

On Drugs .



coffee. People don't realize that it's a strong drug that can become quite addicting. You don't have to look very far to see people who can't function normally without it. Caffeine doesn't create energy it just makes your nervous system release stored energy. Once you've done that you have to give your body a chance to replenish those stores of energy. Our problem with coffee has to do with our failure for the most part to acknowledge it as a drug.

Now there are South American Indians who take a drug called yoco that contains up to six per cent caffeine. But they only take it when the sun comes and that way, because their bodies have time to store energy, they never become addicted to it. They have a very positive relationship with their drugs and they don't have any problems with them.

In Port Townsend in 1977 you told a great story about the mushroom Amanitas and misinformation...

I had a friend who was living out in the woods in Oregon and he had heard that you could get high from eating Amanita pantherina. He ate some of them and became very disconnected from ordinary reality. Now he was a great tree climber and he climbed up on this log that had fallen across a ravine and fell off and hit his head on the rocks below. Not knowing whether he was dreaming it, or remembering it or what, he felt a compulsion to keep repeating this act. He did it seven times in a row, and finally the seventh time he hit his head and cut his scalp and was bleeding all over.

Someone was watching this and did nothing until he hurt himself then they took him to the emergency room of a hospital. The people that took him there had no fears of his mushroom eating, their only concern

was whether or not he'd fractured his skull. But as soon as mushroom was mentioned the doctors went into their drug panic mode and gave him a large dose of atropine. In those days atropine was advertised as the antidote for Amanitas. The truth is that atropine makes the effects of the mushroom even stronger. So he had a much more intense experience than he would have had if they'd just left him alone.

That's typical. I could give you many more examples about misinformation about psychoactive drugs in the medical profession. Doctors generally, unless they've taken pains to teach themselves about it, it's not something that they're prepared to deal with.

One of the common myths is that women who take LSD will have deformed babies...

Or that LSD breaks chromosomes. That myth grew out of some incredibly bad research. When the research that showed that LSD has no effect on chromosomes was done it didn't get any publicity because that's not what people wanted to hear.

This is still happening today. The head of our National Institute of Drug Abuse just testified before congress that actual research shows that marijuana smoking leads to heroin addiction. Here it is 1981 and that kind of stuff is still being repeated. It's true that a lot of junkies will give you a history of other drug use, but they probably drank alcohol before they smoked marijuana and people don't run around saying alcohol leads to heroin.

What are the real physical and psychological dangers of LSD?

LSD and its close relatives, "the true hallucinogens", are, I think, the least toxic drugs known to medicine. There is just not a shred of evidence that those drugs are medically harm-

ful either immediately or in the long term.

That doesn't mean that they're safe. The dangers of LSD relate to its psychological toxicity. Problems of that sort usually stem from taking them in bad ways; either taking too high a dose or taking them in a bad setting or with people who are inexperienced. All those things can combine to create a bad trip.

By the way I'm not talking about marijuana here. I think that marijuana is a relatively more toxic drug that has a great potential for abuse.

Most people think that hallucinogens are among the most dangerous of psychoactive drugs and that's really an example of how people's attitudes are shaped by fear and ignorance.

Could you elaborate on what you see to be the positive uses that LSD could have in our society?

I'd love to see more research into the positive potential of hallucinogens. There is essentially no research being done on possible therapeutic uses. They have a lot of potential not just in their ability to show us things about the mind that we didn't know before but in physical medicine as well. It's very disappointing that there is nothing being done. That's due to a whole variety of factors, pre-

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Thank You

Douglas Johnson