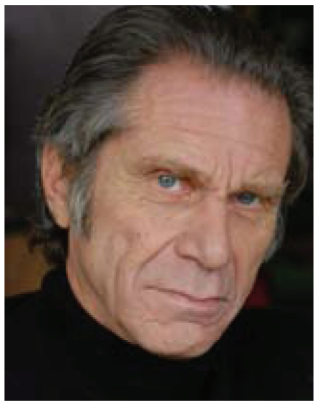
Could **Flower Power** Have Saved the World?



Gregory Sams
gregory@gregorysams.com
http://www.gregorysams.com

The psychedelic experience appears to have been, at one time or another, part and parcel of human cultures throughout the world; with or without assistance from the plant world, and usually with. Today, as our civilization careens mindlessly out of control and we face rejection by the planet that is our only home, it is appropriate to ask whether the virtual absence of the psychedelic experience in modern culture might be connected with the predicament in which we find ourselves.

The fields of ecology and green consciousness are products of the Sixties hippy movement, now branched and developed far beyond the first "back to the land" aspirations of the time. Before then, a few select and far-sighted individuals primed the pump, from Rachel Carson to Bertrand Russell, Aldous Huxley to George Ohsawa. But it was the wholesale ingestion of psychedelics that enabled large numbers of a new generation to break out of a mental straightjacket that has constrained our dominant Western thought processes for far too long.

…as our civilization careens mindlessly out of control and we face rejection by the planet that is our only home, it is appropriate to ask whether the virtual absence of the psychedelic experience in modern culture might be connected with the predicament in which we find ourselves.

Psychedelics can transport us into an unfamiliar space. The familiar world in which we live, with houses, plumbers, parliaments, cellphones, cars, advertising, restaurants and so forth is but one channel on the set of all possible channels. Because this is the reality we have created within the world around us, we are tuned to it to such a degree that we easily become oblivious to the deeper nature of this intricately interwoven world, of which we are but a part, living upon our little speck of dust within the Universe.

The psychedelic experience is not embraced as an escape from our world but as a ticket to escape from the single channel; to see the bigger picture and the smaller picture; to see our world from a different perspective, even from a different dimension. It is hard to emerge from this voyage without developing a realization, amongst many others, that those 'in power' are possessed of a narrow vision fuelled primarily by the desire to stay in power. Their viewpoint is of one channel only--the one that represents the status quo they understand, in whatever country they control--and their efforts to control and fine-tune this channel to a micro-degree can often appear ludicrous.

The "alternative" culture that developed in the Sixties was the first mass-movement to recognize that the channel we are tuned to is incompatible with the fostering of health, happiness or peace and goodwill among humankind. Perhaps we did not recognize the coming of climate change and the scale of the threat. But we certainly recognized, through a new and spiritual perspective, that our communal ship was in danger of sinking. The state's natural response was to do everything in their power to prevent us from building lifeboats, to stop us from tuning into new and experimental channels. And what may have most frightened the maintainers of the status quo was the prospect of a generation who were inserting flowers into gun barrels; embracing threatening concepts like love, peace, one-ness and non-violence; looking inside themselves; and rejecting a nine-to-five future as tax-paying consumers in an untenable endless-growth economy. Who would need Big Government any more?

The psychedelic experience re-connected us with our inner self and a world of spirit; with concepts such as harmony and

The fields of ecology and green consciousness are products of the Sixties hippy movement, now branched and developed far beyond the first back to the land aspirations of the time.

good vibrations; practices such as meditation and yoga; values such as conservation and re-cycling; organic farming and natural eating; alternative healing techniques from acupuncture to herbal and the laying on of hands. It is difficult, today, to imagine just how grey and disconnected from our true reality was the pre-Sixties culture of the Western world. Opening the doors of perception in those days was a much greater surprise than it is today. Yet it is depressing to see just how little has changed in the core mindset of those who profess to run our world; those who rely upon the power of coercion and propaganda to achieve their ends; those who ban cannabis and psychedelic drugs; those who seek to restrict and even ban the expression of dissent and protest; those who would drill holes in the lifeboats.

But how did we get disconnected in the first place--how did we get to the point where things that come naturally would be part of an "alternative" culture--be a "movement" instead of the mainstream? In the same way that we would not need a nutritional supplements industry were our food not refined and denatured in the first place, there would be little need for ecological awareness and a green movement had our culture not come to be isolated and dis-connected from the world around it.

Though our profligate consumption of the world's oil reserves can easily be seen as a root cause of our ecological crisis, it is important to recognize that our dis-connection from the planet was in place long before the Age of Oil. It is complex, bordering on the impossible, to conceive just how the discovery of cheap and transportable power would have impacted upon a culture that had not banned shamans and the shamanic experience. Those who developed the oil industry were of the same stock as those who slaughtered herds of buffalo in order to sell their tongues, the same who would destroy beautiful landscapes to extract a few pounds of yellow metal, the same who ardently believed in a universal god whose prime purpose lay in producing, providing for and monitoring the human race.

Perhaps we can track the original suppression of the shamanic, psychedelic experience right back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, described in the Bible's opening pages, and the most commonly known Bible story of all. In this fundamental story, the fruit-pushing snake is portrayed as an agent of the dark side for telling Eve that "when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3). The snake, of course, has been symbolic of knowledge and divinity across many religious and shamanic traditions throughout the world. An angry God, as punishment for being disobeyed, visits toil and suffering upon the human race thereafter, especially targeting women by promising to "greatly multiply your pain in childbearing" and decreeing that men shall "rule over you." It's a peculiar story to be sure, and one that has impacted upon us ever since.

An alternative interpretation of this Adam and Eve story was held by the widespread Gnostic sects known as the Ophites, who revered and recognized the serpent as man's benefactor and saw Jehovah as the bad guy who sought to keep us in ignorance by denying us knowledge of our potential divinity. The Ophites were declared heretics and brutally extinguished by the spread of an organized and intolerant Christianity in the fourth century. One could be forgiven for suggesting that had our species embraced the serpent's gift, we might still be living in harmony with each other and our planet--enjoying life in the paradise that we inhabit. Instead, a lack of differentiation between good and evil seems to be the hallmark of those in power today.

The powerful post-Constantine Church claimed a monopoly on spirituality, banning or destroying anything they thought to be in conflict with their religious hegemony. Witchcraft, astrology, spiritualism, soothsaying, and worshipping the Sun or moon could all get one into serious trouble. A patent was effectively put upon the ecstatic state, with punishment meted out to those caught seeking a 'religious' experience by any means other than those approved by the Church.

The psychedelic experience and shamans were out--thought control was in. A select group of people now decided what we could think and how we should behave, assuming a mandate from God to do so. The natural world was not supposed to be able to teach us things and our intuition was not to be trusted in matters which had been divinely decreed, or decreed by those who claimed divine responsibility to do so. We could use our intellect to learn about the natural world, usually for the purpose of exploiting it, but that world itself was stupid and could not inform us, and to believe it could was to indulge in superstitious pagan behaviour. That was a dangerous place to be.

The natural world had been provided by our divine creator as little more than a store cupboard for humanity. A common mindset believed that we were specifically given "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." as well as "every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, etc." It says it all, right there in the Bible (Genesis 1).

A consequence of this assumption of human dominion over all was to invest Western civilization with a God-given license to take from this planet with unabashed greed, wiping out species and blithely destroying landscapes and cultures in the process of "developing" them. Humanity was relieved of the need to show any consideration or thought to the land or its other residents, except for their utility to the intelligent human race. Everything else in the Universe was seen as stupid or inanimate, other than creatures kind of like us, and the denizens of Heaven. It is becoming more and more apparent that this viewpoint is ungrateful, thoughtless, plain stupid and as damaging to us as it is to the planet that hosts us. Yet it has infused the culture of the so-called "developed" world for seventeen centuries.

Doors opened by the psychedelic experience allow us to blow this crippling mental straightjacket right out of our mind space, revealing a world more interconnected, alive and wonder-filled than we had ever realized; a world in which we may feel like gods, but not a world that we can rule over like deterministic kings; a world that is our host and teacher as well as our conscious provider. We learn to respect the world, and wonder at how we could have ever done otherwise.

For the shaman in all of us, spirit IS out there and is as real a part of our world as the physical stuff we can see and touch. When we recognize the spirit in the trees, the spirit in the mountain, the spirit in the earth and the Sun and its fellow stars, we live in harmony and respect with our environment–it comes naturally. •

"If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern."
–William Blake, ***The Marriage of Heaven and Hell***

Gregory Sams is the author of ***Uncommon Sense: the State is Out of Date***–not recommended by leading politicians, (Chaos Works, London, 1997,available online at: http://chaos-works.com) and ***Sun of gOd*** – the key to understanding a Universe brimming with intelligence and design, with no need for an Intelligent Designer. (Weiser Books, 2009)

"***Sun of gOd*** is simply one of the wisest, most lucid, and thoughtfully written books that I've ever read on integrating spirituality with other disciplines. A marvelously written, unusually insightful, and extremely well-integrated discussion on the origins of religion and the evolution of consciousness, that radically refreshes our view of the world."
–DJB

Doors opened by the psychedelic experience allow us to blow this crippling mental straightjacket right out of our mind space, revealing a world more inter-connected, alive and wonder-filled than we had ever realized...