

ShrinkRapRadio

#283 An Update on the Positive Potential of Psychedelics, with James Fadiman, Ph.D.

Introduction:

My guest today is author, educator, and transpersonal psychologist, Dr. James Fadiman, who will be discussing his 2011 book “The Psychedelic Explorer’s Guide: Safe, Therapeutic, and Sacred Journeys.” For more detail on his background, please go to the show notes at ShrinkRapRadio.com. Now, here is the interview:

Dr. Dave: Dr. James Fadiman, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Dr. Fadiman: Thank you.

Dr. Dave: Well it’s good to have a chance to speak with you. We’ve been travelling in overlapping circles for years, you at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, and me in the Psychology Department at Sonoma State University. And as a result, we know many of the same people. And, I’ve interviewed some of them here, for example Stan Krippner, Stan Grof, Charlie Tart, David Lukoff, and Dean Radin, to name just a few.

Dr. Fadiman: Oh, yes.

Dr. Dave: So I know you know some of those people.

Dr. Fadiman: We might have even been closer, had I taken a job. I was offered a job at Sonoma State, in the psychology department, one year out of graduate school. And, for reasons that are probably wrong, I turned it down, and was never offered a job in a psychology department again.

Dr. Dave: Well, you went on to start your own graduate school.

Dr. Fadiman: Well, it’s the only place that would offer me a job.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Well it was an extraordinary place. I probably came along a bit after that job was offered to you. I want to frame our discussion. You’ve written a very fascinating book on psychedelics and I want to frame it at the beginning with the kind of proviso that you put in the front of your book, and I’ll read that right now.

Dr. Fadiman: Please.

Dr. Dave: You’ve written right opposite the table of contents, it says, “Nothing contained herein is intended to encourage or support illegal behavior. However, even though the use of psychedelics remains illegal in the United States, government researchers estimate that more than twenty three million Americans have used LSD, and at least that many

more people have used it worldwide. Given that psychedelics continue to be widely available, this material has been prepared to encourage safe and sacred ways to use psychedelics, if these powerful substances are to be used at all.” So, that’s the caution at the beginning of your book, and I will claim it as the caution for this podcast.

Dr. Fadiman: Good. And, one more caution that I’ve needed to make now and then, ‘cause I get a lot of more and more interesting mail, is psychedelics are not for everybody. Not for everybody. Is that clear?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I definitely agree. Before we get into your background, and your new book, psychedelics have been in the news the past couple of weeks and I’d like to get your comments on two recent stories. Sadly, as you know, Steve Jobs just passed away. And, he credited using – I didn’t know this, until he passed and then I saw news stories that he credited using LSD as a big part of his success. In an interview with New York Times reporter John Markoff, Jobs once said, “Doing LSD was one of the two or three most important things I’ve done in my life.” He added that Bill Gates would be “a broader guy, if he had dropped acid once.” And, he also went on to say that there were things about him (Steve Jobs), that people who have not tried psychedelics, even people who knew him well, including his wife, would never understand. So, what do you think about that?

Dr. Fadiman: Well, what’s wonderful about that quote, and I also quoted it in my book very quietly, is that Steve Jobs took acid as part of his coming of age. He also went to India. He also became a serious Buddhist. And these were all the kind of background on which he began to be interested not only in computers, but as he said in another interview, bringing the liberal arts to computers. And what he felt was that it was important that people feel not only okay with a technical device, but good about it. And that aesthetically, it should look beautiful. And it should look on the screen beautiful. And, I think that all came from this combination of really sixties internal liberation where his world view was stretched wide open. And, so I’d like to think that psychedelics were critical in the development of the products. But, they probably weren’t. But, the nature of the whole company, and the nature of the products really does come from his own realization that people should feel pleasure in what they do, and that there is no distinction between the natural and the technical.

Dr. Dave: Well, my listeners know that I am a Macintosh, what they call, a fan boy. I’m a real Mac fanatic. I’ve been using Apple products since the Apple II. And, speaking of the sixties, and that this came out of the whole zeitgeist of the sixties, one of the places he was coming from, you remember one of the refrains of that period was, “Power to the people.” And, he really thought that computers could be, which at the time were the property of the military industrial complex – those were the only people that had

computers – and he really felt that the “People” at large should have access to this powerful tool.

Dr. Fadiman: Well, it’s even a little deeper than that, ‘cause John Markoff’s book, which is just a delight, called “What the Dormouse Said”, asks the question of why on earth did the personal computer originate in Northern California at a time when all the smart computer people – big doctors and dudes in this area – were on the East Coast? And he literally took a big bookstore in Menlo Park, an independent books store called “Keppler’s, drew a one mile circle around it, and started interviewing. And what he found was that it was the interface of people like Steve Jobs, who were interested in gadgets, and the people who were using psychedelics who were – many of them – scientists of all sorts. And, those overlapping interests seemed to lead to the whole personal computer industry, to the Whole Earth Catalog, and to a lot of things.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, Stuart Brand is somebody else who is one of my heroes that I’ve had contact with, speaking of the Whole Earth Catalog. And, there was in fact legal LSD research going on in Northern California, at that time, right? And, that was how – I do want to get into your story, I think I’ll postpone this part, because I also wanted to talk – we’ll come back to that, because there was a second story in the news that I thought was very significant. And, I sent you a link to it. And, that’s a study of psilocybin, which is extracted from what are known as “Magic Mushrooms,” or the psilocybin mushroom. And a new study that showed that there are long-term personality changes. I almost want to say, “Duh!”

Dr. Fadiman: Well, there was a wonderful article in the San Francisco Gate, by Mark Mumford, who says, “Duh” at the top of the [story?]. But, what the study really was showing is that the personality changes that you have after a spiritual psychedelic experience – and that was very critical – are, one of them is, what he calls “Openness.”

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Dr. Fadiman: And, that’s openness to experience, to creativity, to relationships. And, it’s seen as a sign of health. And, the fact that, after a year – and that’s as far as they’ve looked, at the moment – that holds makes sense once you let go of the medical model. The medical model says that you put a chemical, a drug, a substance, into your body. It has an effect, like aspirin, your headache, you don’t feel it. It may be actually going away. And then when the aspirin is done, the symptoms may or may not return, but your body, kind of, returns to normal. And, that’s the medical model. The educational model is, you have an experience - brought about by drugs, by reading, by going to a movie, by being with someone, by going to Paris - and your world view changes. You learn something. It’s kind of what education is supposed to do.

Dr. Dave: I love that distinction. Go ahead...

Dr. Fadiman: And, the learning is, of course, retained. Therefore, what you're seeing is not a kind of long-term biochemical rearrangement. But, what you're seeing is, "Oh! Being more open, makes my life richer and better, why would I close back down."

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Dr. Fadiman: So, it's a very different model.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I like your take on the two models. That's a nice way of positioning it. According to the article that I read, I guess openness is on a standard psychological inventory known as measuring the "Big Five."

Dr. Fadiman: Right, and the five factors of personality. And, the wonderful thing about the test is that it's one of those tests which says, "This is really stable, this does not change."

Dr. Dave: Right, right.

Dr. Fadiman: This is like your eye color and your fingerprints.

Dr. Dave: And, that's why this finding was deemed so dramatic.

Dr. Fadiman: Well, it's wonderful for me. And, it's a kind of quiet pleasure, is that the article goes on to say that no one has ever measured this before. But, in some of our early work, we picked another measure that was supposed to be stable - that was popular then - called EMMTI, which has hundreds of questions and measures all kinds of things. But, one of the things about it, it's supposed to be stable. And, what we found is that after an entheogenic - and we'll talk about what that word means in a moment - but, a large dose, in a therapeutic setting, that very basic personality structures not only change, but took at least six months to a year before they would re-stabilize into a new configuration.

Dr. Dave: Fascinating.

Dr. Fadiman: So, we're talking about a profound shift in world view and in how one approaches one's self.

Dr. Dave: Yes. And, one of the things that I love about your book is that it's so intensely personal. The book has a kind of unusual organization. It's kind of a mix of your writing, some of other people's writings, but it's not really an anthology or a collection of essays, or anything like that. It's definitely got your imprint throughout it - a guide for psychedelic voyagers, and their guides, and so on. But, I love the fact that it's so personal. You're very open about your own personal experiences. And, you were really in the right place at the right time, in terms of the immense cultural shift that was the sixties. And, in the book you said you led three lives. And, I'm old enough to remember Herbert A. Philbrick, and the show - "I Led Three Lives." So take us through your three lives of that period, if you will.

Dr. Fadiman: I graduated from college and collected all the gifts and money and savings and went off to Europe. And, I was living like a mouse, on a walk up fifth floor apartment in Paris writing a not terribly good novel and feeling very, very happy with myself. And, my old undergraduate mentor and personal friend, Richard Alpert, appeared.

Dr. Dave: Were you at Harvard, then?

Dr. Fadiman: I had graduated from Harvard.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Dr. Fadiman: With no particular career intention, but certainly not to go to graduate school. And, I was off, assuming that I was going to be discovered and become a famous novelist and have women begging for me, and all the things that one does at age 20 when one is living alone.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Fadiman: And, he showed up, on his way to Copenhagen, with Tim Leary and Aldous Huxley, where they were going to do the first presentation to an international psychology conference about these substances. And, he said, “The greatest thing in the world has happened to me! And, I want to share it with you.” Now, that’s a hard offer to turn down, from your favorite teacher.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, and in case anybody doesn’t recognize the name Richard Alpert, he later became Baba Ram Dass, and then just Ram Dass. So, keep going...

Dr. Fadiman: So, I said, “Sure.” And, then he reached in his pocket and pulled out a little thing of pills. And, I thought, “This is bizarre,” because I had no information and no knowledge, and no interest. However, I took psilocybin that night, and began to understand that my world view was limited, and that my identity was really a lot better and healthier than I thought. And, a week later, I had left Paris, and basically kind of ran after them to Copenhagen, where again I worked with this material and really learned about human closeness. And then, I ended up at Stanford for graduate school, mainly because that was an alternative to Viet Nam. And, as much as graduate school didn’t look too good, I thought I would be a very poor soldier.

Dr. Dave: That’s how I got into graduate school as well.

Dr. Fadiman: So, I just didn’t think that crawling on my elbows and knees, through the mud, with a rifle was going to be... you know, I was going to be a credit to me or my country. Particularly, after psychedelics, the idea of killing other people really is hard to get your head around. So, I did come to Stanford, and I did wind up with a psychedelic research team in Menlo Park that was doing basic clinical research with an investigational drug

license from the government. And, from there is really how I learned much deeper and much more profound uses for these substances.

Dr. Dave: And, so that's one of your three lives. Or, maybe that's two. Maybe that's two of your three lives.

Dr. Fadiman: No, no. By day, I was a graduate student. And, because psychedelics were both unknown and unpopular, and the Harvard scandals were starting, I was the only graduate student at Stanford, in psychology, who regularly wore a jacket and a tie when I walked around campus. And, my theory was that I would fool them, and they wouldn't have any idea of what I was really up to. And, I'm sorry to say, given the quality of the Stanford faculty, that it worked perfectly.

Dr. Dave: *[Laugh]*

Dr. Fadiman: And at night, I was desperately reading things like "The Tibetan Book of the Dead," and Huxley and many other things like that, to make sense of what this new expanded universe was, that I was part of. So, literally, maybe I only led two lives. But, I looked like a dull graduate student by day and an unrepentant psychedelic hippy by night. And, I also ended up being a kind of outlier among the Kesey crowd, the Ken Kesey group, who were doing what you might call open-ended field research. Which is, they were taking pretty much anything they could get and trying it out in every way possible.

Dr. Dave: And, of course, Tom Wolfe's – the second Tom Wolfe's book, I think that was his first big book, "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test." Is that it?

Dr. Fadiman: Yeah, that's the one, in which Dorothy, my wife, and I appear. And, I'm taking the I Ching, the Chinese book of divination, to Ken Kesey in jail, and a bunch of us also ended up pledging our homes for his bail. So, we were involved.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Well, young listeners who weren't alive during that period, I recommend that book to you. It will help give you a sense of that period of time and what was going on in that particular subculture. So, that's what I mean about you being in the right place at the right time. Some people might say the wrong place at the wrong time.

Dr. Fadiman: Well, what was wonderful is that I was in the available wrong places at the right time, simultaneously.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. Sometimes, when I think about the '60s, and I don't want to wax too nostalgic here, but, I sometimes feel like maybe the planet was passing through some kind of an archetypal field, or something. That there was something that was going on, that maybe there was more than LSD and more than political protest, and more than the Vietnam War. Do you have any reflections about that?

Dr. Fadiman: Yeah, what it seems like more from the psychedelic world's point of view is that we were able to see through what the Buddhists call Illusion, and to see that the institutions, which were supposed to be of value and help, were constricting. And that was certainly the military, it was certainly education, it was certainly government. And, in our naiveté, what we felt is, if enough of us understood that, we would simply get rid of them and change them and redo them. And, what we didn't quite understand is all the people who were running them, were not open to that.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Dr. Fadiman: They saw our very clear disillusion as a personal attack. Particularly when the disillusion, you know, let's say you are running a bank, in Vermont, and you're a perfectly decent banker, and you are making a profit, and you may not be the... you probably aren't doing the kind of things bankers do today. But, then your children suddenly say to you, "Money isn't a good thing to have, dad. What you really need to do is return to the land." And, the parent, very appropriately, thinks his children have gone crazy. So you really had a generational shift that was very, very difficult for parents to deal with. I did a series of films for KQED, called "Drugs: Your Children are Choosing." And it was to really let parents know something of what was going on with their children so that they would be able to cope, learn, benefit, and also not lose track of each other. So, it was a very different era in terms of hopeful optimism.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I've just been watching a really fine film on HBO about George Harrison.

Dr. Fadiman: Ah, yes.

Dr. Dave: And, it kind of goes through his progression, the progression of the Beatles, and, after their initial explorations experimenting with LSD, particularly for George, it really led to an interest in spirituality and meditation. And, it seems to have had that same effect for many others.

Dr. Fadiman: Well, now, once again what you saw again is, if the leading world rock stars were becoming interested in meditation and spiritual issues, then we were really in a cultural shift. Lady Gaga doesn't have the same impact, and, doesn't have the same interests as the Beatles did.

Dr. Dave: What was that progression for you? Since you went on to cofound an institution called "The Institute for Transpersonal Psychology," I have to assume that there was some kind of spiritual transformation in your life. What was your spiritual orientation before, and then after, your psychedelic experiences?

Dr. Fadiman: Well, my spiritual orientation before was, pretty much Unitarian, which is kind of liberal literacy. And, what that really meant was that I was kind of aware that the rigidity

of conventional religion didn't seem realistic, but, I didn't really have much interest in what lay behind it. And, at one point, when I was a graduate student and now into psychedelics, the local Unitarian youth people called me and said, "We'd like you to give a talk." And, I said, "What shall I talk about?" They said, "Oh, we're Unitarians, you can talk about anything." I said, "Okay, I'm going to talk about God." And, there was this wonderful, dead pause on the phone. And, I said, "It's okay, I'm only kidding. I'll talk about psychedelics."

Dr. Dave: [Laugh]

Dr. Fadiman: And, so, that was the shift. I moved from a kind of intellectual liberalism, to an awareness that the internal sense of personal Divinity is shared by all beings. And, that not only that internal sense of Divinity is available, but that it certainly transcends any kind of religious system differences, so that saints all sound the same pretty much from every tradition, and theologians argue from every tradition.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Dr. Fadiman: And, I moved into the group that wasn't going to argue.

Dr. Dave: Okay. I have the impression that research on psychedelics is beginning to open up again. Is that true, and if so, what's caused the shift?

Dr. Fadiman: Well, someone, I think, very optimistically calls it a renaissance. I would call it more like the camel's nose has once more been allowed back under the tent.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Dr. Fadiman: And, what's happened after forty years of no published research, and as you indicated at the beginning of the program, twenty three million Americans taking LSD, and we should add to that, that number goes up still 400,000 – 600, 000 a year. So, for a substance that's not available and you can't research, that's a pretty exciting history. And, if you then extend it, to realize that the people in power, at the regulatory agencies, the lawyers, the judges, many of the politicians, have also had psychedelic experience. And, the one thing that they found out, was that it wasn't frightening and terrible, and didn't lead to insanity, death, and loss of facial hair. And, so when the researchers, who have been quietly thinking about this for many years, approached the government agencies, the government agencies said, "We have lots of regulations, but, if you simply do everything in the regulations, we will support you, if it's science. And, in the old days, there was research, for instance, in Canada, where the treatment for alcoholism with LSD assisted therapy, was sufficiently successful, and sufficiently understood that it was no longer experimental. It was simply listed, in the province of Saskatchewan, as one of the things available. Particularly exciting to the people in Saskatchewan is that your

long-term treatment-resistant alcoholics, who are now beginning to deal with cirrhosis and worse, given one psychedelic experience in a supportive setting, with some follow up, had a close to fifty percent abstinence rate. And, the control group, which was the same people before the treatment, was close to zero. So, it was very exciting. And, that data was presented to the person in charge of the Federal Government's Alcoholism Research Unit. And, he said, and I quote from someone who was at that meeting, "I don't believe this data." And, the person, not unrealistically, said to him, doctor such and such, "What data would you believe, about this kind of work?" He said, "None."

Dr. Dave: [Laugh] Right, that really speaks to paradigm shift, Thomas Kunz' inside the paradigm...

Dr. Fadiman: Exactly. That, basically, isn't occurring any more. And, so when the two studies that you quoted came out, not only was there no kind of push back from the Federal Government, but, there were two or three hundred media mentions, around the planet, of each of those studies. And, people say, "Why does it get so much press, so fast, this very little study?" And, my own theory is, and if you read for example, Time Magazine, you really get it clearly, is the reporters covering this have had their own experience. So, they are delighted to bring to light what they already know from their personal experience.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, it's just like what's happening in research on meditation. I think that a generation of younger psychologists and brain researchers have grown up, who are already meditators, or certainly were open to it. So, suddenly meditation explodes with all of this new research.

Dr. Fadiman: Exactly, and I think, now, it's kind of common knowledge that, if you don't know much else, you do know that meditation is good for you.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Fadiman: And you also know that yoga is good for you.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Dr. Fadiman: And you may know lots of details, like you and I know. But, that's a basic shift. And, I think my interest in re-emerging and taking a public stand around psychedelics is, used correctly, and I mean that with a very big underlining, if used correctly, psychedelics seem to be very good for people. That doesn't mean that they are safe. People misusing them get in terrible trouble, and now and then someone will say to me, "Well, [unintelligible], and I have a friend who's still in a mental hospital." And, I say, "I think that's so tragic that they didn't get the correct help, and that they weren't understood, and that they were so frightened by their own experience that they misused it. It's no different for me when someone says, "Someone in a private plane crashed." And,

I don't say, "Well, let's ban people flying in private planes." But, I sure say we better to a good job of educating pilots, and educating mechanics, and having regulations so that we can protect people when they do something that is out of the ordinary.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Hey, Synchronistically, just yesterday I received an e-mail from a listener suggesting I should interview a Dr. Bill Richers, at Johns Hopkins, who's doing...

Dr. Fadiman: Oh, wonderful.

Dr. Dave: Oh, you know him?

Dr. Fadiman: Bill has been a guide. What I call a guide, someone who assists people during the psychedelic experience. From the end of the earlier research, and then was brought back to work with the John Hopkins people, who were doing the spiritual studies, and a number of other studies. And, he's just one of the most gentle good souls that you will ever run into, and is a licensed psychologist, as well.

Dr. Dave: Well, that's great. I think I will try to track him down. This listener said that he was doing research on psilocybin, with cancer patients.

Dr. Fadiman: There's a study going on that is working with end-state cancer patients, terminal patients, to help them basically lower their sadness and anxiety and fear during the remaining months of their lives. And, this is replicating the wonderful study done by Charlie Grob and Alisha Danforth, and a few others at UCLA, where again, to no one's total surprise, that people who are given psilocybin near the end of life, in most cases, find it an incredibly healing experience, and that the remaining months of their lives are lived much more carefully, and much more beautifully than what was true before they took psilocybin.

Dr. Dave: Is there any other current research that you are aware of that we can touch on, here?

Dr. Fadiman: Oh, yeah, there's a wonderful bunch of research that's being done with MDMA, also called "Ecstasy," which is not exactly a psychedelic, but, close enough. And, it turns out that what's called "MDMA Assisted Psychotherapy" with people with what's called "Treatment Resistant Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder." "Treatment Resistant" is a medical term saying, "We weren't able to help you, but we kind of want to blame you for it."

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Dr. Fadiman: But, in any case, these were people who, whatever the treatments are out there, and there are many, it didn't help. So, we're dealing with not your average post-traumatic stress disorder person, but the hardcore. And, the results have been so good, that the

initial study has been, again, replicated and, they are now doing another study where they're allowing in as potential subjects, war veterans. And, if you think about the hundreds of thousands of war veterans who are suffering and the conventional treatments just aren't very good. Nothing about the physicians who are using them, they're doing the best that they can, but they don't work very well, because we're not dealing with a bio-chemical imbalance, and we're not even dealing with psychodynamics. We're dealing with something where your fundamental wiring has been violated. This is particularly true of people who have had to shoot and kill civilians and children. You don't recover from that, very easily. And, so that's probably some of the most exciting research going on.

Dr. Dave: Where is that going on?

Dr. Fadiman: It's going on in Virginia.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Dr. Fadiman: And it is with the full knowledge and support of the Food and Drug Administration, and the various agencies. The VA is becoming aware of it, but right now, it's a watch and see. And, I'm very hopeful, both because it does open people's lives around. They can go back to work. They can be friendly with their families. They stop self-medicating. Self-medicating means alcohol and hard drugs. And, they are incredibly joyful of being able to let go of past trauma, and I'm not only talking about war, I'm talking about rape, I'm talking about severe abuse, things that really dominate your inner life, and prevent you from having any kind of what we would call a normal, happy, existence. So, that's probably the...very exciting.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Now, earlier, you underscored taking psychedelics in the right way, and in a safe way, and the first couple chapters of your book, actually, are "Guidelines for Voyagers and Guides," by "The Guild of Guides," so, we probably should touch on that.

Dr. Fadiman: Right, well those first two chapters are a compilation of the wisdom acquired both before and during the forty years of no research, on how to help people, in particular if they wish to have a transcendent, or spiritual, or what's called "Entheogenic" or Divinity awareness experience. And, it's the work that I know best. And, it's really the "Best Practices." And, just to ensure that your audience does not think that, "Oh, he's doing another one of those, 'You've got to buy my book' numbers," those two chapters are available on the net, at a site called "EntheoGuide.net", which is a site that, fortunately, I have nothing to do with, but, they asked me for those chapters. And, it has some other very useful things for people who, in spite of it being illegal, are going to be doing it anyway.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I just heard from a listener in Europe, I won't pinpoint it any more closely than that, who sounds like is involved with a group of people who are following the source of safe practices that you advocate, and using ayahuasca. And, I was just surprised to learn that people in Europe are somehow able to obtain something like ayahuasca. I'd be interested in your comments about ayahuasca generally, and maybe to hit some of the high points of your recommendations, of your guidelines.

Dr. Fadiman: Sure. Well, I have a chapter in the book which has a couple of just beautiful, beautiful, ayahuasca reports. And, it's a chapter that says, "This book is not about this chapter." It's to let people know that my book is not about all psychedelics, in spite of the guide, in spite of the title, which obviously the publisher likes a lot. And, it also is to really remind people there are lots of other ways. Ayahuasca is a difficult experience for most people, certainly the first time. And, it is almost always taken, and this is why I'm happy about it, it's almost always taken with a shaman, what's called an "Ahuascidero," or a "Vegetisto," meaning someone who has been trained in the use of many plants. And, there are people in Ecuador, and other places, who do go to Europe and work with groups. There are also people who have been trained here, by shamans, who also work both here, and in Europe. And, there are, of course, several churches in the United States that originated in Brazil that have Ayahuasca as the central sacrament.

Dr. Dave: Oh, I didn't know that.

Dr. Fadiman: And, there's lots of research going on, again, mostly, not surprisingly, out of this country, on the pharmacology and the psychology, and the neuropsychology, etc., of ayahuasca. But, it's a different set of experiences than the family my book is about, which is mostly LSD, psilocybin, and mescaline, and the plants that those come from. So, my advice to people, if I was asked, is very, very, important to understand the qualifications of your guide, if you're going to use ayahuasca. And, what's wonderful so far, although I'm sure it will change, is that nobody's figured out how to do it recreationally, 'cause it's not a lot of fun.

Dr. Dave: [Laugh] Hit for us the high points of your recommendations for guided psychedelic sessions.

Dr. Fadiman: Sure. Okay, this is what we started to learn forty or fifty years ago and it's now done by every research group which is you pay very attention to what's called "Set," or your mental attitude, to setting, which is the physical situation which should be as comfortable and as safe as possible, and with access to nature, that you pay attention to the quality of your guide, or your sitter, and what their understanding is, because what we know is, and this is research really done by Leary and Alpert long ago, is that when a session got bad for a person, what's called a bad trip, they saw very often it was when the guide became anxious or felt they were out of their depth. So quality of guide is

important. The other three are: the nature of the substance, what literally are you taking, and the dosage turns out to be very important. The session itself, how is it being conducted? Again, we're talking about safety and comfort, and correct use of music and whatever other things that are available that I go into some detail. And, then finally, the situation, which is what is the kind of world that you go back into after you've had the eight to twelve hours of the intense experience, which is do you go back into a family that would feel that you've just done a kind of anti-Christian devil worship? Or, do you go into a family that says, "Oh, you have found indeed what we have been talking about as a family and as friends, for a long time. So, there's a lot of things that make it work, and the thing to keep in mind is that we're never talking about drugs, or a plant. We're talking about an experience, a multi-faceted experience that is accelerated or potentiated or expanded, or made available with the drug. But, without those other things around you – set and setting and sitter and so forth, it can go wrong.

Dr. Dave: I have a question and I'm not quite sure how to formulate it. One version of it is: does one outgrow the need to have psychedelic sessions? I think many of the people that I know from years ago stopped at some point. Is there a lesson to be learned, and after that point it becomes a bit fruitless to keep trying to learn the same lesson over and over again, or not?

Dr. Fadiman: As we know, neurosis is when we don't learn the same lesson over and over again.

Dr. Dave: [Laugh]

Dr. Fadiman: And, I'm sure there are people who take their psychedelic insights and begin to lose them, and basically not much happens. Or, they take it recreationally, and they never knew that if you did it differently, you'd learn something more. But, what I've found, and I've been getting...well, let me quote Jack Cornfield, who is one of the great Buddhist teachers in the United States. He says, "Eighty percent of the Buddhist teachers in the United States began their spiritual practice either just after using psychedelics, or early on in their practice, they used psychedelics." And, what I've gotten is a number of letters from people from different spiritual traditions that say just what you're saying – that you should stop taking psychedelics at some point and become serious in your spiritual practice, but psychedelics seem to have been very helpful in starting off. So they seem to open one up to why people are willing to do, year in and year out, serious spiritual practice. And, the question of, does one outgrow the need to understand one's self, is always an interesting question. Freud, as you know, wrote that analysis, in a wonderful article, "Analysis – Terminable or Intermittent?" suggests that you never quite finish working on yourself. And, I think with psychedelics the question is, "Where are you in your life?" And, again, given that they are illegal, it does make it harder to get that good set and setting that I've talked about. So, when someone says to me, "Well,

should I take psychedelics?” And, my answer is, “Should you?” And, if they have any reason at all not to, I say, “You’re right. Don’t do it.”

Dr. Dave: You know, that point about the illegality is, I think, a pretty important point. It can be pretty hard to not have somewhere in the back of your mind that, wow, this is illegal. The storm troopers could come breaking through your doors at any moment.

Dr. Fadiman: Well, it’s true, it’s illegal, but, the government, in spite of it being obtuse in many areas, doesn’t seem to care too much about any individual user. The government really does worry about people who are manufacturing and selling, because that’s really kind of like where the leverage is. So, yes, it is illegal, but that’s more in terms of kind of adding a shadow over it. So, if you take another situation, like Burning Man, where...

Dr. Dave: I was just going to ask you about Burning Man. Very synchronistic.

Dr. Fadiman: Well, Burning Man seems to be a place where the purpose of the Black Rock Rangers, who are the people who kind of, are the government for the week, is they’re there to keep you out of trouble, and they’re there to keep the regular law officials off your backs. And, so again, there is lots of use of all kinds of substances, many of which I can neither pronounce nor spell, that are taken at Burning Man. And, there are casualties. There are problems. They have a wonderful psychological support system, called “Sanctuary.” And, they have a medical team, and so forth. And people get – usually very naive people - make very naïve mistakes. But, it is a place in which a lot of creativity, certainly, has appeared. And, a lot of that, probably, is fueled in some part by serious and probably fairly safe psychedelic use.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, just before you started talking about Burning Man, I was on the cusp of asking you if you had attended Burning Man. I haven’t, but I’ve listened to a podcast called “The Psychedelic Salon,” I don’t know if you are familiar with that?

Dr. Fadiman: Oh, yes, I am. I was actually planning to go this year. I had a couple of speeches lined up, with various groups. And, I had a heart virus which said, “I think you’re going to rest for a few months, a lot more than you ever intended.”

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Dr. Fadiman: So, I missed my Burning Man this year, and I hope to go next year.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Well, as we wind down, is there anything that you’d like to add, anything you had hoped to talk about that, maybe, I didn’t evoke?

Dr. Fadiman: Yeah, there are two other uses that we didn’t talk about much. One is creative problem solving, and we did a study using senior scientists, and giving them a lower dose of LSD – or mescaline, depending on what we had most available. And, they were

basically there to solve very hard, totally rational scientific problems, such as in physics, in chip design, in architecture. And, it was generally felt, at the time that this couldn't happen. Then the results were stunning, with products being accepted by companies, patents, publications, and that whole area of lower dose – again, set and setting being very, very, very critical – is something we are only beginning to re-explore. Again, if you go around Silicon Valley, there is an awful lot of people who would say, “Well, I did have my best ideas when using a lower dose of psychedelics, but I certainly never did it formally. That’s one area. The other area that we didn’t talk about is something I’m currently researching called “Micro-Dosing,” which is using a tiny amount – much, much less than you would even notice – which is called, “Sub-Perceptual,” which is psychedelics past a certain dose, the world gets brighter, your pupils open, all kinds of interesting things happen. But, below that dose, none of that occurs. And, what people are reporting when people use what’s called a microdose – and the person who invented LSD, Albert Hoffman, said this was a very under researched area – they are reporting that their day simply goes better. That they are a little more able to focus, a little more creative, a little kinder, a little more patient. That they may do one more set of reps at the gym. It’s not a big deal. But, what they’re finding, that it is doing what Adderal, or the Ritalin used to do in the sense of giving them a clearer energy, but without any of the physiological side effects that these other stronger drugs have. And, so that’s an area that I’m researching. I’m getting protocols from around the country, of people who are doing it and just know that I’m interested, because obviously, I can’t do that research, both because I’m not an MD, and the government is not interested in that particular subject. But, those are two areas in the book that are really not available elsewhere. And, I think, where some of the cutting edge is.

Dr. Dave: Oh, I’m really glad that you were able to get that in here. That’s great. Well, this has been delightful, Jim. So, Dr. James Fadiman, thanks for being my guest today, on Shrink Rap Radio.

Dr. Fadiman: Well, I loved being on this show, and thank you for having me.

