

**DRUGS: THE ALTERATION OF THE SELF - PART 4**  
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The solution that I recommend is not to attempt to go back to where we started, but to finish the job and become a butterfly. The concept of the self in almost all forms of mind practice is something to get to know, handle, and move beyond. All the Buddhists agree. It is not that there is no self; of course there is, but rather that our attachment to it is misplaced at best and limiting at worst. This is why most meditation methods help us to become clear about what the self is and is not. As some of the ancient wisdom teachings say: "Attachment to the 'self' is the only cloud in an otherwise cloudless sky." What do they mean by this?

They don't mean get rid of the self, but instead to not take our self so seriously. If you get to know it, you can't take the self seriously. Give yourself its due; feed it what it has to have to be happy, but more or less just put it out to pasture. Be kind to yourself as you would to any other person, but don't count on it to solve your problems or rule your life. Put yourself on a diet of reality.

At the same time, and more important, get to know your mind, which is not your 'self'. Your self is replete with the little nagging narrator that tells you that you have a dentist appointment tomorrow. The mind is beyond that, more like the theater of operations that the narrator works in. Learn some form of meditation or other form of mind practice, and above all start using your mind to look at itself. This is a simple exercise that you can do anytime. Exercise your mind looking within at its own nature just as you have been using it all your life to look outside. Familiarity with using the mind to know itself is what Socrates and scores of other mystics, philosophers, saints, and yogis have been telling us to do for centuries. In other words, stop thinking about it, get off your mental duff, and actually use your mind to investigate itself. This is key. How is that done?

The mind is like a muscle that needs to be exercised and there are plenty of exercises available, many kinds of meditation and mind practices. Learning to use the mind internally is not a passive thing. Use the mind to look at itself, like: right now: look at who is reading this page. Just try it. It is not easy and you can get a mental charley horse instantly. But here is my point:

That mental charley horse shows you that the mind is workable and that you are just out of shape or never got in mental shape to start with. Learning to use the mind like a muscle, working the mind like you would run a treadmill is the key to mind practice. Forget about lighting a candle and sitting on a cushion. That is not the kind of mind practice the Zen Buddhists do. Gary Snyder, Alan Ginsberg, and scores of others learned to use their mind as the Buddhist do. You first have to get your mind on its feet and moving around, making efforts, like trying to focus on your breath or look at who is reading this page. Do something! This is what I mean by mind practice, and meditation is a form of mind practice.

That's enough. I will give you folks a rest at this point. I have tried to point out some ways to complete your drug experience if you are stuck in it. The rest is up to you. The need for many of us who have had unresolved drug trips to learn meditation and the methods of mind practice is not just some alternative option from the East. It is the next step, the necessary step to finish the job and know the mind after become confused about it on a drug trip. Sure, you learned

something on acid and you probably have parts of it right. But what about the parts that you didn't get right? What about your questions? It is pure arrogance and stupidity to think we have it all figured out.

Sure, we may profess to know something, but there come moments, those three o'clock in the morning lying in bed staring at the ceiling sleepless moments, when we still wonder. We owe it to ourselves to finish the job that acid started. The butterfly deserves to fly.

Diligent mind practice (call it meditation or whatever you like) gradually reveals the entire mental landscape that may have been illuminated for a moment way back then. Meditation can reach beyond the limits of what we saw on a drug trip and show us what the mind actually is and looks like. It can replace the partial truths we were imprinted with through drugs with the ancient and well-known map of how the mind actually works. The mind is not unknowable and unfathomable. It is knowable, but we each have to know it for ourselves. No one, not even the Buddha can touch our forehead and enlighten us. That is a myth. It takes work on our part. We each have to enlighten ourselves, personally. That is the whole point. The dharma is a method only, not a religion.

Meditation is not just some new-age fancy, but an age-old tested method to know the nature of the mind itself. And while it is not easy, it is much easier than the alternative, which is to continue not knowing.

Note: I am sure there are many valid forms of meditation, but I have not tried them all. The ones I know from experience that are authentic and that do work are the various forms of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism. Some centers that I know personally are listed at this site:

<http://www.kagyu.org/>

Good luck!

Michael

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