

The Role of the Acacia in Initiatic Experience By Michael McKeown

Freemasonry can be recognized by its iconography. Some of these symbols have a meaning Masons recognize because of how those elements are used in our rituals. The acacia for example plays a prominent role in Freemasonry's core story of the Hiramic legend.

We as students of alchemy and Hermeticism are particularly on alert for clues to the esoteric meaning of our common symbols. Often there is the possibility of layered meaning. The attributed esoteric meaning of some of our symbols gets to be a pretty far stretch of history and pretty far out esoteric sounding mumbo jumbo, but on the other hand some of the core elements of Freemasonry's iconography have a very direct and incontrovertible esoteric meaning that is so in your face that it's barely really esoteric. The acacia is one of those, and in a rather surprising way.

There is a particular York Rite ritual where one sips a bit of watered down wine from an unusual cup. Could it be that the Acacia points the way to a previous era where initiation was not exemplified, but rather experienced directly and immediately in a personally transformative way?

Before we embark on our path of discovery of the Acacia tree, let me remind the reader of a few tenants of my work. The primary thesis of my study of Freemasonry is that Masonry holds three core secrets at its root about who we really are, where we came from, and a lost technology that was used to build the megalithic stone buildings around the world.

During the course of my research while with the SRICF I have written on the "who we really are" part. This leads one to a discussion about this non-thing called enlightenment, variously referred to as self realization, experience of the non-dual, or as Bernadette Roberts writes "Experience of the Non-Self". I believe it is important for us as humans to have at least brief exposure, personally, of this experience, because without it there is no awareness in your mind that maybe how you are viewing things is not how they actually are, and as a result anything you can think and do is flawed from the outset, and it is the flaw of humanity today that our collective decisions are made from an un-enlightened, ego addicted, ignorant to use a technical term, i.e. unaware of what is Real, perspective.

We can sit here and say "what a bunch of 60's drug fueled federal that is...I'm sitting here in this chair in the real world fully rooted in the knowledge I am who I am and feel

how I feel". You might go so far as to say how you feel right now reading this page, looking out your eyes, thinking with your head, is what is real, and any other real feeling state, no matter how convincing, is not real, so there's no sense even trying. But what if you're wrong? People who have the transformative personal experience of the non-dual underlying reality tell us it's the real deal, so we oughta pay attention.

So because we're intelligent creatures that do actually try to have an open mind and are willing to learn new things and recognize that very likely at least half the things we believe to be true are probably wrong, we take a look at the literature on the subject. We read about famous enlightened sages that talked about how to do it. We have likely met someone whom we believe that professes some past experience of contact with this thing, the elementary aspect of awareness.

So, despite it maybe not having occurred to us personally, we can pretty much buy in on the idea enough to read on the subject a bit further and discover the techniques involved are all pretty much based around the same concept of inner inquiry. This inner inquiry aspect is very important to a point we will make about the Acacia in a little bit.

Common techniques used to allow the non-dual experience to reveal itself all revolve around a core point of first training the mind to pay attention to something (anything) for a period of time without stopping, and then placing the mind in the position that allows the ineffable, the un-knowable, to reveal itself. For some people merely sitting down once and turning the inner eyes around to try to look at one's self triggers the enlightenment experience. For some very few very rare souls on the planet, this glance at the divine elemental nature of experience becomes so captivating they remain in that state permanently, never to return to the previous state of awareness, the one we are all (I think all) currently enjoying, the ego attached state, the dual state, the state in which we do not stand in the middle but rather experience things as "one way or the other way" rather than both ways at the same time.

In any case meditating in a cave for thirty years is surprisingly ineffective. One can not go do anything to make enlightenment happen, because that suggests there's someone for it to happen to, and as soon as you make that leap of judgment you're sunk.

But the planet provides a kick-start down this path in the form of a very few plant medicines. If you didn't figure out where I was heading by now, I think you know now. These very few plant medicines we are going to talk about work on the ego, and they do it in slightly different ways. They point the way to the egoless state, they make you

spend time with your ego and become really familiar with it, and may even briefly stop the attachment to the ego for a brief period.

Whether the egoless state occurs naturally through mental training, suddenly via the mechanism of a shocking experience, through near death experience, or via the mechanism of a plant medicine, the result is the same. The result is “knowing” what this enlightenment talk is all about. Not by understanding it intellectually, but rather by having had contact with the divine aspect from which our sense of self springs and we are forever changed. For the rest of our life we will “know” what’s really going on, even if it does not remain as a constant awareness.

These plant medicines that work on the ego are primarily molecular chains of the tryptamine family. These are the Psilocybin containing mushrooms, the mescaline containing cacti, and the DMT, or N,N-Dimethyltryptamine, containing plants.

Tryptamine does not behave like a drug in the manner you are likely to be thinking about right now. Once at the hospital I was given too high a dose of an injectable pain killer and I was stoned out of my mind to use the old vernacular. I was not in my normal sense of awareness. I was drugged. As I was being driven home I remember commenting that the reason they had given me a shot was because they had ran out of wine glasses. That is drugged. What they gave me was a drug. Tryptamines are not like that.

Alcohol is a drug. One drink and our feelings change and our thoughts change and become cloudy. Several drinks in and emotions run to extremes and we are not thinking rationally. Our “defenses are lowered”. We lose restraint. The tryptamines are not like that.

Marijuana mellows our mood, makes it easy to communicate, makes us think we are more creative. The tryptamines are not like that either.

As it turns out it doesn’t take more than about ten seconds of an online search to learn that the Acacia has in it’s bark the highest concentration of dmt found in the plant world. DMT is known as a powerful spiritual plant medicine. You might think of it as a 60’s type of recreational hallucination drug to “tune in and drop out” with, but you’d be very incorrect. It is not that at all.

It would be a mistake to characterize the use of these plants for work on the consciousness as ‘hallucinogens’, though it is certainly the realm of classification most would assign to these plants. To think of them as some 60’s wiped out mind watching

tracers come off your hands as you party to some Janice Joplin is completely incorrect. They do not work in that fashion at all.

These medicines do something different. I call them medicines because they are different than a 'drug' in my mind. Cocaine, Heroin, methamphetamine, alcohol, marijuana, etc., all behave differently from each other but generally fall in the classification of inebriants or social enhancing drugs. They all change our behavior at some level, and none of those would ever be thought of something you would do while meditating to try and reach some divine aspect within, right? Nobody goes to the bar with the hopes of meeting God after consuming a particular quantity of alcohol, but I assure you that after consuming a handful of psilocybe mushrooms you will most definitely come in contact with another reality.

DMT is found in virtually all living organisms. It's mechanism is unclear (the why it exists part), and the human brain almost instantly converts it into something non-reactive. DMT has zero potential for abuse. It is not fun, it does not make one "feel good", and the work it does on one's psyche is not easy work. Oh, and then there's the puking part.

The specific plants that have a high enough concentration of DMT in them to be useful that I am speaking of here are few, but they are not rare. They occur in one of their forms everywhere on the planet. Desert cacti from arid regions of the Americas, mushrooms found in virtually every somewhat occasionally damp environment, especially those that coexist with cattle, and a particular shrub like plant that exists virtually everywhere else. Each one of them present the opportunity for instantaneous understanding of how the ego functions.

And, this part of the discussion would not be complete without mentioning the Colorado River Toad (also known as the Sonoran Desert Toad), which secretes 5-MeO-DMT at a high concentration.

An internal researcher, a psychonaut, that choses to ingest a tea infused with tryptamine containing plants knows he will with certainty be transported into a mental space where work on one's consciousness begins. The intrepid psychonaut knows that his ego that he is so firmly attached to may be completely surrendered in the experience, if only briefly.

Cocaine does not offer this promise. Alcohol; no. Heroine creates a stupor, not an elevated level of attention. Methamphetamine? well, enough said. The DMT containing

plants are unique. They are totally different than this other stuff that you would lump into the category of “drugs”.

Nearly all living creatures have tryptamine in their tissues at some level. Humans have a high concentration in the pinecone shaped small walnut sized pineal gland, which I know my audience is quite familiar with. The iconography of the pineal pinecone is found in central prominence everywhere from the Vatican to ancient stone carvings.

Dr. Rick Strassman (DMT The Spirit Molecule) who did clinical tests with DMT, is of the opinion that the brain releases a store of DMT at death and is what causes the near death experience. Not many researchers share his opinion (there is not enough DMT in the human brain to ‘trip’), but there is a suggestion in the literature on the subject of the function of DMT on living creatures, and especially humans, that DMT is the filter by which the phenomenal world is experienced in the manner in which we do.

We are taught throughout the history of spiritual researchers that the enlightenment experience involves one of seeing behind the curtain if you will and realizing that the stuff we used to believe was real is actually a phantasm, a created mental experience, which is not to say that experiences we have are not in fact “real” in an experiential way, but rather they do not exist in the form we think they do. Some DMT researchers believe that it is the DMT in our brains that causes us to experience the input of energetic wave forms as “seeing” “hearing” etc. which creates for us the experience of the phenomenal world. They argue this is what causes us to experience as “emotions” the differentiations of the energetic energies that move in the modalities of the internal, thinking/feeling experiences.

If these researchers are correct, it is DMT in our brains that is causing us to experience the separation from who we really are and our incorrect ego attached belief of who we believe we are, and it is DMT that can integrate experience with the understanding from where it springs...although that is also not entirely accurately stated as that suggests there is a place of origination separate from normal experience, but anyway I digress.

So let’s look at the Acacia plant for a minute and acquaint ourselves with how the medicine is extracted and utilized.

The Acacia exudes a sap through wounds in it’s bark that is collected as a product called Gum Arabic. Gum arabic is used in the food industry as a stabilizer, emulsifier and thickening agent in icing, fillings, soft candy, chewing gum and other confectionery and to bind the sweeteners and flavorings in soft drinks.

Gum arabic, also known as gum acacia, is harvested from two types of wild Acacia trees found in the African Sahel from Senegal/Sudan to Somalia. The Acacia Senegal and Acacia Seyal provide the hardened sap used to make this ingenious product. The gum makes up much of Sudan's livelihood and is used in many everyday items without you knowing, in postage stamps, coca-cola, paints and fireworks.

Acacia grows in a wide genetic array around the planet. 144 species live in the northern Africa/Mediterranean area alone. Mimosa trees are of the same species. Virtually every one of dozens of examples of Acacia found on every continent have DMT in their bark and or leaves. Acacia Confusa has a high concentration, and the name begs how that came about. Similarly Mimosa Hostilis has a high concentration of DMT in its bark and has a name that seems to reflect an awareness of that.

DMT is collected from the bark, root or leaves. An acid base extraction is done. The goal of any A/B is to first convert the alkaloid into a salt by making it acidic (below PH 7) so that the alkaloid will dissolve in a polar solvent, in this case water. Then we convert the resulting salt into its freebase form by making it PH above 7 so that it will dissolve into a warm non-polar solvent, in this case naphtha/petroleum ether. Then the polar and non polar solvents are separated out, and cool down the non-polar so that the alkaloids can precipitate out.

Basically one uses Acacia root bark, a solvent, vinegar, lye, and salt and a simple distillation process to leave behind the crystals of DMT which can then be vaporized and inhaled.

However, our brains are amazingly built around the chemical structure of DMT, and almost immediately neutralize it, so the experience is short, though intense. In order to experience a slower come up and a longer experience, one must ingest it orally.

However, monoamine oxidase enzyme in our gut neutralizes the psychoactivity of ingested DMT, so one requires the presence of a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI), such as a β -carboline.

Monoamine oxidase inhibiting plants used for ingesting DMT are plants containing Harmaline, Harmine or d-Tetrahydroharmine. Both Harmine and Harmaline are highly reversible MAO inhibitors, whereas Tetrahydroharmine is a weak Serotonine (5-Hydroxytryptamine) uptake inhibitor.

These plants include *Banisteriopsis Caapi*, a vine, and *Peganum harmala*, or Syrian Rue, which grows widely throughout the northern Africa and Mediterranean area.

DMT is widely regarded as the most potent psychedelic drug known, but in order to talk about how it works, let's first talk about its much more friendly chemical cousin, the tryptamine derivative containing mushrooms. The molecular chain is very similar between the two, DMT and Psilocybin, and the experience at its root level is similar, but it works through a different modality.

The important thing to understand about these particular plant medicines is hallucinations will occur, and they are a very important aspect of the experience. Indeed, it is completely captivating, but there is at the core a higher level of work being done. It's like the hallucinations are an unfortunate, or maybe fun, or maybe educational, side effect, but they're not the main show. It does not take very much experience to very easily separate out the hallucinatory aspect of the experience and focus on the real work that the medicine allows.

The main show, the thing that's really going on is best demonstrated with the magic mushroom, and is what I can speak from personal experience with, and will in a moment extrapolate that to the Acacia/DMT experience. The tryptamine like molecule in the mushroom puts a feeling in one's head. It's a feeling like a double espresso, but not at all actually, it's something different. In small doses it is a feeling of one-ness with that which is observed. Not in a completely immersive way like the full enlightenment experience is, but it's a pointer...it is the feeling of that direction. The internal movement of inverting awareness to the experience of what is real is sensed. But more than that the experience is really one of introspection. It is one of reflecting on your behaviors in an understanding and compassionate way, and in a way that has lasting impact.

I recommend ingesting a tiny piece of fresh, not dried, mushroom about the size of your little finger nail. Most people eat at least an 1/8 ounce of dried mushrooms, and Terrence McKenna recommended an entire ounce to have a truly transformative experience, so most certainly a tiny piece the size of your little finger nail can not possibly provide an experience anywhere near scary, or long. I assure you, hallucinations will not occur at this dose, not even close. But it will put the mushroom feeling in your head. Then you'll know for yourself. It is an initiatic experience. It will educate you. You will grow from the experience. Rather than being a fun thing you will want to do again, it is more likely to leave you feeling like it could take you a year to process what you learned.

With larger doses, transformative experiences can be had.

I have not yet experienced DMT myself. Not out of fear or lack of interest in doing so, but it seems like I need my head on straight every single day. I can ill afford to be a shaman at this stage of my life. Maybe later. But I have spoke with numerous people, one recently, that have experienced DMT, and I have read the popular books on the subject, as well as read reports online, and can give you this synopsis of my general impression of the reports is that it works very much like it's magic mushroom twin in that it puts a feeling in one's head and creates an environment of introspection, but whereas the mushroom allows one to look at one's own behavior and thoughts with compassion and understanding and you learn from it, and most importantly learn from where behavior springs, but DMT does it differently. DMT teaches you things about your behaviors and thoughts by presenting you with hallucinatory scenarios. The scenarios can be as frightening as those things we don't want to face are in our own psyche, because in fact they are those things, projected.

These DMT scenes can run the gamut, but frequently the literature speaks of "machine elves". Terence McKenna once said: "Can you die from taking DMT? Only if you can die of astonishment!"

The advanced spiritual devotee that maybe has had some out of body experiences or has been visited by spirit guides (or devils) in dream or meditation will have had some practice at overcoming fear of things mental, and the fear that can occur from purely mental types of experience can be as extreme as the most real physically based fear, and this is a component of the tryptamine ingesting experience. Once you ingest it, you are going to have an initiatic experience in very short order, and there is no backing out. You can assure yourself that you are physically fit, emotionally strong, and reflect on the fact that no one has ever died from overdosing on a tea made from tree bark, and yet there is fear. What is to come? What will it feel like? What if it becomes overwhelming, will I freak out? The ride is spinning I want off! The experienced psychonaut, not unlike a warrior, puts all this in a jar. It exists. There is fear. But, it is observed, understood, and set aside. For after all, we're on the ride for a reason, so let's get on with it.

As to my thesis, did the inhabitants of the northern Africa and Mediterranean areas use DMT in initiatic ceremonies? Is it possible that Freemasonry's use of the Acacia in the Hiram Legend is an esoteric nod in a direction of part of a larger secret I theorize exists at the root of Freemasonry?

Acacia Nilotica is portrayed hugely in Egyptian mythology. It is referred to as the tree of life, and from under this tree the first gods of Egypt were born. Osiris, god of the underworld, was also born from an Acacia Nilotica tree. Osiris is also believed to live inside the spirit of all Acacia Nilotica trees. This is a very similar belief as held by the Amazonian Shamans and the people who have experienced Ayahuasca.

Yet Acacia was not just revered in Egypt. The plant grew throughout the middle-east and its symbolism exists even to this day. To the east of Egypt, Judaism flourished, and once again Acacia Nilotica has huge symbolism. In the book of Moses, it is said that the tree that was set afire in front of Moses was an Acacia Nilotica tree. This is fitting as the Acacia can be found in over 3 different sub-species (all containing DMT) in the Jordan Valley and Sinai Desert. In both Hebrew and Judaism, the Acacia was recognized as Sacred and was revered as a building material saved only for temples. According to Judaism, the ark of the covenant was made of Acacia. I believe that Judaism was heavily influenced by DMT and its connection to the "spirit world." In pre-Islamic Mecca, the goddess of their religion was also Acacia Nilotica and is very similar to the Egyptian beliefs around Osiris.

Acacia Nilotica is one of the few acacia species that has 5meoDMT in its leaves rather than only in its root bark. Syrian Rue, the MAO inhibitor that must be ingested with it grows wild all over the area, right among the acacia. Syrian Rue is found in saline soils in temperate desert and Mediterranean regions.

It does seem reasonable that the results of the combination of the two could have been known well back into the mystery school period of the Egyptians that many believe our gentle craft of Freemasonry either had as its earliest beginnings, or at least borrowed from. Maybe we only borrowed the imagery from the Egyptians who knew of the Acacia's power but we did not. Maybe we just borrowed the symbol of the acacia without knowing why it was so significant. But at the same time it certainly stands to reason that early Masons could have known about the transformative nature of the Acacia. It is likely that Masonry exists far beyond what our distorted history suggests.

As for my opinion, and mine alone, my research has lead me to the idea that maybe Freemasonry has existed far longer than we think but that something happened as recently as a few hundred years ago that caused us to forget these elements I suggest are hiding in Freemasonry. I think the framework of our craft survived the forgetting and we can ferret out from it information about what happened, and maybe even a bit of the technology that was lost, and maybe we also forgot how to use spiritually symbiotic plants for initiatic transformative change.

Bibliography

Strassman, Rick. *DMT: the Spirit Molecule*. Park Street Press, 2001.

Mckenna, Terence. *True Hallucinations*. Rider, 2014.

McKenna, Terence K. *The Archaic Revival: Speculations on Psychedelic Mushrooms, the Amazon, Virtual Reality, UFOs, Evolution, Shamanism, the Rebirth of the Goddess, and the End of History*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

Letcher, Andy. *Shroom: a Cultural History of the Magic Mushroom*. HarperCollins, 2008.

John, Graham St. *Mystery School in Hyperspace: a Cultural History of DMT*. Evolver Editions, 2015.

Isaac, Gerardo Ruben Sandoval. *The God Molecule: My Journey to 5-MeO-DMT and the Spiritual Path to the Divine Light*. Divine Arts, 2016.