

Magic Mushrooms

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A Thousand Words

Hi. This is “A Thousand Words”, July 5th, 2019. Welcome to the podcast. Today I’ll be speaking about magic mushrooms.

I once lived in a small apartment on Haight Street in San Francisco. I heard the name Haight Street before I ever saw it on a street sign. Oh – so that’s how you spell it? I thought it was like the verb, to hate, and I always wondered why a street would be named that. But Haight Street is written HAIGHT, and was named after a banker back in the 19th century named Henry Haight. Somehow he got a street named after himself. I don’t know if Munroe Ashbury ever crossed paths [1] with Mr.

Haight when they were alive, but their two streets cross one another even today. And some say that where these two streets meet, Haight-Ashbury, was the birthplace of the hippies in the 1960s.



The main meeting point at this crossroads was a Free Clinic, which is where most went to get their psychedelic drugs. Drugs were important to the hippies. It helped them access [2] their counterculture perspective. The area quickly attracted people [3] from all over, including criminals who took advantage of [4] the neighborhood’s alternative lifestyle. I don’t know much about what it was like during the ’70s and early ’80s, but by the time I moved there in the late ’80s, the street was trying to relive its hippie past.

“Shrooms, trips, weed?”

Now that I lived in the area, I heard this same song sung to me as I passed the same type of young guys on the street.

“Shrooms, trips, weed?”

“Excuse me,” I said to one of them one day. “What was that?”

“Shrooms, trips, weed,” the bearded man said. He slowed down but didn’t look at me.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Dude! Shrooms – mushrooms; trips – LSD; weed – grass. You know grass?”

I nodded.

“And?” he said.

“And what?”

“Shrooms, trips, weed?”

“No, thanks. I’m good. I just wanted to know what you guys kept saying.”

At the time, Marijuana was illegal, but it was everywhere in the city. There was even a Buyer’s Club downtown where you could go in and on three floors choose different varieties. All that you needed was a note from a doctor saying you had one of a long list of medical conditions which marijuana shows to help. LSD was more difficult to find, and something I’ve always been afraid to try. But mushrooms I was interested in.

So one day, when a friend asked if I wanted to do some, I jumped at the chance [5]. He said he had a very reliable [6] friend who could get hold of some good quality magic mushrooms. He also had never tried them. We met after work one evening and he arrived with a small paper bag with about 20 inside. I was surprised how small they were. They had tiny umbrella caps with thin stems [7]. They looked like dried, over-sized sperm. The only thing we knew about magic mushrooms was that they took about 45 minutes to kick in [8] and usually left you with an experience that sounded whacky [9] when you tried to tell someone about it later.

We weren’t sure how many we needed to take. So we popped a few into our mouths [10] and killed the time by walking through downtown neighborhoods. After about an hour, nothing happened. So we popped the rest into our mouths like potato chips. We walked the neighborhood more, and then, after another hour of nothing happening, we decided they were duds [11]. We cursed [12] his reliable friend, and then called it a night [13].

We took an escalator [14] underground and waited for a train. My friend wandered down the platform a bit and started having a conversation with himself. Or so I thought. When I got closer, I discovered he was discussing something with his mother. “Yes, Mother, I know,” he kept saying.

When the train came I felt bad about interrupting him [15], but I did, and we both got on. The moment I sat down I felt my head melt into opposite directions. Where was I? Underground! What was all this metal and glass and plastic around me? Nothing natural. All man-made. I was inside something that was about to close its doors and rocket me through tubes under the city. I panicked. I had to get back outside, into fresh air, into nature. I stood up and ran out. My friend just made his way out through the closing doors and followed me up to the street.

Outside, it was better. But I could feel the mushroom wanted to take me somewhere, to show me something. But I didn’t want to go. And for the next hour, my friend and I sat on an outdoor bench and did our best to control our breathing and not vomit [16].

After a while, I came to understand that the mushroom didn’t want to do me any harm [17]. So I surrendered to it [18]. I got up and announced dramatically that I was going to walk.

“Walk?” my friend said. “Where?”

“I don’t know” I said.

“Alone?”

“Doesn’t matter,” I said. “Come if you want, stay if you want. I’m going to walk.”

He stood up too. “Okay.”

And off we went.

We walked for hours and hours and stopped now and then [19] to look at things we saw every day but never really saw. Wow! Look at that! Look at the beauty of that shop window! Glass! What a miraculous thing – strong like a wall, but you can see through it. Look at all the work it was doing, advertising what’s inside the building! Amazing, we agreed. The mushroom was sharpening our senses [20]. I was sure that if someone blew a dog whistle then, I’d be able to hear it.

At one point, we found ourselves in a park and sat down on a bench. It was probably 3 or 4 in the morning. Everything was perfectly quiet and I felt anchored [21] in reality in a way I had never known. Nothing mattered but that exact moment. The wind began to pick up [22] and the leaves in the trees rustled together [23]. They made a musical sound, and I imagined it was their voices speaking to each other. As I looked around, I noticed how their branches were reaching outward and upward like arms into the sky. They were leaning and bending around each other to get into better position for more sunlight. And then I saw something I could not believe. I actually saw the trees breathing. I saw their trunks [24] moving in and out, inhaling and exhaling ever so slightly [25]. How could that be! I had never had the thought before that a tree might breathe. But I could see them!

How could it be that I had never seen this before? That night, I came to understand how alive and intelligent trees are. They simply live, rooted [26] in the moment. They don’t seem to worry or have obligations. They’re just there, growing and living their lives. Are they aware like us? Can they think and communicate with other trees? That night, I was sure they did.

I’ve done mushrooms three times in my life... the last, over twenty years ago. So far away from the mushroom now, I hear myself when I try to explain what it showed me, how hippie I sound. Breathing trees? Really? Please!

But they did. And I’m sure they still are... even though I can’t see it anymore.

Thanks for listening.

If you liked this podcast, or others you’ve listened to on our website podclub.ch, tell a friend. You can also write us a message. You can even download our app if you’d like, and we have a vocabulary trainer to help you practice some of the new words you hear.

I’ll be back on July 19th with a story about a podcast I listen to.

Bye for now.

Glossar: A Thousand Words

[1] to cross paths with someone: to meet someone by chance rather than choice

[2] to access something: to be able to get or have something

[3] to attract people: to make something interesting to people so they go there

- [4] **to take advantage of:** to profit or use for one's own benefit
- [5] **to jump at the chance to do something:** to say yes immediately to something
- [6] **reliable:** to be trusted
- [7] **stems:** thin parts of a plant that hold leaves and flowers
- [8] **to kick in:** to begin
- [9] **whacky:** crazy
- [10] **to pop something into your mouth:** to eat something quickly
- [11] **a dud:** something useless or something that doesn't work properly
- [12] **to curse someone:** to say bad words about a person
- [13] **to call it a night:** to stop what you're doing for the day and get ready to go to bed
- [14] **an escalator:** mechanical rolling stairs that take you up or down a floor
- [15] **to interrupt someone:** to stop someone from finishing something
- [16] **to vomit:** to empty what's in your stomach through your mouth
- [17] **not do someone any harm:** not hurt or do something bad to someone
- [18] **to surrender to something:** to let something happen without trying to stop it
- [19] **now and then:** from time to time; sometimes; at intervals
- [20] **to sharpen one's senses:** to see, hear, feel etc more strongly, more sensitively
- [21] **to feel anchored somewhere:** fixed to a certain place
- [22] **to pick up:** to get stronger
- [23] **to rustle together:** to make noise by objects hitting one another
- [24] **tree trunks:** the thick body of a tree from which branches grow out of
- [25] **slightly:** just a little bit
- [26] **to be rooted to something:** to be attached to something, like a tree to the ground