot springs
- attending a sound bath event
- guided breathwork sessions
- lay back and listen to music
- watch a sunrise/sunset
- lay back and watch the clouds pass by

Creating Context

At this time, you may start searching for ways to explain what just happened. Your intellect wants to understand, especially if this experience is outside of your past framework for reality. Keep in mind that sometimes clarity takes time. Be patient with your process.

Strategies for Creating Context:

- read relevant books and authors (see suggested study section)
- listen to relevant lectures (see suggested study section)
- look at relevant art and videos (see suggested study section)
- study the language of symbols and archetypes as they relate to the unconscious (i.e. tarot cards, astrology, dream work, etc.)
- study various maps of consciousness as described by traditions in mysticism such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Gnosticism, Sufism, shamanism etc.

From Inside to Out

During a psychedelic experience, inner transformations, insights, somatic processes, and other phenomena emerge from the unconscious in ways you may not have language to address. When you come down, it is important to give space in your life to the ineffable so you can integrate it further and allow it to process.

Strategies for Giving Space to Our Inner Processes:

-expressive art, painting, drawing; it's about process, not product; tune in to the memory of your experience and allow whatever comes through the medium to come through

-journaling: freeform and questions/prompts to ask oneself; "From this experience, I wish to remember: _____"

-give space to the experiences arising; find a place away from judgement where you can let out whatever expression feels natural (yelling, crying, laughing, singing, etc.)

-free form dance, ecstatic dance, embodiment, yoga

-support in working with somatic sensations; massage, acupuncture, etc.

-altar creation and the language of symbols; create a space that you can regularly go to in order to give presence to the experience; the altar should contain symbols and objects that reflect aspects of the experience

-telling your story; peer support; it is important to take special care when deciding who to share your story with. The person you share it with should receive it non-judgmentally and see it as important and valuable.

-ritual; transitions, letting go, cleansings; ritual is a way that we can act out aspects of our inner processes to give them power in our external world; example: I have come to terms with parts of myself that I felt shame around. To ritualize a letting go of this shame, I can write down the stories of that shame on a piece of paper and then burn it. This can solidify my process of moving on.

Nourish Yourself, In Body and Mind

Creating a smooth re-entry into the world involves being mindful of what we choose to take into our body and mind. Remember to give yourself appropriate rest during this stage. Settling back into a regular schedule will help support body/mind integration. Be mindful of what you invite into your awareness during this time. It is recommended to avoid certain types of media such as horror films, social media, and the news.

There are 2 approaches to diet following an experience. The foundation of each of these approaches is that you eat healthy and natural foods.

- Approach 1: Food for grounding purposes. Indulge a bit and enjoy the sensation of taste. Heavy and rich foods, root veggies, soups, and meats can help bring us back into our body and ease us back into our physical rhythms.

- Approach 2: Some journeyers attempt to keep their diet light, with healthy salads, smoothies, juices, etc. This approach can support a lingering sensitized state of consciousness.

Community

After having an experience that exists outside the realms of mainstream awareness, you may feel alienated or distant from those who may not understand. This is normal, and points to an important aspect of integration: Connecting with others who understand or can connect with you from openness and curiosity to these experiences. This does not mean you cannot be connected to others who do not understand, but that it will help to expand your circle to connect with those who do.

Finding Community:

- Local Integration Circles
- Psychedelic Meetups (i.e. The Psychedelic Society of San Francisco)
- Ecstatic Dance- a community that creates freeform, non-judgmental dance/movement events
- Spiritual Communities/Retreats
- Burning Man/Festival Communities
- Breathwork Communities
- Psychedelic Conferences

Professional Resources

It could also be beneficial (and in some situations necessary) to seek out professional help in integration.

-Therapy: Processing the content that emerges from a psychedelic experience with a trained therapist can support maintaining lasting benefits as well as addressing challenges that can arise. As stated before, when sharing your experience, it is important that the therapist can view the experience as valid and valuable. Ideally, the therapist would have their own experiences of non-ordinary states of consciousness and be trained in Transpersonal Psychology. Other supportive modalities include Hakomi Therapy, Expressive Arts Therapy, and various Somatic Therapies. The organization MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies) has a list on their website of integration therapists.

Possible Challenges Following an Experience

The following is a list of possible challenges that can arise within the integration process. The message that is important to understand is that experiencing these hurdles/speed bumps is **temporary** and **normal**. Having support can make all the difference; it may be hard, but you don't have to be alone in it. Also, keep in mind that **it may get harder before it gets better**. See these challenges as an important step in your own development. The butterfly must let go of its caterpillarness fully to complete the metamorphosis. This is a naturally unfolding process and happens at its own pace.

Integration Challenges

- reconciling the two worlds in the context of Society: The hustle of daily life and work is not aligned with the visions, freedom, aliveness, and/or openness one has experienced.
- sudden disconnect/dying of what one once had and/or believed.
- connection to friends and family that don't understand becomes strained, weak, or broken: Feeling lost, alone, and alienated related to this newfound experience and not having a supportive community to give validation and care through the emergence.
- isolation/alienation/loneliness are all major markers of an initial emergence.
- attachment to the high, blissful state of consciousness; not wanting to come down.
- following a particularly intense and challenging experience (i.e. ego breakdown, extreme confusion/fear, etc.) the voyager feels disconnected or not quite "fitting in" to reality after the substance has worn off.
- thoughts of grandeur following an experience of god realization/unity consciousness, confusing one's individual level of identity with higher levels of consciousness.
- spiritual emergencies as defined by Stan and Christina Grof

All of the strategies mentioned earlier in this document are valid ways of navigating the challenges that can arise in addition to other qualities of integration. Remember that integration is a process, and allowing it to come to completion involves embracing and encouraging whatever is arising in that process.

Slowing Down the Process

In the event that things become too overwhelming, or you are continually unable to return to your daily life/activities, remember that this is not a sign that something is wrong. This is another indicator of a dramatic transformation that when supported appropriately, can lead to healing and growth. It is possible to slow or mute the process if it becomes too intrusive in normal functioning of society. These techniques are temporary aids to maintain balance in life, but the process will remain unresolved until it is fully allowed to move.

Techniques to Temporarily Slow/Mute the Process:

- Notice what amplifies the experience and stop doing that. For example, if you notice as you sit down to practice your daily meditation routine you are suddenly experiencing uncontrollable somatic movements and blurred vision for an extended period of time, it may be helpful to pause your meditation practice to ground.
- Devote specific time to open into the process and experience, and specific time to contain and set it to the side
- Eating heavy and rich foods, including sugar
- Distraction strategies

WARNING: Seeking Help

When faced with challenges in integration, as well as life, we can become desperate for help, healing, and/or answers and attempt to seek out healers, spiritual teachers, or gurus. Given that we are in a vulnerable state, it is extremely important to exercise caution when looking for help from others. Avoid others who claim to have your answers or have solutions to your inner struggle. Listen to your intuition. If you sense someone is trying to “sell” you on their healing powers/wisdom or that you “need” them to heal, this is an indication that this person will exploit power over you. A supportive person will not take responsibility for your healing, and will reflect a trust in your own healing intelligence. “This is part of a process. You got this and I’m with you through it! It’s okay to not be okay right now.”

Suggested Study for Creating Context

This is a small list of helpful resources to help increase some understanding around what you may have experienced. There are of course endless resources on these subjects, so feel free to do your own explorations relevant to your personal journey as well.

Books:

Be Here Now – Ram Dass
The Stormy Search for the Self – Stanislov and Christina Grof
The Tao Te Ching – Lao Tzu
The Doors of Perception – Aldus Huxley
LSD: Doorway to the Numinous – Stanislov Grof
Psychedelic Prayers – Timothy Leary

Lecturers/Speakers (found on podcasts and youtube):

Alan Watts, Ram Dass, MAPS Psychedelic Science Talks, Terence McKenna, Ann and Sasha Shulgin

Visionary Artists:

Alex and Allison Grey
Michael Divine
Randall Roberts and Morgan Mandala
Amanda Sage

Websites:

-Erowid.org – Online encyclopedia of psychoactive substances with a large array of information as well as a section of experience reports
-www.maps.org

Lists of Psychedelic Integration Therapists:

<https://integration.maps.org/>
<https://psychedelic.support/network/>

***Remember, this is an opportunity to be the architect of your world
to come.***

May your integration be rich and easeful.

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Dedicated to Ram Dass

His pioneering explorations of consciousness, psychedelics, and spirituality have aided many voyagers who had experienced their first awakenings into higher states of consciousness by giving us a map.

Thank you, Ram Dass

Here we are.

Welcome Home.

“It’s dark because you are trying too hard.
Lightly child, lightly. Learn to do everything lightly.
Yes, feel lightly even though you’re feeling deeply.
Just lightly let things happen and lightly cope with them.

I was so preposterously serious in those days,
such a humorless little prig.

Lightly, lightly – it’s the best advice ever given me.

When it comes to dying even.
Nothing ponderous, or portentous, or emphatic.

No rhetoric, no tremolos,
no self-conscious persona putting on its celebrated imitation of
Christ or Little Nell.

And of course, no theology, no metaphysics.
Just the fact of dying and the fact of the clear light.

So throw away your baggage and go forward.
There are quicksands all about you, sucking at your feet,
trying to suck you down into fear and self-pity and despair.
That’s why you must walk so lightly.
Lightly my darling,
on tiptoes and no luggage,
not even a sponge bag,
completely unencumbered.”

-Aldous Huxley, *Island*