

**Bill L.D 1914**

**The Right for Access to Psilocybin**

**Daniel Beauchemin, RN**

**Beauchemind@husson.edu**

“ Turn on, tune in, drop out!” This was the phrase exclaimed by Timothy Leary for all the world to hear from the campus of Harvard in 1966, the phrase which catalyzed a movement by the national government to quell the use of psychedelics within the United States. With the muttering of these words Tim would put the final stake in heart of decades of research and healing fostered through psychedelic assisted therapy, and ultimately created enough disruption that not only did the mental health community lose access to one of the most powerful therapy tools ever known to modern psychopharmacology, but even more offensive was the indigenous peoples of America suffered an affliction to their religious freedom through the prohibition of their traditional earth medicine which had been used safely in their communities for what could be thousands of years. Although the disruption to access of substances which have been known to allow people to derive the benefit of thousands of hours of psychotherapy in the period of a single day has gone on for far too long, I am so excited to be able to be having this conversation today. We cannot let the opportunity be lost for so many people to finally be free of the suffering caused by disorders of low entropic thinking. What we need to ask ourselves today is whether we are finally ready to confront the issue that safe access to psychedelics is the right of any free people, a right which was unjustly revoked for political reasons over fifty years ago.

Starting in the 1990’s and accelerating to the present there has been a resurgence in the research into the use of psychedelic medication led by Johns Hopkins University in the United States, but extending to both international public and private agencies and corporations (Pollan, 2018). The FDA has even granted psilocybin a breakthrough status to treat major depressive disorder and is now in phase two of clinical trials (Penn, 2021).

Studies are continuing to link disorders such as depression and anxiety to what is becoming known as an overactive default mode network (DMN). The DMN resides in the medial prefrontal cortex as well as amygdala and hippocampus and serves to offer the individual to perceive what they know as “self” (Pollan, 2018). The mental duress that some people experience when facing

terminal illness mimics greatly the patterns of patients with depression, anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorders, which have all been linked to overactive DMN ( Presern, 2021). Psychedelics serve to disrupt the DMN and increase the level of entropic activity in the brain. In this manner they can treat disorders tied to low entropy such as anxiety, depression, OCD, and addiction, which could be easier classified as disorders of to-rigid thinking (Pollan, 2018). Psychedelics can disrupt thought patterns and increase the ability of the brain to pursue alternate pathways of neurological activity(Saxe, 2018). Essentially it allows the thought process to step outside of well trodden neural pathways and instead foray into alternative neurocognitive patterns. Consider just how valuable to quality of life a substance is that gives the opportunity to alter the thought perceptions of death, especially to those clutched in a fear of perceived imminent finality.

Having given you all that information, I need to stop and say that as we all sit here today and ponder whether the people of Maine are free enough to have access to a drug which allows the exploration of their consciousness, there is another drug that we are not talking about. This drug has been known to take people of sound mind and cause them to go into fits of violence and rage, rape and destruction. There are countless studies which show the loss of ability to think clearly and effect rationale judgment with a concurrent loss of motor coordination when under its influence of this other substance. People take this drug and accept more dangerous risks with little regard for conclusions. Even if you don't do anything so stupid as to cause immediate harm to self or others when under its influence, the chemical can still cause terrible harm to the body, damaging the liver, heart and nervous system, leading to death with long term chronic exposure. I have seen people suffering the chronic effects of this drug decompensate and die even before the age of 40 due to liver injury and internal hemorrhage. I have seen people with their entire lower halves of their bodies so swollen with fluid that they could barely move, their eyes stained yellow, and blood pouring out of their mouths screaming "look at what is happening to me!" The most difficult part for me today to speak about is that even though I witnessed firsthand the wake of destruction

caused by this other drug, a drug that major corporations have positioned as as American institution, I was unable to find a way to exist without it myself. When my wife told me she could not go on any longer, I could not exist without it. When I would wake up every single morning and just lie there and try to remember for once just what I had for dinner the night before, I could not exist without it. When I was thrown in jail, I could not get exist without it. As everything in my life that I knew and loved burned down around me, I could not exist without it.

The drug that I could not get past, the drug which inflicts more damage on our population than any street drug, including unregulated psychedelics ever has, the drug that psilocybin finally allowed me to see beyond when I had even lost the hope to care, was alcohol.

My name is Dan and I am here today to support access to psilocybin for the people of Maine, not only as a nurse who is witnessing a losing battle to mental illness and substance abuse, but as a person saved by psilocybin. Today I am compelled to share my personal story with the mushroom.

I wish I could tell you where I first heard this idea, to take mushrooms to stop drinking alcohol, but I cannot. Right about a year ago however I did just that, I took some mushrooms, and I stopped drinking. I wish it did not sound so simple, but that is basically what happened. After a subjective experience with psilocybin I was imprinted with a basic fundamental understanding which had long escaped me. Alcohol is poison. If I put you into a jar of alcohol, you would die. After my experience with psilocybin alcohol no longer seem to be my default operating condition. I just did not need to drink anymore. There was no existential crisis, there was no battling of addictions, I just saw what I was doing from a new perspective; I saw alcohol for the poison that it was for me. My limited perception of reality had been blocking this obvious truth from me; no small feat considering I had even tossed our entire family dining set off the porch one night while black out drunk at dinner. It was only the drug psilocybin which finally expanded my awareness to a reality that did not involve drinking until I was numb.

It might be difficult for those here that have not had the subjective experience with psychedelics to be able to truly understand the value can be derived by their use. And although an ineffability is one hallmark of a meaningful psychedelic experience, for those that have not had the opportunity, you might be best served with the following imagery as described by Leo Zeff whom was the founder of the MDMA movement. "Imagine that you are standing in the center of a very large round stage. Around the stage is a huge curtain very very high and it's closed except where the curtain comes together in the front there is a 3 foot opening. As you look out that opening everything that you see is the totality of your experience of yourself that is of your own consciousness. What happens on a trip is that by some mysterious means the curtain very gradually is pulled back. It's pulled all the way open until finally you are given the opportunity see everything that's been there all the time that you could not see behind the curtain. All the different levels of experience that it's possible to have, all of the different truths, all of the new alternate ways in which to perceive reality, you can access. Then as the drug wears off very gradually the curtain gets pulled back around until eventually most of your view of that reality is again restricted to a limited window. However this time instead of being left with 3 feet of space to look through the curtain you have about 15 feet of space. What has happened is that through the use of psychedelics your awareness of reality has been expanded."

The opening through the curtain that Leo is referring to is the default thinking processes which command us so strongly in our everyday lives. When I hear myself talk about these ideas of expanding consciousness and connecting with alternate realities I sometimes feel like I should be coating myself in patchouli oil and organizing a love in. But the use of psilocybin goes so far beyond nice feelings or having a good time. When I talk about an expanded awareness of reality what I'm referring to is the expanded awareness beyond the low entropic rigid thoughts that so many people today suffer from. Now all of a sudden because of a psilocybin experience what used to be so important no longer is. The thoughts telling a person that they're not good enough, that

something bad is about to happen at any moment, that they should just pick up a needle because it does not really matter anyways, that they really just don't fit in anywhere and that their job sucks and they cannot do any better, and the thought that once they can have just one drink that they will begin to feel just a little bit better; it is these thoughts that will no longer hold the same command of attention that they once did.

Thank you for taking the time to listen today, this has been so meaningful to be able to share my experience with psilocybin with all of you. It is not going to be a matter of if, but rather when these medicines are made public for all. Right now it is the wealthy, well connected, and highly educated who mainly benefit from psychedelic therapy, however it is for everyone else that I stand and speak for today. Psychedelics should be accessible to all those adults whom decide that they feel they could benefit from the opportunity to investigate more deeply their own consciousness, looking past the narrow perceptions of the ego to a more universally connected understanding of reality. In closing, as this committee considers how to proceed in returning access of psychedelics to the people of Maine I will pose to you the question once asked by the poet Mary Oliver, a question which all psychedelics will impel any person to take seriously. "What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life."