



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society March 2022

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by Rev Todd Beiswenger

Jenn Beiswenger

Rev David Moffat

Taking A Ferry To Defeat The Trickster

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

I faded into a dreamlike visionary state in which an evil tickerstish demon's cackling laughter jarred my nerves. "Finally I have you! I've been waiting a long time for this moment. Now you are mine, and there is no escape. You should have called out to your wife while you had the chance, but you didn't want to be a bother. You are about to die, and you won't call to your wife for fear of annoying her. Ha! That's not love! Now you'll lie here unattended until you suffer brain damage, or your body dies, or both. She doesn't really love you. No one does. How does it feel knowing that you may die alone in your own excrement?"

The demon doesn't pull any punches, does he? This account sounds a lot like one of Swedenborg's spiritual experiences if you ask me, however, this is actually the experience of Richard Haight, described in his book "The Psychedelic Path." You see, Haight was on a quest. About ten years prior he had gone on a trip to Ecuador, where he spent several days travelling around by bus. That eventually led him to an ecotourism camp in the Amazon. After a few more days there he was invited to take part in a "natem" ceremony, also known as ayahuasca or "the vine of the soul."

It was a one-off experience, but one where he learned that taking ayahuasca was not like taking other recreational drugs. Taking ayahuasca was work! The brew itself tastes terrible, and within 30-60 minutes you start to feel nauseous until you puke it up. Yet the experience that is brought on is described by most people as one of the top three most profound, transcendent moments of their lives. As such, people who are seeking deep and meaningful change in their life are willing to subject themselves to it. While the experience does vary for each person, there's often a vision seen, or perhaps a message given that can be both confronting and powerfully healing. My basic understanding about it is that each person gets what they need for personal, spiritual growth.

When you get into the stories and accounts, they actually sound a lot like how Swedenborg describes the process of vastation in the World of Spirits. It's in that process where we get to really see and experience the deeper reality and consequences of the things that we say and do. Yet at the same time, the process seems to be very benign in cases where people already know their areas of weakness and the ayahuasca simply helps them break a destructive cycle. In the case of Richard Haight, he had decided he didn't want to wait until after death for this transformative experience. He sought out another psychedelic experience, but this time utilizing psilocybin, aka magic mushrooms. The goal: he prayed to be exposed to and explore his inner darkness. He continues:

I realized that I had spent my entire life avoiding reliance on others and seeking total independence. Although I was happy to help others in need, I could not ask help for myself. Was it pride, arrogance, insecurity? Whatever it was, it was clear that this demon was going to put my nose in it, while I soiled myself. "God, I hope I don't soil myself," I thought.

The trickster said, “You’re so screwed up! You care more about your wife having to clean up the mess of your death than you do about actually dying. That’s not love. You’ve never been loved, and now you know that your marriage is false. Oh, you love her, but you feel deep down that she doesn’t love you. What is your marriage based on? Convenience?”

I realized that the real issue in my marriage was that I didn’t want to bother my wife by asking for her help. I didn’t want to bother anyone. I didn’t consider myself to be worth the bother. I didn’t consider myself to be worthy of others’ time and energy. This demon was clever. He seemed to smell psychological disharmony like a shark senses blood in the water, and he knew exactly where to sink his teeth in.

That demon certainly was mean, but I’m not so sure that he was actually clever. Kind of sounds to me like these are pretty standard lines, probably taken out of an introductory course given to demons on how to torture humans. “Now class, recite after me, ‘Nobody loves you.’ And as they are trying to figure out how to respond, just hit them with another insult.”

Now, in one sense, I suppose there’s really not much new here for the readers of the Writings because the Writings explicitly teach us that evil spirits are with us and putting all sorts of lies in our minds in an attempt to destroy us. As such, it is fair to wonder why am I sharing with you this story. The reason is this: I’m guessing that most my readership hasn’t given much thought to the use of psychedelics beyond the fairly mainstream ideas of “drugs mess with your brain” or “the only spiritual experience one should seek is regeneration through repentance.” But I’d like to challenge those ideas, and consider if we as New Church people should be a bit more... weird.

I am well aware of passages in the Writings that warn us about the dangers of being in contact with spirits, and this one in particular comes to mind...

The Lord exercises the greatest care that the spirits should not know that they are with a man; for if they knew it, they would speak with him. In that case evil spirits would destroy him. For evil spirits, being conjoined with hell, desire nothing so much as to destroy man, not alone his soul, that is, his faith and love, but also his body. (HH 292)

Haight would no doubt agree with every word of this. Elsewhere in his account he was very clear that he was having to fight the impulse to do physical harm to himself, and that it was absolutely essential to be in a place where there was nothing that he could use as a weapon against his body. What he was doing was dangerous in large part because he was doing it alone without any supervision, but also because he took his “trip” with the express intent of exploring his inner darkness. Frankly, I admire his courage and intent.

Despite the danger expressed in the Writings, backed up by Haight’s account, there is still a lot of evidence that under the right circumstances that psilocybin and psychedelics in

general can impart some important benefits that aren't found elsewhere. Interestingly, we find the doctrinal "upside" to psilocybin only ten numbers after the warning.

If we believed the way things really are, that everything good comes from God and everything evil from hell, then we would not take credit for the good within us or blame for the evil. Whenever we thought or did anything good, we would focus on the Lord, and any evil that flowed in we would throw back into the hell it came from. But since we do not believe in any inflow from heaven or from hell and therefore believe that everything we think and intend is in us and from us, we make the evil our own and defile the good with our feeling that we deserve it. (HH 302)

"What's the benefit here?" you may ask. The big deal is that we would see the thoughts that flow into our mind as not "us." We would believe the way things actually are! Imagine if the next time you were having a bad day, feeling worthless, unloved and without purpose that instead of feeling those thoughts within, you saw "the way thing really are" and saw those words being spoken from the trickster. Okay, sure, it can still hurt when a stranger says mean things, but it's a whole lot different when we know that it is a third party speaking and not just ourselves. I think it's even more powerful when we see that third party not just as some random person, but in this case we see the demon as a demon, one who we can clearly see is there to trick us.

That is Haight's big advantage in dealing with his demon. Not only was he was able to see his demon, and see that these thoughts weren't his own, but he saw that demon for what it was: a demon. He wouldn't have had that advantage without the psychedelic. He writes:

I vowed that even if I died, I would use this experience to purify my soul. I realized that I could use this demon's talent for detecting my weaknesses to my advantage, even if it killed my body. I would use this demon like a disharmony detector, to release and resolve whatever he force fed me. I had no ability to stop him, so I was determined to make the best of situation by facing my fears and insecurities.

With that awareness, suddenly, I was free... I called out to my wife in a strong, clear voice asking her to come to me."

I've heard ministers before say that there are no shortcuts when it comes to regeneration, but is that really true? The Children of Israel were offered to take the Holy Land not long after leaving Egypt. It was only because of their fear that they had to wander the desert for 40 years. To my mind the Lord will use any number of tools at His disposal to get us to heaven. Sure, you can take the slow path if you want, but the short route is a valid option.

It reminds me of an old tale I heard that goes something like this... A devout man moved near a river and he wanted to find a way to travel across the water. He decided to take a very "spiritual" approach to solve the problem: he spent ten years meditating, refining his diet, and creating a spiritual practice that allowed him to perform a type of levitation that would allow him to float across the river.

Buddha, who was preaching in town, was confronted by this man, who said, "Look master, look what I have achieved. I can walk across the water."

And Buddha said, "Yeah, but the ferry ride across the river only costs 10 cents..."

We put a lifetime of effort into the intellectual side of religion in order to teach ourselves to be better people, but unlike this man most of us fail to float across the river. Call it a "short cut" if you want, but the reality is that Haight's relationship with his wife was transformed through this psychedelic experience. The years and years he spent stuck in the cycle of thinking he wasn't worth being loved was now broken. How does that sound to you? I think most people get stuck in a destructive pattern or cycle in one form or another. Maybe it's a substance issue, but it could just as well be getting overrun with anxious thoughts, or fear about opening up to people around you, being controlling... all of these things are just cycles that we run on repeat. We do this even though we have the most comprehensive revelation known to man at our disposal telling us that we shouldn't think this way. So why are we so sick in our minds as to believe the lies of the trickster? What would you be willing to do to silence his or her voice? Would you take a ride on the ferry

More in a future newsletter...

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Autumn 2022 Women's Weekend

We're doing it again! Ladies, you're cordially invited to join other New Church-minded women across Australia and New Zealand for our autumn women's weekend. The dates are **April 1-3**, and this will be our first hybrid one: both in-person at The Tops in Stanwell Tops, NSW, and virtual via Zoom! We've got a nice combination of fun, inspiring and useful sessions lined up, and down-time to spend visiting with our 'sisters'. If this interests you and you haven't already signed up, please let **Jenn** know ASAP! (jenn@beiswenger.net) The deadline is March 23rd.

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Working Bee March 6

It's been a while since we've had one of our quarterly working bees. Lock downs, pandemics, and end of the year craziness will do that. Things aren't too bad in one sense because we have had cleaners come through Baringa, but we do need to go through all the stuff in the Morse room, culling what can be culled and putting away that which we want to keep. Plus there's always weeding to be done, windows to be washed, cob webs to be removed... basically, we have things you can do! As always we'll buy the pizza, and I do promise that I'm always looking for a Dominoes alternative, but so far the places I'm finding aren't open on Sunday mornings. If you've got a better idea I'm happy to hear it! Thanks!

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NCIA Virtual Retreat July 2022

Following on from our Virtual Retreat in January, and the enthusiasm with which it was received, **David Moffat** is proposing to run a similar event ending on the weekend of 9 & 10 July. This keeps the event well away from the women's retreats run by Jenn Beiswenger (scheduled for April and probably October), but it is also in that part of the year when we're most likely to be in lockdown (although let's hope not!).

We kept the timetable light and informal which seemed to work quite well, giving everyone space between sessions, and with permission to attend or not depending upon availability and interest. Two sessions per day is enough, we could stretch it to three (morning, afternoon, and evening) if we really need to.

So, I'm looking for volunteers to lead sessions. I'll get you to propose a subject and time, but I'd aim to fill up the end of the week before we start encroaching on the beginning.. Anyone who is interested should in the first instance register with David (d_a_moffat@yahoo.com.au) , and he will make sure you get the relevant information,

I'm happy to invite everyone to attend Melbourne's Sunday morning - when we'll be looking at the Doctrine of Sacred Scripture - but maybe it would be nice to "visit" one of the other societies who are streaming a service on that day? That's yet to be decided.

Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Debbie Walsh** (7th), **Graham Horner** (12th), **Edward Horner** (18th)

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