

He's Gone Ape

I had been traveling on LSD aplenty, and DMT was becoming a new favorite, though I would come to find that my all time favorite was DMSD, or *Dimitri in the Sky with Diamonds*; that is to say DMT at the peak of LSD. Ahhhh. . . That's a conversation for another time. Anyhow. By now I had obviously taken to hearing what people such as the likes of Terence McKenna had to say about DMT, and it just so happened that he had a lot to say about those whimsical and wisdom-filled magical mushrooms teachers. I had never experienced them, and at the time I only knew few other individuals who had. The experiences I heard were a mixed-bag, some good, some bad, some vague or drab. But I figured before I was going to even start taking myself and my thoughts about any of this seriously I had to take on one of the most common psychedelic experiences. So I sought after the cute little fungi's, and a mutual friend was able to provide.

I honestly didn't think much of it. I knew bad experiences were possible, but the majority of what I was reading and hearing online were positively glowing reviews, and it seemed pretty typical across the board. Moreover, many had reported that it is not entirely unlike LSD, that they have their distinct differences, but the overall experience is often comparable. This likely played a role in why I didn't think much of it, I could have a normal day on 500–700µg of LSD, so what's 4 grams of these shrooms my friend gave me? He says he has a good time on it, and often takes about 3.5 grams. So I measure it out, he gave me quite a bit just for the hell of it—good guy—and the scale read 3.75g, a little over the eighth he suggested. Well instead of taking a little off the scale I thought, “eh, what's another .25g?” So I added another little cap until it read 4g. It turns out that another .25g is kinda like, what's another 20mg to this already full DMT bowl, or what's a metal pole feel like against a 7200 volt power line? Absolutely disintegrating is what it is.

I would later make friends with a mycologist, and when I told him I took 4 grams of Albino Penis Envy, he said, “4 grams of APE!? . . . Jesus, man.” I said, “Yeah! He was there in the end!” We had a good laugh at that. Apparently this particular strain is known to be one of the most potent around.

It was in the late afternoon or early evening when I put the mushrooms atop a pizza and began chowing down. The first couple hours are a bit hazy. I know I didn't feel well. I tried many things. Smoking my medical cannabis, taking a shower, going out into nature, laughing, singing, walking. Nothing was helping. I felt so immensely uncomfortable. There was something in the mushrooms that had exacerbated my chronic pain. The medical cannabis didn't do a thing to help it either as if completely cancelling out the usual pain-relieving effects I receive from it. This could be interpreted as either a chemical interfering component between the two specific plants and their constituent parts, or the mushroom knew better than me, and I needed to undertake this experience—however hokey we want to get about it. Fckn mushrooms.

The pain was one thing, it came in waves, but what was really bothering me was physical restlessness. With my chronic pain often comes something akin to Restless Leg Syndrome, except it is in the back and arms, and sometimes the neck and face. Certain fabrics become uncomfortable, another person lightly touching my arm may cause a shooting pain, no position of hopeful and usual comfort soothes. You can't stay still, but you're in pain so you can barely move around without making it worse.

Everything around me was consumed by a thick fog, like the shadows from the depths of the Earth had lurched through the surface to surround and watch me no matter where I went, blocking out all matter of bright and welcoming light no matter where I tried to find a method for it to shine through. At times I could hardly speak. My mind would be racing, but my tongue would not cooperate.

About two and a half to three hours in and I was at my wits end. This was as much constant and overwhelming pain and discomfort I had had to experience, comprehend, and work through in quite some time. I told the person watching over me, "I just want to kill myself again. I hate this. I hate my body. I don't want to do this anymore."

We agreed that the best thing for me at this point was just to lay down in bed, turn on some soothing music, and ride it out.

For the next two hours I lay there tossing and turning, trying my best to accept the experience, knowing it would soon end even while feeling like it never would. One of the more difficult aspects of these two hours, trying to rest, feeling exhausted from the previous hours, was that I could not close my eyes. To clarify, I could physically close my eyes, but what began happening when I did was thoroughly unpleasant, so I couldn't close my eyes or things started getting worse. When I would close my eyes, for just a moment things would seem to be feeling better, but instantly there would be a shift. I would begin feeling a crushing weight pushing down on my entire body, but most prominently on my chest and ribcage, like a hydraulic press from the cosmos sent to crush my soul back into the ether. As the soul-squeezing began, an auditory signal began building in the space where my head was supposed to be, it was a digital fire alarm set to eleven with full distortion and max reverb; Hell's vacuum of dementors, sucking my soul into their outer and eternally dark oblivion. This was a terrifying and uncomfortable ordeal, but in hindsight, that auditory distortion was not unlike the one heard when blasting off on DMT. I only wonder what would have ensued had I been able to take the soul-compressing asphyxiations.

Nevertheless, it came to pass that verily, verily I was eventually able to close my eyes without feeling as if I was going to be squashed by this moldy universe. The sounds on my meditation playlist shifted, beginning with light birdsong and then the tone of a Tibetan bowl, the hum of a low E dynamically growing slowly, and at the tone of a high F# all the light shifted, and the world was growing bright, and my body was relaxing. I opened my eyes and looked up toward the ceiling in the far corner, and I saw there, bathed in a bright white and yellow pillar of light, the image of Christ on the cross. The pillar was surrounded by that same towering shroud of Earthly shadows from the depths only now I could

see that it was a tangle of vines and thorns, twisting and knotting in on one another, a dance of deep greens and reds amidst the black and brown shroud of earthen ambiance. The entire scene was overlay with a structure I had seen before, and would see again in a real distinct way on DMT in the weeks to come. It was a light web of light covering the entire scene, reminding me of a quote by Lovisa Mack, Joseph Smith's Aunt. She had fallen very ill, and there is much more to the story for the reader to go find, but Lucy Mack Smith reported in one of her preliminary manuscripts, that,

“[Lovisa] told them when she lay sick she was carried away.
There was nothing more than a spider's web between her and Christ.”¹

I closed my eyes to a brighter light, and fell asleep some time after.

As a Mormon kid growing up with chronic pain, clearly failing to understand the complex simplicity of the Latter-day Atonement and Doctrine and Covenants section 19, I often wondered if the pains I was experiencing equaled more pains that Christ had to undergo in Gethsemane. Would it have been better that I wasn't born, or that I no longer be here, so that it alleviates—in some twisted time warp—the probabilistic pains he may have felt on my behalf? When I was going through this mushroom encounter, I just wanted to end it all again. I had spent hours calling upon the many different shining lights of help and hope to raise me out of this destruction, and just as I was ready to succumb to despair and let it all take me, not to a fictitious force, but to the power of the mushroom beings I ate which had cleaved me, just in this moment of alarming hallucinogenic send-offs, I heard the notes E and F# alongside the song of morning birds. The daunting asymmetrical shroud of nothingness was pierced into like a knife, pouring out a web of symmetry and comfort in the process.

In the end, there was—if even just in stories handed down, symbolism, and geometrical forms—that which represented my daily battle. I don't meet many individuals who suffer from chronic pain, let alone a male with a juvenile case currently twenty years running. “Fibromyalgia,” as they have been calling it, while it can strike anyone, is most commonly known to affect women more often than men, and is more typical near middle-age and older. Every day for me is pain and discomfort in some form, guaranteed. In this experience, I know I'm not alone. I saw for myself, and know he knew, and knows my pains because he experienced them. I know that pain is universal, so everyone around me will inevitably relate, because all pains are chronically in me, all pains are in you, and because all matter of comfort is chronically in you, all comfort is in me; this is the chronic dance of Earthly circumstance; mutuality.

¹ Smith, J., Skousen, R., & Jensen, R. S. (2021). *The Joseph Smith Papers*. Church Historian's Press. p.12 bk. 1., <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/12>