LSD: A JEWISH VIEW

The use of mind-affecting drugs is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history, men have taken drugs to evade reality or to stimulate religious experience. American Indians used peyote as part of their worship, and the Mexicans ate mushrooms. The Moslems — hashish, the Zoroastrians — haoma, — the list is endless. The opium of the Orientals is already mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud and by Maimonides.

These drugs are not narcotics, tranquilizers or energizers. They are known as consciousness-expanding, altering perspective and perception in new dimensions of experience. By far, the most controversial among them in terms of its effect on the individual's psyche and personality is LSD.

Lysergic Acid Diethalamide was first discovered by Dr. Albert Hoffman in 1938. Publicized recently by Timothy Leary as the utopian hope by which he wants “to turn on the whole world,” its use has spread from the breeding grounds of the avant-garde to college campuses all over the country. Approximately 5 percent of the nation's college youth have taken LSD at least once; evidence shows that the age of its users is dropping.

Dr. Donald B. Louria, a Cornell medical professor and head of the infectious disease laboratory at Bellevue, reports that 130 persons with LSD-induced psychoses have been admitted in the last eighteen months.

He has attested to the fact that effects of the drug hallucinations may reappear weeks later under stress, and that a single dose is sufficient to cause permanent personality changes.¹ Many of those hospitalized suffered from strong terror and others exhibited homicidal or suicidal tendencies. Its potency and the dangers of taking an overdose are dramatic: a single ounce is enough of a dosage for 300,000 people. The average dosage of 200 micrograms, synthesized easily by any chemistry student, is

¹ Footnote reference is not provided in the text.
and Houston write that “LSD is exactly like atomic energy. It has enormous potential for good or evil. Right now we are just seeing the mental Hiroshimas . . . the value of the drug is not the drug itself but how the insights are implemented in one’s daily life.”

Granted, then, that LSD has potential in certain areas of psychological imbalance. However, the adolescent who takes it does so from a different motivation, for the “neurotic” in him is unrecognized by the subject. In actuality, the adolescent user often develops into a Dostoevskian “underground man,” whose vision of the future contains radically new relationships between the individual and society.

In a society as impersonal and tension-charged as ours, where the sense of identity is lacking, and belonging is replaced by emotional insecurity, man finds himself tragically lonely. The adolescent student, more than others, is beset by a deep sense of unbearable isolation. Escape mechanisms of all sorts are therefore employed to defend one’s ego from the devastating dangers to which he is so critically exposed. Instead of seeking his Ego-ideal in the real world, the olam-ha’asiah, the search is carried on in distortion. The colorama viewer who claims he is undergoing a voluntary psychoanalysis is deluding himself. His claim that he has “found himself” is true only to the extent that he has seen but a minute part of his potential, in unreal circumstances. Says Dr. Louria, “Those who frequently use the drug almost inevitably withdraw from society and enter into a solipsistic, negativistic existence, in which LSD is not merely an experience in the totality of living, but rather becomes synonomous with life itself.”

THE “REAL” IN JUDAISM

An offense, even when committed without conscious knowledge, is considered by the Rabbis to be a “bad symptom.” It is an indication of mental weakness and moral disequilibrium. Thus, the Rabbis said, “Sinful thoughts are more severe than the sinful act itself,” for the thoughts are indicative of a blemished personality. This, too, is the impact of the Talmudic comment
that man sins only when possessed by a ruach shtut (spirit of folly).

We know from clinical practice that neurotic demands are usually selfish desires. These cravings, outcroppings of the neurosis, are unconscious reactions. Our Rabbis envisioned sin much as the psychoanalyst views the neurotic; both the sin and the neurotic act are evidence of internal conflict.

The hallucinatory state of mind, where one's actions lack control and conscious awareness, may be the same as the lapse into neurotic or sinful behavior. Not only are the acts committed under drug influence mirrors of the user's subconscious, but taking the drugs itself is a lapse into infantile, socially-unacceptable behavior. The attempt to escape reality is in itself neurotic.

We thus can see that, discounting the possible neurotic and psychotic effects on the student user, the normal youthful motivation is in itself contrary to Jewish thought. For Judaism the real is the world of creation in all its diversity, and man's role in it is to act as a partner in hallowing all of its aspects. If the state of the world is depressing, "neither are you free to set yourself apart from it." If social institutions such as marriage and family have disintegrated, the Jewish answer is not their abandonment. The salvation of man is dependent on his capability to raise up his world, not on his ability to raise himself out of it.

Some claim that the drug experience gives the user character traits that will be useful upon his return to normal consciousness. The fact that one has increased sensitivity while under drug influence would not justify their use unless this sensitivity extended into the olam ha'asiyah. (This eliminates from our consideration all those who use LSD for aesthetic or hedonistic reasons alone. Regarding this claim, there is no evidence available in current research.)

On the contrary, it has been pointed out that the Indians of the Southwest and Mexico who make extensive use of hallucinogens have passive, stagnant cultures. In an important series of experiments, the authors report that "These drugs attack some of the deepest values of our culture — competition, material achievement, striving, . . . social responsibility. . . ."
HALAKHIC CONSIDERATION

As mentioned above, the only recurrent traits in the drug seem to be their negative effects, as pointed out by Dr. Louria. His evidence of an adverse “pleasure-to-risk ratio” should be considered halakhically. Self injury — hachovel be’atzmo — is clearly prohibited. This principle was codified by Maimonides who states that “man is forbidden to inflict injury upon himself or upon others.”\(^{18}\) If such is the case with physical injury — a fortiori this applies to mental injury through psychedelic ingestion, which affects both the psyche and the soma alike, with serious repercussions.

Inducing others to take psychedelic drugs or any harmful medicine “for kicks” as is the practice in the “pot session groups,” may be considered as hachovel bechaveiro — as injuring his fellow man — a damage which makes one liable for compensation\(^ {19}\) in addition to the halakhic consideration of chamira sekanta me’issura, involving not only individual but collective injury.\(^ {20}\)

In fact, causing fright and emotional stress to others even without concrete damage is an offense which, though exempt from the judgments of man, makes one liable bedinei Shamayim (judgment of God).\(^ {21}\)

It may also be stated that enticing one into the use of psychedelics entails also the issur of velifney iver lo titein michshol\(^ {22}\) — placing a stumbling block before the inexperienced and naive. Violation of such an ethical precept involves a large variety of moral principles bordering on wrong counsel and ill advice, which are an expression of human callousness and disrespect for our fellowmen. Maimonides in his Regimen Sanitatis reiterates “the deep concern of the Torah for the mental welfare of the Israelites, whether they be sinful or righteous.” In many of his medical works, he stresses “the importance of mental health, the improvement of behavior which is the cure of the mind and its faculties,” stating repeatedly “how dangerous it is to indulge in medicine, tranquillizers, sedatives or stimulants and becoming habituated to them.”\(^ {23}\)

Many of the rabbinic regulations concerning the “better ad-
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justment of society” point to the fact that damage or injury perpetrated on a *rabbin*, involving a group, is considered a more serious offense, *hezeika derabbim*, than any other injury concerning the individual. In this sense we can consider the hallucinogenic craze as an *hezeika derabbim*, a hazard for the entire community, and a direct threat to organized society.24 New bio-medical evidence points to the genetic damage caused by LSD to the chromosomes, which, according to Dr. Maimon Cohen of the State University School of Medicine, could lead to mental retardation and physical abnormalities in the offsprings of LSD users as shown in a number of maternity cases.

Traditionally viewed, then, taking psychedelic drugs and exposing oneself to a “bad trip” with all the possible psychotic repercussions would be considered a transgression of the positive commandment for man’s welfare in the Torah, *venishmartem meod lenafshoteichem* (taking protective measures to guard one’s health), committing an act of *chaballah beatzmo* (self-damage) and hampering his homeostasis and mental balance from performing the Divine way of life properly.

**Religious Experiences**

Not a few “trippies” have reported on the similarity of their experiences to the reports of religious mystics and quite a few papers have discussed the drug’s religious implications.

From our point of view we must address ourselves to several questions. Is the mystical experience in general a religious experience, synonomous with Jewish religious experience, or is it even a legitimate part of Jewish living?

On the first question, opinion seems to be divided. Walter Pahnke, a psychologist and theologian, writes, “...all mystical experience is not necessarily religious. If one makes the concept of a ‘personal God’ central to the definition of religion, many forms of mystical experience could not be considered religious. The phenomena of mystical experience may occur outside the framework of any formal religion. ... Whether or not mystical experience is religious depends upon one’s definition of religion. ..."25
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Gershom Scholem is of another opinion: "... there is no such thing as mysticism in the abstract ... which has no particular religious system. ... But only in our days has the belief gained ground that there is such a thing as an abstract mystical religion."26

If one keeps in mind that Scholem's analysis is chiefly historical, while Pahnke speaks from the results of experimental data, the contradiction may resolve itself. Historically, mystics were people deeply concerned with their particular religions who integrated the experience into their philosophy or theosophy of religion. Nonetheless, one can readily see certain psychological phenomena which are common to all religious mystics, which Scholem readily affirms. From Dr. Pahnke's evidence, it would seem that LSD has the ability to duplicate the psychological phenomena of unity, ego-transcendence and the noetic feeling described by James, in a person who has no conscious religious life. Hence, the severing of the mystical from the religious. From the point of view of religion, it is a counterfeit experience.

In Buber's criticism of Aldous Huxley's counsel to the use of mescaline as a means to acquire mystical insight, he states: "Man may master as he will his situation ... he may alter it, exchange it for another, but the fugitive flight out of the claim of the situation into situationless-ness is no legitimate affair of man. And the true name of all paradises which man creates for himself by chemical or other means is situationlessness ... It is a flight from the authentic spokenness of speech in whose realm a response is demanded, and response is responsibility."27

We spoke before of man's place in the world of reality. Mystical experience is no doubt a part of Judaism, and it may be the summum bonum of religious experience, but it must arise from the involvement of man in the real world and it must enable him to return to it. It is the final rung on a ladder whose legs are resting on the ground. One doesn't fly to the top; one climbs.

Religious experience in its true sense is from within. It is the fervor of the soul — the divine spark — to unite itself with the eternal flame. Such mystic fervor which one sees in the Hasidic ecstasy aroused by Tefilah (prayer) — a sound, healthy re-
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...velation is the encounter of the purified soul with the Holy — can hardly be compared to a drug experience. On the one hand, the experience is the climax of *hirhur teshuvah* (thinking of repentance) and *chesbon hanefesh* (self analysis). In the latter case, it is the experience of a person lacking discipline. In the former, it is the result of a total orientation of the self toward accepting a certain mode of life. In the hippie, it is the result of a haphazard attempt to escape the reality of a purposeless existence. Into what frame of reference can the hippie channel this ambiguous feeling?

Contemporary youth is lacking in stability and orientation towards an ethico-religious code of values. They must be taught that religion wants man to play a role in society — *hamakir et mekomo* (knowing one’s place). If there is a self-accepted discipline of a *torat chayim*, repression is never necessary. They must also learn that healthy, interpersonal behavior, which senses affection and acceptance, is another genuine expression of one’s real self.

A key word among the hippies is “love” — a deficiency they severely feel. Hassidim tell of a father who complained to the Baal Shem that his son had forsaken God. “What, Rebbe, shall I do?” “Love him more than ever” was the Baal Shem’s reply. Aside from showing then that love in all its forms is a cornerstone of Judaism, parents must actively provide love and security to their children in this age-period of upheaval and adjustment.

We must not evade responsibility and mature growth, nor fear reality and escape into a chemically-induced transcendentalism, but we must accept and master our *olam hazeh* — this world. In his anguished cry for identity, purposefulness, and self-discovery from the refrigerating alienation and de-personalization, man must “turn on” his inner resources and redirect from subliminally towards a more affiliative, symbiotic and sociable personality. By rechanneling his psychic “economy” towards self-improvement, better inter-personal relations, and a sincere human understanding, man can rediscover his true Self.

Experiences in self-discipline, which correct the baseness of orgiastic passions and represent impulses, fortify the mind with enlightened and useful knowledge and bring in their wake inner serenity and hopeful existence. Knowing that fellow men will...
comprehend affliction because an omniscient God understands human frailties and suffering, moves Man to heights of spiritual elevation and closer encounter with his Maker. In this way, man can become a co-worker with God, and achieve integration and spiritual redemption.

NOTES

1. Donald B. Louria, in “Therapeutic Notes,” Parke, Davis & Co.
11. Ibid.
12. Varieties.
15. Chagigah, 5a. Compare Bava Metzia 33b, Chulin 15a (kansinan shogeg atu mezid), Bava Kama 32b.
18. Mishnah, Bava Kama, VII, 8, Maimonides, Code, Hilkhot Chovel uMazik, 5:1; Ibid. Hilkhot Shavuot, 5:17; SeMag, Lavin 70, 238.
19. Bava Kama 83b; Mishnah Bava Kama 8:1, Tosefta Bava Kama 9, 29. See also Yalkout Shimeoni, Vayera 91, and Beshalach 257. Compare also Ketuvot 32b where Hachovel bechaveiro requires also mechilah by the inducer.
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21. See Bava Kama 56a, Maimonides, Code, Hilkhot Chovel uMazik 5:9 and infer a fortiori for nizkei nefesh.


23. Maimonides, Pirkei Mosheh, 8; see also Eight Chapters, 1.

24. Bava Batra 2b and 59b, Kidushin 39b. Compare Moed Katan 13a, Sanhedrin 72a, Chulin 142a, where man is always considered “muad” even “beshogeg.” See also Zohar Bereshit 111a.


