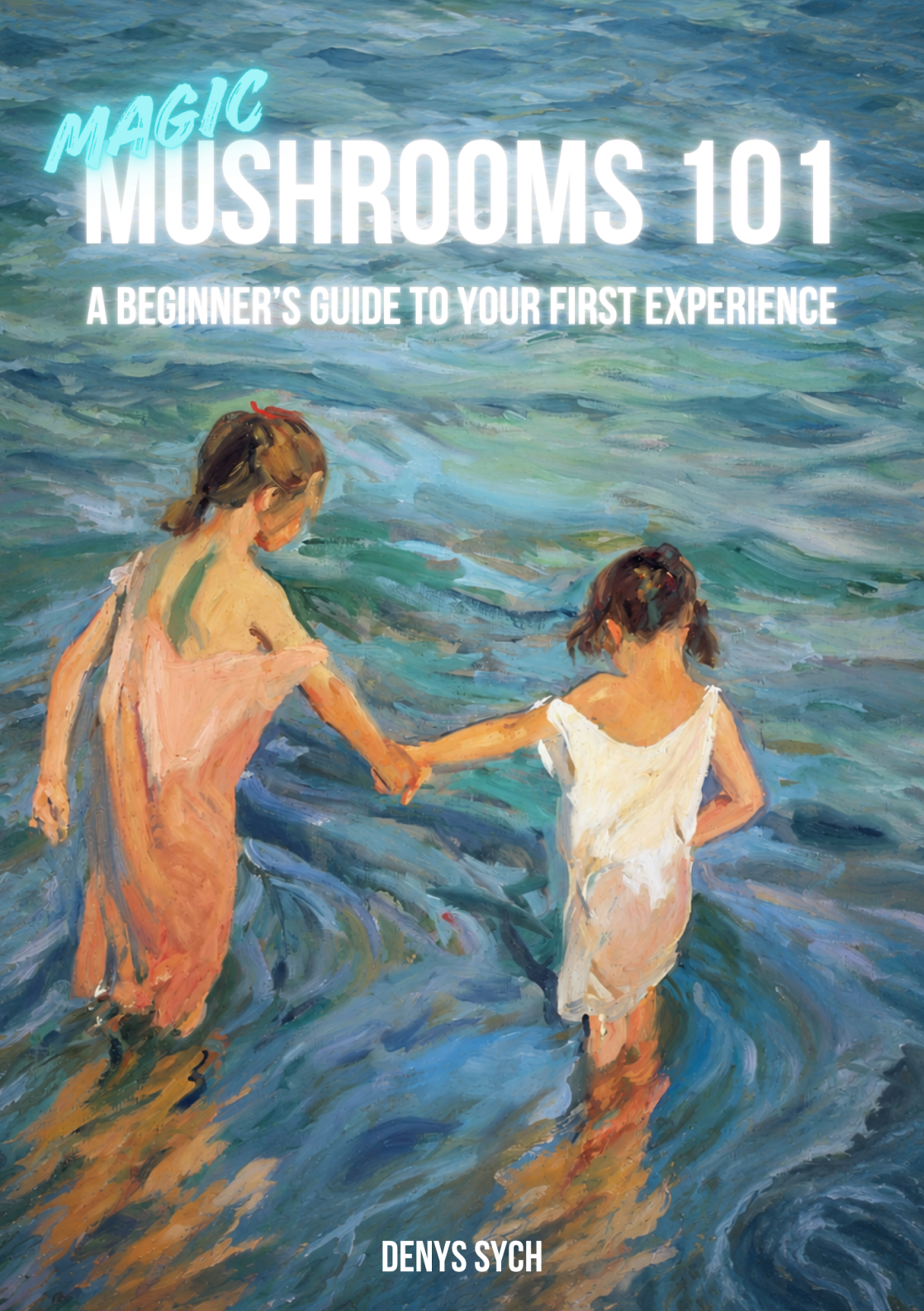




MAGIC MUSHROOMS 101

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO YOUR FIRST EXPERIENCE

DENYS SYCH

Magic Mushrooms 101

A Beginner's Guide to Your First Experience

This book will guide you through every stage of a psychedelic journey: from preparation and intention, to working with unexpected turns, to gentle integration.

It is written for those who want to approach the experience with full responsibility—to reduce risks, navigate the pitfalls, and carry valuable insights out of the journey.

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The Breeze. Prologue

This book is not written to convince anyone to use psychedelics. Not to declare them a solution to all problems or something that everyone needs.

But if you are considering trying them, I will share how to make the experience safe and worthwhile.

It is *extremely important* to me that you know about the risks, and about ways of engaging with yourself and the world before, during, and after the journey. Equally important to me is the safety and well-being of the people around you.

Conversations about psychedelics very often start with mystical experiences, astonishing sensations, visions, insights, spirituality, or therapeutic potential. All of this does indeed occur—both in research and in personal experience.

But what is the point if someone ends up with psychological trauma? If someone harms themselves or others? If someone finds themselves in a situation that could have been avoided with a more responsible approach?

Psychedelics can be part of a process of deep change. This is a neurobiological fact—they genuinely alter the way differ-

ent parts of your brain interact. But what matters to me is not that I or you have become different, but how we go on living with that.

There will be no stories here about seeking unusual experiences. People often interpret the same experience in completely different ways. I will not tell you what you should see or understand. I do not believe anyone has that right except you. My goal is to create conditions in which you can explore your experience more deeply and arrive at your own conclusions.

The work is about the culture of engaging with altered states of consciousness. Although the focus is on psilocybin mushrooms, most of the principles apply to any intense inner experience. Many of them may prove useful after deep meditation, intense breathwork, various trance states, and other methods that can significantly shift perception.

My path is most closely tied to mushrooms, so I will speak about them not only from books I have read or stories I have heard, but from my own experience—including observations, mistakes, and conclusions.

Inner change implies not only taking a substance (that is just the beginning), but intensive work. I consider preparation

and integration equally important—we will talk about them and other things further on.

The risks are real. From temporary disorientation to exacerbation of latent psychiatric conditions. Intense experiences can trigger personal and existential crises, painful realizations. Contraindications, “bad trips,” working with difficult states—these are not secondary topics but the starting point. Problems are not guaranteed, but readiness for them is important regardless of whether anything happens at all.

We will begin with the question of whether you should even move in this direction: we will consider limitations, contraindications, possible risks, yellow and red flags, and situations where it is better to choose another path.

Then—preparation: working with intention and expectations, creating a safe space, attention to physical and psychological state—sleep, nutrition, digital and emotional hygiene, the role of a sitter, tools for recording details of the experience, as well as questions of dosage and method of consumption.

We will talk separately about the experience itself: what can happen during an altered state of consciousness, how to engage with difficult moments, and what practices help maintain calm.

After that—integration: how to weave the acquired knowledge into life. We will talk about approaches that help solidify changes, about communication—how and when to talk about what you have experienced, where to find support, and also about pitfalls after powerful experiences.

I believe many of the ideas in this guide will prove useful beyond its main focus. Ultimately, this is not so much about substances as it is about the person—about their ability to encounter unfamiliar experience, maintain respect for themselves and others, not rush to conclusions, and gradually make what they have experienced part of their life.

The Beach. Red and Yellow Flags

Let's begin not with vivid imagery or *expanding consciousness*, but with risks and safety. Your well-being matters more than any experience, no matter how extraordinary. Sometimes the wisest decision is simply to let a questionable idea go.

Yes, mushrooms can be a starting point for inner change—my own story is no exception. But they are not a universal path, nor a pill that suits everyone. There are other roads to inner transformation, self-knowledge, and unusual states of awareness.

Why do people turn to psychedelics at all?

Reasons vary: sheer curiosity, a life impasse, the aftermath of loss. Some seek answers to existential questions, trying to feel a deeper connection to themselves or the world. Others are drawn to stories of unusual states of consciousness, of

spiritual insights. There are many reasons, and each is important and valid in its own way.

The question is not why a person wants to dive into a psychedelic experience. The question is whether this path is theirs. For some it may prove a suitable trail; for others, a place to twist an ankle. Sometimes it's a matter of poor conditioning, sometimes bad luck, and sometimes a direct contraindication to the strain.

Red Flags

There are circumstances in which the experience poses serious risk. The psyche is a complex, multi-layered system, so a little caution early on can prevent trouble later. Understanding the possible consequences is the absolute bedrock of psychedelic practice.

Mental Health

This concerns first and foremost psychiatric disorders, especially those involving psychotic states (for example, schizophrenia and bipolar affective disorder), as well as cases where such diagnoses run in the family. If you already have a psychiatric diagnosis or serious doubts about your own

mental health—any decisions should be discussed exclusively with a professional. This is not an area where intuition or internet advice is appropriate.

It is also worth knowing about the risk of HPPD—a condition in which visual effects persist or return days or months after the experience. This is fairly rare, but if symptoms appear, you should consult a specialist.

Physical Stress

Psychedelics place noticeable strain on the cardiovascular system: increased heart rate, blood pressure fluctuations, autonomic reactions (nausea, sweating). If you have heart disease, acute-phase hypertension, or other serious somatic conditions—an unsupervised experience is strongly discouraged. The same applies to severe liver and kidney disease (impaired metabolism can affect the experience), as well as pregnancy and breastfeeding—here the experience is absolutely contraindicated. The body must be ready for the load.

Emotional Crises

Today, psilocybin is being actively researched as a tool for treating depression and other conditions. But these studies are conducted in controlled clinical settings with profession-

al support. Do not undertake journeys during periods when you are unstable, vulnerable, or on the edge.

Medications and Alcohol

Do not discontinue prescribed medications on your own. If you are taking any medications, be sure to consult a doctor. This is especially important for antidepressants and other substances that affect serotonin—their interaction with psychedelics is not fully understood and may carry additional risks.

Avoid alcohol. This can lead to catastrophic consequences. Refrain from stimulants and any kind of drugs on the day of the journey. This will prevent possible traumatic outcomes.

Yellow Flags

Sometimes it is worth telling yourself: “Not now.”

If you hope that mushrooms alone will fix your life, solve relationship problems, or relieve inner pain—be careful. Psychedelics are rarely a way to escape yourself; rather, they tend to draw attention precisely to what we are avoiding.

Paradoxically, this may also hold a gift: often we spend our lives stubbornly turning away from personal hidden qualities.

This is a good place to recall Jung's Shadow. Those parts of the psyche we hide, considering them "not-me." Among them is not only what we are afraid to admit in ourselves— anxiety, weakness, hatred—but also what we implicitly refuse to reveal: our own strength, openness, courage. A psychedelic experience can illuminate both. The knowledge gained makes excellent material for further work, even if meeting these sides of ourselves is not always easy.

General Considerations

Yellow flags may include pressure from friends or social circles, a desire to prove something to someone (including yourself), emotional instability, severe fatigue, lack of a safe environment, or insufficient time for subsequent integration of the experience.

If you decide to have the experience with someone nearby, make sure that person is sober, calm, familiar with the subject, and will not laugh at your experience or dismiss it.

The Unrelenting Call

One subtle point that is mentioned less often. Unlike many other substances—alcohol, nicotine, opioids, or even some medications—psychedelics do not cause physical dependence in the classical sense. But psychological craving is a different story. It is linked to the desire to be in that state again, to feel the same thing, to escape the ordinary or “brighten” the time. If you notice a tendency toward *escapism*—fleeing reality through any means—you should approach psychedelics with particular care.

Another paradox: the very same mushrooms, used wisely, can help break addictions—both chemical (alcohol, tobacco, hard drugs) and behavioral, including unhealthy patterns in relationships with yourself and others.

Young People

The brain continues to develop and reorganise during youth, and the prefrontal cortex—involved in risk assessment and self-control—matures later than many other regions. That is why many specialists recommend caution with psychedelic experience during this period.

How to Check Yourself

A good option is to consult a specialist or a retreat centre for screening. Only a practicing psychotherapist or psychiatrist familiar with the subject can objectively assess your condition and history. In an ideal world, each of us would have the money and resources to do exactly that. Reality, however, makes its own adjustments.

If you do not have access to professional consultation, honestly and without embellishment check yourself against the list of red and yellow flags above, based on the facts of your own biography.

For deeper individual preparation, you can turn to trusted sources.

- **MAPS** publishes open preparation protocols and safety guides (maps.org).
- **Zendo Project** offers a free “Psychedelic Journey Companion Guide” (zendoproject.org)—it covers preparation, process, and integration.

In addition, I can recommend the assessment framework described in **Françoise Bourzat’s *Consciousness Medicine***. The method she outlines is quite extensive and touches on

many areas of life; it can serve as a map for thorough, comprehensive preparation.

On Expectations and Uncertainty

No one can tell in advance what your experience will be like. Some expect to see beautiful visuals. Some hope for a spiritual experience. Some seek answers to specific questions. The experience may turn out to be entirely different.

Later we will talk about intention. Intention helps set a direction for exploration, but it is not a guarantee of outcome. I suggest approaching whatever arises as a symbolic language of your own psyche. This perspective shifts attention from what we see and feel to the very process of observation. Analysis of what you have undergone has its place, but it belongs to integration. Meaning-making should not happen directly within the experience.

What Psychedelics Can and Cannot Do

Current research shows that psychedelics can temporarily change the nature of interaction among various brain networks and likely promote enhanced neuroplasticity. Many

mechanisms are still being studied, so they should be approached with scientific caution.

Regardless of biological mechanisms, one point is crucial. Psychedelics by themselves do not make a person wise, kind, or mature. They can open the possibility of seeing something new in yourself or your life. But only the person themselves can translate that understanding into real change.

Integration After the Experience

The experience itself lasts a few hours, but the digestion of it can continue for weeks, months, and sometimes years. Integration—that is where the real difficulty of the process lies, if we are talking about consolidating the effect rather than treating the experience as an end in itself. It is painstaking work of making sense of and embedding the experience into everyday life.

Everyone develops their own approach and toolkit. The important thing is not to copy someone else's system, but to find one that truly suits you.

Other Paths

Psychotherapy, regular meditation, somatic practices, creative work, deep conversations, time in nature, and many other approaches also lead to inner change, though they usually do so gradually and through long-term practice. In my view, these and other techniques form the foundation of inner work regardless of whether a person has had a psychedelic experience.

Legal and Ethical Aspects

Laws regarding psychedelics vary significantly from country to country. Before making any decisions, be sure to study the current laws where you intend to have the experience.

The very fact of potential criminal liability can distort the experience, making it more paranoid or tense. Ask yourself: are you prepared to bear the consequences not only psychological, but also social and legal? Responsibility for any actions lies solely with you.

Conclusion

If after reading this chapter you decide to postpone or abandon the idea—I have fulfilled my task no less than if you were to continue down this path.

If, however, you feel ready to move forward—then we can proceed to the next stage.

The Pier. Preparation

You have read the chapter on red and yellow flags, are confident in your condition, and still feel the desire to explore the nature of consciousness? Then it is time to sort out preparation.

A quality experience does not happen by chance. It takes time and attention. I am not saying spontaneity will ruin everything, but you may end up watching a trailer instead of a feature film.

Preparation is a process we can turn into a ritual, tuning ourselves for the journey. The immersion begins not at the moment of consumption, but a day or even several days before. We will take care not only of external factors such as physical condition, place, and space, but also of the inner state—a calm mind, working with intention and expectations.

Companionship or Solo Journey

This guide is written primarily based on my solo journeys, but the techniques and approaches mentioned are universal—they work both with and without a sitter.

Nevertheless, I strongly recommend conducting sessions with a prepared sitter. Regardless of your experience and skills, a trained person nearby can significantly influence the quality of the journey. In addition to, of course, safety, an assistant becomes your hands in the outside world. A rattling window or searching for a blanket, making tea (be careful with boiling water) or a water bottle that has rolled under the bed—such little things can disrupt the flow, and it would be good if someone took care of them instead of you.

The sitter should be prepared, understand the process, and ideally have practical experience. Discuss the interaction plan in advance, including critical situations. I recommend familiarizing yourself with the basic principles of the Zendo Project (zendoproject.org)—they describe simple and effective support protocols. In a nutshell: hold a safe space, do not judge, do not direct, listen, and be present.

For first experiences, I consider a sitter mandatory. Solitude in journeys should be a result of choice, backed by skill.

The Foundation

I believe the classic triad—Set, Setting, Intention—can be supplemented with what I call the foundation. Regardless of your state, the location of the experience, or your intention, there are techniques that help you stay balanced at the peak of the experience, without getting lost in difficult moments.

Breathing practices aimed at activating the parasympathetic system (box breathing, the 4–6–8 technique), grounding methods (5-4-3-2-1, sensing body weight, focusing on the breath), as well as yoga postures—these can be learned in a couple of days. Try applying them in daily life to refine the skill and find the most suitable tools.

Meditation helps enter a state of so-called meta-thinking. From this perspective, we can observe our thoughts and sensations without merging with them. Then fear, anger, or euphoria do not consume us entirely. This is valuable in itself in daily life and no less useful during a psychedelic experience. The phrase *“this too shall pass”* ceases to be mere words and becomes factual knowledge. Meditation may require sustained practice before yielding noticeable results. It is not a necessary tool.

Set

No cold, headache, or chronic fatigue? That is what you need. The mental and emotional state should also be steady. If life has been bouncing you over bumps and potholes lately—better postpone. There is a risk that a tanker of psychedelic fuel will land in the inferno of an inner conflict.

Get enough sleep, avoid intense physical exertion. The body and mind are our bathyscaphe. Everything must be ready and tested.

Time

The first thing we will take care of is time. For a full immersion, ideally have at least three free days.

- Day one (before): time for tuning and preparing the environment.
- Day two (during): the journey and the return period.
- Day three (after): time for recovery, beginning to process the experience.

If you do not have three days, try to keep at least the day before and the day after as free as possible from emotional and psychological burdens. If tension or anxiety appears on the day itself, I *strongly* recommend postponing.

Food

Heavy food the day before makes the experience less deep. I recommend a light diet the day before and complete abstinence from food for at least 4–6 hours before consumption, ideally on an empty stomach. Keep vegetables or fruit within reach—hunger rarely appears during journeys, but if you feel like a snack, it is better to have something ready.

Setting

The environment should give a sense of complete safety. Prefer a calm environment, indoors or in nature. It is important that you feel: here is everything you might need. Warm clothing or the ability to cool down, access to water and toilet, a place to lie down, access to darkness. Prepare a sleep mask, headphones—they will help you concentrate and minimize distractions.

Comfort

Tidiness should be in order. There is no need to achieve absolute cleanliness, but the space should evoke a sense of satisfaction. Clutter can distract and irritate, affecting the journey. For some of us, cleanliness around creates a feeling of cleanliness within.

You need comfortable clothes, suited to the environment and temperature. Try to keep them clean and fresh—this can play as significant a role as the cleanliness of the space. Just in case, set aside a spare set of clothes.

Prepare scents you like, that remind you of home or loved ones, associated with calm and safety. These could be incense, flowers, or aromatic sticks. Also do not forget access to fresh air.

Phone and Other Communication Devices

Put your phone on silent or airplane mode. Warn loved ones, if you think necessary, that you will be unavailable. During the experience and shortly after returning, try not to contact the outside world. News, messages, notifications—better leave all the noise behind until your nervous system returns to normal. Under the influence of psychedelic substances, perception changes—that is obvious, but it is important to remember that contact with the outside world in such a state can have unexpected consequences. Avoiding them is very simple: eliminate the chance of their occurrence by not using communication devices.

Rituals

Rituals and psychedelic substances often go hand in hand, especially in the practices of indigenous peoples. In fact, regardless of your views, beliefs, and convictions, any form of ritual will most likely enhance the effect. You could lay out photographs of significant people or places if you plan to work with your life story. If you practice prayers, use altars, and so on—this is worth including in the preparation. Ritual intertwines well with shaping intention—our roadmap.

Visuals

Videos or images of nature, plants, animals, and their young can help you shift focus if you get stuck in a difficult experience. I notice that nature itself has a calming effect—so you can choose not only the visual imagery but also the whole space in this vein. Fractal, kaleidoscopic images, mandalas can help you dive even deeper.

Music

Make several playlists, for example: favorite compositions, classical, trance, nature sounds. The musical background can deepen the experience, direct it, and sometimes distract. Trust yourself, try changing genres or pieces. And do not

forget that sometimes silence is more melodic than any sound.

Recording and Creativity

Prepare tools for recording thoughts (notebook, voice recorder), paper, pencils. If you have any hobby, such as music, sculpting, or drawing, prepare your tools in advance. Recording details is not only about words. It can be a drawing, a sound, or even a gesture.

Intention

Intention is that skyscraper visible from any point in the city. It is the knowledge of the direction in which you want to move, even if the path is not clearly known. “I want to explore the nature of my fear” or “I want to see ways to solve the problem of addiction”—that is intention. It sets the vector.

What is intention and how is it different from expectations?

Expectations are what we want to get. They are concrete, detailed, and often do not come true, leading to disappoint-

ment. “I want to stop drinking” or “I want to get rid of fear”—these are expectations. They draw a final point that must be reached. If expectation can sound like a demand to arrive at coordinates, intention is a description of the place you plan to visit. Returning to the skyscraper: it is not an apartment or even a floor, but simply that place. And in the process you may end up in the park nearby, or in the security guard’s secret room.

The more precisely the request is formulated, the easier it will be for you to move during the journey. You can write the intention on paper. You can connect it with some object that will be with you during the experience. Weave the intention into any of the preparatory rituals. This external hook will help you more easily return to the intended trajectory.

The Experience Does Not Have to Follow the Intention

If the vector deviates from the intention—try to let it go. Remember: effort is not the way out.

Sometimes the most useful experience turns out to be not at all what you wanted to get. Perhaps we are crawling toward gold, not realizing that platinum lies beneath us. You came to work on the cause of a stutter, and ended up at a childhood memory you had never thought of.

The psychedelic mind is wider than our consciousness, wider than our understanding of ourselves, wider than the ego. It often already knows what “we” have not even begun to consider. Just move where you are pulled.

Preparation Checklist

Before moving on to the next stage, run through this list. If even one item raises doubts—better postpone the date.

- **Well-being:** I am healthy. I have slept well for the last several nights.
- **Emotions:** The background is steady. I am not depressed, not in anger, not in acute stress.
- **Time:** I have at least 2–3 free days without important meetings and deadlines.
- **Space:** The space is clean, comfortable, and safe. There is access to water, toilet, and a warm blanket.
- **Sitter:** If I plan to work with a companion, they are prepared and understand their role.
- **Distractions:** Phone is off, household chores are done, loved ones are informed.
- **Nutrition:** I ate lightly and have not eaten for more than 4–6 hours. Alcohol and other stimulants are excluded.
- **Clothing:** I have comfortable clothes and a spare set.

- **Crisis plan:** I know what I will do if it gets difficult (change music, change location, breathing, tea, sitter).
- **Intention:** I have formulated a direction and understand why I am doing this.
- **Flexibility:** I am ready to let go of control if the experience leads me elsewhere. I am not attached to a specific outcome.
- **Confidence:** I trust the process. If I feel doubt or discomfort, I will decline the experience.

The Push.

Consumption and Dosages

It's time to get acquainted with the guides. Teachers, friends, gods, and sometimes just “substances”—people call them many things. Why not come up with something of your own? After all, you can ask them to tweak the experience—it's they who split the atom in your brain, ignite supernovas, and dissolve you into infinity.

In this chapter I will speak only about what I have direct experience with—psilocybin mushrooms. I'll cover two of the most commonly available categories (for example, in the Netherlands): *Psilocybe cubensis*, *Golden Teacher* (not sold legally, but available as grow kits) and *magic truffles* (sclerotia).

Dosage Ratios

You need to understand clearly: the active compound content varies not only from species to species, but also from

batch to batch. That's why any introduction should start with small doses. Keep this in mind every time you engage with a substance.

The dosages suggested in this guide are approximate and intended only for the species mentioned.

The empirical rule of thumb is:

1 gram of dried mushrooms $\approx$ 10 grams of fresh (wet) truffles. A gram of fresh mushroom and a gram of sclerotia are roughly equivalent in effect.

Pay attention to truffle labeling: some varieties are marked as “strong,” and their potency can exceed the average. Consequently, even at the same weight, the effect may be stronger or weaker.

The effect begins approximately 30–60 minutes after consumption—it all depends on your state and individual tolerance. Pay attention not only to the onset, but also to the arc of its unfolding. The peak occurs around 2–3 hours in.

For a first encounter, I strongly recommend starting with:

- 0.5–1 gram of dried mass (mushrooms);
- 10–15 grams of fresh truffles.

This is the dose that lets you “feel the waters.” If after an hour you feel it’s not enough, you can carefully add more (0.5–1 g dried or 10–15 g truffles). But do so cautiously. After this, no further top-ups.

***Important:** if it’s your first time, it’s always better to take too little than too much.*

Methods of Consumption

To put it very simply: chew, wash down with water. But I don’t want to leave this section with that—there are genuinely different approaches. Choose what suits you.

The first thing to know: initially, mushrooms and especially truffles can cause stomach discomfort and nausea. This is a normal reaction. Ginger helps many people ease it. I prefer using dried powdered ginger, but fresh sliced root works too.

Here are the main practical methods:

Direct consumption (dry)

You already know this one. The simplest—just eat the product, chewing thoroughly, washing it down with water and chasing it with ginger. It works, but it’s not the gentlest

on the digestive tract. On the other hand, it's the most accessible and straightforward.

Lemon method (Lemon Tek)

The acid in lemon helps convert psilocybin, making the effect more intense but somewhat shortening the overall duration. Personal observation and shared experience confirm its effectiveness: imagine a few dozen extra horses under your hood.

***Caution:** this approach should only be used if you have solid experience. For beginners, even at minimal doses, the effect can become overwhelming.*

Technique: Grind the material. For truffles sold in vacuum packs, I recommend simply crushing them with a rolling pin or even your feet until they turn into a paste. Truffles bought in the Netherlands come in sturdy plastic—crush them before opening; the packaging will hold. Dried material should be ground to powder.

Pour the resulting mass with lemon juice (a whole or half lemon per 2 g dried mushrooms or 20 g truffles) so that the liquid covers the mass with a little extra. Mix thoroughly, seal from air, and leave for 20 minutes (stir again after the first 10 minutes).

When the time is up, you can either drink the mixture whole (with the pulp—stronger effect, but heavier on the stomach) or strain the pulp through a sieve, bandage, or cloth bag (cheesecloth or a tea infuser works) and drink only the juice—which is easier on digestion.

Tea

This is the most pleasant and gentle method. Use the same grinding approach, but instead of lemon, pour the mass with water at around 80 °C. Steep like regular tea for about 20 minutes. For taste and stomach comfort, add honey, mint, or chamomile.

Culinary variations

Chocolate. Melt dark chocolate (preferably sugar-free) and mix with the dried ground material. This masks the taste and makes consumption easier.

Honey. Can be mixed with honey, but this is more applicable to dried mushrooms. Wet truffles won't keep long this way, so you'd need to eat them right away.

Booster dose

You can add a booster 60–90 minutes in. If you’ve made a drink, you can strain the pulp and then pour the same mass again with hot water or lemon juice to extract the leftovers.

A booster dose does not guarantee a deepening of the experience. It is much safer and more effective to intensify sensations not by increasing the dose, but through breathing techniques (activating both sympathetic and parasympathetic systems—depending on what you need) or by raising your body temperature (hot shower or bath).

***Warning:** use booster doses and intensifying techniques only after you already have sufficient skill and know your peak periods.*

Tolerance and Breaks

From my observations, tolerance lasts around two days on average, though numbers vary. If you decide to practice several days in a row, keep in mind that the effect will be weaker and you will need a higher dose to reach the same level.

I do not recommend daily sessions. This is a serious strain on the body and mind. If you feel like doing multiple sessions, take a break of at least a couple of days in between.

This allows tolerance to drop and your nervous system to recover.

Most people prefer to have an experience several times a year or less, rather than repeating it within a week or month.

On Microdosing

This practice falls outside the scope of this article, but I think it's worth mentioning.

A microdose is an amount at which you feel no psychoactive changes in perception. Roughly 0.1–0.2 g of dried mushrooms or 1–2 g of truffles. Taken on a schedule (for example, every other morning).

Microdosing can help stabilize your mood, ease anxiety, and bring a greater sense of engagement with life. Whether this is a placebo effect or a genuinely working method remains scientifically open. The clinical efficacy of microdosing has not been proven to date, so it's best approached as an experimental practice rather than an established method.

Conclusion

Whichever method you choose, remember: more does not mean better. You are not obliged to try everything or go all the way. The only rule that truly works is to start small and listen to yourself.

The Jump. Immersion in the Experience

So. The space is ready, intention formulated, body rested, head clear of heavy thoughts. You know the rules of consumption and approaches to navigation in the experience. No red or yellow flags.

You consume the substance—and the world begins to change. Welcome.

Before we go further, remember: whatever happens—*this too shall pass*. Everything you see and feel is born in your head. It is real to you at this moment, but it is not objective reality. This is your inner world, projected outward.

Two Approaches to the Journey

I distinguish two approaches—internalized and externalized. There is no right path—they are just different routes. You can focus on one, or you can build a sequence from in-

ternalized to externalized (going in the opposite direction is unlikely).

This division is conditional, but it will help you get more of what interests you.

Internalized

You cut off the channels of perception as much as possible: use headphones with active noise cancellation, wear a tight sleep mask. Music, if present, is soft or trance-like. The body remains still in a resting position most of the time.

This cuts off external distractions, making the journey deeply internal. The lion's share of attention goes to inner experience.

Externalized

Here you use all your senses. Music, fresh air, tactile textures. This is a brighter, externally rich experience. Being in a forest or by the ocean, where noise and movement are created by nature, can be much deeper than at a festival or party. If you choose this option—pay attention to the quality and source of stimuli.

Kaleidoscope of Experiences

When the substance begins to act, the familiar world dissolves. Here, a wide range of states is possible. All of them are part of the play.

Archetypes and Images

Depending on your cultural and religious background, you may encounter so-called archetypes. A Christian may see Christ, a Buddhist—Gautama, a Hindu—a whole pantheon of gods. Even if you are an atheist, you may encounter images that speak in the language of your unconscious. These are not just random, meaningless images. I call this *the personal language of the psyche*.

Spectrum of Sensations

You may feel and realize an immense variety. The list below covers the main basic positions, but is not an exhaustive almanac.

Synesthesia

Senses may blend. You may taste a color, hear the smell of a sound—this phenomenon is called synesthesia. The world

becomes whole, dense, alive. The boundaries between senses dissolve.

Unity

The feeling of connectedness with all that exists—with people, trees, animals, with the very fabric of reality. This is one of the most beautiful experiences, often described as “coming home.”

Unity is a truly significant experience, and once felt, the world may not return to its former positions. The feeling of unity is accessible not only through psychedelics. But it is probably the shortest path to actual experience.

Observation

The feeling of being a spectator in the cinema of your own life, observing your body from the outside. You are here, but you are not quite here. This experience is somewhat reminiscent of dissociation (in the clinical sense—a defense mechanism against stress), but here it is most often temporary and not related to trauma. Remember that this too shall pass, as everything passes.

Emotional Spectrum

Here anything can await you: from sadness and sheer terror to delight and euphoria. The psychedelic does not filter emotions—it shows all of them. Sometimes simultaneously.

The key recommendation is not to try to suppress or push away an emotional reaction. Struggling only creates resistance to what you cannot overcome anyway—yourself. If you want to scream—scream, cry—cry, swear—swear. Perceive yourself not as the source of feelings, but as a pipe through which they flow.

Death and Birth (Ego Death)

You may feel as if you are dying. This is one of the most common and frightening experiences. Or, conversely, that you are being born anew. Both states are part of what is called “ego death,” about which much is said. This is not physical death. This is the dissolution of the habitual “I.”

If you begin to feel ego death and it frightens you—remember that it is temporary. Your “I” will return anyway.

Biologically, this is related to the suppression of the Default Mode Network, which will eventually return to normal after the substance wears off. You will return too.

Body: Temperature and Water

Psychedelics can disrupt thermoregulation and cause dehydration. Periodically check by touch: if the skin is hot and moist—remove clothing. If you are cold—cover up, put on socks. Drink water in small sips every 20–30 minutes or as desired. Do not ignore your body's signals.

If It Gets Difficult. Anchors and Tools

When fear or a feeling of unbearable intensity arrives, panic is a natural reaction of the psyche to the unusualness of what is happening. Your body and brain are trying to protect themselves from what does not fit into the usual framework. What frameworks can there be when they have simply disappeared?

Nevertheless, you have several anchors to regain control.

Breath

Return to the body and breath. This is the most powerful tool, always with you. Practice a few days before the experience—and you will have a basic skill that will work automatically.

- **Box breathing:** inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4.
- **Extended exhale:** inhale for 3–4 counts, exhale for 6–8. Activates the parasympathetic system, calming you. This is a physiological mechanism: when you exhale longer than you inhale, the body receives a signal “all is well.”
- **4–7–8 technique:** inhale for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8. Works in a similar way.

Separately, I mention an approach that developed in my practice based on the above methods and Buteyko practices: inhalation lasts significantly shorter than exhalation, for example 5–10 or other variations. The breath should be extremely slow—air gradually pressed out by the diaphragm. Imagine there is a feather in front of your nose and you need to breathe so that it does not move.

Physical Approaches

To calm down and feel safe, you can use yoga postures such as *child*, *cactus arms*, *mountain*, and *savasana*. Familiarize yourself and try them a couple of times before the actual experience to understand the technique and choose a suitable variation. The fetal position is worth mentioning separately—it also works.

Intense shaking of limbs or even deliberate, targeted trembling can help release stress and exit a state of anxiety.

Focusing on the body, on your weight, on the surrounding world (**5-4-3-2-1 technique**: notice five things around you, four sounds, three touches, two smells, and one taste) helps ground you in the moment and break the cycle of anxious experience.

Stretching, dancing, familiar physical routines (without intense exertion)—things you already know and know how to do—can become your life preserver.

Sitter and Physical Contact

If you have a prepared sitter, you can ask them for physical contact. This should be discussed in advance.

A touch to the chest (heart center area), shoulders, or a simple hand squeeze returns you to reality.

The sitter can softly remind you that you are breathing, that you are safe, that this is the effect of the substance.

Important: the sitter should not ask questions like “What do you see?” or “What are you thinking about?” This is overloading. Their task is to be a silent presence.

Pressure and Hugging

If there is no sitter or you do not want touch, you can use tactile anchors on your own:

— Lie chest-down on the bed, creating soft pressure on the chest. This calms the nervous system.

— Hug a pillow or blanket, burying your face in it. This gives a feeling of safety and protection.

— Hug yourself, stroke your shoulders, place your hands on your chest—this also works.

Warmth and Sugar

If anxiety persists, warm sweet tea or chamomile infusion can slightly balance the physical state. This is not a panacea and does not turn off the psychedelic, but sometimes it helps the body calm down so the psyche can level out.

Shifting Focus

Sometimes it is enough to simply change the environment:

— Open your eyes if they were closed.

— Turn on the light if it was dark.

— Move to another room.

— Step out onto the balcony or into the yard, if possible.

If a thought refuses to leave your head—write it down, thus fixing it externally. In such a case, the brain receives a signal of completion and can move on.

“If-Then” Checklist

Print this out or keep it in mind.

IF scared... → Take a deep breath with an extended exhale. Remind yourself: “This is just the substance. This will pass.”

IF panicking... → Focus on a physical sensation: squeeze a pillow, feel the floor with your feet, rub your hands together. Switch the brain from thoughts to the body.

IF it feels like you are losing your mind... → Remember: madness is a state different from the usual. You are not breaking down, you are simply seeing the world differently. This is temporary. Return to breathing.

IF you want it all to end... → Ask your sitter to remind you that you are safe. Ask for warm tea or wrap yourself in a

blanket. Tell yourself: “I am okay, I am just waiting for the wave to pass.”

IF it feels like you have died... → This is classic “ego death.” Your habitual “I” is dissolving. Do not fight it. This is not physical death. Breathe. Your heart is beating, you are alive. This experience often leads to the deepest renewal—if you do not resist.

IF it feels like it is all real (monsters, threats)... → Change the setting. Open your eyes, turn on the light, look at the sitter’s hands or your own. Return to “base reality” through objects, breath, and body. Remember: your mind is painting these images.

IF the sitter is not helping... → Ask them to just sit nearby and be silent. Sometimes the best help is simple presence. If you need specific contact or its absence—say so directly.

Floating Toward Shore

The effect begins to fade, the world gradually returns to its familiar course, but it is no longer quite the same. You still feel a light aftertaste. Do not rush to shake it off and immediately pick up your usual pace.

Give yourself time to rest. Do not try to immediately share the experience with someone or record it for yourself. Spend the rest of the day in calm. You can take a warm shower, drink tea, take a walk. However much you might want to—do not rush to analyze. Simply enjoy what is, dissolve in the present moment. This is a necessary pause before you begin to make sense of what you have experienced.

The Shore.

Integration

Integration is the most important stage and the concluding arc of the psychedelic experience. In this chapter, we unpack what we brought back from the journey: both the pearls and the cuts from the shells.

In the first case, we mean realizations, revelations, ideas—new and valuable things you might want to solidify. In the second—things that can become traumatic if not worked through: suppressed fears, memories, and so on. We cannot choose what the journey gives us, but we can work with everything we receive.

Some internal conflicts may become much sharper, and attempts to ignore them will only worsen the situation. New ideas may insistently demand implementation.

That is precisely why integration is a natural continuation of the experience. The difference lies only in how it happens—whether intentionally or “by itself.” Some people do not bother with this step—that is their business and choice. I

believe that the lion's share of the benefit of the whole undertaking lies precisely in integration.

If our views differ—so be it. But in the case of severe consequences, waiting for everything to “sort itself out” is risky. Some experiences gradually weaken on their own, but if they continue to cause significant discomfort, it makes sense to seek professional help.

What is integration?

The experience ends, but life goes on. Integration is the process in which what you have been through is made sense of and gradually becomes part of your daily life through actions and practice.

Wake Up, Neo

Important: the feeling that you have understood everything forever or that you have become some kind of sage is a very common phenomenon. Some people believe they are God, the reincarnation of Jesus Christ or someone else, think they have superpowers, heightened sensitivity, and so on.

I ask you very seriously: be careful with this.

In the experience you saw much that you do not see in ordinary life and may never see. The same goes for self-perception. The difference between hallucinations and self-perception is that the latter remains and feels real even after the psychedelic effect has passed. This feeling can be very convincing.

The feeling of absolute certainty by itself does not mean the conclusions are objectively true. You are a person, I am a person, and people around us are humans too. *It is more useful to treat your new beliefs as hypotheses, to be tested by time and real life.* I recommend adopting this perspective as a baseline if you encounter what we might call “chosen one syndrome.”

Severe Aftereffects

If your experience was frightening, and afterward you are haunted by nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, or constant anxiety—this does not mean all is lost.

If symptoms do not subside within a week or interfere with daily life, you should consult a psychotherapist familiar with integrative approaches. Sometimes a few sessions are enough to restore a sense of safety.

Ways to Integrate

You can consolidate the results through various approaches, described below. All the practices mentioned are useful in themselves, and mushrooms or other psychedelics can become fertile black soil for their sprouts.

Self-Integration Through Journaling

After some time has passed and the experience has “settled” (at least a day, maybe more), I strongly recommend writing down what happened. Such a text is often called a trip report.

In the trip report, pay attention to these things:

- what was the intention;
- what were the expectations;
- what did you see, hear, and feel;
- whom or what did you encounter.

It does not matter how coherent the narrative becomes. Just pour the story onto the page. Try to capture as many details as possible, because this material will be useful for further integration. Journaling should be as full, raw, and vivid as possible. If you wish, you can polish the text later.

Discussion

Based on the journaling (or without it), you can discuss the experience with someone or people you trust.

In a group

For integrating significant or complex experiences, conversation in a circle of like-minded people can yield good results.

If you do not have a circle of friends who share an interest in exploring themselves and the world in this way, you can still discuss your experiences. There are special support groups—so-called integration circles—where people gather (in person or online) to share experiences in a safe, confidential environment.

With a friend

Share your experience with someone close who knows how to listen and, ideally, understands the specifics of psychedelic practice. Perhaps you just share what happened. Perhaps your friend will give feedback, and together you will begin to unfold the experience. Do as you see fit.

Be careful: another person's interpretations are a view of your experience through a different prism of perception. You can listen,

but remember: the key decision about interpretation is yours. No matter how authoritative the interlocutor.

With a therapist

The approach is roughly the same as with a friend, but it is important to understand that a therapist has professional (integrative) training that allows for safer accompaniment of such processes. The foundation remains the same: you are the key interpreter of your experience.

If you decide to seek a therapist, check whether they are familiar with integrative approaches and have worked with altered states of consciousness. Not all specialists are ready for such topics.

With artificial intelligence

AI is now used everywhere: as a home therapist, as support, as a search engine, as a planner, as an assistant—anything. Why not let it act as an interpreter of your psychological experience?

Artificial intelligence, despite all its potential, cannot yet capture the full spectrum of human interaction. It lacks broad context and what cannot be encoded in bits. It can help as a magnifying glass or a walking stick. It can structure thoughts, offer various interpretations, and draw atten-

tion to details that might have gone unnoticed. However, it does not live through your experience and has no direct access to your inner world. Therefore, any AI interpretations should be taken as hypotheses, not final truth. Always remember this.

AI can help move through archetypes, images, through the prism of your social circle—for example, religious or national undertones you may sense without knowing it. This relates to concepts of collective shadow and collective unconscious. You can think of it this way: an assistant can point out where to look, but it cannot say what is there.

Creativity

Here I include various types: visual art, poetry, music, writing, sculpture, theater—anything.

What settled into your head after the experience can be worked through not only by analysis. Experiences extend beyond cognitive perception and language—whether we want them to or not. Art allows one to enter the beyond of thought. Write, sing, draw, create—anything. This is an important part of integration.

You do not even need to understand how it works. Do not think there is a right way or path. There is no right path—there is yours.

Body

If the body asks for some kind of movement, pay attention to what kind. Find an activity that matches the request and simply try yourself in something new. For example, you may be drawn to yoga, but you may also be drawn to martial arts.

Your food preferences (like many other things) may change. Pay attention to what attracts or repels you. Do not force yourself to follow your usual routine or disrupt it if you feel resistance.

Meditation and Breathing Practices

These approaches help you stay in contact with yourself and the world regardless of substances and external circumstances. Meditation and some breathing techniques require sustained practice. I recommend Zen Buddhist meditation, which can be combined with any breathing practice.

Usually, when we talk about meditation without practicing it, we do not know what it gives. To feel it, sometimes

months are required. But mushrooms or other psychedelics can show in a moment what state it can lead to.

Still, a trip is a glimpse from the cable car window at that mountain station that meditation walks to on foot. The true miracle lies in the everyday, patient return to that state without substances.

Foundations, Traditions, Norms

Cultural context, social norms, and frameworks may begin to press on you. This does not mean the cultural framework is wrong or your experience is mistaken. No, they both work, just each in its own way.

What matters is where you focus. External norms are what is considered right or meaningful in your environment. Inner norms may not align with public ones.

If inner feelings and external demands begin to contradict each other, attempting to completely suppress either side almost always leads to inner tension. This can lead not only to discomfort but also to crises and disorders. Finding balance in such a situation is a nontrivial task, and it should not be ignored.

Make changes if you feel the urge. When such changes arise naturally and make life better—gradually explore them, without forcing yourself to follow new beliefs (or cling to old ones) at any cost.

Theological Teachings, Philosophy

Ways of engaging with the world, people, and yourself may expand. You can find much of value in theology and philosophy. Your current views and beliefs may change or open from new angles. Other teachings may suddenly capture your attention.

Do not dismiss what comes to mind, because the key is to notice the spark of interest. Your consciousness may request information or change. Your task is to let it happen.

How long does integration take?

I would say integration is not a stage but an ongoing process. Integration happens throughout life, regardless of experience.

People often say integration takes weeks, months, or years. In my understanding, integration is not a segment but a ray. But even a ray can have segments: if you have gathered ma-

terial and brought it to some stage—you can consider that an integration of a particular experience.

Do not try to implement all changes at once. After a powerful experience, a desire may arise to change your life in one week: job, relationships, diet, place of residence, social circle. Sometimes such decisions turn out to be fitting, but strong emotions can amplify impulsiveness.

If a decision is truly important and does not require urgency—give it time. Allow a few weeks or months to confirm that this is not a temporary impulse but a stable inner change.

Repeat the experience or not?

Often what I have heard and read: intense psychedelic experiences are recommended once or twice a year, moderate ones no more than once or twice a quarter. These are general recommendations. I believe here it is not about quantity but about quality, as in many other things. Excessive, uncontrolled, irresponsible consumption can lead to problems—be careful and responsible. This is your life.

Personally, I believe even one time can be enough. For self-knowledge, there are therapy, meditation, breathing practices, and other directions. Psychedelics can accelerate the

process, but this can become a challenge—this is my personal observation.

If you are interested not so much in the experience itself and its sensations, but in what it gives, you can try other paths. If it is the psychedelic practice that has proved effective, then my recommendations are as follows.

You can work through current events in your life with the help of psychedelics. But not at the moment of the event—let it sit for a week or two. Then form an intention based on the event and conduct a session, preferably introspective. The paths to integration and preparation remain the same.

If you are simply interested in the experience for its own sake—that is also an option. All protocols and preparations apply in that case too. Be prepared that even if you intend just to have fun, the experience may still turn out differently.

Conclusion

A psychedelic experience does not end when the substance's effect ends. It ends when what you have gained becomes part of your life. That is successful integration.

You are the main author of your reality, and only you decide how to weave the worlds that have opened into your own.

The Lounge.

Conclusion

Thank you for reading this guide and for approaching the psychedelic experience with awareness.

If you believe that quality practice requires preparation and respectful attitude, then we see the process in a similar way. The primary responsibility for any such experience always lies with the individual.

I hope that if this book reaches you at the beginning of your journey, it will help you avoid many common mistakes, answer most of the questions that arise, and allow you to have a more conscious and safe experience. If you already have experience—I hope you found something worthwhile for yourself.

Of course, this is not an exhaustive guide. But while working on it, I constantly asked myself one question: “Would I have liked to read such a book before my first experience?” The answer was always “yes.”

Many things I had to learn gradually: some in advance, some after the experience, and some directly during it. Not

everyone will read several large books or dozens of scientific articles before their first encounter with psychedelics, and I do not think that is unusual. That is precisely why I wanted to gather the most important knowledge in one place and present it in plain language. The result is this book.

Acknowledgments and Sources

Although the book uses almost no direct quotations, it draws on the knowledge, research, and experience of many people to whom I would like to express gratitude. Dozens of articles and essays, forum threads and chats, stacks of books, hours of video recordings, and conversations with practitioners. Much of this remains in my mind without a reference to the source. But that does not change the depth of my gratitude—thank you to everyone who, despite everything, works to ensure that psychedelics gradually stop frightening people and begin to bring real benefit.

Nevertheless, among all sources I can single out several key ones. I recommend the following books:

— *The Psychedelic Explorer's Guide* — James Fadiman. — *Your Psilocybin Mushroom Companion* — Michelle Janikian. — *Consciousness Medicine* — Françoise Bourzat.

I can also recommend the lectures, books, and appearances of Paul Stamets. Largely thanks to this person, his personal story, and his research, I began my journey into the study of psychedelic substances.

The materials from MAPS and Zendo projects, focused on harm reduction and supporting people during difficult psychedelic experiences, had a great influence on my understanding of a safe approach.

Thank you.

Finally

I believe psychedelics are not a goal in themselves, but merely one possible tool for exploring consciousness.

For some, they become the start of an interest in psychology, philosophy, meditation, breathing practices, or art. For others, they help see relationships with loved ones, the world around them, or themselves in a new light. Sometimes they even become a starting point for a career change or a new creative path.

This is a powerful tool. And that is precisely why it demands respect, preparation, and caution.

I wish you to take care of yourself, remain curious, and treat yourself and others with attention, interest, and respect.

Safe journeys, of whatever kind they may be!

About the Author

For many years, I have worked with systems — codebases, protocols, and architectures. As a programmer, I have learned to look deeper: tracing a system's behaviour back to its mechanisms and understanding why it works the way it does.

Similar systems and protocols exist within us. Our minds are organized around patterns, loops, triggers, and internal processes — much of this remains outside conscious awareness. Habits, beliefs, and emotional reactions all have their own structure.

I am interested in why we get stuck in destructive cycles, how the psyche tries to protect itself, yet sometimes becomes its own prison. Alongside this, I am drawn to the old questions of good and evil: where cruelty comes from, and where the capacity for love, compassion, and empathy arises.

I am also fascinated by tools that help us work with such states: bodywork, breath practices, meditation, music, rhythm, and altered states of consciousness. I view psychedelics as one of the tools for exploring deeper layers of the psyche — sometimes through challenging experiences, but

with the potential for reflection, new perspectives, and change.

I welcome your feedback, questions, and suggestions.

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