

Leaving Home:
The Role of Community in Integration and the Entheogenic Journey

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Abstract

Entheogenic or psychedelic journeys are often done in order to grow as people. In general, the more people can integrate new perspectives they have gained into their ongoing lives the more they can grow from the experience. Some people say that integration is 80% of the work in the growth and transformative process with entheogens. Only limited attention has been paid to integration in the literature though, in spite of the many practices, attitudes and understandings that can support it.

Community and social relationships play a large role in the integration process, consciously or not. This happens whether through mirroring and support or as a place to leave from and then be received as someone new. Through this process the community may be changed too.

Looking at community across several dimensions shows some of the ways that community can support the integration process. These dimensions can include different parts of a journey, different ideas of who has the journey, different aspects of the self, and different relationships between self and community.

The theoretical frameworks that emerge from this exploration provide a rich set of perspectives that can be applied to individuals, situations, or experiences. This gives people tools for developing more depth and effectiveness in the integration process. Additionally, going into more depth in this theme of integration provides an example for others so they can explore and illuminate other integration themes.

Leaving Home:

The Role of Community in the Integration of the Entheogenic Journey

Integration practice - Cultivating intention for reading

Before you read any of this paper, stop and check in with yourself. Close your eyes. It's only a short paper, but what are your desires, your hopes and fantasies in reading this paper? Open your eyes. Now you may need to put the paper to the side for a while. If you can, don't continue reading until you have told someone else a bit of what came up for you just now. Someone who you'll be able to find easily after you finish reading. One sentence is plenty. Even a word. But something.

Introduction

Following our series of circles we will also be hosting an Integration circle on Sunday evening beginning at 7:00pm. While attendance at the integration circle is optional it is highly recommended. We have found these integration circles to be incredibly useful for grounding the experience of the ceremony into our being and for receiving valuable reflection and feedback in a positive community setting. We strongly encourage your attendance at this gathering which will be preceded by community social time and a light potluck feast.

– Email announcement (email communication, spring 2012)

Entheogenic or psychedelic journeys are often done in order to grow as people. People not focused on growth are usually intending simply to have fun, or to play in some way. We humans are mammals though, and one thing all mammals seem to have in common is that we play, and we use play as a way to learn.

Still, growth is not completely automatic. The more people can integrate new perspectives they have gained into their lives the more they can grow from the experience. There are many practices, attitudes and things to do that can support that integration process. Community and our social relationships are a big part of that. Engaging proactively with community can support greater and more effective integration.

In a broad sense this is all relevant far beyond just integration of entheogenic experiences. It is broadly applicable to singular experiences that help us grow as people. Mystical experiences are a subset of that, and entheogenic experiences are a still smaller subset.

In this paper I discuss integration, community and their relationship. I use examples from my own life, from traditional indigenous entheogenic practices and from other singular transformative experiences. I look at the boundaries between self and community, meaning, and issues about who changes.

The word ‘community’ is thrown around a lot these days in relation to spirituality. It is typically mentioned as something important, but usually with a very simplistic perspective, as in “it is important to engage in your community.” What community actually means or the roles community may play in someone’s life is rarely addressed. This is part of what I will address.

I also come at all this from the perspective of a spiritual seeker and support person. While I discuss this from both theoretical and practical perspectives, as a support person I emphasize the practical. That is “how to do this” rather than “how does this work.” As mentioned in the introduction to *The Participatory Turn*, (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008) my perspective is typical for this kind of work:

...importing the language and epistemic categories emerging from Western scientific and philosophical traditions to analyze and account for the validity of knowledge claims from all cultures, ways of knowing, and domains of reality is highly questionable. Most religious and spiritual endeavors, we should stress here, are aimed not so much at describing or explaining human nature and the world, but at engaging and transforming them in creative and participatory ways, and may therefore call for different validity standards than those emerging from the rationalistic study of the natural world. (pg. 9)

In general I'm looking at all this through the lens of mystical experience, and by looking at who is changed. This initial perspective contains a subtle dualism. In some ways the mystical experience is much like the object to be looked at, an external ‘thing.’ By looking at who is changed I am looking at the subject of the experience. Ultimately these perspectives dissolve into

the broader concept of participatory events, and beyond that into transpersonal phenomena. The dualism in the initial lenses will necessarily result in subtle dissociation and reductionism in this paper. This will always be the case though, given the dualistic nature of being human.

The Problem

“Psychedelics can trigger understanding; on the other hand, behavior change takes time, and in this culture it is often harder to sustain than we acknowledge.”

– Neal Goldsmith, *Psychedelic Healing* (Goldsmith 2010)

When people go on entheogenic journeys they may believe that they have been permanently changed by the experience. While things may function a little differently after the journey, over time the experience fades. There’s often little or no long term change.

I’ve heard many stories about people who do lots of journeys, and are always talking about the experiences and how profoundly the journeys have changed them. Several years and many stories later, the themes have changed, but the person seems just the same.

Why is this? Lasting change happens as the new things someone has learned, or the new perspectives they have gained, become part of more aspects of their life. This process of integrating knowledge, perspectives or worldviews into your life seldom happens automatically. Changing thought or behavior patterns takes practice and is limited by the restrictions inside us that affect how knowledge flows from one aspect of ourselves to another. Things that help us practice, or help understandings move past blocks, are things we can do to support this integration process and grow more from the experiences. If you want to grow from the experience, focus on integration.

Integration

Integrating entheogenic experiences is often thought of as a process or practice people do after a journey that might last a few hours. It may be seen as limited to something like the circle mentioned in the email at the beginning of this paper. While this can be a valuable piece

of integration, it is not the whole thing.

In reality everything in someone's life having anything to do with the themes of their journey is part of integration as well as everything connected to that. Following these ripples of impact everything in life is part of the integration process. This means that integration happens no matter what. It may result in lots of change or very little, but it happens. The key here is what you do to support change and integration.

Methods of integration.

Most literature I've read on integration discusses a few specific things to do to support integration (Cole 2008; Fadiman 2011; Goldsmith 2007). Sometimes those practices are considered the entire "integration," although thankfully not usually. The following list of things to do came from an anonymous manual for supporting people that I was given a copy of and is much more specific and practical:

Integrating the lessons of the journey concretely: (Anonymous)

- Means changing routines.
- Get into the nuts and bolts of how to do that. Creativity.
- Honor and ritualize the "new beginning" of the journey.
- The emotional carrying over into life of what you experienced. It can be "loving" or "angry" or whatever it is: it must be manifest in the world.
- If there is pain, allow it to be there.

This is all after the journey. When I speak about integrating things into your life I mean all of your life though. And by all of your life, I mean not just your entire future, but your past. The past plays into the present. If someone wants to integrate the experience fully into their life then it's valuable to prepare for the journey, even beginning long in advance.

Although all of your life is preparation for a journey, there are plenty of things you can do intentionally beforehand. Anything you've done leading up to a journey is relevant, and things that help build a stronger relationship to your own growth process will help you with the journey. Thinking about your intentions, goals or purpose for a journey is one

example. Ongoing spiritual practice is another.

Another realm is guides, support people and psychotherapists. A guide is someone who supports someone during a journey through some form of interaction with the person having the journey. Having support from someone with knowledge of how to work with these kinds of journeys is valuable before, during and after the experience. The training manual for the current legal studies on treating PTSD with MDMA discusses the role of the therapist after the journey. (Mithoefer et al, 2011, pp. 47-48)

5.3 Therapists Role During Follow-Up and Integration Sessions

During follow-up and integration sessions, the therapists are present to answer any questions the participant may have about his or her experiences and offer support and encouragement as the participant processes the intrapsychic realities and new perceptions gained through the MDMA session. The therapists take a supportive and validating stance toward the participant's experience. They also facilitate the participant's understanding of the trauma from insights and perspectives gained from the opening of new channels of emotion and thought, and the clearing of other reactions and thoughts that may have outlived their usefulness. The therapists may offer insights or interpretations of the participant's experience, but this should be minimized. Participants should be encouraged to exercise their own judgment about what comments they may or may not find useful and to primarily apply their own experience and understanding.

...

The process of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for the treatment of PTSD continues well after the MDMA sessions are complete. The challenge at this stage is to help the participant develop a wider behavioral and emotional repertoire with which to respond to anxiogenic stimuli. To reach this goal the therapists and participant embark on integration of the treatment process. To function effectively in everyday life, the participant must be able to integrate the valuable insights from the treatment process.

Axes of integration.

There are many ways to support integration and make it more effective. One way to look at this is to look at the aspects of self being worked with. Someone might work with integrating new understandings into the body, into the heart, etc. You can look through many different lenses, whether looked at as body, vital, heart and mind (Ferrer, Romero & Albareda 2005), as the chakras, or through some other lens. Another axis might be based on time, looking before the journey, during the journey, and after the journey. Still another might be self, community, the world and existence. All of these can be looked at from many places on the given axis. There's a

full range of possibilities for each one.

Who Travels, Who Accompanies?

So let's step into the concept of community and relationship with others. Community is the "in between" when we look from the individual self to all of existence. Working with community is a way of connecting the two. On a very personal level, if you're going on a long journey, don't you want your friends with you? Or at least have them wish you well before you leave, and welcome you home when you return?

After a journey it may seem like big changes have happened. Memories fade, and it's easy for what seems life changing to not result in much change at all. To really make change you need to integrate the experience thoroughly into your life. The integration process spans your whole life, before the journey and after. It's also not possible to choose whether to integrate the journey or not; it happens no matter what. What you can do though is choose to support integration processes that help you grow more effectively. But there's one more thing. It's not just you on the journey.

Yes, it's very easy to look at this as one person's experience. As an experience, it is just one person. The word 'experience' though limits us to a subject/object perspective. As Ferrer and Sherman (2008) put it:

...emerging modes of participation overcome Cartesian dualism self-reflexively by preserving a highly differentiated though permeable individuality or *participatory self* as the agent of religious knowing. (pg. 38)

So when someone goes on a journey like this they're actually participating in an *event* that they share with others. The person may be the main player (or *participatory self*) in the event, but it's still a shared event.

So who is it shared with? And what does share mean in this context? Most clearly the person's communities and social connections are with them. They always are, because we all

carry all our connections within us. That means community is part of the journey, inherently. What the people involved share is that they participate in making it happen the way it does. That means everyone is part of creating it, and not just everyone, but everything that plays into it.

In other words, the participatory approach presents an enactive understanding of the sacred that conceives spiritual phenomena, experiences, and insights as *cocreated events*.¹ (Ferrer 2011, pg. 2)

Example – my journey.

One time I did an internally focused journey with intentions related to working on my relationship with my father. During the experience I spent hours moaning and even heaving my body because I felt so bad for my father. I was feeling compassion for him because of his pain. And in a way I was seeing myself as the cause of his pain, but I couldn't do anything about it for him.

All my life I had heard and felt my father's judgement toward me about how I live my life and what I do. This day I saw things from his perspective. I saw his pain as a mix of things like sorrow, shame and self-doubt. I saw him as feeling like a failure as a father, because, as I imagined him seeing it, all his children were failures. And there is truth in this: he failed at raising me to be as much like him as he would have liked. In this sense he really failed.

I came home after the experience and had a simple but heartfelt email from my father, the first communication I had received from him in a month or so.

From an experience perspective, of course this was my experience. From an event

¹ Terminology: Note that I use the word *experience* in many places in this paper. This implies a specific perspective, that of the experienter. Stepping beyond that perspective moves into the terminology of *events* and *phenomena*. I use the term *phenomena* as something that includes *events*, rather than the reverse as Ferrer holds it. Looking from the perspective of something like the changes that happen with a journey I have difficulty seeing the changes as an event; it's easy to look at the changes as a phenomena. The same is true for concepts like love. It's challenging for me to hold love, which exists in general in our universe, as an event. I have no difficulty holding it as a phenomena. I will speak primarily in terms of events and experiences. This works fine for the concept of a time-delimited journey and things that surround I, and with a focus on the main player in the journey.

perspective, my father and siblings were part of it. The relationships and dynamics among us were part of the journey. On top of that, you can begin to see how the changes from a journey happen to others beyond the journeyer. First, there's the relationship between my journey and the email I received from my father. More clear though is that the experience changed me; I see my father differently now. Instead of simply being frustrated and angry with him for his judgement of me, I became very aware of my compassion for him. As a result of this I no longer had so much conflict with him around these themes.

Also as a result of all this my father, at 80, learned boundaries. While the changes in my father did not happen at the same moment as my experience, they were part of the same event, even if delayed from my journey.

Example – death.

Community and social relationships are an easy way to look at the scale between the self and all of existence. As another example, a non-entheogenic one that everyone is familiar with, what happens when someone dies?

So when someone dies, whose experience is it? Imagine the father of your close friend dies. Whose experience is this? Clearly your friend's father's, at least until he passes. The friend has also had a big experience. People usually change a lot after a parent dies, so there are changes in worldview similar to after an entheogenic journey. What about you? What is your role in all this? If your friend changes, does this touch you and make you part of the event? How is your support relevant or important? The closer someone or something is to the central phenomena we're looking at here, this death, the more impacted they are likely to be. There's not really a limit to who might be touched given how everything is connected to everything else.

Similarly, what happens if someone has a terminal illness? How does that touch everyone around them? When someone has a terminal illness others often expect changes in that person. It's common for people who are dying to resolve old issues and create closure. Those around them are less likely than normal to fight the change or try to maintain old behavior patterns. In addition, those around the person go through changes, possibly also initiating closure as well. Everyone is having the journey.

This is even true on a collective level. Jürgen Kremer (Kremer 1994, pg. 21), for example, discusses the changes in the worldview of the gay community in San Francisco as a result of the AIDS crisis. If a whole community goes through a health crisis then the attitudes and culture of the whole community may change.

Rites of Passage

In traditional indigenous cultures the process of going through a major rite of passage changes the relationship between the individual and the community. The individual's worldview may change, and their communal roles, expectations and responsibilities shift as well. This is true for whatever major rites of passage the culture works with. Many indigenous cultures useentheogenic journeys or related practices as ways of marking some of these transitions.

(Winkelman 2007, pg. 153)

Entheogenic journeys are often compared to dying. The journeyer may face death, a little like believing they have a terminal illness. This implies change, as above. Those around them may not be seeing it this way though. In our culture as a whole, even where the taboos aroundentheogens don't function as strongly, these journeys are rarely held as major transformative events by others beyond the person journeying. They will likely hold expectations that the person having the journey will stay the same and interact with them as before. This also means that

others beyond the individual may fight harder to hold onto old behavior dynamics between them and the person who had the journey.

The question of who is changed with death is similar to that with birth. People expect relationships, social roles and community to change for new parents, even in our culture. Others in the community may offer support to help them deal with the changes. This is community support for integration. It's normal. Marriage may have some of these components as well.

In Western or industrialized culture this is not so true for other transitions. The transition from childhood to adulthood is barely acknowledged. There is nothing marking puberty and adolescence in the broad culture, and the move from finishing school to adult responsibilities, whether finishing high school or a Ph.D., is marked by a graduation ceremony but with little or no community support for the transitions necessary. I grew up Jewish, and had a Bar Mitzvah when I was 13. While I was told that this was traditionally about the transition from childhood to adulthood, it was clear that it didn't actually mean anything. I wasn't treated any differently. No one told me anything new. Nothing really changed.

In some traditional indigenous cultures these kinds of changes are marked with initiatory rites of passage. These rites may involveentheogens, visionquests or other practices. With all of these though, the whole community recognizes that something important is happening, acknowledging that the person involved will return changed . This means their relationships will change as well, also meaning others around them will be changed.

Community

To sustain spiritual life, we need one another's eyes and hearts as surely as we need help creating food and shelter. This reflection and encouragement is no small thing. As Adirenne Rich says, "Truthfulness, honor, is not something that springs ablaze of itself, it has to be created between people."

– Jack Kornfield (2001, pg. 241)

While Kornfield speaks of needing one another's eyes and hearts, in truth these are our

own hearts. The heart is not truly individual. We humans are probably the most socially complex creatures on our planet. This stems from the connections between our hearts, and the ways we share them.

It's relatively easy to see that our relationships or community define our social reality. It goes deeper than this though. Our social reality is actually constructed or created by the structures of community we live in. This is, as Jürgen Kremer puts it, 'communal social reality creation.' (1994, pg. 31) There is no other social reality. We humans are profoundly social creatures and as such we become people through our relationships (Heron 2007, pg. 9). Without them we would no longer really be human. So we're not just creating social reality through community; we're creating our shared reality.

Kremer uses a shamanic perspective to speak about this. He uses the term 'shamanic concourse' to speak about the practices used for creating this reality.

The shamanic coming together in a circle is the idealized prototype to which the term 'shamanic concourse' alludes. This would be a circle where the communal reality creation is reviewed through talking as well as ritualistic embodiment; this circle would have space for silence, stories, humour, theatre, dancing and other arts. (pg. 31)

He also explains why he uses the word 'shamanic' by discussing the roles of the shaman in this creation process.

The name 'shamanic concourse' seems appropriate as an acknowledgement of the fact that shamans appear to be the primary model of practitioners actively engaged in world creation and world maintenance; these are people who appear to be conscious (although not in the Western sense) of the relationship between knowing and creating and who are constantly engaged in dealing with issues of alignment; they are, frequently, aware of other cultural worlds, respect them and find ways to engage with them without abandoning the world which they are intent on maintaining. (pp. 31-32)

In this sense we are each other's shamans.

Another way to look at this is to look at the individual as a piece of a community. If we are socially constructed individuals, and this construction works through community, then we are actually manifestations of community. This fits very well with the concepts of collective and

individual unconscious. I do not mean by all this that consciousness is itself socially constructed. Consciousness may be socially and communally directed though, and that process is perhaps what makes us humans.

Still, community extends far beyond this. The Lakota term, *mitakuye oyasin*, is usually translated as ‘all my relations.’ For the Lakota this means everything we have a relationship to. This is a common indigenous view of community. It includes the ecological community around us, our ancestors, and our descendants and the future beings.

Kinds of community.

While the broad sense of ecological community is important, I’m focusing on community in terms of human social relations. This is how people most often understand it, and the realm in which we are best able to have personal authentic relationship, like what Martin Buber calls the ‘I-Thou’ relationship. Relationships with the non-human realm parallel this.

There are many kinds of community that are relevant to the entheogenic journey and to integration. I’ve mentioned family some already. We carry our relationships with our closest family members with us all the time. They show up in entheogenic journeys, like the one I mentioned with my father and siblings. After a journey it is in changes to our relationships with family members where we may see the deepest changes. Family can be the most powerful, and the most difficult, place to practice and try to learn new ways of relating to others. Family is core.

Peer groups are also important. We practice here too. We get reflection from others and support. Having peers of some sort that you can be open with about entheogenic work and who are supportive of it is extremely valuable. For some individuals even if they don’t have supportive peers it may still be valuable to simply be able to be open about the work.

If the journey itself is done in some sort of group context then that group of people is also a good context for working things as part of integration. Spiritual communities are very important here too. While ongoing spiritual practice is extremely valuable for integration, a spiritual community makes this much more powerful.

There are many other kinds of communities that are relevant for integration. Whatever kinds of social networks people have may be helpful. As I mentioned before, even nonhuman realms are relevant, whether the ecological world around us or some other kind of spiritual realms that someone relates to. The human realm though is the most likely to provide clear mirroring and reflection to us. As I've said, we're social beings, and it is important to stay grounded in the interpersonal world we live in.

In general, having people around you who are familiar with your spiritual, psychological or emotional journey through life is profoundly valuable for getting some perspective on what you have gone through. They are the most likely to be able to see when things have shifted for you. These people may also be strongly impacted by changes in you. Being open to a changing relationship with you means being open to a changing relationship with themselves. When one person changes in a context like this it often results in rippling waves of changes in others, as I've spoken about earlier. Spiritual communities and families, probably more than any other communities, grow together.

The experience of being truly seen and honored by another reminds us of who we are.
We cannot underestimate the importance of the awakening we bring to one another.
– Jack Kornfield (2001, pg. 241)

Roles of community.

I've mentioned some already, but community can play many roles in integration. Much of this falls broadly under the category of mirroring, but there are other things as well. Most roles of community are simply expanded roles of ordinary social interaction.

One of the simplest, but one of the most profound, is simply being witnessed. Telling the story of your journey to a group of people all at once or having several different friends simply see what you're like after a journey that has changed you can help you feel seen in many ways. Knowing how others perceive you is valuable information.

Another one of the interviews from Howard Whitehouse's dissertation (2004) touches on this directly:

The most important thing about a community is, in a community it really matters to you how these people feel about you – what they think, what they've said, what they do – and that's what matters to me. (pg. 139)

If there is conversation involved, and others can relate to what you say, or tell you they see changes in you, then you may feel deeply validated. On the other hand, witnessing may involve having others tell you that you're completely off. Sometimes they're right. Regardless you have still been witnessed here, even if you do not feel validated. Whether you agree with the people around you or not, this is valuable information.

In general, the patterns of how others react and respond to you after a journey can tell you a lot. Aside from what they say or see there is simply your impact on them. I once went on an entheogenic journey and for the next month or so I kept getting hit on by women 10-15 years older than me. While I don't know what changed in me, clearly something did! If all your friends start avoiding you, or lots of friends start sharing more private details about their lives with you, or you notice any change in the patterns of how your peers interact with you, pay attention.

Sometimes what's most valuable for the integration process is allowing your understanding of what the journey was about to change. Or perhaps whatever has changed opens up the ability to learn or understand things you couldn't before. The specifics of how this works have a lot to do with others. Through dialogue and conversation, and even through argument, our understandings change.

In spite of all the roles of others to support change, it's important to remember that change in you depends on you. While community can help you change, it can also do the opposite. Community can stop you in your tracks or reverse things that seem to have already changed.

If the people in your life, especially when it's a whole community of people, keep acting as if you have not changed it's possible that your patterns of behavior will largely revert back to what they were. Think of the way family systems work: you can't have one person change without other people changing as well. If family members, for example, hold tightly onto the roles they have played then it can be very difficult to engage with them and be a 'new you.' Others may continue to treat you as if nothing has changed, even if you really act differently. It's challenging to constantly fight against the expectations of others, especially when they expect something that you're so used to doing.

I'm mentioning this mostly in terms of roles of community after a journey, but the role of community beforehand is just as important. Personally, I sometimes discuss why I'm doing a journey, or my intentions, with friends. Or sometimes I'm just talking with them about what I'm working on in life. What friends say impacts me, and my understanding of myself may change. This feeds directly into the intentions and mindset I take to a journey. After the journey you can evaluate what played out regarding those intentions, perhaps even with the same people.

You and community.

Earlier I spoke about our social reality being created by community, and about us as manifestations of community. As such, we are also part of community ourselves. This means that we create community, and are part of creating the social reality of others. So we are reality creators. Part of the integration process is recognizing our own roles in this.

All spiritual traditions I'm aware of speak of the individual giving back to the community. This is the cyclical nature of community and individual. This is where terms like Kremer's 'shamanic concourse' (pp. 31-32) become clearer. This interwoven process with others, with community, and with creation itself, is the process of cocreation. This personal sense of being part of that creating process is the essence of participatory spirituality.

Whitehouse's interviews (pg. 138) also spoke of the need to bring something back to the community. In traditional cultures when someone goes through some sort of initiation they may come back with either visions for the community or newfound gifts or skills that may serve the community. One of my journeys contained a vision for my tribe, the Jewish people. It was a vision that helps us see ourselves and the role that Jews have been collectively playing in the world for the last couple thousand years. Describing this vision out loud to other Jews has sometimes touched them deeply. Another of my journeys contained a vision for all humanity. It's surprising what kinds of gifts can emerge.

In this sense you could say that the journey isn't just for the individual involved; it serves the whole community. Similarly, if a person changes as a result of their journey, that changes their community. This happens in ripples, as I've described earlier.

So who is the journey really for? Is it for the individual, or the community? Who really changes? And given the ripples that go in all directions, who is it that even causes change? Whose experience is it anyway?

As John Heron says:

...the spirituality of persons is developed and revealed primarily in the spirituality of their relations with other persons... as such it is a form of participative peer-to-peer inquiry... (pp. 7-8)

This is the essence of who we are as humans, and as I've already discussed, we become human through our relationships. While this is still a rare view in the Western industrialized

world, these conversations are happening in many places, which is why people are speaking about things like a new participatory paradigm. Michel Bauwens even speaks about multiple growth-oriented practices that are being developed that are consciously based on this paradigm. (Bauwens 2007, pg. 43) The culture is slowly changing.

Going on a Journey

At the very beginning of this paper I mentioned that most of what I'm writing applies beyond entheogenic journeys. It applies to many other kinds of intentional experiences as well, like visionquests, many kinds of spiritual retreats and other things. In general this applies to short term experiences where you plan to leave your regular life, you can predict that change will be coming, you go through something while you're away, and then you return to a regular life. Much of this will apply to other kinds of growth experiences as well as deeper mystical experiences. There are some difference though when looking at things that emerge spontaneously when someone is not aiming for or expecting deep change.

It's partly because of this sense of leaving your regular life that we call this an entheogenic journey. In addition the experience itself may be like leaving this reality rather thoroughly and then returning. Looking at the experience as a journey gives us a lens based on time that we can use to look at integration and community through.

Home.

We begin, before the journey, at home. If you're going on any kind of journey you will likely prepare. In this case, you are preparing to leave your normal life. You may leave your physical home, your normal relationships, your ways of being with other people, and even your sense of self. Perhaps during the experience you will even feel that you have left your body or even left life and died. All these things are part of home.

One role community plays for us all is in our sense of self. Your relationships are part of how you define yourself. In that sense, your community is your home. It's where you come from and where you will likely feel most rooted in your usual sense of self, like it or not.

Sometimes you may take parts of your community with you on the journey. Friends may be physically with you, whether as co-journeymen or simply being there to help you out. As I've mentioned before though, in some ways the community always goes on the journey with you.

Things to bring.

The people around you play a major role in how you both step into these journeys and how you return from them. Things get exposed or worked in your life, and then you can have focused experiences in order to go deeper into yourself. Most typically things get exposed through the interactions you have with the people you see regularly in your life. They can also be exposed through whoever you bump into from the broader society, which is itself a very large community. You can also do things to intentionally expose things in yourself, whether it's with an individual, like a psychotherapist or spiritual teacher, or in a class.

In the last year or so I've had several experiences shortly after a class of some sort that helped issues emerge for me. One of those experiences was right after a class on sexuality. While themes related to my own sexuality were the main theme of the journey, people who were in the class also came up in the experience. The relationships and dynamics between people from the class came up as well. The community I had just been with went on the journey with me in a sense.

The issues you're working on in your life emerge from your social world, from your relationships. Community is where you do your groundwork and where you begin to learn your weaknesses, strengths and generally who you are. Knowing yourself is part of what helps you

see what you want. It's where your intentions emerge from, whether conscious or not.

Leaving.

All this self-knowledge is valuable to take with you on the journey. Having community support before the journey is valuable too. Whether it's to help you assess your goals or intentions, or simply to be someone to wish you 'bon voyage,' it's good to have community you can talk about this work with.

In initiatory practices in indigenous cultures the person having the experience will often get some sort of sendoff. Everyone has an interest in seeing a good outcome and in seeing benefit for the whole community through the individual's transformation and visioning.

In our culture here it's valuable simply to have people to talk with beforehand, even if it's just someone to listen to your fears.

During.

I've spoken a lot about the ways you carry your community with you on the journey even if they aren't physically with you, but what if they are physically with you? And what if you're interacting with them? During a journey integration is relevant too; integration becomes about getting your life into the journey, rather than vice-versa as we usually think about it.

There are several roles community can play during a journey. Interacting with others depends profoundly on what entheogen you are work with and how strong an experience you plan for or have. A high dose mushroom experience is not going to be conducive to interacting with others. On the other hand, and group experience with MDMA will likely open people up to deeper connection and interaction.

During the journey all the ways community is in your life with you can show up in the visionary state. If there are others physically with you, even if you are not interacting with them,

you may be very aware of them in the moment. All your awareness of them plays into your experience. You may be aware of other people because of the sounds they are making. Maybe in the visionary state you see energy flowing out of people. This community is part of the content of your journey.

Not so long ago I arrived very late for a journey with a group of friends. I had misunderstood the time when we were meeting. The stress and disappointment of being late shifted during the journey. I felt shame about my sense of disorganization in my life, but even more, I felt very vulnerable because everyone had seen it so clearly. Having a whole community of friends see my weakness sent me off into my whole journey about the intersection between vulnerability, my mom, sexuality, birth and expressing desire. Being witnessed and then doing the journey with these friends was huge.

If you are on a journey where you are interacting with each other then the community has a whole bunch of other roles. More formally you could have a healer, guide or care-giver from your communities with you. They may do work on you, talk with you, or give suggestions. You would probably already have a relationship with them beforehand, and connect with them afterward for support.

In a group setting there may be structured or ritualized interaction. A guide might direct interaction. Structured interaction can take many forms. For example, I was once part of a silent role-play as animals on a light mushroom dose.

If it's less structured then many of the roles community plays in life are relevant. You might share hugs with your friends or be fed by them. You might get some form of mirroring, whether hearing the perceptions others have of you while in their altered states or seeing your impact on them while you're altered. Less verbal interaction is possible too. For

example, what does each person experience when one person gives their friend a massage in a visionary state? Many kinds of reality testing can happen too, like when a friend of mine in college got wasabi in her eye while journeying and wanted to know whether her eye was melting out of it's socket.

Returning.

Community provides many kinds of integration after the journey, but most people who think about it at all conceive of integration as being only after the journey. For each of the things that I mention here for post-journey integration, think about what you might do before the journey to make it more effective.

The most common perspective on this is simply that returning to a supportive community is valuable after a journey. Sometimes simply receiving a hug from your friends is the most valuable kind of welcome we can have.

Many of the roles that community plays for integration after a journey are similar to ones they play before a journey and in life, especially regarding mirroring. How others perceive you after a journey is especially important. They may perceive you similarly to before, or perhaps not. They can give you feedback on your perceptions. They can provide reality testing and validation. Michel Bauwens considers communal validation to be important for creating spiritual knowledge (2007, pg. 38). While he may be talking about knowledge that's true for more than one person, it's just as true for an individual's spiritual self-knowledge. Others can help you look at your experience through the lens of the intentions, goals or purpose you went in with as well, and even help you re-evaluate how you went into the journey.

How you feel around those you know well is also an important measure of what has happened. Do you feel different with people than before? What can you do to help remember

these newfound feelings? Acting on new feelings helps ground them in experience. Supportive community is a great place for experimenting with new ways of being.

So when you return, how do your friends receive you? How do you receive them? This is your welcome home, but it is also seeing them and seeing how your relationships have changed. Your relationships with friends and family may be slightly different. Beyond your human social community, your relationship with the whole world will also be slightly different. Things have changed. You're not quite who you were. And the same is true for everyone and everything else.

Conclusion

So what changes through or as a result of community? Your sense of identity or sense of self? Your worldview? You'll have to look for yourself to see how you hold it. Practically though you are changed, your relationships change, and others around you change. When you look at the ripples from the journey you can see that the whole universe changes from a journey.

A journey is held by everyone around it, whether they know about it or not. Everyone is a participant. The closer the participant is to the center of it the clearer that is. The journeyer is the central player, but everyone is there.

It's easy for it to seem like everything has changed after a journey, but memory fades. The less the experience is integrated into life the less the changes stick.

Proactively engaging with community and the roles that others can and do play in the journey, at all stages, is important for this integration process. More engagement with community that supports change means greater and more effective integration. And actually, when you go through a change, your community does as well anyway. They're already with you; it's just good to be more directed about that.

So who is it who has changed, you or the community? Whose experience has this all been?

The Integration

The blindfolds are taken off and we are offered juice or water. This third stage of the journey, integration, may last as long as five hours. It is a time for the group to discuss with Cesar and each other whatever occurred during the journey. Cesar may have us read what we wrote during the preparation, look at our drawings, do body work on a fellow participant, dialogue with each other, describe what went on for us during the session. Invariably, we have a strong sense of intimacy and community with the others we have journeyed with, sharing tears and hugs and the wonderful feeling of community: the absence of separation. Telling and hearing deep experiences of the mystery and our lives creates a very special bond in the group, and tends to establish deep and abiding friendship that is carried out into life beyond the session.

When the integration is finished, the participants and the staff have a feast. Along with good foods everyone has brought there may be dancing, hot tubbing, music, celebration, followed by cleaning up the area together. This is a significant time for the participants. We are very open and vulnerable and usually filled with that love, sensitivity, and gratitude that are the nature of the second conscious. The staff members have all been on journeys themselves and are sensitive to the open place of the participants. They are able to be available, supportive, and loving. The profound sense of community this experience creates answers a deep longing in most of us, for real connection, for genuine intimacy, for loving relationship. (Waidelich, 1995, pp. 26-27)

Integration practice – Taking what you have experienced into the world

Now that you've finished reading, it's time to close your eyes again. Check in with yourself. Where have you gone while reading this paper? What has moved through you? What is your strongest impression? And finally, is there anything you want to do as a result? Open your eyes. If it's easy to find the person you spoke with at the beginning, check in with them again. Otherwise speak to someone else nearby. But check in, say something about what your experience was like reading this and what you want to do with it.

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