



Kabbalistic Insights Into The Dangers of Drug Use

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Throughout the ages, many spiritual traditions, in their alleged zeal to experience the spiritual realms have turned to the usage of mind/body altering chemicals. The decision to follow this path is usually based on a desire to experience what is beyond the conscious mind. The hope of the practitioners of this path is that in the induced, altered state of consciousness they will be afforded a closer look into the spiritual world, and or receive "powers" that could be used for, what we must define as, questionable purposes.

While Kabbalah transverses many levels of altered states of consciousness, there is never any reference to using any external chemical in order to achieve the prophetic state. The prophetic state experienced by the prophet was achieved only after long arduous training in the spiritual disciplines of prophetic Kabbalah. The results were always ecstatic, but never intoxicating, nor hallucinogenic.

In Biblical times, the priests, who served in the Holy of Holies before the Divine Presence, were forbidden to partake of anything could hinder their mental faculties, at the time of their service.

In the Bible (Lev. 10:1-2), the story is told of Nadav, and Avihu, the two sons of the High Priest Aharon, who when offering the ketoret incense before G-d, were said to have offered "strange fire". Consequently, fire came forth from G-d, and they were both burned alive in the presence of G-d. G-d then commands (v. 8-11) that the priests must never enter their service intoxicated, (it is taught that the "strange fire", was a foreign element within their bodies that defiled them before G-d's Presence). This abstinence is an eternal commandment, for all times. The priests are told that this is a separation between the sacred and the profane, the pure and the unclean. While the specific reference is to alcohol use, it is obviously applicable to anything else that might interfere with the priest's ability to properly do his job. Whosoever would enter the presence of G-d without full faculties is condemned to death, a penalty that G-d, Himself will carry out.

Prophetic ecstasy was thus never a state induced by some external means. True prophetic ecstasy is one of spiritual/psychological origin. This state, however, was achieved only after long practices of stringent disciplines geared at successfully educating the conscious mind how to correctly separate from the limitations of the senses of the physical body. There could be no short cuts here. This had to be



accomplished in a very precise way to avoid the dangers of such separation, which could be severe psychosis, or death.

This was the experience, recorded in the Talmud, Hagigah 14B, of the four men, who entered the "PaRDeS". One looked around and went insane, one looked around and apostates, one looked around and died. Only one entered and exited, in peace. If any type of external chemical was introduced into the body of the aspirant during these trials, even for the purpose of drawing closer to G-d, like Nadav and Avihu, one might get a little too close, and not being properly aligned, be burnt up, alive.

Within my experience in Kabbalistic circles, I have known my Rabbis specifically to not initiate anyone who has a history of hallucinogenic drug use. I was told, and have seen with my own eyes, that when one approaches the true spiritual courts wherein which G-d resides, one must be both, physically and psychologically grounded in the objective reality of that experience. One misconception caused by a malfunction of brain chemistry (brought on by drug use or abuse) can be the cause of devastating psychological and spiritual problems.

In order to understand why the Torah of the Kabbalah is so adamant in the rejection of consciousness altering chemicals, some introductory knowledge regarding true Jewish Kabbalistic initiation is necessary. To begin with, Kabbalistic training is progressive. Like the priesthood in the ancient Temple, training develops in stages. It must be remembered that in Kabbalah, there are many avenues and levels of practice. Each one of these levels is learned, mastered, tested, and only then practiced.

In the Mishna (Hagigah Ch. 2), the schools of Kabbalistic study are divided into three sections of learning. First, there is the sitrei arayot (secrets of forbidden relationships), generally; this is the study of the olamot, and the sefirot. These are the cosmic laws of Torah and nature. Second, there is the Ma'aseh Bereshit (secrets of creation) which deals with the manipulations of these cosmic laws of nature, through the manipulation of the building blocks of creation, the letters of the Hebrew Aleph-bet. The third school, considered to be the purest and most profound teachings of the Kabbalah, is Ma'aseh Merkava (the work of the chariot). Ma'aseh Merkava is the experience of G-d's presence, the purpose of which is for the reception of Divine inspiration and prophecy. This was the level where Nadav and Avihu stood.

In order to see how chemical usage can sabotage this progression of learning, we must understand some more Kabbalistic basics. The Ba'al Shem Tov teaches (Ekev 35), that the physical body is created in the image of, and correlates to the spiritual body. The spiritual body is, of course, created in the image of, and correlates to the ten supernal sefirot of Atzilut (Zoh.3,73A). It is not the physical body that experiences G-d directly, but rather the spiritual body.



The spiritual body, the source of the physical body, experiences G-d directly, and this experience reverberates all the way down the line to the physical body and consciousness. *(The spiritual body being spoken of here is not the astral body referred to in western mystical literature. The astral body, according to the Kabbalah (Zoh. II, 162B) is nothing other than that level of the physical body, which is made up of a higher form of matter.)* If the Kabbalist wishes to affect something in one's physical body, (as in the case of healing) he is taught to go to the source of the problem, in the spiritual body, i.e. the Neshama (Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Ekev,2,7).

The Neshama congeals its interacting powers into a form that leads to the manifestation of the physical human body. Therefore, the body is the outward expression of the Neshama soul. At the same time, the Neshama of a person is a vessel for the holy yehida, which is the spark of holiness and the connection between the human soul, and G-d. It is called nishmata d'nishmata, the soul of the soul, in the language of the Zohar (II, 118B).

The body is thus the vehicle for the Neshama, as the Neshama is the vehicle of the yehida, which is the vehicle of the Shekhina. *(Remember, vehicle in Hebrew, is Merkava).* Therefore, whatever affects one has an affect on all the others. Any unnatural alteration of the body chemistry has a correlative effect upon the astral chemistry. What happens in the body, both physical and astral affect one another. The Neshama and what it contains can therefore be hindered from correctly manifesting its light in the body.

The astral, spiritual and sefirotic plans all have objective reality to them, as does our physical plane. One can artificially alter all the consciousness that one perceives. Yet, the experiences therein are nothing but subjective, and thus only a shadowy reflections of the truth. For example, if when in an altered state of consciousness, you decide to stand in front of a speeding train, thinking yourself to be Superman, you will very quickly realize that you are not.

Many people experimenting with mind-altering drugs feel themselves to be spiritual supermen. They believe that they can side step the long, ardent details of spiritual discipline. What they do not know is that what they are experiencing is not an objective reality, but a subjective one. Such subjective truths are of no concern for the Kabbalist, for such immature experiences are nothing but klipah (the glow that surrounds the true light). Bluntly put, such experiences are lies.

It is of interest to note that in his work, "Meditation and the Kabbalah", (Pg. 156) Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan z'l refers to some esevim, (grasses) mentioned in the "Shoshana Yesod Olam", a text on magical Kabbalah. He offers a possible interpretation that these



"grasses" refer to psychedelic drugs. Yet, there doesn't seem to be any Kabbalistic authority who mentions esevim in this context. Esevim are widely spoken about in Kabbalistic literature.

The Holy Zohar says that, *"There is no grass or herb that grows in which G-d's wisdom is not greatly manifested and which cannot exert great influence in heaven"* and *"If men but knew the wisdom of all the Holy One, blessed be He, has planted in the earth, and the power of all that is to be found in the world, they would proclaim the power of their L-rd in His great wisdom"* (Zoh.2,80B). Yet, the best definition that can be ascribed to the word Esevim is not "grasses", which is its literal interpretation, but rather medicinal herbs.

Two texts on practical Kabbalah, Mareh Yeledim, and Abiyah Hidut, both have long sections on Esevim. Together, both books cover over 100 different herbs and their medicinal usage. Within all this, there is never mentioned, even one hint, to the usage of any esev in a way, or for the purpose of altering consciousness, or drawing closer to the spiritual world, or G-d.

In ancient Israel, the prophets, who were the masters of spiritual discipline were also masters in herbal arts and healing. The use of herbs and natural healing was widespread in Biblical times. The Talmud relates that in the days of King Hezekiah, the *Sefer Refuot*, the Book of Healing had to be concealed because everyone was being healed of everything and no one was dying.

The Zohar (II, 80B) says, *"The Holy One has purposely hidden this wisdom from men that they should not turn from His way by trusting in that wisdom alone, forgetting Him"*. While much of this story might be legend, it does reveal, nonetheless, the existence of the knowledge of an ancient Jewish knowledge of body chemistry.

The sectarian group known as the Essenes were also natural healers. According to Encyclopedia Judaica (Vol. 6, pg. 900, in the name of G. Vermes), the word "Essene" come from the Aramaic root "esen" which means to heal. Therefore, the title "Essenes" means, "the healers". This would fit in with our historical knowledge of them from Philo, and Josephus. Being they knew so much about medicinal herbs and medicines, maybe they also knew of mind-altering chemicals. Yet, in whatever literature we have regarding them, there is never any mention of any type of chemical usage for altering consciousness.

I believe I can offer an answer as to why drug use might be a spiritual temptation. Remember that the three levels of Kabbalistic learning are progressive. First, one is to learn the outline of the prophetic universe, which are the sitrei arayot. One then proceeds to learn the secrets of creation, Ma'aseh Bereshit. Only then can one proceed and learn the secrets and source of Self, Ma'aseh Merkava, which is the pinnacle and



ultimate acquisition of wisdom. Ma'aseh Merkava is not an easy path to walk. It requires full devotion to ultimate truth, including the recognition, and rectification of the dark side of the human self. This last step is one most do not succeed in achieving. In order to make up for this loss of experience, many choose instead to receive a substitute. This substitute is the personal subjective experience one receives from the powers of the klipot. It is a shadow of the real thing but it is false.

Many learn the powers of Ma'aseh Bereshit, and abuse them as simple magic. It must be remembered that manipulation of the laws of nature, which is all that any magic (or Ma'aseh Bereshit) really is, is not a sign of any spiritual advancement. Magic is a science like any other technology. Mental magic, alternate states of consciousness follow the same biological/spiritual pattern. It is only impressive to the simple minded who cannot understand things in their true depths.

As there are no shortcuts in physical bodybuilding, so there are no shortcuts with spiritual soul building. Hallucinogenic chemicals are like spiritual steroids. In the short run, they appear to bring results. Yet, in reality all they do is destroy the souls ability to properly receive G-d's power through the biological channels that correlate to their spiritual counterparts. What is left is a handicapped spiritual condition. One who is in this condition still hungers for the true taste of spiritual nourishment, yet is unable to receive it, due to the inability of his body to receive the light.

In such cases, out of desperation, many choose to receive from the dark side, rather than not receive at all. Of course, what is received is not real. Yet, a filling illusion is sometimes considered more desirable than an empty reality.

This is the result of those paths that do not properly channel G-d's light. They cause themselves harm, and add insult to injury by drifting farther from the truth, instead of rectifying the wrong.

According to the Torah, drug use for the purpose of spiritual gain or for any other kind of recreational use is wrong, misdirected, dangerous to both body and soul is and therefore condemned. There is no place for drug use in the life of a Jew walking the path of the Torah.