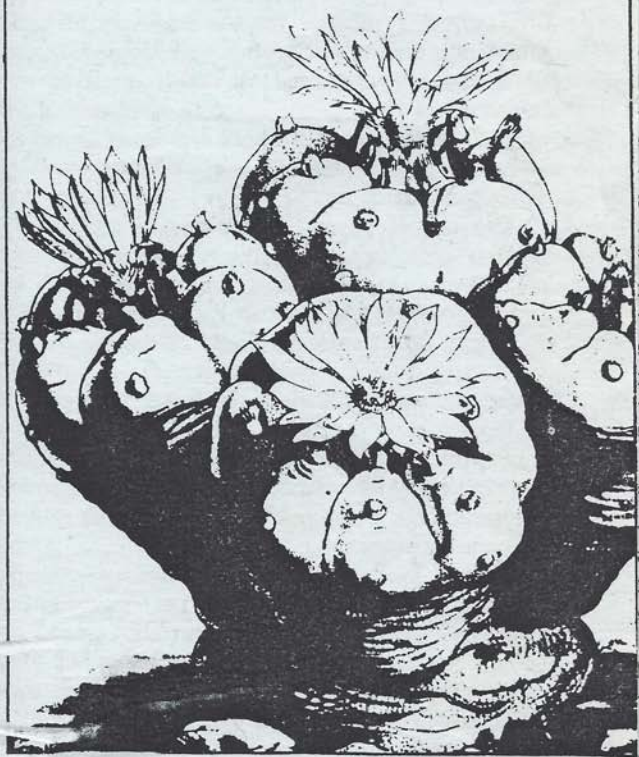


The History & Use of Peyote & Mescaline



A "DO IT NOW" PUBLICATION

THE HISTORY AND USE OF MESCALINE/PEYOTE

Peyote is a spineless cactus with a small crown and a long carrot-like root. The crown is sliced off and dried to form a hard brownish disc known as a "button." Peyote buttons were being used as a hallucinogenic sacrament by Mexican Indians centuries before Europeans knew Mexico even existed. Worship of deities through the use of this plant/drug was widely practiced by the Aztecs and other Indians at the time of the Spanish Conquest. This and other "divine" plants (including sacred mushrooms which contain psilocybin, morning glory seeds containing lysergic acid amide, and yurema snuffs containing DMT) were employed for the purposes of healing, telling the future and producing visions during rites of passage. Peyote was (and still is) believed by its Indian users to be a god-powerful medicine, capable of giving sight to the blind and healing incurable ailments. (See "Medical Uses of Peyote and Mescaline" section of this pamphlet.)

The use of peyote began spreading north from Mexico on a large scale during the middle of the nineteenth century, at the close of the Indian wars. Indian prophets like Quannah Parker and John Wilson carried a Christianized version of the peyote ritual from tribe to tribe throughout the western United States and parts of Canada. Thus a peyote cult came to replace the "red bean" cult (a cult based on the ceremonial ingestion of the beans of the *Sophora secundiflora*. The red beans were dangerous, an hallucinogenic dose being near fatal, and peyote proved to be a conveniently safer sacrament.

Despite four centuries of non-Indians attempting to stigmatize the use of this drug as "peyotism" and to portray the drug as being dangerous, Native American religious use of peyote has survived to the present in many parts of the New World. Although several bills have been introduced over the years, the Congress of the United States has never passed a law prohibiting the use of peyote by Indians. In addition, the U.S. Supreme Court has struck down as unconstitutional several state laws which sought to prohibit the sacramental use of peyote by the 250,000-member Native American Church. Whites, on the other hand, have been continually denied rights to use psychedelic plants for religious purposes.

The peyote rite, as practiced by most of the Indian tribes of the southern plains of the United States, usually went something like this:

On a Saturday night, the men would circle around a large campfire within a tent and proceed to pray. They would accept maybe four buttons from the leader (during the course of the ritual, each man might eventually consume about ten or twelve buttons . . . and sometimes as many as thirty). The participants would slowly chew and swallow the buttons, sitting in a trance-like state and listening to the singing and beating of drums by other members of their tribe, absorbed in the oncoming psychedelic manifestations of peyote intoxication. They remain like this until the following afternoon, by which time the effects have worn off and things are back to "business as usual."

Chewing and swallowing any number of peyote buttons is not as easy a task as it may sound because of their incredibly foul taste which invariably causes nausea and vomiting — a reaction that the peyote ritual usually allows for, viewed as an act of purification. The initial nausea is accompanied by increased perspiration and dilated pupils. The vomiting usually signals the end of the nausea and the beginning of the psychedelic experience. The tufts of white hair on the peyote buttons, by the way, are widely believed to contain strychnine. This is a myth. Strychnine is an entirely unrelated compound from the seeds of *Strychnos nux-vomica*.

A peyote trip is reputed to be more of a "body" trip than that which LSD produces, though typical LSD-like effects occur: sensations of weightlessness, depersonalization, alteration of time perception, visual distortions and hallucinations. Many people think peyote intensifies the senses more than LSD does, especially taste, touch and color reception.

As for subjective reactions, users commonly experience emotional lability, mood changes, unprovoked emotional discharges and introspective experiences. Users often feel that the drug has increased their ability to perceive "truth," although by the time the effects have worn off, these "truths" are not nearly as mind- and soul-boggling as they were at the peak of the experience.

Mescaline

Mescaline, named after the Mescalero Apaches, is the main psycho-active ingredient of the peyote button. It was isolated from the peyote cactus (*Lophophora williamsii*) in 1896 by A. Heffter, a German scientist. Twenty-three years later, in 1918, mescaline was synthesized as 3,4,5-trimethoxy-

phenethylamine. As one of the first hallucinogens to be isolated, it became a center of scientific interest during the first half of this century. Mescaline was the hallucinogen most widely used in the experimental treatment of alcoholism, neurosis and other disorders prior to the discovery of LSD.

Mescaline occurs only in one North American species of cactus. A related compound, macromerine, is found in the North American cactus, *Coryphantha macromeris*. A few South American species of cactus contain mescaline, most notably the San Pedro cactus *Trichocereus pachanoi*. This particular species is widely used in South American folk medicine, and is sold openly in the markets of some countries. Though not at all related to the peyote cactus, mescaline has been identified as the San Pedro Cactus' active principle. It produces a reaction similar to that of peyote, but it is much less a stimulant and the nausea isn't so pronounced.

The effects of mescaline, like peyote, begin approximately one to two hours after ingestion, and usually last from six to ten hours or longer. Also like peyote, mescaline produces some amount of stomach disorder and perhaps vomiting. We asked our Neighborhood Chemist why this happens, and he said that it is "simply a body reaction to foreign chemicals, particularly the active amines, that trigger the nausea and vomit reflex when blood concentration reaches a certain level."

While mescaline and peyote produce many common effects, the two experiences are somewhat different because peyote contains over fifty alkaloids¹ besides mescaline, some of which are bioactive. The stimulating and nausea-producing effects of peyote, for instance, are much more pronounced than those of mescaline; peyote also contains a reflex excitant, a convulsant, a respiratory stimulant and other active compounds. Generally, however, the physiological and subjective reactions to mescaline and peyote are similar to each other as well as to other psychedelics.

The Medical Uses of Peyote and Mescaline

It might be argued that the medicinal qualities

¹ "Alkaloids" are a class of alkaline organic compounds, containing nitrogen, which occur in plants. To a biologist, the term may be confined to include only plant-derived compounds containing nitrogen that have biodynamic activity.

ascribed to peyote by its Indian users are based on its inherent supernatural powers and its exalted place in their belief and ritual. Peyote really does, however, possess at least some of the curative powers with which it is credited.

As long ago as the late 1800's the medical world was aware of the health benefits peyote offered, having seen its positive effects among the Indians. Tests were conducted with patients who suffered a variety of maladies ranging from asthma to softening of the brain. In many cases, according to the *Medical Record* of 1896, the "effect of the drug was little less than marvelous." The best responses seemed to take place among patients with psychically-caused problems as opposed to basically organic disorders such as broken bones, viruses, etc.

Research interest switched over to mescaline around 1940, when certain researchers announced their belief that it could produce a "controlled schizophrenic state." This possibility helped motivate many studies which attempted to relate psychedelic-induced biochemical changes to biochemical changes in schizophrenia and other psychotic states. Eventually, though, scientists began to regard the effects of mescaline and its hallucinogenic relatives as somewhat distinct from the true psychotic state, so further research has been focused in other areas. Before the discovery of LSD, mescaline was also one of the most widely used hallucinogenic drugs in experiments for the treatment of alcoholism. (See DIN pamphlet # 130, "A Closer Look at Tripping".)

Not too long ago researchers at the University of Arizona separated a water-soluble crystalline substance from an ethanol extract of the peyote cactus which reportedly exhibits "antibiotic activity against a wide spectrum of bacteria and a species of the imperfect fungi. The name peyocactin has been given to the principle antimicrobial component contained in this partially purified substance. Of particular interest was its inhibitory action against eighteen strains of penicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (a bacteria which causes such conditions as boils, carbuncles and internal abscesses)."

Street Use of Peyote and Mescaline

Whereas peyote buttons are fairly common on the illegal drug market (although there is some fear that the cactus is on the verge of becoming extinct), mescaline is rarely available in street sales anywhere

in the world. Since the late Sixties, the LSD chromosome-damage scares and the evolution of general belief that mescaline produces a more "mellow" trip than LSD, there has been a high consumer demand for the drug . . . but there is hardly any to be had. This situation is found uniformly throughout the USA and Europe, and is due pretty much to economics. For one thing, LSD is easier to synthesize than mescaline (or that other equally popular "mellow" psychedelic, psilocybin). On top of that, one teaspoon of mescaline equals about sixteen doses; the same amount of LSD is enough for anywhere between 48,000 strong to 192,000 weak doses. The mescaline would have to be sold for at least twenty dollars per dose just to break even; the LSD could be sold for as little as ten cents per dose and still return a goodly profit.

The economics become even more irresistible when we get down to street-dealer level. If a dealer can get, say, two dollars per dose of LSD — but his customers want mescaline which he and practically no one else has — it becomes very tempting to cut his LSD doses in half to "mellow" the effect, call it mescaline and get more money for it.

The result: although you run into more "mescaline" and "psilocybin" being sold on the street than almost any other psychedelic these days, only about two out of every one-hundred samples submitted to street-drug analysis labs turns out to be authentic. Most of them are really LSD or mixtures of LSD and PCP (phencyclidine, an animal tranquilizer). In the past, they contained amphetamines, STP (DOM), belladonna alkaloids and other contaminants, many of which have been improperly synthesized. Real synthetic mescaline comes in the form of white needlepoint crystals, recognizable by its moderately terrible taste, whereas the usual off-substitutes are relatively tasteless. Another tell-tale clue is that, since a reasonable dose of mescaline sulfate ranges from 300 to 500 milligrams, a capsule of true mescaline would resemble something you might give to a horse in order to be of sufficient hallucinogenic dosage. The chances that anything smaller being the "Real McCoy" are less than slim.

**For more information, write: Do It Now Foundation,
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