



Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 13 with Jim Fadiman

Psychedelic Healing: From Microdosing to Transcendence

March 27, 2018

[Intro]

[0:00:00]

(Intro Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)

Amber: Hello friends! Welcome to the Medicine Stories podcast. This is Episode 13, and I am your host Amber Magnolia Hill. Today I am talking to Jim Fadiman.

Jim is a dear friend of mine and just one of the coolest people ever. He's a giant in the world of psychedelic research. He's one of the elders. He's one of the original people there in the 60s, doing scientific experiments and using these medicines himself and learning how to guide people on psychedelic journeys. He is a writer, a researcher, has a PhD in psychology. And his main work that he's known for is the book *The Psychedelic Explorer's Guide: Safe, Therapeutic, and Sacred Journeys*, which really forms the basis for this interview. Review. He's also — I don't know if he's the inventor of. Should have asked — but certainly the popularizer of micro dosing. So it's very likely that you've heard of microdose seen or maybe that you have microdosed yourself. That's all Jim, like, you know about that because of Jim's efforts.

So sorry, I have a little cold that I am just trying to get over right now.

I first. Okay, so as I've talked about before on the show, I had a really big psychedelic psilocybin mushroom experience when I was 16. And I had no idea, no idea that it was gonna be what it was. I just thought like, "Hey, cool, we're gonna shroom you know. I smoke weed. I drink alcohol, like, no I'm sure man. It's cool." And it ended up being this totally transcendent, beautiful experience.

So I was always interested in psychedelics or really, like, deeply interested, wanted to understand how they work, like, why that happened, how the substances could, could make something so incredible happen in my body and in my mind. And around 2012 or 13, I was listening to some podcast, and they mentioned that psychedelics were being studied -- psilocybin, specifically -- with end of life anxiety in terminal cancer patients with incredible results in lessening the fear and the terror that these people were feeling at the end of their lives. And this just blew me away.

I was already starting to work in death and home funerals and conscious dying at that point. And that these two worlds were being brought together, I mean, like, I remember the moment that I heard that and made the realization and of course, it just made so much sense that that these medicines could alleviate such a deeply-rooted human anxiety.

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Amber: So I kind of dove right back into psychedelic research. I hadn't been really in that realm for a while. And I found out that The Psychedelic Science Conference was coming up in April of 2013. And I took my tax return from that year, and I bought myself tickets. And I tacked on extra workshops at the beginning and the end of the weekend. And the workshop at the beginning was taught by Jim. I don't remember what it was about now, but I, I just liked Jim so much. And I met my friend Colin that day. Hi Colin!

And then a year later, the women — The Psychedelic Science Conference happened again last year in 2017. And I didn't go because I had, you know, a new baby, but I really hope to go to the next one whenever that is. It's put on by MAPS, The Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies. And you should definitely check out maps.org if you're at all interested in psychedelic healing. They have all the videos online from the last conference. There's just Gabor Maté. Jim, all these other people, big names, really intelligent, wonderful people and fascinating research topics.

So the following year, the women with whom I had co-founded the Full Circle Living and Dying Collective up here in the Grass Valley Nevada City area of Northern California and I were interested in attending this conference called the Conscious Dying Summit. It ended up only happening that one year in fall of 2014.

And I was looking at the website, and I saw that Jim was going to be one of the presenters. And so I was like, "Okay, I really want to go. I'd love to see this man again, I just, I value so much what he brings to the world. And I'm pretty sure I already had *The Psychedelic Explorer's Guide* by then, too. And so we went, and Jim and I — it was a lot smaller than the Psychedelic Science Conference. You know, there's thousands of people there. And Jim is like a superstar. This was much smaller.-- and so Jim and I and his wife, Dorothy, who was there with him, we got to really spend a lot of time together, you know, eating our meals together and just talking in between things and got to become friends with them. And one of the women in my group, and I went down and stayed at their house for a night, I don't know, a couple months or a year later or something.

[0:05:32]

Amber: And when I started thinking about doing this podcast, I knew that I wanted him to be on here, I knew that I was going to be looking at psychedelics and encouraging people to do them in a safe, sacred, and therapeutic way. So I'm really excited to present this information to anyone who may not have it. And even if you already do have it, even if you already have an amazing psychedelic experiences, Jim just has so much to offer.

So, you know, you have to be wary when approaching a psychedelic experience we talk about. Like, not everyone should do them. Not everyone should do them at any time. There's just so many variables, you know what's going on. But I truly believe — and I know this is a big statement to make, so I have thought this through — I truly believe that nothing has as much potential to change the world as psychedelics do because of how deeply they literally rewire the brain.

And so, you know, we clearly need some gigantic paradigm shifts to happen on a societal level, if we are going to continue to be able to occupy this planet. And people don't change easily, especially conservative people. It's kind of like the meaning of the word "conservative", you know, not wanting to change, wanting things to remain the way they've always been, including your own mind and belief systems.

And so what psychedelics do is they, they, they break open those old patterns and show us different ways to think; really engender more creativity. Among other things, we talk more about what they do in the brain.

[0:07:23]

Amber: So some of the things that we talk about here, and then I'm gonna tell you about the awesome free thing I'm giving away on Patreon to everyone, not just to patrons to everyone so it's free. We talk about:

- That feeling when the future Ram Dass gives you a substance you've never heard of before called LSD in Paris and changes your life forever.
- We nerd out on some of my psychedelic heroes like Ken Kesey, Albert Hoffman and Houston Smith. I loved asking Jim about these people who he knew who I of course did not know but have long admired.
- We talked about why psychedelics research got shut down in the 60s. And if you don't know the real reason behind this, it's insane. And what we were learning about them before that happened.
- We talked about how they work. Jim gives some of his guidelines for how to have safe, sacred, and therapeutic journeys.
- And we do talk about micro dosing and the seemingly endless number of ailments that it can address for people, all the reports he's heard back from people who have done them, everything from depression, to colds to menstrual problems, asthma, allergies, stroke, and like, just so, so much more.
- And we talk about how dying is absolutely safe and conscious dying.

So the thing that's available Patreon.com/MedicineStories is something... It's a 16 page PDF that Jim and I think some other people put together. And what they have written about it is in a study of nearly 100 people who took a psychedelic, guided as outlined, in this manual 78% reported "It was the greatest experience of my life." This response was true even for those people who had taken a psychedelic many times before.

This manual describes how to benefit from having an experienced guide, sufficient psychedelic material, and a supportive setting to be in. Many people who hope to have a spiritual or an entheogenic experience using a psychedelic don't know how to reach and stay open to those levels of consciousness. And few people who wish to help others on that voyage have had the benefit of being taught how to serve as effective guides.

This manual has been written to offer useful, tested suggestions to guides and voyagers. The guidelines in this manual are intended to promote spiritual, rather than recreational, use. This manual brings together the insights of a number of psychedelic guides who have been working

discreetly over the last 40 years to facilitate maximally safe and sacred entheogenic experiences. This compilation is being made available.

I don't have the rest of that sentence here. So this is such a valuable PDF, and it's right there for you to download. The last couple pages are a really simple checklist. So you know, you can really, really simplify the whole process.

[0:10:31]

Amber: Before we get into the show, I want to let you know that if you'd like to sign up for my newsletter, *The Mythic Medicine Newsletter*, you can just text 66866 text the word "medicine" to 66866. And you know, if you like what I'm doing, if you're interested in herbal healing at all, then I'll send you an email every now and then. I don't do it too often. And you can also check me out at mythicmedicine.love. And I'm on Instagram @MythicMedicine.

So I want to clarify a couple things real quick that we talked about but don't clarify or like finish the thought in the interview. The first is at the beginning when Jim is talking about his early experiences with Richard Alpert, who became Ram Dass, and with Timothy Leary, he just talks about "Tim", but it's Tim Leary that he's talking about.

And then later when we talk about Albert Hoffman, he says, "Something Hoffman was doing made him healthy," and I'm pretty sure that something that he's referring to is microdosing. And I think that Albert did not outright say that he was microdosing in the end years of his life, but that is kind of like an open secret that he was. That's what I remember at least reading or hearing about this many years ago. He lived to be over 100 years old and was just like this glowing, joyful, beautiful man the whole time.

So, yeah, without further ado, I'm trying to cut down on these intros. Let's let's get into my interview with the wonderful Jim Fadiman.

(Transitional Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)

[Interview Begins]

[0:12:17]

Amber: Hello, Jim, welcome to the podcast.

Jim: It's really a pleasure to be podcasting with you.

Amber: I'm honored to be speaking with you. I've admired your work for a long time and also feel very honored to consider you a friend. So thank you, thank you for everything you do, and for being my friend.

Jim: Well, I actually admire the work you do and the work you've done. So we're in that wonderful place where we're both looking up to each other.

Amber: Wow, that's nice. Thank you. Mutual admiration society.

Jim: The best kind.

Amber: Yeah. Okay, so I wanted to — there's so much I want to talk about — but I want to start with giving our listeners your background.

And I thought I would begin with the question, what happened to you in Paris in 1961? And how did that form the foundation for your life's work?

Jim: I was, I graduated from college, and I was doing my best to live as desolate a life as I could manage, which wasn't too much.

In Paris, I was living in a sixth floor walkup. And I was writing a novel and thinking of myself as incredibly interesting. And my favorite professor, whose name then was Richard Alpert (it became Ram Dass) was passing through Paris on his way to to give the first conference for the presentation for psychologists about psychedelics, which he had discovered with Tim Leary that, when I was away from college. And we got together, and he was happy to be in Paris, and I was happy to see him. And then he said, "The greatest thing in the world has happened to me." And I thought, "That's nice." And he said, "I want to share it with you." And I thought, "Well, that's even nicer."

And then he went into his jacket pocket and came out with a little vial of pills. And I thought, "I don't know what's going on. But this is really weird." Because I was sufficiently straight in those days, I didn't even drink coffee. So the idea of taking a pill for anything seemed quite extraordinary. And I did, and we settled down in a cafe, and the colors got very bright, and the noise got very crisp, and I was aware. I can easily hear and understand the conversations of people walking by.

And then I realized my French actually wasn't that good. I'd never been able to do that before. And I freaked out a little bit, and said, "This is too much for me." And Dick looks over at me and says, "It's too much for me, too." And I said, "We didn't take any of these pills." He said, "No, but it's my first time in Paris, and it's really too much."

[0:15:23]

Jim: So, long story short, that evening, I realized a lot of things about my life were not not as important as I thought. And then I was not as important as I thought, and that there was something quite remarkable about the human mind that I didn't know much about. I had graduated in psychology, but I can't say I learned very much.

And a week later, I had followed Dick and Tim to Copenhagen, where I had another experience with these materials. It turned out to be psilocybin and had a feeling of human closeness and caring and being what a good friend really was.

And then life went on, and I was recalled in United States. I didn't want to leave Paris, and I didn't want to leave my kind of easy life. But my draft board said, "If you would like to join us in Vietnam, we have a place for you, or you could go to graduate school."

So I ended up in graduate school and found at Stanford an off-campus group that was doing serious psychedelic research with high doses of LSD. And on October 19, 1961, I participated in their way of working, which was much deeper and stronger than the work that Albert was doing. And my entire worldview was replaced by one that was much larger, much more expansive, much more compassionate, and much more connected to nature.

So that was where my life and career made a turn. And that's still going on today.

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Amber: How was the psychedelic therapy that they were doing there different from what was happening at Harvard or with those men?

Jim: Well, the Harvard group really was looking at eyes open, kind of slightly interactive and lower doses. Really, they did not have and did not understand the nature of the classical mystical experience, the experience of total unity. They simply weren't working in that area. And what they were doing was becoming incredibly able to be good, and kind, and creative, and supportive of each other.

But the people on the West Coast, were actually working in such a higher doses, higher level, and real transcendence, where you leave your personal identity behind and become much more aware of your being part of the natural world.

Now there, Alan Watts had a comment that says "The body does not end at the fingertips." And to realize your connections to things was simply a different experience than I had had with the Harvard group. And they also went through a transformation when they obtained LSD and started to do higher dose work themselves.

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Amber: I really, I'm kind of, like, a nerd for psychedelic history and culture. Like, I really, I just love diving down the rabbit hole of the history of these people and this time, you know, the few decades when this was all unfolding and kind of have some hero worship for a lot of these I you know, mostly men, maybe all men except for Maria Sabina, of people that I know about.

And you were your friends with a lot of these people. I love reading that and your book and knowing that about you.

And so, let's see, I guess, then I would like to hear more about this story this, what happened to this young woman with a flower on a hillside in Pescadero and how that also changed the course of your life.

Jim: Yeah, I had become friends with a woman who was working at the VA hospital as a speech therapist. Her name was Dorothy, and she was from Pittsburgh. And she was delighted, kind of surprised by the... She said the things that would make me go to therapy in Pittsburgh were what people liked about me in California.

And she ended up going with Stewart Brand who later did the Whole Earth Catalog. And then she became the... She was a girlfriend of Ken Kesey, and Ken Kesey had an open marriage. So it was a little complicated.

And one night I was actually up at the Kesey world, and in his place, which always had eight or 10 people around. And during the night, Dorothy took LSD. And because I was there, I did a little guiding the way I'd learned from my Menlo Park friends, and she got a very profound experience.

And as a piece of it, in the morning, Ken took his girlfriend and his girlfriend's friend, me, to the Pescadero town dump, which sounds awful, but what it was was a hillside filled with flowers, and at the bottom, there was a bit of a dump. But this was a gorgeous piece of nature.

And Dorothy saw a flower in a little path where we were standing. And as she looked at the flower, part of it seemed to curl up and die. And part of it seemed to blossom and bloom and kind of flourish. And she asked me, "What's going on?" And I said, "Just keep looking." And she did, and it kept doing that.

And it is an experience that people have psychedelics have where you see that birth and death maybe are like the snake chasing its own tail. That one isn't born and one doesn't die, but one goes through what looks like birth more than once.

And she looked at me, as someone who knew about these strange and gross, wonderful states. And she looked at Ken, who was gorgeous, and charismatic, and charming, and married. And there was a shift in her, which eventually ended up where she and I got married. And for at least the past 50 years, it's been working.

Amber: 50 years. Wow. Two or three, Dorothy is an amazing human being in her own right. And I'm also honored to have gotten to spend some time with her.

[0:22:45]

Amber: So I want to get more into the guidance piece that you're talking about. But first, I want to kind of keep nerding out on these people that you knew.

I'm curious, did you know Albert Hoffman? Did you know Houston Smith?

Jim: Yeah, I met Albert Hoffman just one set at a conference. Some years later, I would say he look 60. And he was 90 at the time.

Amber: Yeah, will you tell people who he is to who don't know?

Jim: So something he was doing, perhaps, had made him healthy.

Amber: Well, yeah, we can talk about that later, too. (*Amber laughs*)

Jim: And what I remember most is he was, there was a group that had been brought from around the United States and Albert Hofmann didn't travel much then. But he came to Kalamazoo, Michigan, to this retreat center. And he said, one of the main reasons was to meet Huston Smith. And Huston Smith had also traveled to Kalamazoo, and his main reason for coming was to meet Albert.

So it was at that point Ram Dass was there, and he'd recently had a major stroke. So he was in a very unusual state, barely able to speak. And during that time what Albert says is "People..." — and I'll imitate his accent probably wrong — (Jim imitating Albert's accent) "People are always asking me, coming up and asking me, 'How should I use psychedelics?' And I say to them, 'Always take it in nature.'"

And I recall that vividly because his own experience, he was deeply aware of nature from a small child. And it's why he actually went into organic chemistry to understand living systems. And up until his death at age 102, what he would do often was take walks in the woods, outside his home in Switzerland, to stay in touch with nature.

So this was a very gentle, beautiful man, and very much an organic chemist, that if you read his work, you are clearly reading a chemist writing about the world. And he did not only synthesize LSD as a new substance, but he later on synthesized psilocybin and was involved in all of these things. A remarkable human being.

Amber: And then in the 40s, he's just a straight-laced chemist.

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Jim: Yeah, He was an organic chemist, working on variations of the molecule of what's called "ergot". And one of the sets of or ones derive something called lysergic acid. And the 25th variation that he came up with was called lysergic acid diacetyl amide or LSD 25.

So the 25 is is a kind of laboratory shorthand for "it goes in the drawer between 23 and 24. And then on the other side is 26." So the number 25 has no mystical or philosophical or spiritual meanings.

Huston Smith, who wrote the most popular book on meaning, *The World's Religions*, a wonderful kind of undergraduate textbook.

Amber: It's the reason that I majored in religious studies was that book.

Jim: (*Jim laughs*)

Exactly. It's a wonderful book, because Huston is even-handed with all the religions. He's basically saying, "This is why this one is good. This is why this one is good." And Huston had, as all of us did in the 60s, no psychedelic experience, but he had LSD while he was a professor at MIT. He would have it with Tim Leary at Tim's home. And what he said of it afterwards, he says, "It turned out that everything I believed was true."

And this is, you know, like, an academic discovering that what he's been studying is actually true in the deepest possible sense. And so when he was with Huston, he really felt that there was a glow. You know, if I could see in those in those other levels, I know I would be seeing the aura of sainthood around him. But when he smiled, the world improved and he smiled often.

[0:27:44]

Amber: So yeah, when I was 16, I had an accidental, big, mystical psilocybin experience, and I didn't know that was possible. It, I felt.. (*Amber laughs*) I remember thinking afterwards, I felt like

Moses coming off the mountain. You know? (*Amber laughs*) Like, I thought that I was enlightened. I thought, like, I must be glowing, like, my hair must have turned silver. And people were gonna know that I was different when they saw me. You know? I just was really suffused with that feeling for weeks afterwards.

But, you know, I didn't have the tools or the community or the information that I needed to understand what had happened to me. I had no way to integrate it. It was just, you know, if people are like, "Oh, you sure it's cool?"

Jim: Oh boy, do I know.

Amber: Yeah.

Jim: When we have a feeling we come out of that we say "I'm God"

If we're not careful, we think other people aren't God.

Amber: Right.

Jim: And then we tell them how to behave. Now, if we come down from the Mount, and we say, "Wow, everybody's God, and I know that." That still makes you very, very special, but it doesn't make you into a kind of strange jerk that nobody wants to be around.

[0:29:08]

Amber: Yeah. So then, a few years later, I worked at a Barnes and Noble and on the shelf one day I saw this book, *Cleansing the Doors of Perception* by Huston Smith. And I already knew who he was because I was already in college and taking these religious studies classes.

And I took it home, and I read it in one night. I'd never done that before just like blown through a book. And it was so validating for me, that this man, Huston Smith, who I looked up to so deeply, and who has taught in my college courses, had written a book all about psychedelics.

Jim: All about **your** experience.

Amber: Mm-hmm.

Jim: Yeah, I mean, the nice thing about books is I'm not sure how much they educate, but they do validate. "Someone, oh God, someone else has had that experience. Someone else has lost a sister someone else lived in Nepal." Whatever it is, and that those of us who write books are never quite sure why we're doing it. But once in a while you get a letter that says, "I read your book, and my life made more sense." And Huston's books, I mean, literally millions of people have read Huston's books and become more tolerant, more aware that there is God in every face.

Amber: Yeah, man, I wish I had met him. My previous landlords knew a good friend of his. This was a few years ago and they're like, "You know, he's, like, he's in an old folk's home now. He is, you know, pretty far gone. I think had dementia." And I was like, "That's okay. I love people! I love old people. I love people whose minds are in different states. I will drive to the Bay Area and meet him!" and they're like, "No, it's just not gonna happen." I was like, "Okay, fine."

Jim: Well, I'm sorry I didn't know you better then. I would've made it happen.

Amber: Aw, well, thanks Jim. Well, I met you, though. I tracked you down, and made you my friend.

Jim: That's true.

[0:31:06]

Jim: And Huston remained beautiful. I don't I didn't know him, but I think when he was in the older person's home, it was partly because his wife had died. I'm not sure that he ever became demented. Because when he was quite elderly, he had severe scoliosis. As he said, "If I get this a little more bent, I'll be able to, you know, to bow to the ground without moving."

And what he had done is every about every 10 years, he would take up the serious practices of a different religion so that he was actually a student of Zen, a serious student of Zen, for about 10 years. And he was a serious student of Sufism, Islamic mysticism, for at least 10 or 15 years because I taught Sufism for a while, and there was this connection between us where he was actually a quiet, covert Muslim. And I was an overt teacher of Muslim thought and not a Muslim at all.

So we both enjoyed each other.

Amber: And underneath it all he maintained his Christian upbringing.

Jim: Yeah, he felt that Christianity was his basic path, but it was a Christianity they swore in the teachings of Christ, than the specialness of Christ

Amber: Right.

[0:32:35]

Amber: Let's go back to Hofmann for a moment and to his discovery of LSD, and how he had shelved the 25th derivative for a while and what brought him back to that drawer.

Jim: Well, the story is that — it's practically a mythology by now — that he decided one day that he should look again at the 25th derivative.

Now, when you're making these chemicals, the first thing you do is you feed them to mice. And most of the time the mice either get sick or weird or die and that takes care of that.

In this case, the mice just lay around, and if you didn't know what you're looking for, it just looked like it made them lethargic, but we probably guessed is they were just digging the universe very quietly; kind of in deep meditative states as only mice can do.

But in any case, he said, "You know, I think I should resynthesize this." So he did, and it's not an easy synthesis. This isn't, you know, really "off the shelf, stir twice, and cook." This is a fairly complex synthesis. And so he made some.

And apparently he got some in a cut of his finger, and he had a very complex experience. But he figured out, as he came down from this mostly negative experience of fear and visual distortion, that where it had come from.

And he thought, "Well, the only thing I've done unusual is work with with LSD." He said "So being as safe and prudent as possible. I deliberately gave myself the smallest dose that I could imagine could have any effect."

That was 250 micrograms.

Now, we know that 250 micrograms is a walloping dose. And so he had a whole nother experience in which he bicycled home and had much more profound experiences. And the next morning because I believe he said, it was like the first day after creation. Everything looked so wonderful. And then he started to explore what this substance was, and why so little of it was so profound and so forth.

[0:35:04]

Jim: He gave it to some other people at Sandoz, made notes, and at some point the genie started to escape from the bottle because Sandoz Pharmaceuticals after all, he was working for them. And he had already created a couple of projects off of this ergot that he'd been working on; ones that were... they're still sold today.

And Sandoz just didn't know what to do with this substance. So researchers in consciousness around the world would write Sandoz to say "Can I try some of this?" and Sandoz would send them some vials with LSD in them.

And when I got interested in, when I came into this field in 1961, I wrote Sandoz, and it seems so naive, but I just wrote Sandoz, "Has there been any prior research done? And can you, you know, can you tell me?" Now this is, you know, pre-web, pre-everything. And I got in the mail from Switzerland, two volumes, two huge volumes of the abstracts, not the paper, but just the abstracts of the first thousand papers that have been written about LSD.

So clearly, there was a lot of interest in what this substance was and how it worked. And what's wonderful about science is most of their early guesses were dead wrong.

Amber: Right, psychonometrics and whatnot.

Jim: Yeah, they thought it mimicked psychosis, meaning, when people would take it, particularly in a sterile laboratory, being observed, and having their blood tested, and their urine looked at, what we would now call a "terrible set and setting", people had terrible experiences.

And it was only sometime later that some unusual people came up with the notion of treating people, making it into a positive and pleasurable set and setting. And that totally shifted the kinds of experiences people have.

Now, understand this was before any of us understood that this had probably been a substance used in the Greek mysteries, the Eleusinian mysteries, that we knew nothing about anything from South America. We knew nothing about peyote. We knew very, very little, actually, even about marijuana. So this was almost in isolation we discovered the effects of psychedelics.

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Amber: So what, at the time that you were doing this research in Menlo Park, what were your group, what were you looking at? And what were other people around the world looking at? What were we learning about how psychedelics work, and in which areas of life they work in the 60s before research got shut down?

Jim: Well, when I started in '61, most of the research out there was animals and mice and frogs and psychosis. There was still the notion that this is a psychonometric; it mimics psychosis.

And the little group I worked with The International Foundation for Advanced Study, had a license from the government, what's called an Investigational Drug License, meaning this wasn't something that could be sold. And we were doing basically a clinical work, like a little outpatient clinic, where people would come in, and they would say, "I would like to have this experience," and we would say "First, we'd like you to see this psychiatrist." And because we were — didn't want people who were too mentally upset.

And then we would do some pre-screening and some pre-therapy, some pre-getting to build trust. Then they would have a one-day high dose experience with two guides, a male and a female guide. Then they would get aftercare and after-- kind of what we now call— after-integration for on and off for a couple of months.

And then we were doing research on what happened, and why, and what kinds of conditions, and what kinds of experiences. And so we were doing this very basic clinical research under government — I can't say "approvals", right? — but we just, they said "Fine, you have the right to do this. No problem."

And then we, for a final research, we were using it for creative problem solving with senior scientists. And that was a very different type of research. We were doing somewhat lower doses. And they were there not to learn about themselves or about consciousness, or anything about mental health, but simply to make progress on the research that they were most deeply concerned with.

And to get into that study, you had to have been working on some kind of scientific problem. And you had to have been failing for several months. So you had to be pretty emotionally committed to this problem.

And in the midst of that study after we'd run 27 people, the federal government sent a letter to us and the every other research project in the country. It was close to 60 research projects. They said, "As of the receipt of this letter, your investigational license is terminated."

And we got the letter the same day we had four of these senior scientists in our, in our somewhat living room-like setup. And they were listening to music and had headphones and eyeshades, because that was the way they spent the morning, and then the afternoon they would work on their projects. And here was this letter. And I was the youngest member of our team. And I remember looking around at our team and saying, "I think we got this letter tomorrow."

And we agreed that we did, went in and did work for that last group, and then we had to shut down the clinic.

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Amber: So your group found that these kind of medium doses helped with scientific problem solving pretty significantly. And with the higher doses you were just sort of looking at what sort of experiences people had right and...

Jim: Medium doses turned out to be for science, the high doses were life-transforming.

Amber: Yeah.

Jim: And that's what people came for. That's what we worked to achieve.

Amber: So, you're looking for the transcendent experience.

Jim: Yeah. Because what we found is after people had a transcendent experience, their lives improved. Their... well, for example, their neurosis became kind of unimportant, because their neurosis was simply a part of their personality, and their personality was a small part of their total self.

So, for instance, right now I have on a shirt, and at lunch, I dribbled a little, and it has a little stain on it. That's not very personal. I can handle that. It's just a shirt. It's not me. It's just a stain of food. It's not anything very important. And if you begin to treat some of your problems, as if they only belong to a very small part of you, it shifts the way you run your life. And that's what we found. That's what our results were.

[0:43:20]

Amber: So what other research was happening then? Addiction comes to mind.

Jim: Well, the Harvard group, before they were thrown out of Harvard, did a very serious study looking at a prison.

And the question then for them was, if you gave prisoners this kind of psychedelic experience (not quite as mystical as ours, but pretty good) would they have less recidivism? Would they return to prison less? Would you basically be making them more likely to not be criminals? And that was a very serious study.

There was another serious spiritual study called "The Good Easter Study".

Amber: The Good Friday.

Jim: The Good Friday Study, thank you, where a graduate student in theology for the dissertation worked it out where there would be a Good Friday service in Marsh Chapel in the Harvard area. And Marsh Chapel has upstairs, as you know, like most places, but it also had a little downstairs, where they did Sunday school or something.

And the sermon was piped down to the downstairs. And the downstairs people were given either a psychedelic, or they were what's called a "control group" they were given something. In that case they were given some niacin which causes flushing. And the question was:

Would the people who would have a psychedelic in a set and setting of profound religious importance have a different or, perhaps, beneficial experience that would be very different from the people that didn't have the psychedelics?

And the very simple answer was incredibly "Yes." So much so that a follow up study 25 years later, the people interviewed, almost all of them said it was the single most important experience of their lives.

So there was the religious studies going on. There was the prison study.

[0:45:33]

Jim: There is also alcohol studies being done in Canada, predominantly with people who had failed every known method of treatment. And the abstinence rate in that group without psychedelics was maybe one or 2% for whatever therapy they were getting. This is in a mental hospital. And the group that had a psychedelic experience had it about a 50% abstinence rate. So it was a remarkable bit of research.

But the culture wasn't ready for it. Because there was a moment in Washington where the person at the National Institute of Mental Health in charge of alcohol studies, was shown this Canadian data of 50% improvement in people who were basically hopeless. And he said, "I don't believe this." And the researchers said, "Well, what data would you believe?" And he said, "There isn't any data that I would believe about this happening."

Amber: Wow.

Jim: So, you know, people say, "Well, all you have to do is show them the data." The answer is not in the slightest.

[0:46:53]

Amber: So why do...

Jim: ... There was a lot of work being done before the government stopped it.

Amber: Yeah, and I'm so happy that it's been happening again. But why do you... What happened?

Why did the government freak out and schedule these substances and shut all the research down?

Jim: Well, there's a famous quote by John Ehrlichman. John Ehrlichman was a lieutenant to President Nixon. And President Nixon, among other problems, did not like hippies. He did not like Jews. He did not like Blacks. But when you're the President of the United States, you can't put out a notice — I mean, Trump doesn't quite know this — but you can't put up a notice that says, "Here's a group of people that I don't like, and I want to hurt them in some way."

But John Ehrlichman pointed out that "If you made marijuana criminal, and made psychedelics illegal, you could prosecute and persecute the hippies and the Blacks, indirectly." This is a direct quote of his, and Nixon thought that was a wonderful idea. And that's how we got the anti-drug legislation. So it had nothing to do with the science at all, nothing in the slightest.

Amber: Right. Wow, so I would mention here, too, for anyone who's not aware that the research that's been done now is really focusing on addiction, again, PTSD, and end of life anxiety in terminal patients.

Jim: Right. And there's a lovely study of smoking secession as well.

Amber: And just like what was being found in the 60s, like, when you read the results of these studies, it's just, across the board, astoundingly good.

Jim: Yeah, well, the studies are much better-designed. One of the reasons is they're much better-funded.

I mean, the little clinic in Menlo Park did not have a control group because they were charging people for a therapeutic intervention. It's like, you go to your doctor, and you say, "I'd like to, you know, buy a flu shot," and he says, "Well, okay, but I might give you a placebo instead." You say, "No, I don't want to pay for that."

So there's very good research that is replicating what we knew in the 60s, which is end of life, psychotherapeutic benefit, post-traumatic stress, et cetera. I will say that tobacco study I like because we never thought of that in the 60s.

And then of course, there's work that I've been involved in, in microdosing, which is not formal research. It's citizen science. But it's also finding out things we never connected to psychedelics. So this is genuine research happening; both a renaissance where we're recreating what we already do, and we're moving forward.

Amber: Yes, we will get to micro dosing.

First of all, I want to appreciate you for pronouncing et cetera correctly with an ET. Because everyone, the smartest people I know, the smartest podcasters and newscasters, say eX cetera. So I just noticed that you said that.

Jim: I think I grew up with a father who spoke the English language very well. (*Jim laughs*)

Amber: Oh, that's nice! (*Amber laughs*)

[0:50:36]

Amber: Okay, so how, how does psychedelics work? Why do they work? Why are these results so overwhelmingly positive?

Jim: Well, the really correct answer is we haven't the faintest idea. (*Amber laughs*)

The answer that most of the researchers will say "These substances have an affinity for the 5H2 receptor in neurons." And then if they're honest, they'll say, "And we have no idea why that's important today." (*Jim laughs*)

What we do know, and we actually have very good data, is that the amount of communication between different parts of the brain goes way up when one takes a psychedelic. That one literally has better access to memories, to imagery, to color, to sound.

And one of the questions is, "Gee, why does music sound so much better when I'm on a psychedelic?" And the answer is that the same amount of vibration is hitting your ear, but you are much more able to differentiate between sounds. You basically can hear more finely, and you can see more colors.

And also the loosening of your visual system, where your visual system doesn't necessarily need an object out there in order to make an image in your mind, it can create it, what we would call a — it's not the right word — but a "hallucination" or just a visual image and distortion. So that you can look at a flower, as my, my wife Dorothy did, and the flower is dying and growing. Now, a person standing next to us in the Pescadero dump, would think it looked a lot like a flower looking like a flower because they were not able to see us as, as many different parts of the brain simultaneously, not only observing it but changing what's observed.

So the fundamental answer is they make the system more fluid, more flexible, and open up areas which normally do not communicate with each other.

Amber: And the eighth episode of this podcast I interviewed Steven Harrod Buhner, and I really like a word that he tends to use most which is "neurognostics".

Jim: (*Jim laughs*) I love it.

Amber: It's just the perfect word for how these substances work.

Jim: The thing is, the fact that it makes the brain the parts of the brain communicate better, and we can show that with with these gorgeous pictures showing without psychedelics, not too many colored lines, and with psychedelics, lots of colored lines is really sweet, but it doesn't seem to have had any practical application at all.

So that it just hasn't changed the way people do psychedelic therapy. It certainly hasn't changed the way people do recreational use, which is 90% of the use. It hasn't changed the nature of the plants. But it is, but it kind of says modern science can now use a whole different vocabulary to describe psychedelic experience. And they don't need to use either a psychological or a medical or a religious vocabulary.

But it doesn't... you know, I like this stuff. But I was so relieved when I was doing my own book and I, there was an article on the pharmacology of LSD and I thought, "Oh, Christ, I'm gonna have to understand this well enough to say something in the book." And then there was this wonderful line that says, "You know, we've read over 100 papers, and what we think to say is we don't know the mechanism of, action of LSD." And I thought, "Oh, goody, I'm with them." And I'm 800 papers less burdened. (*Amber laughs*)

[0:55:14]

Jim: So we're still dealing with natural substances. And the thing that is probably most interesting is what is it in a mushroom, in a cactus, in the intestines of a blowfish, in a morning glory seed, that seems to have connections direct, that there are receptors in the brain designed to accept these items. And the brain seems to like them. So that gets to be an interesting question because all of these plants existed before there were any human beings.

Amber: Yeah, well, Stephen Buhner and I talk about that, in that episode, how the neural networks of whole ecosystems are affected by psychedelics, like grasslands and psilocybin. The mycelium and the root networks of plants all have those same receptors. And they interact with these substances, too.

Jim: Well, it is highly likely that, you know, when I look at a plant, and I say, look at marijuana. Marijuana has two major alkaloids that we know a lot about, but it has 400 alkaloids, and we know very little about almost, you know, almost all the rest.

And nature, the way I understand nature, nature really doesn't waste a lot. Nature is really quite efficient. So there's some reason why it has all those alkaloids. It may have nothing to do with us, but it has a lot to do with the marijuana plant, itself.

Peyote, another one, has one major alkaloid, mescaline, but it has 40 others. And I did do a little background research once because I was going to give a talk in Mexico, and I found out that we know something about four of the rest of those alkaloids. We know nothing about all the rest. So it may be that the 37th alkaloid of peyote, you know, cures MS. But we've never even looked because our science tends to be reductive. And our pharmaceuticals tends to go, you know, as you know, as an herbalist, plants are complicated, and there's a good reason, and pharmaceuticals are simple, and therefore and are much more dangerous.

Amber: Right, it's just synthesizing one chemical out. Yeah, you don't know what you've lost or how it will affect the body.

Jim: You don't know how all the other chemicals in the natural plant support each other.

Amber: Yeah.

[0:58:12]

Amber: Something that you write in your book that I found so fascinating is that:

LSD metabolizes almost immediately, long before the effects are felt.

So it's not like this is coursing through your system causing these changes. It just, here I'm gonna... let me quote you because this is beautiful, beautiful sentences:

It seems to act as a catalyst, creating an environment in which other reactions can occur. It serves as a lubricant, allowing certain faculties to interact with one another more easily, thus enabling latent brain functions fuller expression.

Jim: Given the help I had doing during editing, that really is lovely. *(both laugh)* I wonder what my first draft looks like. I don't want to know.

Amber: So that reminds me of something...

Jim: — The other thing that we, even, you know, so smug and satisfied and proud of ourselves, researchers, we tended to not notice what you talked about with your first psilocybin experience is how you felt for weeks afterwards.

Now, that to me is one of the areas we haven't looked at. And that's where we know the psychedelic physical item is gone from the system. But those effects that lasted for weeks are very real, and are part of the total experience.

And it's one of the, again, the differences is most pharmaceuticals actually only are effective when they're in the system. They don't, they don't set up a whole, you know, a kind of...

Amber: They don't create lasting change.

[1:00:00]

Amber: So another way to come at the same thing, I heard this on a podcast years ago, and I did mean to research it more before he spoke, so I could make sure that I'm explaining this correctly. But what they were saying about the most current research into psychedelics is that they shut down, or greatly, like, tamp down the default mode network in the brain, which is kind of the, like, "Go go, go. Get shit done", like, super-logical thinking, you know? Just kind of paying attention to the same things over and over, just survival.

So it shuts all that down. And then that's kind of what allows this blossoming, this neuroplasticity, to come in and take over in the brain.

Jim: Well, it's, it's a little bit like one of the things that happens when you're ill is your body says, "I think you should sleep more." And we know that your sleep mode is actually a much more recuperative mode for dozens of systems in the body. But until you get your weak, waking self, so to speak, out of the way those systems don't turn on.

And what happens with psychedelics, particularly a higher dose, is your identity is put on the shelf so that all of its issues are not what you're not what your brain is attending to.

And it's a little bit, you know, when we used to go on vacation and nobody could reach us. So you went backpacking, and for two weeks you didn't know anything about the war or injustice or climate change. And you actually could think your own thoughts. Well, in a sense psychedelic gives you that. It gives you, it puts all of those things on the shelf and allows the rest of the system to function, and it functions extraordinarily well.

Amber: So I am so grateful that when I had my accidental big trip, that I was in a safe place. I was alone with two girlfriends, who I loved, who I still love, in one of their homes. We were safe. It was just us.

And I can't imagine what a bad experience that would have been, if I had been at a party or outdoors interacting with strangers or somewhere unsafe. I did start to have a bad trip for a few minutes there, and it totally reversed itself once I got into comfier clothes and, like, just kind of chilled out with my friends.

[1:02:46]

Amber: But you said earlier that 90% of psychedelic use is recreational, so I'm assuming that's what you mean.

So I'd love to get into really the bulk of your work in *The Psychedelic Explorers's Guide* and talk about how people can have safe, sacred, and therapeutic experiences. I was telling a friend yesterday that I was going to interview you. And she was so excited because she's never had a psychedelic experience. And she really wants to, but she wants to do it right. She wants to know what you know.

Jim: Well, the wonderful thing is the reason, the main reason I wrote the book was the first two chapters, which describe how to safely have a life-transforming experience. And not only it's about how... it's how to be a guide, and it's also how to be the person who's guided.

It's like, if you were, if you didn't understand massage, you could tense up and fight it. And it would basically not give you any benefit. What you know is you go with the pressure, even when the pressure is painful. And you kind of know how to get the benefits of massage.

So similarly with psychedelics, if you know what you're doing, and you're with a guide, whose only interest is giving you the best possible experience, that works out very well. And the rest of the book is all about all kinds of fascinating things about psychedelics. But in terms of your friend, that's really what's important is to understand how to be a good journeyer and how to be a good guide.

And it would be wonderful if there were professionals, and so forth and so on. But there aren't. And so very often, people help each other. And one of one of the suggestions I have is if you are a guide, the question is: do you really care for the person who you're helping? And if you're the journeyer: do you really trust the person who is helping you? And those turned out to be much more important than credentials and training and so forth.

[1:05:07]

Amber: You quote Neal Goldsmith, in your book, he says:

If you know what you're doing, if you've been careful about who you're with, if the setting is good, the substance is pure, and the preparation has been taken seriously, there is little chance of anything going wrong.

Jim: Yep. And there was very early research in the 60s with 10,000 people. I mean, they just asked a whole lot of the studies to send them information. And they found even then, when we didn't quite know what we're doing, and a lot of people didn't understand the setting very well, there are almost no negative effects. And people who don't know what they're doing, and take too much, or their setting suddenly turns bad, and my favorite story, someone who wrote me said, "We were having it was really a great session until the car caught on fire."

Amber: Oh God. (*Amber laughs*)

Jim: Yeah, it really makes it a rough afternoon. (*Jim laughs*)

So, you were fortunate that you were with people, who you all cared about each other. And then even when it got uncomfortable or negative, you either knew what to do or someone to say, well, you know how, basically what you were doing was gee, how can I make myself comfortable again?

So, this is something which people can learn to do and to help each other and have. There's been 26 million Americans who have taken LSD, and I'm not talking about mushrooms or ecstasy, just LSD since LSD became illegal. And the number of people who have died from taking LSD is zero. Now, there have been people who've taken LSD, and other things, and have gotten into very serious medical trouble. And I'm sure there are people who had traffic accidents. But literally, the substance itself did not harm anyone.

Amber: Right. I'm gonna... I just want to quote, too, the things that you say in your book. You say:

There is a door within the self, and to become more aware is your birthright.

Those things are kind of what this podcast is all about. And since the beginning, I've been subtly encouraging people to explore psychedelics and talking about them. And so you're my first out and out conversation.

Jim: So I'm asking you to come out right. (*Jim laughs*)

Amber: Yeah.

[1:08:01]

Jim: So when people come up to me and say, "Well, I'm thinking of taking a psychedelic," and I say "That sounds great." And they say, "But..." and then I say "well, don't do it." And they say, "Well, wait, wait, you haven't. I haven't told you my, you know, my my concern." I say that, "whatever your concern is, if you have a concern, don't do it." Then they usually get mad at me and walk away.

But what I'm saying to them is, there are lots of reasons not to take a psychedelic. That's fine.

Amber: Yeah, there are many paths to the same destination. Yeah.

Jim: Yes, that's right. It's kind of like I've, I taken the same bus into town for 20 years, but I only get off at the same stop. But there's a whole bunch of other stops.

Amber: Mm hmm.

Jim: But I'm not ready.

Amber: I would also say like if you feel nervous about it, you, you should feel nervous about it. It's gonna be a really big experience in your life. And that's okay to feel nervousness and feel fear. You can, like, don't let that be a reason to stop you as long as you're totally prepared.

Jim: Yeah. Well, it's also when people say, "Well, I don't want to travel" because they know it's scary. The answer is "I don't travel."

Amber: Yeah. Then okay. You missed that experience,

Jim: Or travel and it's scary. It's okay. It's okay that something's scary.

Amber: Right.

Jim: I mean, how do we all learn to swim?

At some point, we said, "You could drown to this stuff!" People do and then your swimming instructor says "Yes." But there's a whole lot of things I can show you where you will feel, not only won't drown, but you will love being in the water. And you don't do that by just saying, "Oh, I'd love to be in the water. I'll just jump off the pier."

Amber: Right. You're full of good metaphors. *(Amber laughs)*

Jim: Yeah, well, I think it's — if see, if we look at it some of our early data, we said, "How important was this experience?" And the answer is for most of our people, it was, you know, among the five most important experiences of their entire life.

And you say to someone, "Well, if you're gonna have the most, maybe the most important experience of your life." Is that worth preparing a little?"

Amber: Right. And I want to say again, for anyone listening that in your book, you fully lay out, yeah, how to be a guide, and how to be the journeyer, how to prepare, and how to go through the session, then how to integrate afterward.

Jim: And it must be so because I get a lot of mail for a lot of things, but people don't complain that I've left something out for those higher dose experience.

[1:10:56]

Amber: Yeah. Okay, well, looking at the time.

Let's talk about microdosing, this thing that you have totally pioneered and that is everywhere in the culture now, at least in my little realm. I hear people talk about it all the time.

Jim: Me too.

Amber: Yeah. Or that.

Jim: Yeah. Well, microdosing. I mean, the wonderful thing about microdosing is the definition of microdosing is it's taking psychedelics at such a low level or small amount, that there are no classic psychedelic effects.

Amber: You call "sub-perception."

Jim: No flowers living and dying. No universe opening up and goddesses coming out. No dragon. No being eaten alive by snakes. None of that good stuff.

Amber: No ego death.

Jim: No ego death. No ego concern. But what people report — I'm really now talking several thousand people — is they feel better. Their life works better. They are kinder. Their grades go up. I'm not even sure what the sport was with a recent report that said, "I used to get silvers now I get golds."

Amber: (*Amber laughs*) Wow.

Jim: There's a number of people in martial arts are discovering it. People's lives work a little better if their lives are working well. And a lot of people, this is maybe half of our sample, start, say, they are or have been depressed. And they're, when they microdose, they're not depressed, and that's remarkable.

Amber: Wow. Yeah, it is. That's another thing that we didn't talk about is psilocybin for depression. And I didn't know that even at the microdose level that was helping people.

Jim: Definitely, and just, here's an aside because it's not anywhere in the literature. But this is an anthropologist friend of mine that said, "Did you know if you take just a little bit of psilocybin mushrooms when you're starting to have a cold, you won't have a cold?" He said, "I haven't had a cold in 15 years." So that's the kind of herbalist point of view.

Amber: Oh my gosh. Wow. And yeah, I'm very interested in that now. Wow.

[1:13:29]

Amber: So you call these doses "sub-perceptual". So, like just to say that, again, you're not even supposed to realize that you've taken anything. It's just like at the end of the day...

Jim: what you realize is, you say, "Gee, I really feel good."

Amber: Right?

Jim: Or you can focus for hours when you could only focus for an hour. So people in the creative arts like it because it gives them more time in what's called "flow", which is the place where you are simply in the creative side of yourself, and you can stay there.

People who are depressed report that they feel normal.

And here's one that is more for the women who are interested in their own bodies, which is we have a number of people who have report that prior to microdosing they had either painful or psychologically-upsetting periods or both. So whatever PMS is, they have it.

And after one, well, not necessarily after, with either after just one round of microdosing, meaning taking it every couple of days for a month, or taking it during their periods or some variation of that, they report that their periods are normal.

Amber: Wow. So that... I actually had that experience last month, and I never would have put that together.

Jim: Ah! (*Jim laughs*)

Amber: Yeah, but I microdosed, like, just I have some mushroom chocolate thing that a friend made specifically for microdosing. And I took some and first of all, I had a pretty I just a really great experience around like realizing some pain and breath patterns in my body. And when I went for a walk afterwards, it was about an hour later so I knew that they were kind of coming. I could kind of feel it, you know, had that subtle little like psychedelic feeling, but it wasn't too bad. And I was walking my dog and I was like, "Holy shit, is this how I always hold my body? Like, my diaphragm is being really impeded and I'm not breathing properly." And I've been working with that ever since. But my period before that one had been awful, and they're not usually that bad, but it was so bad. And then this last one was like no problem.

Jim: Yep.

Amber: That's amazing.

Jim: You just added to my sample.

Amber: Good (*Amber laughs*).

Jim: And as a favor to me, I'm going to ask you to just write that up a little bit.

Amber: Okay, I will.

[1:16:18]

Jim: Because what we're looking at is what we know is we're actually working — we being my researcher, a colleague, named Sophia Korb — and Sophia is now working with a PMS researcher. Because we're trying to — there's various reasons why women have hard periods. And we're sure that microdosing resolves some of those but not others. So we're just trying to, we're really looking at people whose periods improve with microdosing, and then try to find ones who don't see if we can make a difference.

But to me, that's one of the see, that's the fun of my way of doing science, which is you ask people what they're doing, and you just made the perfect model because there's, believe me, I know the psychedelic research, you know, way past that first thousand papers, and there's not a whiff anywhere that it's good for improving difficult periods.

Amber: I mean, it seems like there's probably... sorry, go ahead.

Jim: But I got a note a couple of years ago, maybe two years ago, from a woman that said, "Hi, I owe you a report. And I haven't done that. But I think this might interest you."

This was a woman who was an art historian. She was living in London, and she was taking microdosing, I believe, for depression. And what she said is, “During the month when I was microdosing, I had my period which has always been awful and painful. It wasn't, it was entirely normal. You have changed my life.”

And I wrote her back. And I asked her, what was she doing? How much has she taken? You know, that kind of research-y talk. And then also what was she doing every month? And she wrote back and she said, “I only microdosed during that one month. My periods are normal.”

Now, we have other women for whom that doesn't seem to be true. They microdose during their period. So we're really still trying to find out but we were, but it's really exciting.

Amber: Yeah. Well, it makes me... Just think about all the areas of application that we don't even know about. And I think about, like, Paul Stamets has shared his story of getting rid of his stutter. I believe it was. And I Dr. Andrew Weil, like, getting over a cat allergy, both of them because they took a psychedelic and intentionally were like, “I don't want this to be a part of my life anymore.”

Jim: Right.

Amber: And just like it just it happened. It went out. The stutter went away and the cat allergies went away.

[1:19:19]

Jim: So these are the kinds of — this is what's fun for me is discovery. That's where the action is for me.

I'm not, honestly, constitutionally-designed to run a study, you know, where I'm taking 40 women who have menstrual problems, and I'm going to give 20 of them microdoses, and I won't give the other 20. That research should be done, but I'm just not the right person to do it.

I'm the right person to say, “Wow, look at that.” And then I will now say, “And then my friend Amber told me...” And that's to me what makes the research very interesting.

So for the love, let me give a different one which I know will not apply to you, which is I have one study of someone who had a stroke, a serious stroke, when he's about 70, and he'd been a musician and on the road, and after the stroke, he... It was the kind of stroke where they, in the ER they debate whether they want to bring you back or not. But he came back and because he lives in Northern California, he had endless non-medical interventions to improve his health. And he was functional, and he was okay. And he walked with a cane, and he had never traveled again. And then he microdosed. And after three or four rounds of microdose, and again, one day on, two days off, he said to his wife, “I want to go visit friends in Mexico.” And she says, “Well, that's wonderful. But I won't be able to do that for about a month because I've got various commitments.” He said, “I'll just go on my own.” So I'm now being informed of this. And he travels to Mexico on his own. And he's with friends in Mexico. And then she writes me that he's no longer using his cane. And there are some other wonderful things intervening about improving. Now this was a stroke that was seven years past. This wasn't like even in that immediate after care where who knows how much improvement you make.

So I want to do a study with people with strokes. Yeah.

[1:22:02]

Amber: Okay, two more questions.

Jim: (*Jim laughs*) Okay.

Amber: Shifting gears a little bit for this one:

So I was lucky enough to visit you and your lovely wife, Dorothy in your home a few years back. And you guys have something that not everyone has in their home these days, which is bookshelves, many, many bookshelves. And you have a whole shelf full of titles by Fadimans.

So I'm curious, like, what is this writer's legacy in your family?

Jim: Well, I think if you go to the Bach, you know, the Bach family, all these kids, many of them became composers. And then if you look at Tiger Woods, you'll find that his father is a golf coach.

So I think literacy was what we did in my family. My uncle, Clifton, was actually the Book Review Editor, or he was one of the reviewers. He was a book review editor for *The New Yorker* for 10 years, and also there was something called the Book of the Month Club. And he was often one of the people who made the choices. And my father was a story editor in Hollywood. So we were just a literate family.

And it seemed like at one point in Dorothy's life when she had a revelation of sorts, she thought, "Well, I should write a book because that's what Jim and all his friends do." And it turned out that she's not the person who should write books, because she made a film of her experience called *Radiance: The Experience of Light* and became a very gifted documentary filmmaker.

So the reason there are a lot of Fadiman books is, I think, we don't know anything else that works as well for us as a way of communicating what interests us. And my, there's one really famous author in the Fadiman family called Anne. And Anne Fadiman wrote a book called *When the Spirit Catches You, You Fall Down*.

And it's about a Hmong girl Hmong,

Amber: I remember this book.

Jim: Who has serious epilepsy and is living in the United States. She's one of the refugee family. This is a casualty of the Vietnam conflict. And she gets really wonderful Western medical care from really kind caring people. And she gets wonderful Hmong medical care from her family and shamans, and it's a total disaster.

And it's a beautiful book that is read by almost every medical student every year, and you know, all the new medical students buy it.

Because at the end of it, you have just as much respect for the Hmong who believe that epilepsy is when a spirit catches you, and you fall down. And one of the treatments is that you sacrifice a pig so that the demon that is causing the epilepsy will want to jump into the pig. And it turns out that, has probably as much efficacy as the western medicine.

So it's a... we admire. We're big readers and writers. And that's, that's why there is that shelf.

[1:25:51]

Amber: And aside from *The Psychedelic Explorer's Guide*, you have a novel, *The Other side of Haight*.

Jim: H-A-I-G-H-T, which is a very 60s novel.

Amber: Yeah, I loved it.

Jim: And it was my way before any research was allowed back, it was my way of describing a very well-done psychedelic session, as well as describing how the CIA was also doing LSD research in San Francisco using a warehouse.

Amber: Right, it's pretty shady.

Jim: Right. And that part, I have to say, that's the part that isn't fiction. Even though it seems like it's too bizarre.

Amber: Yeah. So do you feel like having come from such a literate family did that? Did you always know you'd be a writer or do you think it instilled a sense of like confidence or destiny in you?

Jim: No, in a curious way, I never felt I was a writer. I did a textbook, which is in its seventh edition. I've done a couple of collections of other people's work. So I've been an editor. And until I wrote the novel, I didn't feel like a writer.

And it's now I feel like a writer, and I'm probably gonna write a microdose book. And I'm sitting on another unpublished novel, which is not set in the Haight. It's set in the 12th century in France. And so, clearly, only a writer would want to do a novel like that. So it's a puzzle.

But there's... the wonderful thing about writing as an art form is you get to improve it. So when I look at my novel, and my novel says, whatever my title is at the time, but then it has a little number, just like LSD 25. But my number is, I think, 14. Now what that is, is that's the 14th draft.

Now, you can't do that with painting, and you may be able to do it with music. But writing has this wonderful freeing that you're allowed to change it. And that, that in and of itself is exciting.

And I love words, and they're very lovely. And I love poetry and I love the magic of words. The incantation magic. And also, when you've worked with psychedelics, you're aware that there are experiences way beyond language. But there are an awful lot of uses of language where they point in the direction of those experiences.

Amber: And it can be fun to try and capture the ineffable in words.

Jim: Yeah, it's wonderful, always, to try and “catch the wind in a squirrel cage”. *(both laugh)*

[1:28:53]

Amber: So I first was in your presence, I guess we didn't meet, but at the Psychedelic Science Conference in 2013. I took a day-long workshop with you. But then we really met and got to know each other the next year at the Conscious Dying Summit. What...

Jim: What was such a wonderful experience, to be with you at the Dying Summit, and really look at dying in ways that I've never really thought about.

Amber: Yes, so that's my question. Like, for me, I was part of a group that was facilitating home funerals and hosting death cafes. And when one of them sent me the link to that event, I was like, “Oh, cool. Yeah, I'll probably want to go.” And then I saw that you were speaking I was like, “I definitely want to go now. I loved this guy last year at the Psychedelic Science Conference.”

So that's really what drew me there, was I was already working in death and was excited that you'd be there. What drew you there?

Jim: Say that again?

Amber: What drew you to the Conscious Dying Summit? Like, how does your work in psychedelics weave in with this?

Jim: You know, now that I'm much older, and have more friends that have died or are doing it, I'm much more interested in dying than I used to be. *(Jim laughs)*

And the fundamental truth of the psychedelic experience is that there is no birth and there is no death. However, the personality and the body really do die. That Jim Fadiman is not long for this world, but that which animates Jim Fadiman will be very interested in watching what happens as he does.

So that shifts one's interest in dying from fear to almost a curiosity.

I'm... as my personal, as Jim Fadiman, who's in the body, suffering in pain, I don't — I'm not. I don't have any high, cool way of dealing with that any more than anyone else. But the idea that consciously dying seems to me very sensible, because it is an important transition point. And also, if one is conscious near dying, one is able then to pretty much relieve the people around you.

Because one of the things that happens when you're with dying people, is you do think that you're going to be on the other side of the bed at one point or another. So that you are much more aware of the issues around dying and there's this, I think, Swedish — is it called “Death Cleaning”?

Amber: I don't know.

Jim: Do you know about that?

Amber: No.

Jim: Oh death cleaning. It's like it's like cleaning up your life before you die so that, especially, relatives don't resent you. *(both laugh)*

And at the moment, I think my relatives would say I think "We're just gonna bring in the dumpster after we sell the library." *(Jim laughs)*

Amber: I'll buy it.

Jim: *(Jim laughs)*

Well, that dying seminar is I think really where I felt very close to you and still do. And what I found that the feeling from your work is that you're really a healer assisted by nature. And that it's in a sense the herbal work flows through you, and it's a good vehicle for you, but it's not the only vehicle. Because whatever it is that you're going to do is going to be with healing.

[1:33:10]

Jim: And see the lovely thing about home funerals is you're really saying to people, "Why would you give the person you love most over to a bunch of professionals who kind of don't really care much, just at the most critical junction of the person's life, which is the end?"

Amber: Yeah.

Jim: And then until that seminar, it had not occurred to me. Just as when we were having children. I originally, being also a man before women's lib, well, you know, children, your woman goes to the hospital has child. And then it didn't register that. Wait a moment. What did women do before hospitals? They did very, very well. that's why we're all here.

And the beginning and ends of life, you know, are remarkably similar.

Amber: Yeah, my previous guest talked about that very thing: the parallels between birth and death and having witnessed both.

Jim: Yeah. And now that you've, you know, since you've also had kids, you really been, you know, on all sides of it. And it's, uh, it's... so I don't...

You know, I get a little tongue tied, as you notice, and usually I'm very facile-verbally. Because we're a death-phobic culture. You know, somehow the one thing I know that I don't want is I don't want to be prettied up, and puffed up, and have makeup put on, and put in my suit which I never wear.

Amber: Pumped full of formaldehyde.

Jim: Right. With formaldehyde. *(Jim laughs)* And then have small children come and look at and then go home and have nightmares.

Amber: Yeah. *(Amber laughs)*

Jim: I mean, I joke with it sometimes, if you really want to give your child a trauma, just take them to an open casket funeral. And they'll see this person in what looks like radiant health. And then you say, "And then we're going to close the box. And we're going to drop them six feet down, and we're covering them with earth."

Amber: Yeah.

Jim: And then, "And you go home and think about that." (*Jim laughs*) I have lots of friends with stories of being terrified for years!

Amber: Yeah, my sister. Yeah.

Jim: No. So I'm at the moment of saying if when I go, take all the organs that are worth saving for anybody else, and then probably cremate and scatter. Though, though my favorite death is a man I knew in Costa Rica. And what he said is, "When I die I want to be buried in a very shallow grave in the rain forest with no coverings." And I said, "Why do you want that? He said, "So I can be, as soon as possible, flowers, and plants, and bees, and birds."

So he's saying, you know, I want my component parts to be reabsorbed into the natural system as quickly as possible.

Amber: Yeah, that's how I feel. Natural burial.

Jim: You know? So it's a little bit like what we get to do with our pets. Right? We get to dig a hole and put our pet in. And then we get to pass by that little place for years, and we think of our pet. But our pet has become mulch, and soil, and flowers, and it feels great.

[1:36:50]

Amber: Yeah. I will say, too, that my psychedelic psilocybin experience when I was 16 it really does removed my fear of death. Not that I don't sometimes still feel it. You know, not that I'm like, "Damn it, I don't want to die." Because I do feel like that a lot. But on a really deep level, my underlying feeling coming out of that was that, like, everything will always be okay. Even death.

And it reminds me of what your friend and teacher Ram Dass says that "Dying is absolutely safe."

Jim: (*Jim laughs*) Yeah. That's wonderful.

Amber: It's so wonderful. And all of these studies on end of life anxiety, there's so, it's amazing. People who get a terminal cancer diagnosis and are just terrified and anxious. And I you know, I mean, well, how scary? That's so scary. When they have this experience, they come out of it feeling that same way, and they have a better end of life. They have a better death, their family has a better experience of witnessing them go through their death

Jim: Well, the image that I recall, it's someone who is in the psilocybin study at UCLA, and she was there for what we call terminal, you know, whatever it is, anxiety. And what we see later in the film is she's planting flowers with her granddaughter.

And that seems to be the way to approach death: while planting flowers.

Amber: My fifth episode, guest Cari Leverage, is a friend of mine and she was dying. She died six days after we did the interview. And I knew that she loved mushrooms. She had done this Facebook post, like a love letter to fungi. And so I asked her about that, and I had no idea that she was going to tell me that she had been microdosing throughout her dying process. But she did, and she went on to describe how helpful it was for her to sort of get that perspective, get that sort of witnessing-consciousness brought in, as she was going out.

Jim: Well, although, I don't use illegal drugs, I might bend my rules a little. *(both laugh)*

Amber: Yeah, I love the story that Aldous Huxley had his wife inject him with LSD.

Jim: Exactly, injected while he was going.

Amber: Yeah, like, literally in the last hour of his life, he was tripping. *(both laugh)*

[1:39:13]

Amber: Okay, that seems like a good endpoint.

Jim, can you tell our listeners where to find you online? And if you have any exciting upcoming projects or events?

Jim: Well, probably at this point, YouTube is better, because I tend to give speeches. And there are a couple on microdosing, one that I did at MAPS with Sophia, where we're actually doing research. We actually have 1800 people from 59 countries who have been microdosing as we've suggested. So that's where we're learning all this stuff. So that's kind of my cutting edge.

I also just finished a book. It won't be out for years. About cells. That's a whole nother topic, which is the healthy cells within you.

So I do have a website, JamesFadiman.com. And I do have an email, but at this point I honestly get too much email. And I don't like to disappoint people.

Amber: Do you have an autoresponder?

Jim: No, but I might be happy to get an assistant responder if you got some time. *(Jim laughs)*

Amber: Yeah, my autoresponder saves my life.

Jim: No, I'm not famous enough to have one of those that say, "I get so much mail. I won't answer you."

Amber: That's what I say. *(Amber laughs)* No, not that I get so much mail, but that I have a young child and a business to run, and I can't answer everyone's health questions.

Jim: Right. But when you get those letters, it's really hard.

Amber: It's very hard and I usually end up responding.

Jim: Exactly. That's why I'm not telling you. *(both laugh)*

But people who people who kind of know the system track me down, and I do try and answer them, but actually that can be helpful. [Microdosingpsychedelics.com](https://microdosingpsychedelics.com). That's one word microdosingpsychedelics.com. And that actually gives you all the information on microdosing, and allows you to join our study if you'd like.

Amber: Yeah. And your book, like, again, if anyone wants to undertake a journey, just get the book. It's, it's worth it. And it's a treasure trove of information.

Jim: *The Psychedelic Explorer's Guide*, and it's online.

Amber: Yes. Okay. Thank you, Jim.

Jim: Oh, it was such a pleasure.

Amber: Yeah. I'm so happy to reconnect with you. We haven't spoken in years, and I just, I truly love you and value you.

Jim: Well, I love you and admire you, and I'm delighted that you're also on top of your other skills. You're becoming a Supermom.

Amber: Yeah, thank you! Thank you for supporting me as a mom, too. You've... we've had to reschedule this a number of times, and you really, like, reflected my life back to me in such an understanding and compassionate way and not a lot of people, especially men, do that. So thank you.

Jim: Well, there is hope for men. Not much. *(both laugh)* But I still want women to rule the world while we still have one.

Amber: Agreed.

Jim: Take care. I love you. I love you doing this podcast as well.

Amber: Thank you. Me too.

Jim: Sure.

Amber: All right. Bye, Jim.

[Interview Ends]

(Exit Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)

[Closing]

[1:42:48]

Amber: Thank you for taking these Medicine Stories in. I hope they inspire you to keep walking the mythic path of your own unfolding self. I love sharing information and will always put any relevant links in the show notes. You can find my blog, handmade herbal medicines, past podcast episodes, and a lot more at MythicMedicine.love.

While you're there, I invite you to click the purple banner to take my quiz "[Which Magical Herb is your Spirit Plant?](#)" It's a fun and lighthearted quiz, but the results are really in depth and designed to bring you into closer alignment with the medicine you are in need of.

If you love this show, please consider supporting my work at Patreon.com/MedicineStories. There's some cool rewards there: like some exclusive content, free access to my herbal e-book and online course, and the ability to chat with me.

I'm a crazy busy and overwhelmed mom and adding this project into my life, like this podcast, has been a questionable move, but I'm also so excited about it, and just praying that the Patreon will allow me the financial wiggle room to keep on doing it.

Another way that you can support, if that's not an option, is to head over to iTunes and subscribe and review the podcast. That would be super helpful.

Thank you to Mariee Sioux for providing the music I use. This is from her song "Wild Eyes." It's one of my favorites. Check out Mariee Sioux. Beautiful music.

Thank you, and I look forward to next time. Bye!

[1:44:26]