

## SSH MEMBERS ONLY

Book Review:

### Psychedelic Shamanism

Psychedelic Shamanism: The Cultivation, Preparation and Shamanic Use of Psychotropic Plants,  
by Jim DeKorne. Loompanics Unlimited, 1994

Reviewed by Frater Stropharion



THE ISSUE OF WHETHER OR NOT TO USE psychedelic drugs in a ritual context is a matter of some debate among pagans and magicians. This new work by Jim DeKorne is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature available on the subject. It includes an extensive bibliography and is well indexed. Built upon a broad base of theoretical and practical research, this volume offers an authoritative, well referenced viewpoint for those who have an interest in shamanic and/or psychedelic experience.

The book is divided broadly into two parts: Part I, *The Shamanic Hypothesis* is a brief outline of shamanism and the concepts and world views which underlie its practice. Part II: *Psychedelic Catalysts* offers a detailed-enough look at the major plant-derived psychedelics.

This is a winning combination of theory and practice. For those whose interest in these matters is speculative or academic, the presentation of the shamanic hypothesis is an excellent introduction to the shamanic world view, which offers food for thought for novice and adept alike.

#### Time is an artefact of Mind.

I was particularly intrigued by his modelling of the relationship between the inner and outer realities. DeKorne largely dispenses with the notion of time. Time, he says, is merely an artefact of Mind. Thus ordinary reality, which some call three dimensional space-time, is in DeKorne's model *Space-Mind*, while the inner worlds are found through the looking-glass (as it were) in what DeKorne calls *Mind-Space*.

The adept shaman is one who while fully at home in space-mind, that is, 'ordinary' consensus reality, is equally at home and able to navigate the non-ordinary realms of mind-space:

*...the shaman can alter his consciousness at will... he can go where he wills in other dimensions of reality, and understands how to deal with the forces he meets there, and last, but not least, he serves the needs of his community.*

#### Entities of the imaginal realm

The parts of DeKorne's outline of shamanism which I personally find most challenging are the two chapters he devotes to discussion of 'the entities of the imaginal realm.' Hyperspace, as Terrence McKenna has said, is apparently 'haunted', i.e. inhabited, by entities of non-human origin.

It is argued that these entities (be they angels, faeries, daemons, archetypes or self-transforming machine-elves), are at least as real as we are and are not *necessarily* to be trusted.

My own prejudices have tended to guide me towards a belief in the human origin of so-called entities. It is to DeKorne's credit that I have had to reevaluate my thinking in this area and admit that now I'm not actually so sure.

DeKorne doesn't dogmatically state that these entities are 'real' or necessarily of malign intent. He does strongly suggest that they *may* be real and in any case should be taken seriously and treated with some

respect. DeKorne has drawn not only from his own experience, but from the experience of other researchers in this field and has reached a point of view which he states succinctly in his afterword:

*Concerning the entities... I would guess that they are denizens of spatial dimensions perpendicular to human consciousness; that there are 'good guys' and 'bad guys', and that it is very difficult from our position in space/time to differentiate between the two; that it is an evolutionary choice to expand our awareness enough to meet these beings on their own turf and get to know them without abject subservience.*

**P**ART TWO, WHILE STILL of academic and speculative interest has more to offer for the practically minded among us. It is informative and lavishly illustrated with line drawings and full-colour photographic plates.

DeKorne limits his discussion to psychedelic plants, thus there is no mention of synthetic substances like 'ecstasy' (MMDA); and LSD is discussed only in respect of its naturally occurring plant sources.

His bias towards plant based psychedelics is rooted in the shamanic belief that every tree and every plant has a living, conscious spirit and that humans may form beneficial I-Thou relationships with the plant spirits, that these plant-spirits can literally become spiritual 'allies'.

Most of the plant psychedelics are mentioned, and while several are discussed in depth, interestingly enough, marijuana rates barely a mention.

While DeKorne makes it quite clear in which directions his preferences lie – he speaks highly of

the tryptamine hallucinogens – he does not dismiss out of hand psychedelic plants for which he personally has no use.

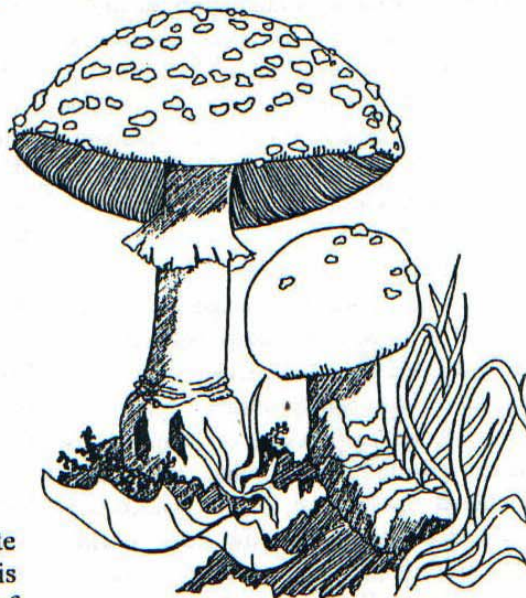
The belladonna alkaloids are discussed impartially and at some length before the author concludes that they are of little use and much risk and best avoided by the aspiring shaman.

As well as discussing various families of psychotropic plants DeKorne details some relatively simple procedures for the extraction of psychoactive alkaloids from plant matter, including the creation of alchemical spagyric extracts.

He concludes with some valuable thoughts on general technique and the use of ritual: he includes some advice given him 'by' the entity residing in the San Pedro (mescaline) cactus:

1. *Be sincere. That means no frivolous use.*
2. *Don't be afraid; no matter what happens during the trip it is for your inner growth and thus part of the program.*
3. *Be alert to "road signs" pointing you in new directions.*

Good advice also for those who are not necessarily psychedelically inclined. ■



**(C) 1996 Frater Stropharion, 2006 Senatorius Sacerdos Harpyiae**