



**Transcript – Adventures in Ayahuasca &
Psychedelic Medicine with Dennis McKenna - #329**



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Speaker 1: Bulletproof Radio, a state of high performance.

Speaker 2: You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey.

Dave: Today's cool fact of the day is that for thousand of years, Amazon natives have been making ayahuasca, which is a psychedelic that they've used in their medicine ceremonies, and something that I first used almost 20 years ago in the Peruvian forest with a shaman. What you probably don't know is that of the 40,000 plant species they could have chosen, somehow they knew to mix the ayahuasca vine and leaves from a shrub to make the medicine. The ayahuasca vine has chemicals known as monoamineoxidase inhibitors that let your body absorb the DMT from the leaves. Without this inhibitor, the DMT would be destroyed by the digestive stuff in your gut, and you feel no effects from the DMT at all. The natives say the plants reveal to them how to make the ayahuasca. Literally, if you ask a well-trained shaman, they'll say, "Well, the plants talk to me and tell me what to use," which is pretty darn profound. Either that, or they're all crazy. You also have to ask yourself, "How did a crazy person pick 1 out of 40,000 shrubs?" Hmm. That doesn't sound crazy to me. It sounds interesting and worthy of scientific discourse.

Before we get into today's interview, if you haven't had a chance to check out Bulletproof Upgraded Coconut Charcoal, you totally should. This is something that I carefully formulated. We use charcoal from coconuts, and this is the finest sized particle you can get, much finer than what you would normally get. What charcoal does, it has huge amounts of surface area that electrically attracts toxins in the gut. Because one teaspoon of this has a surface area equal to something like a football field, if you were to flatten out the molecules, it can absorb a lot of bad stuff in the gut, including pharmaceuticals. In fact, if you took the activated charcoal and then you drank some ayahuasca, you wouldn't have much of an experience at all because the activated charcoal would absorb the medicine in the plant. It's a very powerful form of detox and something that I use if I'm going to drink alcohol, which I don't do that often, and something that I use if I'm going to go eat out at a restaurant that I know is going to have stuff in the food that I probably shouldn't be eating.

This is actually a profound and very, very old thing that's used for detox in much of the world. I very much value it. It's the only one you can get like it on the market. It's also acid washed, which removes all traces of heavy metals that tend to be concentrated when you're burning something like coconut shells in order to make this very fine particle of charcoal. Pretty cool thing, and it's the opposite of what a supplement is. Supplements add things in. This takes away the bad stuff, which is sometimes easier.

Today's guest is well-known. He's Dr. Dennis McKenna, a founding board member of the Heffter Research Institute, an ethnopharmacologist, a research pharmacognisist, a lecturer, and an author, and one of the leading experts in the therapeutic uses of psychoactive medicines derived from nature. He's a key organizer and participant in the Hoasca Project, an international biomedical study of ayahuasca in Brazil. He's a legendary bio-hacker and brother of the well-known Terence McKenna. Dennis, welcome to the show. It's an honor to have you on.

Dennis: Thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure to be here. I'm glad we got those factual issues straightened out ahead of the show.

Dave: What you guys don't know, because we took it out of the cool fact of the day, is that when I was first reading the cool fact of the day, and I prepare ahead of time with notes, and I work with the Bulletproof team to make sure that I've got the notes right. In my head, for years, I've had which of the plant compounds are mixed in ayahuasca. I had it backwards. I was under the impression that the DMT molecule was in the ayahuasca vine and the MAOIs were in the shrub. I had it backwards. I'm reading this going, "Wait, this is backwards. I can't read this. How embarrassing." Then Dennis steps up and is like, "Uh, Dave, actually that was right, and you're wrong." I'm like, "All right. I've just been schooled by one of the most bad-ass psychopharmacologists hallucinogens experts out there." I can live with that. Thank you for the correction, Dennis.

Dennis: You're welcome. We can sort all this out as we get into this. I imagine we will want to.

Dave: We can, indeed. I'm really looking forward to this interview, because you and I got a chance to talk a few months ago about ibogaine research. Ibogaine is another hallucinogen that's really had a profound effect on addiction, in particular. When I realized from that conversation, like, "Wow, we should talk. Lots of people would like to hear what we would chat about," so this is our chance to do that. To get going, I want to know how did you get into this stuff? Was there something about your childhood? What made you spend your life studying these kind of bizarre medicines that most people don't know anything about?

Dennis: I think multiple factors. I'd have to credit my brother or blame my brother, depending on how you want to see it, because he was 4 years ahead of me in age, and he was always into the cool stuff. That's just an age where the little brother wants whatever big brother's doing. He wants in. My brother was really into always doing interesting things. He was obviously brilliant and driven. I really credit him, and also the zeitgeist of the age, because this was the 60s, and we were children of the 60's. My brother was living in Berkeley. In the late 60s, after he graduated from high school, he went to Berkeley. He wanted to be at the epicenter of where the action was, and so I was influenced by all that. LSD was what was the psychedelic of the day, if you will. Everyone was taking LSD. It was a time of social ferment and turmoil. The Vietnam War was going on. It was a very turbulent time, and we were right in the middle of it.

We were nerdy, I guess. We didn't even have that word at that time, but Terry and I, Terence and I, were interested in outrageous things. We were big science fiction fanatics. We read in esoteric philosophy and alchemy, all of these things. When psychedelics came along, it was right up our alley. We could not not get interested in it. We did. Terence again leading the way introduced me to some of these psychedelics.

The first time he introduced me to cannabis one summer, when he came back from Berkeley full of all these radical ideas, with a very pretty girlfriend and a bag full of cannabis, which we probably couldn't give away in today's market. It did the trick. We just went over to the park, which was across from our house, and sat down and topped up. That was really my first encounter with a psychedelic, psychoactive substance that was not alcohol. I had my first

serious encounter with alcohol less than a week previously. Didn't like that at all, and when I took cannabis, I realized, this is my drug. This is much more compatible with what I like.

I was curious about all these things, and he was, and we were in correspondence. By this time, these were letters. We didn't have internet in those days. We were in correspondence. We'd gotten past all of the sibling rivalry that brothers sometimes have. We were now friends and colleagues and fellow explorers of the fringes, I guess, of everything, of culture and so on. I went out to California in 1967, the summer of '67, which was the summer of love, supposedly. He was living in Berkeley, so we had a place to go. My friend and I, why my father allowed this to happen, I still have no idea, because he had to know that from his perspective, it probably wasn't going to go well. Anyway, he let me go out there.

In that summer, we discovered, my friend and I, thanks to Terence's intercession, we discovered LSD. It was really our first psychedelic experience. It wasn't too long before we discovered DMT. Terence had told me about DMT when he'd come back that summer to turn me on to cannabis, but he hadn't brought any, and he just described it as the ultimate metaphysical reality pill. Of course, it's not a pill, as we know, because it's not orally active. It's something that was smoked. The synthetic version was smoked. Anyway, minor detail. When Terence discovered DMT and shared that with me, we both decided that that was just amazing, that it was not just the most amazing drug we'd taken, and our experience was actually pretty limited. It was just the most amazing thing we'd ever encountered in our limited universe. We decided to throw everything else away and focus on that, because we said, in our minds, this was the most important discovery that man had ever made. 45 years on, I really haven't changed my mind much about that.

Dave: DMT probably wasn't that common back in '67. I don't know. This was 5 years before I was born. Was this something you could get, or did you guys have some university hook-up? Yeah?

Dennis: It was hard to get. Terence, he lived in Berkeley, which was kind of the center of all this.

Dave: Okay, epicenter.

Dennis: He worked the matrix. He had connections and so on. He was able to come up with DMT, with synthetic DMT, which was something that you smoked in a glass pipe like crack.

Dave: It's still hard to get, right?

Dennis: It's becoming easier to get, largely because Terence's talks and so on have made it more well-known. It's easier to get now than it is then. What you got then was just this horrible sloppy synthesis. You got this orange, smelly, amorphous paste.

Dave: Yuck.

Dennis: Not great quality, but it did the trick.

Dave: For people listening, DMT is the active ingredient in ayahuasca, and it's also known as the spirit

molecule. There is a well-known book about university research at UNM using this, where they actually quantify it and measured the experiences of people. It appears to have some healing effects, you could put it that way. The stuff I've seen now is more like a white crystalline sort of thing, and it also can be snorted instead of just smoked. I would encourage anyone listening who's never done DMT, if you are going to choose to do this, don't mess around. Have experienced people who know how to take care and to watch you and to keep you safe, because this is not something that I would trifle with. Just to put it that way. It's big medicine, you could say.

Dennis: Yeah. Essentially the same considerations apply to any psychedelic.

Dave: Yeah, that's very true.

Dennis: Especially with a big psychedelic like DMT or LSD or even mushrooms. Pay attention to set and setting. Assure that you're in a safe place. Assure that maybe there's someone with more experience there who can not necessarily even be in the same room, but be close. Just common sense measures so that you can focus on the experience and not the external world.

Dave: I would go one step further and say if you're going to do a hallucinogen like this, set and setting and intention matter. Have someone who's a trained shaman who really understands the more emotional, spiritual, unseen world with you, just because it can't hurt, and it probably could do some good.

Dennis: Right. It can't hurt. In the case of DMT, I don't know that it makes a difference in a certain way because it's so short-acting. That's one of the things about it, and that's one of the key differences between DMT and ayahuasca. When you take DMT orally, the experience is stretched out over several hours. When you smoke DMT, 20 minutes from baseline to baseline. It's very fast and it's very overwhelming when you take it that way, astonishing, I'd say. Sometimes it's difficult to come back with much other than a sense of astonishment and like, "What was that?" It's impressive, but I think when DMT is taken orally, that would be the way most people in indigenous cultures would encounter it, it's pretty different. It doesn't have the intensity, but it has more depth, I would say, and more healing effects that way.

Dave: That's a fair way to describe it. There are people out there who would say that the whole LSD and DMT and the whole psychedelic culture was created by government people looking to destabilize society and MK Ultra and all that sort of stuff, CIA. What's your especially with that stuff? Is there anything to that? There's reams of evidence I've seen from people like this. I'm not sure that it matters, but you were there. Were there guys in black suits and sunglasses? What was that like?

Dennis: No. I think that that's a misinformation that's been deliberately propagated. I would have to say, if the CIA deliberately released these psychedelics into society to destabilize, what would be the purpose of that, to destabilize society? In some sense, society was already in turmoil when this stuff happened. Then the other aspect is that these things have been used indigenously for thousands of years. They were only new to us in the 60s, when it began to come to the attention of mass consciousness, or mass media. These are all part of the traditions that are thousands of

years old. I don't think the government had any more idea than anyone else what the social consequences of these psychedelics escaping into the culture were. There was no plot. I think they were as surprised as everyone.

I am not a believer in conspiracy theories by and large because my approach to it is, nobody knows what's going on. The idea with the conspiracy theory is somebody knows what's going on. Actually, no. Nobody has a clue.

Dave: I find that most things that are labeled as conspiracy theories are emergent behaviors from many, many microdecisions that are made, so they look pretty bad. Every now and then, there really are bad people doing bad things, but.

Dennis: Well, of course.

Dave: I can tell you, if bad people thought they were going to get an advantage by introducing hallucinogens into society, I think their plan, I would say it probably backfired, but there are people-

Dennis: I would say so.

Dave: -people who listen to Bulletproof Radio and friends who would rabidly disagree with that, and I'm not saying that I know, but I'll talk about my experiences and incredible healing that I've seen many people experience using hallucinogens in a healing setting, not at Disneyland. I don't think that's particularly a wise use of these things, and I don't think they're for kids, and they're not for parties. They certainly have some power. Tell me about what happened when you went with your brother Terence to La Chorrera.

Dennis: I'm always reluctant to discuss this on podcasts because it's difficult to explain. Even 40 years later, it's difficult to explain. That's one reason why I wrote this book. If I could mention it, I will.

Dave: Please, plug your book. Bulletproof listeners love to read.

Dennis: It's called, "The Brotherhood of the Screaming Abyss." I even have a copy here. I don't know if you can see it.

Dave: Yeah, "Brotherhood of the Screaming Abyss."

Dennis: My life with Terence McKenna. That is my memoir, and those people who know Terence's writing will recognize this as a sequel to, in some ways, his book called "True Hallucinations," which focuses much more on our adventures in the Amazon at La Chorrera. Why did we go to the Amazon and to La Chorrera in 1971? This is part of this story about DMT. We decided that seriously, that there was nothing going on societally or in terms of our career, or anything else that was more important than DMT. We thought really this maybe is a signal from an alien civilization. We didn't know, but it was related to our frustration, in some ways, that the DMT experience was so short. We actually found out, we researched the literature. Nobody knew at that time that ayahuasca contained DMT. Ethnobotany was still being sorted out, but we

discovered a reference to another preparation used by the Witoto Indians, which were based in La Chorrera, Southern Columbia, called oo-koo-he. They called it oo-koo-he, and it was an orally-active preparation made from the sap of these trees that belong to the genus virola, members of the nutmeg family.

Other tribes all through northern Venezuela and Columbia make snuffs out of related trees, so they get around that MAO inhibition thing by making it into a snuff. We knew all that. The ethnobotany had been studied, and then this paper surfaced about an oral preparation involving virola. We thought, "Aha. Maybe this will be an orally-active form. Maybe we can spend more time in this dimension, in this place, and understand better what was going on." That was the quasi-scientific motive, I guess you could say, for us to go down there in search of this rare drug that no white man as far as we know had ever taken.

We went to La Chorrera. We went where the action was. What actually happened, and if you read Terence's book or my book, when we got to La Chorrera, and that's a whole story in itself how we got there, when we got to La Chorrera, we had met an anthropologist on the way in who was studying the Witoto. We knew he was there. We expected to encounter him. We'd been told in Bogota that he was with his people. We did encounter him. He was utterly appalled, number one, that we'd showed up, and we were every bit as colorful as any of the tribes. We were a wild-looking bunch. We could have stepped right out of any street corner and paid ashberries We had beards down to here. We had bells. We had bangles. We were a colorful tribe on our own right.

We showed up. We told him what we were after, and he, again, was appalled. It was like, "How do you even know about this? You're not supposed to discuss this. This is madness. You can't go in there and ask for this thing." Well, it turns out, he was a little paranoid, eventually. We said, "Okay, yeah, whatever, doc." Then we went on to La Chorrera, but we said, "Okay, we'll be cool."

We got to La Chorrera, and we said, "Well, we'll just hang out until the moment seems appropriate, and we can ask somebody about oo-koo-he. Maybe they can lead us to it." La Chorrera was a place that, it was a mission village. Forest around the village had been cleared, maybe a couple hundred acres had been turned into pasture. There were zebu cattle there, and the zebu cattle, the preferred sub-strait for psilocybe cubensis, which is the pan-tropical, big golden cap psilocybin mushroom, they were literally everywhere in the pasture. We knew what they were, because we'd done our homework. We had very little experience with them, but we knew what they were, and we thought, "Oh, great. We can have fun with these while we're waiting for oo-koo-he, the real mystery to emerge."

We said, "Well, great. We have lots of cannabis. We have stropharia cubensis," as it was called back then, "so we're good. We can just hang out and enjoy these very nice non-toxic psychedelics and see what emerge." It quickly emerged that the mushrooms, not oo-koo-he, when we eventually found the oo-koo-he, it was disappointing. It wasn't really that spectacular. We started eating mushrooms on a very casual basis and not really paying attention, and often, because we didn't have all that much to eat. The food we brought was inadequate, and you can make quite a nice bowl of soup or an omelette with psilocybin mushrooms.



Dave: Good God.

Dennis: We were consuming them kind of pretty much all the time. It quickly got pretty weird. It started suggesting, it stimulated conversation for sure among us. It started presenting all these ideas that were what my brother would like to call "funny ideas," very unconventional ideas about things you could do to essentially operate on yourself to do a psycho-surgery on your DNA. We did those things and we did what the mushroom told us to do, and it was very much like being instructed by some intelligent entity. In our reference frame at that time, we pretty much assumed that it was either the mushroom or something being channeled through the mushroom that was telling us to do this biophysical experiment that was supposed to transform our DNA in a very special way.

I'm not going to go any further into, except to say that, we conceived an experiment, and we performed the experiment. What we predicted could happen could not possibly happen because it violated the laws of physics and every other law of decency and whatever. Could not happen, but we had sort of talked ourselves into a, I guess, a cognitive corner where something had to happen when we did this experiment. What happened was that we both had a simultaneous altered state episode that lasted a couple of weeks, and the predictions of the experiment didn't come true, but it was like something had to give. What gave was our grasp on reality, mine in particular. I fully recovered, I hope, and as far as I know, and so that was the experiment.

I don't want to go into detail because we don't have enough time.

Dave: Sure.

Dennis: I want you to read my book. It's all unpacked there in quite a bit of detail. It's very hard to explain.

Dave: Just based on that, a lot of people listening to Bulletproof Radio today will want to pick up your book, "The Brotherhood of the Screaming Abyss," and read what is one of the stories about very pioneering work in psychedelics, and very fascinating, just from a historical perspective, not to mention if you're interested in pursuing this kind of medicine. I think it's worth understanding where it came from, and at least where it came from in the West.

Dennis: Yeah. I think one of the take home lessons from our adventure there and the experiment at La Chorrera was we really were clueless. We thought we knew, much less. It's almost an example of how not to approach these things. We were lucky. We learned a lot. I would not suggest that anyone else take that approach. Study up. Know what you're doing before you get into this. We didn't, but we learned quickly.

Dave: Someone has to step off the cliff sometimes.

Dennis: Exactly.

Dave: I understand and respect that. You mentioned a couple times, the mushrooms or the plants can be channeling some kind of intelligence or messages from aliens. 40 years later, what's your verdict?

Dennis: I wish I knew. I still have not figured that out, because it certainly seems often with mushrooms, with ayahuasca, with these other profound psychedelics, it often seems that you're in touch with an intelligence that is not you. Maybe it's a part of you that is presenting as not you. That would be the reductionist perspective. Maybe it actually is a different intelligence. It's either the plant or something that speaks through the plant, and I don't think we can decide. I don't think even neuroscience can decide. This is a difficult question, and it goes to some of the most fundamental issues about what is the nature of reality, and what is the nature of our perception of reality? Is the brain something that takes information in? Is it the detector, or a generator of consciousness, the brain?

I think it's partly both, but I think that the brain takes information in from the environment, combines it with associated processes, and essentially generates a hallucination that we call reality. That's the hallucination that we live in. It's partly, at least, synthesized by our neural machinery. That's what the brain does. It's a reality generator. It generates a model of reality that we can inhabit, and it makes more sense than reality itself, which physics tells us doesn't look anything like what we think of as reality. It's mostly empty space and energy fields and all this stuff.

The brain is an organ that enables us to construct a model of reality, which is another way of saying, a hallucination or a dream or a movie. It writes the movie. We are the producers, directors, and stars of our own movie, as is everyone. I don't think we can really answer that question. What I would say is if this information is coming from something outside, another dimension or whatever, that pretty much throws into question everything we think we understand about the way the world is, and we've got a lot of explaining to do. We have to examine some fundamental assumptions about how the world is. This is a problem for we Westerners who are steeped in science, tend to and climb toward reductionism. Of course, indigenous people are, it's like, "Well, what did you think it was?" They're just kind of matter-of-fact about it. Yeah. This is it. That's what we experience.

Dave: If you could, what Stan Grof did, and for listeners, Stan Grof wrote books about the holotropic universe, and he treated 10,000 patients with LSD as a licensed psychiatric, and had profound healing effects. He uses a type of breathing that makes you hallucinate when LSD was made illegal. I've actually done his breathing exercises with him personally when he was in his late 80's, and what he mapped out was profound. There's people, when you look at the statistics, when lots of people do hallucinogens, or go into altered states, even without any sort of chemical assistance, they generally see the same kinds of things. I've looked into the work of other groups like International Association of Consciousness out of Brazil. These people are there mapping things out the way scientists do, and saying, "Well, if you take a statistic of 50,000 people who went on a journey, whether or not it was a meditation-driven or a chemical-driven," they're finding the same things and they're seeing the same things, and they're drawing pictures of these things and describing them in intricate detail. That's familiar to other people who have been there.

I don't know. That looks very scientific to me, and I'm a huge fan of measurement and of using science to look at the question of consciousness instead of to look away from it and to explain it away, which has been the paradigm. Your experiment in the jungle back then and a lot of your work and your brother's work over time has the next generation of scientists just openly doing what happened in the 1700s.

Dennis: What was prohibited back in the day. Now it's almost legitimate.

Dave: Almost.

Dennis: It's getting there. You and I are on the same page that way. I am not anti-scientific, right? I think measurement and scientific verification, science is a powerful tool. One thing that psychedelics will put front and center is how limited science is in terms of its methodology and in terms of what there is to know versus the little tiny slice of reality that science can say, "Well, we've got it figured out here." No. Science only has a tiny part of reality figured out. Even that is subject to question, because it's always subject to question. If science is done properly, you're always trying to invalidate your models, trying to find out what will invalidate my theory or my understanding, or how can I revise it to be better, to better account for the data? Science is good, but it's limited, and especially when it comes to these types of inner experiences.

Terence was much more dismissive of science than I am. His position was, science will never really figure this out, so what good is it? My position is, okay, let's not be too hasty. It might figure it out, or it might figure out some part of it. There's a lot to know, and we have to be cognizant of the limits. I think for me, the take home lesson often from psychedelics is just a reminder of how limited our knowledge sphere is. No matter how it grows, there's always more to be known than we actually know or have consensus on. That doesn't mean we shouldn't try to understand it. Science can carry us a certain distance in that direction.

Dave: When did you realize that you could use psychedelics therapeutically and not just recreationally? At some point, you must have come to that conclusion, that people were healing or changing from these.

Dennis: Yeah. I have seen it, again, from my own experience. Even though when we went to La Chorrera and we had these incredible experiences that were probably very dangerous. In some ways, we're probably lucky that we came out both alive and still relatively sane. That said, looking back on it from the perspective of 45 years or whatever, I don't regret it for a minute. I feel that it was a very healing experience for me. You can apply a couple of models to it, if you want. It was a prolonged psychosis. Okay, it was a prolonged psychosis. I prefer to think of it as a shamanic initiation, although I'm not a shaman. I'm the last person to say I'm a shaman, but it had all the stages of shamanic initiation, and the ultimate thing being that after I reintegrated, I was a stronger, better, wiser, and certainly more humble person than I was when I went into it.

I don't recommend that people should go out and take overdoses of mushrooms and have prolonged psychoses, but I guess for me personally, I realize, this was actually a beneficial thing that happened to me. If it had been interrupted, and there were people in our party who were

appalled at what was going on and thought we should get to the nearest mental institution as quickly as possible, being in the Amazon, that wasn't possible. We were lucky. Terence and I, we knew what was going on. We thought we did, and the process was able to unfold in its own time and eventually resolve. I think that was ultimately healing.

As far as in general, the therapeutic potential of psychedelics, it was pretty thoroughly explored in the 60s, using primarily LSD, before all that research was shut down. For alcoholism and depression and a number of different things, and it's taken 40 years or so to come back to that because the research was promising. The research protocols were maybe not as rigorous as they are now, but the results were clear. They were unambiguous. Here's the substance that could potentially help many people with various, a whole spectrum of psychological problems.

Then the research was shut down. It was like a spasm of hysteria that sort of swept through society. Decisions made by politicians regarding scientific and medical issues, in my opinion, that's always dangerous because they're usually willfully ignorant about all those topics. They should have good advice, and they didn't. The decisions were not made for sound reasons. It was a reaction to societal hysteria. The research which was promising was shut down, and it took a long time to reopen it and take a more sober look at it, and really that started in the early '90s with Rick Strassman's pioneering work on DMT. Then that kind of opened the door a crack, and then more recent research, good, rigorous protocols, good data, I wouldn't say it's a floodgate, but there's a lot more work going on now, and actually psychedelics are emerging as something that is very promising for treatment of PTSD and addiction and intractable depression, OCD, even possibly migraine headache. That's pretty clear.

The therapeutic potential is clear. The challenge is, how to take these substances which have long been reviled and prohibited. How do you reintegrate them into medicine? If they have better properties, and frankly, mental health care, psychiatry, in bio-medicine, the way it's practiced today, is kind of a joke, in my opinion, in that it heavily relies on psychopharmaceuticals. It's entirely drug-based. The psychopharmaceuticals just don't work very well. Psychedelics work much better for many of these things, but there is no revenue model. What pharmaceutical company is going to develop a drug like psilocybin which maybe you take 3 or 4 times in your life, versus another drug that you take 4 times a day for the rest of your life? That's their revenue model.

They have no interest in developing psychedelics as therapeutic medicines. It's got to happen through some other way, and there has to be a regulatory response, some change in the regulatory framework, because these psychedelics are classified as Schedule 1 controlled substances, right up there with heroin and all the most dangerous drugs. They're classified as no medical value. That's number 1, inherently dangerous, can't be used safely, all that stuff, none of which is actually true.

Dave: It's probably not going to happen in a big way in the US because the regulatory bodies are very heavily influenced by the pharmaceutical companies, but if you were in an emerging economy country, if you were Cuba or maybe you're running China and you want to get an unfair advantage, there's definitely, we'll call it 'medical tourism' for these things that's happening, and I would be surprised if some countries didn't benefit unfairly by opening up their laws. I say



unfairly. It's perfectly fair. They have more flexible legal systems that let people control their biology the way they want, cool. People go there and spend money, and then their own populations benefit, and they cut their healthcare costs and things like that.

Dennis: Right.

Dave: Or maybe they have civil war and rebellion. I just don't think so. That doesn't appear to be what happens when people start healing their traumas using hallucinogenic plant medicines that have been around for thousands of years.

Dennis: It is true that psychedelics are not only therapeutic for individuals, but used in the right context, they're therapeutic for societies, and ultimately for the whole planet, because they do tend to make us more compassionate. They tend to make us better human beings, and able to kind of step outside our own personal box and appreciate how it is for other people. This was one of the reasons they wanted to suppress LSD in the '60s, because people were taking LSD and saying, "You want me to go to Vietnam and kill these people? Why would I want to do that?" They can't have a drug that puts these kinds of prohibited thoughts into people's heads.

I would say a couple of things in response to what you said. I wouldn't be too sure. There are efforts under way now to legalize or change the schedule status of a couple of these things, MDMA and psilocybin.

Dave: With MAPS?

Dennis: And Heffter as well. We're focused a lot on psilocybin, and so we're quietly working, much more quietly than MAPS, because we tend to be the quiet one. We are also working to effect a schedule change for psilocybin. I think within optimistically 10 years or 5 years-

Dave: Wow.

Dennis: These 2, at least, are going to be available to therapists for use in various protocols. That's going to have a huge impact on psychiatry. In fact, it's going to overturn the current psychiatric paradigm.

Dave: That is powerful, powerful work, and I support your mission there. If you can pull that off in 5 or 10 years, that is truly remarkable. We're seeing the public opinion shift and that has to precede a regulatory change.

Dennis: Right.

Dave: I do have my concerns about the level of collusion between Big Pharma and these regulations and these laws.

Dennis: That's true-

Dave: We'll see.

Dennis: -but an important aspect of this is that many of these things come from plants, or mushrooms. They come from things that grow in the jungle. You can't restrict access to these things. You can grow them, and in fact, that's a revolutionary act to grow these plants and figure out how to use them and share that knowledge and the plants with other people. That's kind of a way to push back against Big Pharma.

Dave: Oh yeah.

Dennis: Then the other thing is the work that the Heffter is doing, and MAPS is doing. Our approach has been, "Well, if you do good science, that can't be ignored, and they'll have to acknowledge that." If we do good science, and there's solid data that they have therapeutic effects, they will more or less be forced to approve it for those types of uses. They may not fund it, but they'll have to approve it, and that will make a huge difference.

Dave: It sure has taken a long time for that to work on even simple things like nutrition and the ketosis diet. A book was published the year I was born on ketosis that talks about the benefits, and 43, I was obese half my life because that was never accepted by the powers that be. That's finally turning, but it seems to be like a 40 or 50-year cycle, maybe with the internet it's only a 5 or 10 year cycle because when people talk about it enough, just because they're listening to podcasts, heaven forbid, that they may just stand up and say, "I'm not willing to wait. I don't want to be old when I'm allowed to do this thing that I think might help me with my trauma," or whatever else. I'm hopeful from that front and wary of the level of regulations that are in place for economic reasons, not for my own reasons.

Dennis: Right. As you pointed out, there is kind of a burgeoning medical tourism industry or phenomenon for psychedelics, especially for ayahuasca. Many people are going to Peru or other countries to experience it. That is a two-edged sword, because a lot of these places are not well-run and they're not genuine traditions because it's had this economic impact on these societies, and people see that, "Well, I can hang my shingle out and call myself an ayahuascarero and gringos will come down and pay me lots of money." There are good ones. There are traditionally, well-trained ones, and many, many who are basically charlatans. There's no mechanism to sort out which is which. You have to know the territory.

Dave: It's gotten to the point that The Onion just recently ran a spoof about this. I'm guessing you would have seen it.

Dennis: Yes, I did. Very funny, and sadly, very appropriate.

Dave: For our listeners, it's a satire newspaper, and you probably know The Onion because they're famous, but they ran an article about how they interviewed a shaman who was just sick and tired of all the tech CEOs coming down to take ayahuasca in their hoodies and Birkenstocks and generally just completely skewering the whole medical tourism for ayahuasca movement. I'm kind of a proponent of that. I went down to Peru and I think it was '99 or '97, somewhere in the late 90's, when I did it, and I still have some pictures of it, so I could probably date it from then. I went down there and I didn't know I was going to do ayahuasca, but I'd read about it. I was

really interested and I just made a few discreet inquiries and there wasn't a charlatan industry back then because no one wanted it.

Dennis: Right.

Dave: Eventually I found the guy and he showed up and had the black jaguar obsidian thing and was a real, legitimate jungle shaman. I had a really interesting and amazing experience with it, but I think if I went down there now, it would be a very different experience, and I've learned that you should be really cautious about who you do these things with because your defenses are down. You're basically programmable when you take these things.

Dennis: Yes, that's true. You have to be careful now. There is no overarching regulatory body, and there's reason for there not to be, and there's also a rational argument that there should be some level of regulation, but right now, you're kind of on your own. If you go to some place like Iquitos, which is the epicenter of this phenomenon in Peru, you'll be asked 2 or 3 times before you get to your hotel. Picked up at the airport, the taxi driver will say, "Do you want to go to an ayahuasca ceremony," and if you say "Yes," you'll be taken somewhere. There'll be somebody, maybe the brother-in-law of the taxi. There's no way to know.

Dave: Holy crap. I had no idea.

Dennis: Yeah.

Dave: I had to go to the hotel and the guy had to send someone out to the jungle. It was a lot of doing, and they're like, "Why does this guy want to do that?"

Dennis: It's completely out of control, in my opinion. It's an interesting phenomenon, Dave. I have mixed feelings about it.

Dave: I can see.

Dennis: I look at this partly as an evolutionary biologist. I think what we're seeing here is symbiosis and co-evolution with a teacher plant. The indigenous people regard ayahuasca as a plant teacher, as they do many of these psychedelics. Co-evolution is not easy. We're at sort of this rough spot, but it's like ayahuasca has left the jungle and it's gone on to the global stage and I think of it as a kind of ambassador for Gaia, for the Gaian mind, and it's trying to get its message out. It's getting a little bit hysterical because we're not listening. The problematic monkeys are not listening, and the message is, we're wrecking the place. So many people come back with this sort of renewed or rediscovered perspective on our relationship with nature, and how we're losing that. We have to change our attitude before we can begin to take steps to avert all the challenges we face on the environmental level.

Dave: I would dearly love to spray ayahuasca on Monsanto's headquarters, if sprayed ayahuasca worked.

Dennis: It will work, but there are other approaches to this.



Dave: I know, but if it did.

Dennis: Right.

Dave: We are destroying the soil, and I actually believe that there is an earth intelligence.

Dennis: I do, too.

Dave: You look at what roots do, you look at what fungus does in the soil, and the soil is a living organism. It just is.

Dennis: Right. The whole Gaia hypothesis, which basically came from James Lovelock, originally formulated it, it was dismissed when it came out. Now, it turns out, actually, it's not "Woo-Woo" stuff. It's pretty solid science.

Dave: There's even a big magnetic field around the planet that changes, just like the one around our heads, and it's actually kind of scary when you look at it. Wow, we're really jacking this thing up and we have no idea how it works.

Dennis: That's true.

Dave: If you decide to break something, and you know how it works, that's one thing, because you can probably fix it or change it.

Dennis: Right.

Dave: There's a couple levels of knowledge that we just haven't quite figured out now, even about what's going on in our gut bacteria, in the inner workings of our cellular biology.

Dennis: Exactly.

Dave: It's a lot, and funny. People used, I believe it was LSD, to understand DNA in our cellular biology. We've been using plant medicines to get knowledge. Steve Jobs, Apple, a lot of these interesting things come about because we're using these things as, call them smart drugs or whatever else, but they're changing our consciousness and making us more aware of what's around us, and when you pay attention, there is a planet and it does have some consciousness. It's just not like ours, at least, not our perception.

Dennis: It's not like ours. They're catalysts. They let you step temporarily out of your reference frame, and examine phenomenon and maybe yourself, if you're in the therapeutic context, but just examine phenomenon in a novel way. That's why Kary Mullis and James Crick and Steve Jobs and all these people had these wonderful creative ideas because they were cognitive catalysts in a certain way. There's nothing delusional about it. Their insights were valid. They had them on the drug, but then they could go back and say, "Well, yeah, this actually holds up." I think that that is one of the applications of psychedelics. Not strictly therapeutic. They give us a different

way to view the world, and understand phenomena, so you could almost think of them as they're like a scientific instrument, in a certain way.

Dave: What do you think about micro-dosing? There's a huge thing out. I've talked about it pretty openly. There's a huge thing happening in Silicon Valley now, as an extension of smart drugs, where people are micro-dosing either mushrooms or LSD at very low doses, every single day or every 3rd day, for a substantial period of time, like a month at a time. What's your take on that?

Dennis: I have a number of different perspectives on it. I have to say I have not micro-dosed, so I don't really have the benefit of experience. Sometimes, on the one hand, I think, well, micro-dosing is fine, but are these people who are afraid to go the full Monty? You've got to learn things from a micro-dose. Imagine how much more you might learn if you actually took a full dose in a proper set and setting. That's one thing.

The other thing I wonder about sometimes is, the psychedelics produce tolerance very readily, so that's one of the things they do rapidly, produce tolerance. If you take a micro-dose every day, by the 4th day, it's not going to have much of an effect, at least in terms of what we understand from what we know about the pharmacology of these things. Ultimately, my other position is, well, if people want to micro-dose, they feel a benefit from it, let them do it. Why not?

I generally think that people's relationship to these substances should be as unregulated as possible. Education, not prohibition is the answer. People should do what they do based on informed decisions, basically.

Dave: My perspective there is really straightforward. It's my biology, and I'll do with it what I want. Anyone who thinks they have a right to tell me what I'm allowed to do with my body, is basically declaring war on me, and they can die.

Dennis: I totally agree.

Dave: And come back. We can do a dance or whatever, but don't mess with these cells. They're mine.

Dennis: Exactly, exactly. If I could, maybe it's come up on your show already, but another organization I love to put a plug in for is erowid.org, if you know that.

Dave: Oh, yeah, great site. Okay.

Dennis: Yeah.

Dave: E-R-O-W-I-D.

Dennis: E-R-O-W-I-D. Yeah. Best online resource on psychoactive drugs of all kinds. Wonderful people, Earth and Fire, Erowid are great, and if you're going to mess with these drugs, bookmark that one and go check it out before you take anything new. Solid information.

- Dave: There's a crazy segment of society who would be like, "Oh, I took my Robitussin cough medicine and I distilled it and I poured butane in it, and I extracted the DM and I injected it with a tuning fork," and you're like, "Okay, guys, chill. That is not necessary for you to explore your consciousness, and it's not safe." I love it that Erowid is willing to write it down, let people talk about it, and just have a dialog. But don't go nuts. There's plenty of very potent powerful things you can do without hairspray in it.
- Dennis: Yeah, exactly. My position is, well, stick with the plants. You know what you're getting, and they're coming out of a long tradition of use. Yeah, of course, you can work with synthetics and LSD is a semi-synthetic compound, but by and large, this whole designer drug area, Earth and Fire gave a wonderful talk on this whole designer drug phenomenon at a conference I was at recently. It's impossible to know what you're getting. If you have a plant, you probably know what you're getting, especially if you grew it yourself.
- Dave: If you grew it yourself, but even then, there's different strains. Different strains of pot can do radically different things. Then you get storage and processing. You get moldy pot. You know it doesn't do the same thing as good pot. It smells bad. There's variants there, and one of the things is to cultivate awareness. "Okay, that didn't work very well, even though I thought it was going to. I'm not going to do that again."
- Dennis: Right.
- Dave: To circle back on the micro-dosing thing, a friend micro-dosed LSD every day for 30 days. The experience that I heard about was similar to one of the racetams, but there was not a tolerance that happened at all at very low doses, like 5% of a normal, full tab.
- Dennis: That's possible.
- Dave: It was pretty interesting, and definitely increasing creativity and especially around words. They were able to associate words, find words better. It was pretty darn easy. You go a little bit heavy, and you're feeling a little more open than you really should be, and you're probably not as funny as you think you are.
- Dennis: Right.
- Dave: Kind of perspective.
- Dennis: Are you ready for that board meeting in 5 minutes? Yeah. I know. It's problematic.
- Dave: That may or may not have happened on stage at some point with this friend of mine. That sort of thing is a risk, but I do believe if you're working in a cognitive profession, where creativity and association and making new things is part of what you do, there's probably a great argument as a cognitive enhancing strategy entirely different from healing trauma, from hallucinogen things. It's just not well-explored at all, and I'd like to see that explored more.
- Dennis: I think it is being explored. It definitely is being explored unofficially. Like you say, many people

at Silicon Valley are doing this. Eventually there probably will be a clinical study. There may already be clinical studies to kind of put some data behind this and say, "Is this a real effect? Does it improve cognitive function?" I might mention just in connection with this, when we did this bio-medical study of ayahuasca back in the '90s with the UDV, one of the churches down there, in Brazil, we administered a battery, a number of different psychological tests and compared those to controls. Among the things we measured were verbal and cognitive ability, recall, memory functions and all that. The members of the UDV were better than controls.

Dave: Wow.

Dennis: They were statistically better. Not greatly, not a huge effect, but enough to show statistically. The question we were trying to answer was not, "Are they better?" What we were wondering is, "Are they worse? Are they impaired by their lifelong use of ayahuasca?" No indication at all that they were impaired, either mentally or physically. They are remarkable people. Some of the people in our cohort, in our study cohort, have been taking ayahuasca every 2 weeks for 40 years, and in excellent mental and physical health. I actually think it has a lot of physical as well as psychological benefits.

Dave: It seems to. I know a leader in the personal development field who has done 70 journeys. Pretty darn substantial number of journeys given that you threw up for each of them. That's a non-trivial commitment, right?

Dennis: Right.

Dave: He does it because it works.

Dennis: That's how I feel, too. I've learned so much from this medicine. I think that the indigenous people have it right. These are teachers. You learn from them. They have a tremendous amount of wisdom. They don't talk to you like you and I are talking, but there is a transfer of information, and there's a learning process that goes on. Who knows?

Dave: To say that takes a certain amount of courage, because there are a group of people who will reflexively say, "That's crazy talk." Here's the deal. I don't care if someone thinks it's crazy talk. If it added value to you, and you think it made you a better person, or improved the quality of your life or your thinking or something else, good. It doesn't matter if people think it's crazy talk.

Dennis: Generally, the people that say that, they'll reflexively say that. They obviously haven't had the experience.

Dave: Yeah.

Dennis: That's also one of the great things about psychedelics that I often talk about. You don't have to have faith. You don't have to have any belief. You have to have courage. That's all you need is the courage to drink the cup or smoke the pipe or whatever. Have the experience and make of it what you will. Don't believe Terence McKenna or Dennis McKenna or Andy Wile or any of these people. God gave you an analytical brain. You can figure this stuff out for yourself, but you must

have the experience, and if you want to make a pronouncement about it before you've had the experience, I'm sorry, why should I listen to you? You're not qualified to comment. That's my position.

Dave: Very well said. The true scientist is probably going to experiment a little bit and see what it does, given that the harm appears to be pretty darn low.

Dennis: Pretty darn low.

Dave: Well, Dennis, it's been an amazing pleasure to have you on Bulletproof Radio. There's a question I'd like to ask you that I've asked all of the guests on this show.

Dennis: Okay.

Dave: If someone came to you tomorrow and said, "Look, based on everything you've seen and experienced and done in your life, I want your advice. I want to be better at every single thing I do. I want to kick more ass at life. What are the three most important things I need to know?" What would you say?

Dennis: To get more out of life?

Dave: Just to be better at everything.

Dennis: First of all, never forget how little you know. I think we touched on this before, which I don't think of as a depressing thing. I think of it as a joyous thing.

Dave: It's exciting.

Dennis: If you like to learn, there's so much for you to learn. Try to keep the attitude of a child. Keep your curiosity, because the world is a marvelous place, and we only understand part of it. That's a big one right there. Second one, don't take yourself too seriously. Don't take anybody else too seriously. Keep your sense of humor. That's an important one. We don't understand much, and we're just sort of along for the ride, so why the frowny face? We have good reason to be curious and to enjoy life and enjoy each other. The third one? Well, I guess mainly, probably, as a person, I don't practice this as much as I should, but the third one is guard your health. Stay as healthy as you can in mind and body. That's the most important thing you have. That and the people you love. We are along for the ride. We are having a hell of a ride, so keep yourself in shape so that you can enjoy the ride. Like I say, I should take that advice more to heart. I do my best.

Dave: You're living a good life, that's for sure.

Dennis: I am very lucky in that way.

Dave: Dennis, thanks a lot for being on Bulletproof Radio. Your book is "The Brotherhood of the Screaming Abyss," and it's available on Amazon and bookstores?

- Dennis: Amazon and from the website of the same name, brotherhoodofthescreamingabyss.com.
- Dave: All right.
- Dennis: You can get a signed copy there. Amazon doesn't do signed copies. Either place. There's a Kindle edition. Yeah, so thank you for letting me mention that.
- Dave: Of course. Are there any other URLs or resources you'd like to direct people to? Our Bulletproof readers love to read books.
- Dennis: The other one, of course, is we mentioned erowid.org, but also Heffter Research Institute, which is heffter.org.
- Dave: H-E-F
- Dennis: H-E-F-F-T-E-R. We're a non-profit. We've been around 20 years, and in many ways. Heffter is leading the charge when it comes to developing some of these therapeutic protocols. MAPS is very focused on MDMA, and Heffter is kind of focused on psilocybin, not because we planned it that way. It just happens to be good for many things. I guess the third thing I could mention. I won't say much about it, but I've started a start-up company now. We finally have formed an alliance with some friends who actually understand business, which I don't. They've taken that part over and so we have a start-up company that we're very optimistic about. It's called Symbio Life Sciences, and hopefully you'll be hearing more about it.
- Dave: Excellent. Brotherhoodofthescreamingabyss.com, erowid.org, and symbio.com.
- Dennis: Symbiolifesciences.com
- Dave: Oh, symbiolifesciences.com. We'll put all those in the show notes for you, in case you're driving and you don't want to get a ticket because you just tried to type that into your phone while you ran into the guy in front of you.
- Dennis: Yes, don't do that. Don't do that.
- Dave: All right.
- Dennis: All right, Dave, it's been a real pleasure. You're a wonderful interviewer. I've really enjoyed this. I hope we can circle back on this one of these days. It's been fun.
- Dave: Thanks, Dennis. You're always welcome to come back on the show.
- Dennis: Okay, thank you.
- Dave: If you enjoyed today's show, you know what to do. Head on over and pick up a copy of Dennis' book, because, well, it's a fun read and you'll probably learn something. Please also do heed the



multiple warnings that both of us talked about here. Don't play around with this stuff, if you decide to do it. Know it's probably illegal where you live. I don't know where you live. There's a global audience for this. It also can be dangerous, and people can take advantage of you, and etc. etc., but it also can have some profound healing. Find people you trust if you're going to do it and obey all local laws, regulations, talk to your doctors, and do all that other kind of stuff you're supposed to do. Have an awesome day.

Dave: Thanks for watching. Don't miss out. To keep getting great videos like this that help you kick more ass at life, subscribe to the Bulletproof YouTube channel at bulletproofexec.com/youtube, and stay bulletproof.