

Psychedelics

The deep therapeutic potential of psychedelics resides in the fact that they get the conditioned mind out of the way, so people have access to two aspects of reality that they're usually not in touch with. One is the deep trauma and pain that they're carrying that they can actually look at now. And in an appropriate, compassionate, safe context, they can experience these troubled emotions and mind states without having to be driven into insanity, or having to escape. So psychedelics open that up. But what psychedelics can also open up, and which is for many of us really difficult to access, is our true selves and our connection to the universe. Some people get there through spiritual work, and when they do, that's more powerful than doing it through psychedelics, because once you access it that way, it's more available to you. It doesn't depend on your mind being altered through a substance.

Nevertheless, that doesn't take away from the deep value of psychedelics in revealing that true connected self, and the unity of reality. Both the deep trauma and the emotions associated with it, and sometimes the experiences in which they're rooted, and the wondrous unity and loving connection, are hidden from the conditioned mind or the personality, and psychedelics can remove that barrier. That's where their potential lies. Again, depending very much on the appropriate context and support and holding and environment. And, in some cases, ceremony and tradition.

They've been around for hundreds and thousands of years in human experience. In the last century, there was a lot of—this is the 20th century—there was a lot of interesting research and work on psychedelics, and then, for a whole lot of political and cultural reasons, including the fact that some people began to use psychedelics inappropriately, and advocate them inappropriately, but also because opportunistically, the system started this "war on drugs," and it was useful to throw psychedelics into the mix, there was this taboo, there was this interdiction.

Why it has now experienced a resurgence is because of the utter failure of the Western medical system to deal with people's mental health issues, and the utter failure of the Western system to satisfy people's needs for a spiritual meaning, so that to some people psychedelics have appeared as both an antidote to the failure of the psychiatric system, which has no idea how to heal anybody. All we know how to do is to medicate and suppress symptoms at the very best, and sometimes we do a lot of harm. Sometimes we do a lot of good, but overall, we're a failure, let's face it.

So, there's a natural resurgence in modalities that look beyond that and provide an alternative, and so that, even in the psychiatric profession now, there's increasing interest in psychedelics, precisely because they realize that their toolkit is really limited. Now with psychedelics, as with everything else, there's no one size fits all, so everybody's an individual situation. For some people, one or two psychedelic sessions supported with therapy can be transformational. Others would need a more long-term engagement. But I think for most people, especially who are seeking help with so-called mental health issues, it's never just a one-off, it's an ongoing process of... If you're going to use psychedelics, it has to be combined with very adept therapy at the same time, whether in a personal or in a group context, and a lot of the research that's being done is... No research is being done in just giving people psychedelics and say, off you go, it's always psychedelics being used in a therapeutic context.

I had a deep psychedelic experience a week ago yesterday. I'm not going to go into the details, but I learned so much, including I learned all the depth of the self-limiting stories I've been telling myself. It's one thing to teach all this stuff to others, it's another to really experience it for oneself. And intellectually I've always been far ahead of myself, or far behind my *self*, I should put it, so very often when people say to me, "Thank you for writing that book, it changed my life." You know what my response was? "Oh, maybe I should read it myself." Because the kind of liberation and experience that

I've, at times, been able to guide people, others, I've not been able to guide there myself. So last week I had a deep experience of all that. I believe it was a life-changing experience. I'm not going to say more about it, but that happened with the help of psychedelics.

Now, they are no panaceas, psychedelics are no panaceas. A lot of people in the psychedelic world are deeply screwed up, let me tell you, and are using the psychedelics as a bypass. They keep hoping the medicines to do something for them that they're not open or willing to do for themselves. Psychedelics can be a powerful opening, because they get the defensive mind out of the way and you get to see the terror, and also the love. The love that's always there, has always been there, will always be there, and that terror that you absorbed through that perpetrator energy. Sometimes people have bad trips, but there are no bad trips. There are just difficult trips, painful trips, fear-suffused trips, but they're not bad. In the right context, with the right guidance, you can hold it all, and you can learn from it all.

You can also suffer greatly if you're with the wrong guys in the wrong context. In fact, in the psychedelic world, just as in the spiritual world, there's abuse, there's exploitation, there's objectification, there's manipulation. In the hands of healers who are very powerful, just as in the spiritual world, you have powerful spiritual masters who have abused their followers. We know them, I can list you six of them just like that, all within the last few years. And you think, how can they know these spiritual truths and still do this? It's because then not complete, they split off, they haven't dealt with the perpetrator energy inside themselves, their own trauma. They can achieve these beautiful states through spiritual practice and teach from it, and talk to you about oneness, and the next day get drunk with women one quarter their age and sexually abuse them.

And there's a psychedelic, there's two books I can recommend, that'll take you deep. Michael Pollan has written a wonderful book about psychedelics, *How to Change Your Mind*, but it's more theoretical, it's about the research, it's less experiential. Two of the great books on psychedelics are *Consciousness Medicine* by my friend, Françoise Bourzat, B-O-U-R-Z-A-T. *Consciousness Medicine: Indigenous Wisdom, Entheogens, and Expanded States of Consciousness for Healing and Growth*. She's a great practitioner, and it's a wonderful book. And specifically about ayahuasca, a physician colleague of mine, *The Fellowship of the River* by Joe Tafur, T-A-F-U-R, both are really fine books.

In terms of ayahuasca experiences, I can't recommend anything to you, North America, because it's illegal, and I can't jeopardize SAND by making illegal recommendations. But I can tell you, in Latin America, in Costa Rica, there's Soltare, S-O-L-T-A-R-E. They have good shamans, really great shamans, and integrity. In Costa Rica also, there's also place called Blue Spirit, where sometimes they have ayahuasca ceremonies, I can vouch for that place. A place I will not vouch for it's called Rythmia in Costa Rica, because although they have good ceremonies, the context to me is crazy. I won't say more about it.

Psychedelics excerpts from The Tim Ferris Show

Through a series of events, I became aware of the potential role of psychedelics in healing, and I've been doing work with them now for 10 years. They're another potent method, they're not for everybody, and I have to emphasize that whatever modality you choose of a psychedelic nature, you have to do it with adept practitioners with deep integrity and deep knowledge and experience. But in such hands, and in such a context, it can be like a super highway to self-awareness. Not in isolation, but it opens doors that otherwise might take years. And so it's not unusual for me to conduct a psychedelic session with somebody, or a series of sessions, either in a group or individual setting, and have them say, "That was like 10 years of psychotherapy in one day." And I've had the same experience myself.

Again, it's not to be isolated from other kinds of work, and it has to be integrated, but it's another potent way of working. And of course, as I know you're personally aware, there's an increasing movement amongst psychologists, therapists, psychiatrists, medical doctors, other healers, to find ways of incorporating psychedelic healing in the larger therapeutic scheme.

Tim Ferriss:

You mentioned, as it related to EMDR, and some of these other techniques that you listed, that it is a potent way of bypassing the egoic mind. And certainly psychedelics—literally mind-manifesting—in that case are one very potent tool, or they are tools that have been used for millennia in traditional or ceremonial contexts around the world, for many purposes, but including bypassing the analytical, rational prefrontal cortex in many capacities. Now you mentioned a series of events, and I will come back to the psychedelics and ask you which you have chosen and why, to work with.

But if you can mention any of them, what were the series of events that led you to psychedelics?

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Sure. In 2008, my book on addiction, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*, was published in Canada, and very quickly became a number one national bestseller. It was subsequently published in the States as well. I was on a book tour, and people kept asking me, "What do you know about addictions and ayahuasca as a treatment?" Ayahuasca being an Amazonian vine that's made into a brew that has psychedelic properties. I knew nothing. The next speech, or the next event somebody else would ask, "Well, what do you know about ayahuasca and the treatment of addictions?" I finally started getting annoyed with it, like "leave me alone. I've just written a book, I've spent years researching it, my life experience and all kinds of scientific exploration went into it, ask me about something I know about."

And then I realized that maybe the universe was knocking on my door, and somebody said, "Did you know you could experience it here in Vancouver?" There was a Peruvian shaman leading some ceremonies up in Vancouver, so who am I to say no? And I jumped right in, and I sat in this tent with 50 other people.

Tim Ferriss:

50!

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yeah, that's how they set it up. It's not what I recommend, but that's how they set it up. They played beautiful music, and there was a little baby in the room. Mother and dad were there for the experience, the baby was in the room and the baby was cooing away. And tears started flowing down my face, and these were not tears of sorrow, they were tears of joy, and I got in touch with such profound love that I had never consciously experienced before, and they were tears of love. And it wasn't love for anybody in particular, it was just love.

And then I saw in all the ways that I had closed my heart against love in my life, and how I betrayed love in my personal relationship with my spouse, and my children, and in other ways, so I just got this experience of love as something profound, and universal, and life-defining, but something that's been cut off in so many ways, and I got it. I closed my heart against love precisely because, when I was vulnerable and small, I'd been so hurt, owing to my mother's states of mind. She couldn't respond to me in the way I needed to be responded to, not her fault, but she couldn't. And then when I was a year old, she gave me to a stranger to save my life, and I didn't see her for a month, which is a huge...

Tim Ferriss:

Explain that for a second.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Again, it's Budapest, Hungary, Second World War, January, the Russians have circled Budapest and are fighting the Germans. The government in power is a right wing fascist antisemitic military force, and even though the deportations of Jews had stopped—the German had annihilated half a million Hungarian Jews in three or four months—but now the Hungarian fascists were killing Jews in Budapest, including in the house where my mother and I were living. My mother gave me to a stranger in the street, a Christian woman, because she didn't know if she'd be dead or alive next day.

Or that I would be, and I was quite sick. So I didn't see her for a month, which I experienced as a deep abandonment. How else could I experience it? So my heart closes—against love, and I got all this. And so I got that if this plant that, as you say, manifests the mind, can show me both the ways in which I've closed off from myself, and that I don't need to because the love is still there, what healing potential it has.

Now, I wish I could say that after that experience I became a loving husband and a loving human being. I didn't, it's not that simple, as my wife could tell you. Nevertheless, it opened the door for me, and I got it right away. Now, however, the thought that I had was, that I had no induction, I had no introduction, I had no processing afterwards. Ayahuasca is a medicinal plant that has been used in the Amazon basin for hundreds of years, maybe longer, in a cultural context. In a tribe, in a village where people know each other, where they know the shaman, where they share the same assumptions and the same history. That's not the same as a bunch of Westerners, strangers to each other, coming together for one night, drinking this stuff, and then going their separate ways.

Tim Ferriss:

Agreed.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

So immediately the question that came up for me was, how can we create a setting that at least resembles, as best we can fashion, the original setting? So we came up with the idea of a retreat where a small number of people get together with properly trained shamans who have integrity and experience, deep experience, and with me facilitating people's preparation and their post-ceremony integration. And so I've been doing that now for 10 years. A lot of learning involved, we made mistakes, but it evolved, and the essence of it is that people don't come into it cold, they come into the preparation in a safe setting where pretty soon a group becomes a family to each other—which means that not only do they love each other and support each other, but they also trigger each other. Basically I tell people, guess what, you're back in your family of origin, and everything you've hated about your family of origin is going to show up here.

Tim Ferriss:

Yeah.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

But in the context where it's safe for that to happen.

Tim Ferriss:

Right.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

And so I've seen a lot of great healing. I've had people with multiple suicide attempts heal from depression, I've seen people get much better with their autoimmune diseases, I've seen people deal with all kinds of addictions and life issues, relationship problems, come out of it much more themselves, much more able to deal with these issues, so long as the proper integration is done afterwards. So that was my personal experience. Now, that then introduced me to the whole world of psychedelics, and I realized that there's a lot of research being done these days, that there's this organization MAPS, Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, which is a group of psychologists, psychiatrists, medical doctors, therapists, counselors, interested people, to study scientifically the role of psychedelics in healing.

And as you're probably aware, industry studies have been done around psilocybin mushrooms and end-of-life anxiety. Studies have been done, which are revolutionary, in using MDMA-assisted psychotherapy, MDMA being the technical name for ecstasy. Again, in the right setting, with the right leadership, these have proven to be very powerful modalities of healing. So there's a whole new resurgence of psychedelic research in a number of different areas, some of the man-made, some of them plant-based, but there's a whole world that I was introduced to. And I've learned a lot in the last 10 years. And again, I both practice it in my own healing work, and I'm interested in it also as a participant.

Tim Ferriss:

I'd love to add a few things to your second comment, and then ask a bunch of questions about the first.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yeah.

Tim Ferriss:

For people who are interested in learning more about the current scientific studies and mechanisms of action related to some of these compounds, and what is being done, there are a number of very interesting and very competent organizations, as far as I can tell. MAPS is one that you mentioned.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yeah.

Tim Ferriss:

And I'll actually be seeing the founder, Rick Doblin, in just a few days' time. There is the Heffter Institute.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yes.

Tim Ferriss:

Which I've worked with, primarily run by MDs and PhDs, or at least the board and so on is comprised of scientists and medical doctors. It was through the Heffter Foundation, and also directly with Johns Hopkins, so I've had some involvement with-

Dr. Gabor Maté:

The psilocybin.

Tim Ferriss:

With psilocybin studies.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yeah.

Tim Ferriss:

And actually, thank you to many of you—sorry about smacking the mic—to many of you in my audience who helped, through a crowd funding campaign, to raise funds for a study at Johns Hopkins related to treatment resistant depression.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yes.

Tim Ferriss:

And psilocybin. So Heffter Institute, excellent organization to look into, and then Usona also, which I believe is primarily focused on psilocybin, whereas MAPS at this point has done great work on many levels, including helping to facilitate MDMA being designated a breakthrough therapy, and effectively getting fast tracked into phase three trials.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

By the FDA.

Tim Ferriss:

That's right.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yeah.

Tim Ferriss:

And these are all organizations that I would encourage people to look into. And it's really an exciting time, and also a fragile time as it relates to these compounds, which have certainly demonstrated historically, excepting MDMA. Let's just look at the studies, many of which were done starting in say fifties and sixties, looking at the clinical efficacy of using these compounds for everything ranging from alcoholism, to nicotine addiction, to many of the things that you mentioned.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

What is little known, but Bill Wilson, Dr. Bill, one of the founders of AA.

Tim Ferriss:

Right.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Actually had some powerful LSD experiences.

Tim Ferriss:

Yeah.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Which helped him in his spiritual growth. Within AA they don't talk about that very much, but it's a fact. If I may parenthetically say, as much as I support the 12 steps, what AA also doesn't tend to talk about is the trauma that first causes the addiction, and Bill Wilson himself was a traumatized child. He was abandoned by his parents when he was young.

Tim Ferriss:

Yeah.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

And so it's interesting that AA, for all the good work that it does do, which I support, I don't support people being forced into any particular form a treatment, but as a self-chosen form of treatment, it can be very helpful to many people. But they don't talk about two very interesting things, one is the psychedelic part, and the other is the trauma part.

Tim Ferriss:

Yeah, no, for me, just looking at my own childhood experiences and exploring recovery, defined as you defined it.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yeah.

Tim Ferriss:

In the last several years, especially in the last six months, it's been fascinating and frustrating to discover and try to piece together these various elements. But the...

Dr. Gabor Maté:

What is the frustrating part?

Tim Ferriss:

That there is, well, it may exist, but I couldn't find one stop shopping that checked all the boxes.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

There ain't any.

Tim Ferriss:

Right. So it's been an exercise in collecting various tools and piecing them together. Like you said, AA does incredible work, and what they've done in terms of a distributed free service with social accountability and support is incredible.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Absolutely.

Tim Ferriss:

The psychedelic component, which Bill actually wanted to, as I understand it, make one of the steps in AA—needless to say it was hard to get widespread leadership support for that—and then you have the trauma piece. So these are all tools in the toolkit that people can use for their own bespoke approach, in some respects. Coming back to the Ayahuasca specifically, and I should, just as a caveat, point out, because I do think that these tools, I know these tools are very powerful, I have firsthand familiarity from past experiences, and have been very engaged with this scientific community for some time now, they can be misused, there are many charlatans.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

And unfortunately, there's more than that. There are some very powerful healers, shamans, who unfortunately exploit people sexually and financially.

Tim Ferriss:

Very common, yeah.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

And this is of course not just restricted to the Ayahuasca world, it's also happened in the spiritual world.

Tim Ferriss:

For sure.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

How many spiritual leaders with tremendous power, tremendous healing influence, have at the same time exploited men and women, and created all kinds of further trauma? Unfortunately, when you have that much power, and you haven't totally done your integration work, you can start misusing that power. And that happens in all of the healing modalities as we know, but it certainly happens in a psychedelic world as well.

Tim Ferriss:

Yeah, I wish I could say it's rare, it's not, but it's something to safeguard against, especially when you're in that vulnerable state. I would actually recommend that people see a documentary called Kumaré, which is very much worth watching, and the brief overview is, it's an Indian filmmaker who begins studying various gurus and healers in the US, in hopes of, I believe the original impetus was to simply do a documentary on charlatans. And then he went to India and he said, they're just as bad here.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yeah, yeah,

Tim Ferriss:

99% are just as bad or worse, and he decides to make himself a guru as an experiment.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yeah.

Tim Ferriss:

And it's a very thought-provoking documentary that I think will...

Dr. Gabor Maté:

He becomes a kind of fake guru, right?

Tim Ferriss:

That's right.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yeah, I remember it, yeah.

Tim Ferriss:

And then he unveils it.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yeah.

Tim Ferriss:

I don't want to give too much away, but it's very well done, very worth watching, because it helps to prepare you, I think, psychologically, to not lose yourself in a dangerous way.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

No, and here's the problem. You see, what I said about the essence of trauma is that you lose connection to yourself, and that means you lose connection to your gut feelings.

Tim Ferriss:

Right, yes.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

As long as your gut feelings are with you and you honor them, they'll protect you. But the very essence of trauma is the loss of that.

Tim Ferriss:

Yep.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Which means that when you lose connection to your gut feelings, then you're very vulnerable to being exploited. And when you talk to people who were exploited, in any context, psychedelic or not, if you ask them, "Do you ever have any vague sense that this is not quite right?" They'll say, "Yeah, but I didn't listen to it."

Tim Ferriss:

Yep.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

And the fact that they didn't listen to it is already a marker of trauma. So since it's traumatized people, which is most of us, who seek healing, it's also vulnerable people who seek healing, and this is what some of these people can exploit. So the very portal into healing, which is opening up the vulnerability that we've shut down against, is also the portal for potential loss, so people have to do their due diligence.

Tim Ferriss:

Yeah.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

And I'm not trying to create paranoia here, but people just should be careful.

Tim Ferriss:

You just mentioned something that I'd really love to just pause and emphasize. You mentioned a few things. So number one is that your gut feeling/physiological intuition can help you. And that's something that, for many reasons, I completely muted or ignored for a very long time. So it's been a process of getting reacquainted with that, and I would say two things that I found helpful, and if you have any comments on the second in particular I'd love to hear. One was dramatically decreasing my caffeine intake, which I found was almost like turning up the volume on static, it made it very difficult for me to read or feel other things.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

That's right.

Tim Ferriss:

I was using it maybe for many reasons, but it had the side effect at least of muting. Maybe that was why I did it, subconsciously, many of these feelings. The second was in fact a video that was recommended to me, but it corresponds to a book called *The Gift of Fear* by Gavin de Becker, who actually owns a company that does protective services and executive security. So you have to keep in mind, maybe you don't always want to ask a barber if you need a haircut, so keeping that in mind, it also, in brief, points to the benefits of some of these reactions or emotional states that we are prone to labeling negative.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yeah.

Tim Ferriss:

And the, as you said, not to make anyone paranoid, but rather to inform them, these are currently existent risks. And one of the hopes, certainly, with ultimately better researching these compounds after they've been really unfairly, but for understandable reasons, politicized and put into the same schedule in the United States as heroin and cocaine.

Dr. Gabor Maté:

Yeah.

Tim Ferriss:

To have them rescheduled so that they're prescribable, and if then that happens, the ability to certify therapists to regulate, and to maintain a broad type of quality control, goes up. One of the hopes is that that will decrease the likelihood of bad actors, and allow appropriate punishment for bad actors.