

**Transcendence Through Psilocybin By Anthony P. Bossis
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Hello! So we're learning today that we don't die well in America. We don't end well in America. National polls and Gallup surveys show repeatedly that we die not, what they call in palliative care a good death, but a bad death, marked by needless suffering. And a lot of area that I wanna talk about today that is a primary source of this suffering is the existential, spiritual and psychological distress and suffering. And many people experience as the end of their lives as we end our lives.

Twenty years ago, it's remarkable, the institute of medicine called us for a change in how we treat the dying. To change how you approach the end of life. And sadly twenty years later, on a recent study, we found that depression in the following year of life increased by 26%, things aren't changing [00:01:00]. Depression, hopelessness are strong predictors for a desire for a haste of death and end-of-life patients. And depression, right, is it working? Here we go. And one of that spiritual being can buffer against these incredible experiences of hopelessness and depression. Cicely Saunders, the co-founder of Hospice, wrote wonderfully, "You can find a degree of wholeness as oppression whether you get better or not, whether you are suffering or not, and I've seen people find wholeness as they died."

The word heal means to restore to wholeness, to make whole. And there's in that root holy, spiritually pure, and research shows that enhancing spiritual being again buffers these experiences. And wholeness involves all of the human experiences [00:02:00], independent of suffering. And healing is independent of cure, of dying. Even in death we could be healed... and we could become whole. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross wrote, "If you become whole again, you're healed. No matter where along this spectrum." And Viktor Frankl, the great holocaust survivor wrote "Many can't be found on life literally up to the last moment, up to the last breath, and the face of death."

So I'm thrilled to speak with you today about some novel research that addresses and mitigates and treats this awful existential and that some people have and then evolves the use of silicide, whether the government approves psychedelic research. Now I know I'm in San Francisco...

[Crowd Laughing]

...And I know I'm amongst experts and a lot of independent researchers so...

[Crowd Continued Laughing]

...If I get something wrong, feel free to correct me [00:03:00].

For almost a decade, my colleagues in NYU along with a team of Johns Hopkins have investigated the efficacy of silicide, the psilocybin compound in many species of mushrooms to mitigate end-of-life suffering. This existential disparity is so crippling for so many people and it fills demoralisation. These mushrooms have been used for a millennia by indigenous cultures for insight and healing. What many people don't know, you guys know, is that from the 50s to the earliest 70s, there's a large body of scientific literature documenting their clinical benefits, with addiction and with end-of-life distress. These are mini making medicines, mini-making molecules and what strikes me as remarkable is the why for these experiences, this incredible mystical experiences that one dose can generate. At the heart of world religions lies this mystic

core with the great Aldous Huxley [00:04:00] called the *Perennial Philosophy*. Mystics and ordinary people from Himalaya have these incredible peak mystical experiences and we now know if you can harness that scientific study in a safe setting, you can use them to mitigate as end-of-life distress that is so common as these experiences of transcendence are wired in our nature. Along the drug silicide, there's not a drug study per se, it's about these experiences, again, this naturally perennial experience throughout history that it could naturally and could all be generated with this incredible medicine.

I'm gonna give you some quotes from people who were into the study. These are quotes about their experience with the silicide after their session and the months and the years after this session. All these people had cancer and some had since passed away. "This changed [00:05:00] my life," referring to her experience. "I can't even imagine it, fear of cancer. I felt as constantly stated becoming, I felt gratitude like I never felt before in my life. I felt totally welcome." "Death doesn't matter" from a prisoner approaching death, death doesn't matter. "I've just heard life and death are a continuum, we just wanna end where the other begin." "I'm not afraid of death. Death is part of life." No fear of recurrence from a person crippled with fear. I experience that everything is eternal. And all the existence happens in every moment." And finally, "Everything is love." And we're gonna speak about love a little later on because everyone, most people in these experiences, talked about this incredible sense of love, that changes how they live in the moment and changes how they approach death. And it's quite striking to hear, over and over again.

So what is this mystical experience? These are the criteria that we use for these studies [00:06:00]. The sense of unity, a profound sense of the interconnectedness of all people and things, everything is one. Then a lot of quality. Quality by William James, "A profound sense of encounter in ultimate reality — whatever you wanna call it— with incredible ultimate knowledge." Sacredness, feeling of awe, humility, holiness, and wonder. If we felt positive mood, peace, love and joy, all the law and degrees, people in these experiences are weeping for this incredible experience and they're experiencing it internally. And effability, it's impossible to describe! Words truly fell short. I'll have to say they described it beautifully as mystics who had a few throughout the centuries. But it does seem it transcends words. And when I think is the most important feature, a life with this most important feature, is the sense of transcendence. People of spirit has a sense of transcending past [00:07:00], present and future. Space, time as we know it. I know that sounds wild.

Transcending is consent with reality we share today. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross wrote, "Healing is the personal experience of the transcendence of suffering." And for people in this cancer study, some approaching death, this one dose came out with this experience as if putting the lens back on their experience and see themselves, their suffering, their cancer, their bodies, their very existence from a much broader perspective, this timeless dimension that is remarkable. This timeless dimension can forge a non-attachment to this body, to this suffering. I think it cultivates a connection of something more enduring within us. What does persist? And some people report it connects to something outside ourselves. Some say even outside biology, an outside consciousness [00:08:00].

For someone who is dying and those bodies beginning to fail, this body is beginning to fail and cease to work. The insight that I'm not only this body, that I'm something more enduring, that I'm not this cancer, is a profound gift to anyone approaching death. And they reported incredible experience of gratitude and equanimity and compassion and a deep appreciation of being alive at the very moment they have. Albert Einstein who I think is the modern mystic, wrote, "The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is a sensation of the mystical."

So last year our group at NYU with a team of Johns Hopkins as well, published findings never seen before in the history of medicine. One dose of silicide can produce remarkable changes in anxiety and depression and other measures that I'm gonna show you after a few moments. We published this December of last year. And a pioneer of this, of all this research was the ode of Aldous Huxley [00:09:00]. So I think you all know him. He wrote *Doors of Perception*, which is about his masculine trip back in the early 50s. But Aldous Huxley would went on to really exploring lately about the end of life and how we treat the dying. He said the dying face increase in pain, increase in anxiety, increase in morphine with the ultimate disintegration of personality and the loss of opportunity to die with dignity.

This is a picture of Aldous Huxley in Los Angeles on his 1953 Mescaline launcher. The actual picture was first psychedelic trip. I love this photograph because it's a historic photograph, Aldous Huxley at his first psychedelic journey but I also love it because only a classy, elegant English literary writer will come to his first trip with a tweed jacket...

[Crowd Laughing]

...cuff pants, classy stuff! No tie-dye stuff this is very — he dresses well for the trip.

This is where we do the study is when people came in, we prepare them for weeks, what to expect, what possibility to expect, we give them guidelines [00:10:00], they took the capsule, they'd lie down with eye-shade and headphones to encourage them to go in to their internal world and be with the unfolding changes. We give them some guidelines, most important in the guidelines, trust. Trust the guides you're working with, trust the medicine, and trust consciousness, trust wisdom, and let go to the unfolding change experience and be open to all that rises. Even suffering. And we've seen over and over again where people move in even directly into suffering into the face of death and some actually say they experience death, those moments become teachable moments. It was incredible insights. And they report incredible instances about life, death, and the nature of self. Some brief findings are: anxiety and depression drop remarkably one day after this little side session, painkillers with silicide, and blue placebo mitigated in incredible ways, sustained at the six-months marking was still following them, depression again dropped remarkably versus the [00:11:00] placebo. And improved spiritual being. Remarkably demoralisation, hopelessness, two awful experiences to live with end-of-life suffering, were dramatically reduced in the weeks following the one silicide and generative mystical experience.

People experience this transcendence of death, defined as connecting with something more enduring than death itself. You see again the pink being the psilocybin and the blue being placebo. Incredible experiences to see. And so many people spoke about love, which is remarkable. They spoke about a love and kindness towards themselves as they approach the end of their lives, they spoke about a love to other people in their life and throughout their lifespan, and they spoke of what I just find stunning, this incredible larger, broader kind of cosmic love. That love is the grand of all being. I'd like to use the Greek word *theía agápi*, it counts like a divine love.

And I'll read to you a quote from one of the patients [00:12:00]. His name was Patrick. He was in his 50s and he had an awful metastatic cancer. He passed away a year and a half after this study was over. I had the complete privilege to work with him. He was an incredible person. And he wrote about his experience that day on the couch, for three or four hours, in his altered state of consciousness. He wrote later, "From here on, love is the only consideration. Everything that happens, anything and everything, that was seen or heard, centred on love. It was and the only purpose. It was so pure the sheer joy was indescribable and the bliss. And the fact there are no words to actually capture my experience, my stay at this place. I've never

had an earthly pleasure that's come close to this incredible feeling, those sensation and image of beauty, nothing during my time on earth has felt as pure and joyful and glorious as the height of this journey." And he had a great life. He was a journalist, a musician, he owned a restaurant, lead a great full life [00:13:00]. "I took a tour of my lungs," he wrote. But in his experience, he went into his body, a part of him and he can see the tumours. He wrote, "There were nodules there but they seemed rather unimportant. I was being formed to not worry about the cancer. It's mind where there's a scheme of things. The more important work is love. My life is changed in ways I never fully understand but I have an understanding and awareness that was beyond intellect. That my life, that every life, and all that is the universe was one thing: love." Patrick rated this experience as the single most spiritually significant experience of his lifetime. And at the most top 5 most meaningful experiences of his lifetime.

Thích Nhất Hạnh wrote, "Our true nature is the nature of no birth and no death. Only when we touch our true nature can we transcend the fear of non-being, or of annihilation." Is that what these people are [00:14:00] experiencing? It sure sounds like it.

We and traced a clinical trial was psilocybin and if that one merits the results of this incredible study, I think we're on track in this coming years to have psilocybin rescheduled for people at the end of life who are suffering. That'd be a remarkable advancement, how we treat the end of life. Dying has become medicalised and this speech humanised from behind closed doors back into the culture where it is because death is here every day. And the implications here are incredible. Proving how we die, with peace and dignity. It closes us to what is consciousness, where is consciousness, are we wired for meaning and if so, why? Many people here say it's because of love. And that's the enduring ailment.

There are post social implications. People report we're all connected. It's an illusion that we're separate [00:15:00] and if that's true then how do we hurt one another?

In closing, when Patrick had that session that day, he took the capsule, he laid down in the couch and for two hours and nothing, we're right there. The guides are with the person as he watched him, eye shades, headphones and really quiet for five or six hours while the experience happens internally. And two and a half hours after it began, tears coming down his face, he said "Breath and death is a lot of work." It was quite stunning. He later said that was his thought of this journey, within, and onto consciousness. And it really shaped how he died and recalibrated his death. His wife, Lisa, and him both attributed his ending. No fear from this experience. He didn't wanna leave this incredible miracle we have for a life, but he wasn't afraid. Patrick and others in these studies had been a true feature showing us what's possible, that we're wired for this incredible meaning-making [00:16:00] transcendent experiences. Nature has wired us that way and these medicines reliably generate that experience under the right conditions. And it confirmed for me what we use in palliative care the term we use, that a good death is indeed possible. And then maybe the ground there being the very nature of consciousness, is something of a substance that the mystics and these people in a study described as a type of great liberation of our love and that we're all indeed connected, and that perhaps this is our true nature. That is available to us all and with it, we can live well and we can end well. When Patrick said those words, I thought of a zen saying that is said in the monasteries at the end of the day and I wanna close with this saying today: "With love, I respectfully remind you, life and death are of supreme importance. Time swiftly passes by and opportunity is lost. Each of us should [00:17:00] strive to a waking, awakened, take heed, the next part of your life." Thank you.

[Crowd Applauding]

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