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EXPERIENCES OF TRUTH: A COMPARATIVE CONTEMPLATION OF
JAINISM AND THE WESTERN PSYCHEDELIC EXPERIENCE

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DEDICATION

To love, may you forever be an ultimate source of perception and action.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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In this research, I wish to explore the relationship between induced non-ordinary states of consciousness, ineffability, and religious autonomy. Through a comparative inquiry of corresponding themes and arguments, this research entails a thematic and textual analysis of philosophical sources by four key figures from the Jain adhyatmik movement and the western psychedelic movement. Despite the array of differences between these two movements, these noetic mystics enunciated a corresponding goal: the reclamation of the self as the supreme source of religious authority. This research concludes that adhyatmis and psychonauts advocated the individual's right to attain perennial knowledge and empowered the role of the layperson in religion by utilizing non-ordinary states of consciousness as epistemological sources, emphasizing the ineffability of the self and experience, reconsidering the status quo, and advocating for philosophical pluralism and equanimity.

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THIS RESEARCH

The rise of the psychedelic renaissance, a science-focused movement centered on discovering the potential healing benefits of entheogenic medicines, is influencing the reinvigoration of psychedelic scholarship in other academic disciplines. In Religious Studies, there has been a recent inquiry into the intersection between Eastern Spirituality and psychedelics. An essential similarity between the two phenomena is the utilization of non-ordinary states of consciousness to incite metaphysical understandings about the nature of reality and consciousness. In this research, I wish to explore the relationship between induced non-ordinary states of consciousness, ineffability, and religious autonomy. To highlight these phenomena, I will compare philosophical writings from the Jain adhyatma movement and the western psychedelic movement. Despite the array of differences between these two movements, these noetic mystics enunciated a corresponding goal: the reclamation of the self as the supreme source of religious authority. This research's complementary motives include uncovering how these marginalized religious philosophers actualized themselves. These mystics never proclaimed themselves to be prophets or divinely chosen ones. The writings of these mystics emphasized that anyone could have been an adhyatmi and anyone could be a psychonaut. There is nothing supernatural about these humans. They are human beings relaying a message to other human beings. This research seeks to uncover how these mystics used their visions to effectuate the transformation of the individual's role in religious authority.

Since I am starting up a comparative dialogue between these two spiritual traditions, I feel a discussion of the Jain view of *pramada* (carelessness/negligence) and psychedelic substances is imperative. There are five fundamental vows prescribed to both Jain laypeople¹ and mendicants. The vows are *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (chastity), and *aparigraha* (non-possession). Jain ascetics thoroughly observe these vows, while laypeople observe the vows partially in the form of *anuvratas*.² According to Jain tradition, it is assumed that any activity by a lay Jain will involve some degree of inherent violence, so it is the responsibility of the layperson to uphold the right conduct to avoid the influx of inauspicious karma.

Shravakas (laypeople) are expected to abide by the five *anuvratas*, three *gunavratas*, and four *shikhsavratas*. The function of the vows is two-fold: the observance of vows will prevent the accumulation of negative karma and, through abstinence of sin, will maintain peace and safety in society.³ If a Jain were to slack on any of these vows, they are subject to one of the seven *tattvas* (reals) of reality: *asrava*, or the influx of karma. Jain philosophy contains one of the most complex theories concerning karma. There are two types of *asrava*: *bhavasrava* and *dravyasrava*. *Bhavasrava* is caused by the activities of the five senses and an impure mind. One of the five categories of *bhavasrava* is *pramada* (car-

¹ The word *shravakas* refers to laymen, while *shravikas* refers to women.

² These are minor vows kept by Jain laypeople in place of the *mahavratas*, or “the great vows” that are withheld by all Jain ascetics.

³ Kachhara, Narayan Lal, “Basic Principles of Jainism.”, Jain Vishva Bharati Institute, https://www.jainfoundation.in/JAINLIBRARY/books/basic_principles_of_jainism_035317_data.pdf.

lessness/negligence). According to *Tattvarthasutra* 8.1,⁴ *pramada* is one of the five causes of karma bondage, and there are 15 types of negligence one can partake in. One of these actions believed to cause unnecessary *himsa*⁵ to the self or *jiva* and may result in potential harm to other beings is the ingestion of alcohol or drugs. In the Jain view, actions like this will only lead to further karmic impedance in one's emancipation from the world of samsara because it does not allow one to follow the five vows or have complete control over the senses and the four passions.⁶

So if this is the sentiment towards drugs in Jainism, why try to compare the philosophy from this tradition to one that explicitly requires the use of psychedelic substances? First, psychoactive substances are not a foreign phenomenon in Indian religion. Cannabis has been used in the form of *bhang*, *ganja*, and *charas* in Hindu ritual settings since approximately 1000 B.C.⁷ In fact, the *Atharva Veda* considers cannabis to be one of the five most sacred plants on Earth.⁸ Additionally, many scholars argue that there is significant geographical and textual evidence to prove that hallucinogenic beverages were used dur-

⁴ The *Tattvarthasutra* is one of the most authoritative texts throughout both the Digambara and Svetambara traditions and other minor sub-sects of Jainism. Within the 350 sutras, four chapters pertain to the manifestations, influx, bondage, and destruction of karmas.

⁵ *Himsa* is the Sanskrit word for injury or violence.

⁶ The four passions are the *kashayas*: anger, greed, ego, and deceit. It is believed that if a person has *kashayas*, they will not be liberated from the cycle of life and death.

⁷ "The History of the Intoxicant Use of Marijuana from the National Commission of Marijuana and Drug Abuse." *skunked.co.uk*, 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20050813080240/www.skunked.co.uk/articles/history-intoxicant.htm>

⁸ See Sharma, G. K. "CANNABIS FOLKLORE IN THE HIMALAYAS." *Botanical Museum Leaflets*, Harvard University, vol. 25, no. 7, 1977, pp. 203. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41762786>.

ing ancient Vedic rituals.⁹ As for *shramana* (world-renouncer) traditions, Buddhist scholar, Michael Crowley, argues that there is prevalent evidence to suggest that early Vajrayana practitioners ingested a sacramental psychedelic brew. In the book, *Secret drugs of Buddhism: Psychedelic sacraments and the origins of the Vajrayana*, Crowley tackles the prominent demer to his hypothesis. Like Jain ascetics, Buddhist monks take a formal vow to avoid the use of intoxicating substances. He argues that maybe the categorization of psychedelics as intoxicants is flawed. Rather than clouding the mind by intoxication, psychedelics act as “agents that clear the mind, perceptions, and understandings, allowing a clearer, less deluded, mode of appreciating one’s reality”.¹⁰ Going along with the theory presented by Michael Crowley in this work on Tibetan Buddhism and psychedelics, I pose a similar question: what if psychedelic drugs are not mind-altering but mind-awakening? Psychonauts who willfully ingest psychedelic substances to learn, gain spiritual insight, and release trauma are not going into these situations with violent intent. The act of ingesting a psychedelic substance is intended with spiritual progress in mind. If those who have undergone psychedelic mystical experiences report significant improvement in their spiritual development and health, why not believe them? The psychonauts reviewed in this work intentionally take psychedelics with spiritual curiosity in mind and return from their experiences with a profound appreciation for reality and humanity. Through an

⁹ Thoricatha, Wesley. “The Search for Soma, The Ancient Indian Psychedelic”, *Psychedelic Times*, 2015, <https://psychedelictimes.com/the-search-for-soma-the-ancient-indian-psychedelic/>.

¹⁰ Crowley, Michael. “Secret Drugs of Buddhism: Psychedelic Sacraments and the Origins of the Vajrayana”, *Synergetic Press*, 2019.

analytical presentation of psychedelic and Jain literature, I hope to develop cordial relations and the possibility of more interreligious dialogue between the two traditions.

It is worth noting that I am purposely straying away from using words like “altered,” “supernatural,” or “unworldly” when I refer to the non-ordinary states of consciousness experienced by the adhyatmis and psychonauts. These words give the impression that the phenomena experienced by these mystics are utterly different from this reality. The experiences undergone by psychonauts and adhyatmis are believed to be direct perceptions of the nature of reality. Rather than stepping out of this world, their awareness is expanded to perceive the absolute true nature of reality and the self. It is not other than this reality but a clear perception of the true nature of the world as it is.¹¹

Psychedelic mysticism poses challenges to common theoretical, historical, and methodological perspectives. The pivotal role of direct experience in these religions poses the question; how do we study the experiential dimension of religion? In his 2011 work, *Ayahuasca Groups and Networks in the Netherlands: A Challenge to the Study of Contemporary Religion*, Wouter J. Hanegraaf identifies three ways in which Dutch *ayahuasca*¹² religion poses challenges to the traditional framework for studying religion. Even though his work only comprises ayahuasca religion in the Netherlands, his analytical framework can be further extended to psychonauts’ overall spiritual use of psychedelics in the West. Like ayahuasca religion in the Netherlands, this spiritual psychedelic

¹¹ Shipley, Morgan. “Psychedelic Mysticism: Transforming Consciousness, Religious Experiences, and Voluntary Peasants in Postwar America”, *Lexington Books*, 2015, p 50.

¹² Ayahuasca is a psychoactive brew that is ceremonially prepared and consumed by various peoples of the Amazon.

phenomenon can be called a religion because of its ability to connect the experiencer to mystically induced states directly. There are no central authorities to convene with, no common meeting place, and no essential religious texts, yet this phenomena possesses a religious nature. Psychedelic mysticism is a religion, or like a religion, because of its one central practice: the ingestion of a psychoactive substance. Hanegraaf argues that ayahuasca religions show us that "...many of our 'natural' assumptions about religion are still grounded in theological biases."¹³ From a theoretical perspective, psychedelic religion forces us to reconsider certain preconceived notions regarding the definition of religion. Due to monolatrous religious assumptions stemming from Christian theological influence, Western scholarship tends to view "religion" as a phenomenon or established tradition that is concerned with the relationship between humans and the supernatural grace of a superior divine being. In this definition, authentic religious practice concerns the divine grace given by a transcendent God and received by lowly humans. These humans behave by an ethical code meant to appease their God's temperament. All other spiritual practices that stray from this narrow definition are seen as "other" and irreligious in structure. Psychedelic mysticism initiates theoretical considerations that are alternative to this Christian framework. In the psychedelic religious view, humans can directly access and influence divinity through religious practice. Divinity is not a transcendent, out-of-bounds phenomenon. When one voluntarily undergoes a psychedelic-

¹³ Hanegraaf, Wouter J. "Ayahuasca Groups and Networks in the Netherlands: A Challenge to the Study of Contemporary Religion.", *The Internationalization of Ayahuasca*, edited by 45 Beatriz Caiuby Labate, Jungaberie, 2011, pp.99.

induced mystical state, they use their will to access divinity, spiritual healing, and religiosity directly.

From a historical perspective, western psychedelic religion alerts us to an academic lacuna. The study of religion in modern western culture has barely acknowledged the religious nature of non-ordinary states of consciousness and, more specifically, disregarded psychedelically induced non-ordinary states in non-indigenous traditions. While mainstream acceptance of psychedelic use is expanding, societal stigma and legal restrictions reinforce negative stereotypes about psychedelic substances and those who partake in them. Thought to be nothing but drug-induced delusions, reports of spiritual experiences induced by psychedelic use are commonly discredited by statements like, "the person was just high" or "that was just the brain reacting to chemicals". Questioning the overall spiritual integrity of the experience brings psychedelic mysticism into disrepute. The lack of academic research concerning non-ordinary states of consciousness makes it hard for historians of religion to contextualize Western psychedelic mysticism from a historical point of view. Despite the creation of the American Academy of Religion during the height of psychedelic use in America, psychedelics have been given little attention in the discipline. It seems that the ban on biomedical research in the 1960s set a tone of skepticism for psychedelic research in all academic fields. With this research, I hope to enhance understandings of contemporary religious expression by attempting to justify the study of Western psychedelic religion.

From a methodological perspective, psychedelic religion provides new insight into the discussion concerning scholarship's ability to examine the experiential dimension

of religion. Not only is it imperative to reconsider the “impossibility” of studying direct experience, but we must acknowledge that psychedelic mysticism is just as religiously efficient as more traditional forms of religious mysticism. With this research, I aim to demonstrate that traditional modes of understanding religion need to be reframed when studying the content of psychedelic writers. There is no doubt that there are inevitable limitations when analyzing another’s non-ordinary state of consciousness. A religious scholar cannot analyze the subjective effects of a religious believer’s experience, but they can review the empirical data left behind by the believer. Psychonauts of the 20th century have left behind a compendium of empirical data filled with recordings of psychedelic trip¹⁴ reports and discussions. This literature deserves the attention of religious scholarship.

In his work, *Psychedelic Mysticism: Transforming Consciousness, Religious Experiences, and Voluntary Peasants in Postwar America*, Morgan Shipley asserts that pioneering psychonaut Aldous Huxley established a psychonautic topography in his trailblazing psychedelic work, *The Doors of Perception*. According to Shipley, the early works of pioneering psychonaut Aldous Huxley reflect:

...his critical role in modeling the religious undertones of psychedelic writing, which more importantly supplied psychedelic mystics of the 1960s with a way to

¹⁴ Psychedelic experiences are colloquially known as trips.

map the psychedelic experience beyond limits of modern understanding and as an expression of perennial wisdom that expected a compassionate response.¹⁵

Huxley's work set the stage for other psychedelic mystics. This psychonautic topographical system challenges typical modes of studying religious experience because, unlike typical western philosophical frameworks, it is "...non-discursive, non-dualistic, and non-utilitarian in thinking and speaking".¹⁶ In psychedelic religion, the religious experience does not end once the effects of the drug wear off. Religious and ethical wisdom is gained after these experiences. The value of studying these experiences is in how they are spiritually understood. Directly opposing a positivist approach, I argue that by phenomenologically viewing the philosophical writings of psychonauts, and even adhyatmis, we are given a slight peak into the experience of these mystics.

¹⁵ Shipley, Morgan. "Psychedelic Mysticism: Transforming Consciousness, Religious Experiences, and Voluntary Peasants in Postwar America", *Lexington Books*, 2015, p.62.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

II. BACKGROUND

The Adhyatma Movement

The Adhyatma school of the 17th to 19th centuries is a philosophical movement comprising various Jain mystical poets and philosophers. The Sanskrit compound term Adhyātma from *adhi-* (over/above) and *ātman* (self/soul/oneself) translates to “concerning the soul”. Despite the many doctrinal and literary differences between Svetambara and Digambara Jains, both sects affiliate with this school of thought. The Adhyātma philosophy is concerned with reconsidering religious institutions, the faults of logocentric knowledge, and the role of the individual in spiritual guidance and liberation. Rather than depending on external religious authority and the sangha, Adhyātma vernacular poets champion self-reliance through the experience of the *sva-samaya* or the *paramatman* (the pure/true self).

The beginning of this spiritual movement is mainly attributed to the pioneering Jain poet, Banarasidas.¹⁷ Although this work will not analyze Banarasi’s poetry, it is necessary to mention Banarasi and his legacy in the Jain tradition. Considered by many as the *adiguru*,¹⁸ Banarasi transformed the Adhyatma movement from an intellectual endeavor to a religious reform movement.¹⁹ His most notable work, *Ardhakathanaka* or *A*

¹⁷ He was born in a Svetambara family but later converted to Digambara Jainism.

¹⁸ Translated as the “first teacher”.

¹⁹ Chowdhury, Rohini, translator. *Ardhakathanak: A Half Story*. By Banarasidas, Penguin Classics, 2009, p.xxxvi.

*Half Story*²⁰, is an autobiographical tale that retells the experiences of the *murtipujak*²¹ merchant Banarasidas as he navigates his life, questioning the efficacy of his constantly changing spiritual practices. As arguably the first autobiography in Indian literature, the *Ardhakathanaka* is a beloved work throughout North India. Another cherished work of Banarasidas is his *Samayasara Nataka*. The *Samayasara Nataka* is a commentary and adaptation of the original Digambara text, *Samayasara*, by Acharya Kundakunda. As a proponent of adhyatmik²² thought, Banarasi's works invite the lay reader to consider the authoritative power of the *atma-anubhava* (the experience of the self).

Even though Banarasi's adaptation contributed more to the trademark Ādhyātmik concept of individualization in 1641, Kundakunda's work serves as an early exemplar of the movement's philosophy. Before the poems of Banarasidas, Kundakunda's *Samayasara* advised many Jains about the nature of the self and the innate potential to derive knowledge directly from the experience of the *paramatman*. Acharya Kundakunda is a revered saint like figure in the Digambara Jain tradition. He is believed to have lived some time in the first millennium of the common era.²³ Overall, his history comprises a

²⁰ A "half story" refers to the Jain understanding of a whole lifespan as 110 years.

²¹ Mūrtipūjaka (image-worshipping) are the largest sect of Svetambara Jains. They differ from other sects in that they worship images of the Tirthankaras in their pūjā (devotional rituals).

²² I borrow this term from Rahul Bjørn Parson's "Untold Tales of the Self: the Ineffable in Early-Modern Jain Poetry." In this text, he uses *ādhyātmik* as an adjective that refers to any term that fits the Adhyātma philosophy and movement.

²³ Kundakunda has been dated between the second and eighth centuries of the common era. See Soni, Jayandra. "Kundakunda." In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Jainism Online*, edited by John E. Cort, Paul Dundas, Knut A. Jacobsen, and Kristi L. Wiley. First Published Online 2020 (<https://referenceworks.brillonline.com>).

combination of myths and approximated authorship dates (Jaini 33). Some scholars argue that his literary compendium is composed of works by various authors bearing the name Kundakunda. Regardless of his unknown history, he is a widely celebrated teacher in Jainism. Kundakunda's eminent texts are essential because of his development of Jaina logic and advocacy of a two-perspective model.²⁴ According to this model offered in the *Samayasara* and other works by Kundakunda, all things can be analyzed from two different perspectives or *nayas*: the *vyavahāranaya* (mundane or practical point of view) and *niścayanaya* (the ultimate or absolute point of view). While ultimate truth pertains to the ultimate perspective, the practical way of looking at things is necessary to make right choices and progress on the path of liberation. To Kundakunda, no practice or material affair compares to the inner truth of the *paramatman*. Focusing on Kundakunda's use of refutation to allude to the experience of the self and truth, I attempt to uncover the philosophical and spiritual implications of the *Samayasara*.

Another *murtipujak* poet who will be my analysis's focus is Anandghan, also known as Labhanad. The adhyatmi hymnist exhibits a unique Jain bhakti (devotional) expression in his vernacular poetry and songs. There is little historical information about the life of Anandghan. In spite of this, the content, style, and nature of his poetry give evidence to suggest that he lived around the mid-17th century. Unlike other late-medieval Svetambara mendicants who lived within worshipping communities, Anandghan's poetry suggests that he lived a nomadic life where he spent just as much time with non-Jain, re-

²⁴ Shah, Umakant Premanand, et al. "Jainism." *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jainism/Festivals#ref87383>

religious poets and seekers as he did with other image-worshipping Jain monks. Like Banaridas, Anandghan's poetry evinces participation in inter-denominational and inter-religious dialogue circles.²⁵ Due to this and the lack of intellectual property rights during this time, many of Anandghan's verses have been attributed to other non-Jain mystical poets like the famous Sant ("saint") poet Kabīr who lived in circa the fifteenth century. Anandghan's writing reflects an anti-institutional approach centered on freelance asceticism, meditation, and tantric poetry.²⁶ For the focus of my analysis, I will be analyzing various hymns in the collection, *It's a City Showman's Show!: Transcendental Songs by Ānandghan* translated by Imre Bangha and Fynes. In this work, Anandghan emphasizes the direct experience of self, champions the view that the *atma-anubhava* is the true source of knowledge, and uses complex metaphors to help facilitate his audience's awakening towards the true self.

The Western Psychedelic Movement

Similar to the Adhyatma movement, psychedelic mysticism, and philosophy of the 20th century asserted that the self is the premier source of spiritual knowledge and authority. Participants of this spiritual movement adhered to counterrevolutionary ideas concerning religion, societal hierarchies, and the utilization of non-ordinary states of consciousness to induce spiritual and philosophical revelation. Rather than rely on societal

²⁵ Bangha, Imre. *It's A City-Showman's Show!: Transcendental Songs of Anandghan*. In India, Penguin Books, 2013, p.xii

²⁶ Later in chapter three, I will expand on my argument about the presence of tantra in Jain asceticism.

institutions and external spiritual teachers to provide guidance, psychonauts of the 20th century induced mystical experiences through the ingestion of psychedelic substances to incite metaphysical understandings about the nature of reality, the self, and consciousness. The most common psychedelic substances used during this time included LSD, DMT²⁷, psilocybin²⁸, and mescaline²⁹.

Those who partake in the psychedelic pursuit are known as psychonauts. German author Ernst Jünger first used this term in his 1970 essay, *Annäherungen: Drogen und Rausch (Approaches: Drugs and Inebriation)*, to describe a person who journeys through the mind/consciousness, typically through the ingestion of psychedelics³⁰. The term is a combination of the Greek words *psuchē* (soul/spirit/mind) and *naútēs* (sailor/navigator), meaning a “sailor of the soul”. It is crucial to note that when I am referring to psychedelic mysticism, I am explicitly calling attention to the phenomena of non-indigenous psychonauts. Generous academic attention has been given to the ritual use of entheogenic³¹ substances in indigenous cultures. However, there is a significant lack of research on contemporary psychedelic use in the secular Western context.

²⁷ A substituted tryptamine that naturally occurs in various plants and animals. It is the active psychoactive component in the ritually-prepared Amazonian brew, Ayahuasca.

²⁸ The psychoactive compound found in magic mushrooms or shrooms.

²⁹ The naturally occurring psychoactive proto alkaloid found in San Pedro and Peyote cacti.

³⁰ Blom, Jan Dirk. "A Dictionary of Hallucinations". Springer, 2009. p 434.

³¹ I specifically use the term psychedelics instead of entheogens (the academically accepted word for the hallucinogenic drug class). Since entheogens are associated with indigeneity, I will use the term psychedelics to differentiate cultural context. In addition to this, I use psychedelics to reclaim the term from societal stigma and negative stereotypes that media and law enforcement have perpetuated.

Popular representatives of the psychedelic movement include scientists, philosophers, and artists. Some pioneering psychonautic figures include Aldous Huxley, Timothy Leary, William S. Burroughs, Alexander Shulgin, and Albert Hoffman. A comprehensive study of all of the philosophical literature composed by these men would require a significant amount of time and attention. For the sake of this study's concision, I have chosen two psychonauts whose work exemplifies the psychonautic view. Terrence McKenna and Alan Watts advocated for the preeminence of direct experience and the mystical exploration of one's inner self and consciousness as the birthright of every human being.

Terrence McKenna (1946-2000) was an American ethnobotanist, philosopher, and mystic who promoted open-minded skepticism toward societal structures and culture. As a staunch proponent of plant shamanism, McKenna argued that "...mushrooms were the source of humanity's first religious ideas and that entheogens would lead to the next evolutionary step for humanity".³² To McKenna, the dominance of patriarchy, capitalism, and rationalism in today's society abominates the role that psychedelics play as a tool that allows individuals to transcend their mundane ego. Throughout his career as a psychonautic mystic, McKenna authored various books pertaining to psilocybin mushroom cultivation, the evolution of human consciousness, metaphysics, and culture. He conducted numerous lecture tours and workshops where he argued that the psychedelic experience has impressive problem-solving capabilities and repeatedly stressed the importance of directly experiencing the dissolution of the ego. In my analysis of his religious and philosophical posi-

³² Gershon, Livia. "Terrence McKenna's Anarchic Psychedelic Religion." *JSTOR Daily*, [https:// daily.jstor.org/terrence-mckennas-anarchic-psychedelic-religion/](https://daily.jstor.org/terrence-mckennas-anarchic-psychedelic-religion/)

tion, I will review his 1993 book, *True Hallucinations: Being an Account of the Author's Extraordinary Adventures in the Devil's Paradise*, and other analogous lectures.

An equally influential figure in the psychedelic movement is Alan Watts. Watts (1915-1973) was an English writer, speaker, and philosopher. His prolific scholarship popularized and made philosophical concepts within Japanese, Chinese, and Indian religious traditions more accessible to a Western audience. An investigation of Watts's work is critical to this comparative discussion because he is a prime example of the intersection between psychedelic thought and Eastern religion. After experimenting with psychedelics and experiencing mystical states induced by LSD, cannabis, and mescaline, Watts ventured on to study religious philosophy in Zen Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism. The work most synonymous with his position and the focus of my analysis is *A Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness*. This poetic work helps illuminate the revelations experienced during a psychedelic journey and displays the potential of mystical experiences to incite existential harmony and awareness.

Motivations for this Comparative Research

Scholarship has explored connections between psychedelic mysticism and Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism. A core text from the psychedelic movement, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, is one of the first scholarly attempts to examine the psychedelic experience and Eastern philosophy comparatively. Inspired by the cycle of death and rebirth expounded in the Tibetan Buddhist text, *Bardo Thodol (The Tibetan Book of the Dead)*, Harvard University researchers and

Psychonauts Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, and Ralph Metzner created this text in 1964. The book serves as a guide to traversing a psychedelic trip and, more specifically, the experience of *ego death*³³.

A pivotal motive for my comparative analysis of adhyatmis and psychonauts is to legitimize the intellectual integrity of psychedelic mysticism in the realm of academia. By juxtaposing psychedelic philosophy with Jainism's widely recognized, ancient religious culture, I aim to demonstrate the analytical merit and legitimate religiosity of this academically and socially marginalized tradition. In doing so, I take heedfulness not to reduce Jainism's complexity and intellectual nature. While navigating this comparative analysis, I proceed with caution towards the imposition of western terminology onto this South Asian tradition. To combat this, I will instead attempt to place Western psychedelic philosophy into Jain phenomenal categorization. For example, *pramaṇa* (valid means of knowledge) of the direct (*pratyakṣa*) type in Jainism refers to knowledge obtained directly through the self, without mediation through senses or the mind. These Jain terms can also be used to categorize profound metaphysical realizations experienced by psychonauts during their trip.

To my knowledge, the only published academic literature relating Jainism and psychedelics is a small excerpt from the book *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion*. In the book's chapter, "The Mahāvira Vessel and the Plant Pūtika", Stella Kramrisch discusses the *Putka* mushroom. Believed to be a direct surrogate for

³³ Ego death refers to the temporary dissolution of a person's ordinary sense of self. It is a commonly reported occurrence during intense psychedelic experiences.

Soma (plant-based originally intoxicating drink mentioned in Vedic and later literature), this mushroom is one of the main ingredients used to create the Mahāvira pot. This "ritually animated" clay pot endowed with a soul is the main ritual object in the Pravargya sacrifice, a preliminary ritual conducted before the Rig Veda Soma sacrifice. She compares the symbolic significance of the Mahāvira pot to the "brimming vessel" symbol that appeared in the divinatory dreams of Jain Tirthankara Mahavira's mother. My analysis of adhyatmis and psychonauts strives to expand on this inchoate comparative debate.

These religio-intellectual movements acted as forces of a spiritual revolution that transformed the layperson's role in their respective society. Through the comparative analysis of philosophical texts and poems by these four Jain adhyatmis and psychonauts, I wish to highlight the religious and philosophical influence of induced non-ordinary states of consciousness. By utilizing non-ordinary states of consciousness, arguing the ineffability of truth, reconsidering their respective religious/philosophical status quo, and advocating philosophical pluralism and equanimity, these mystics enunciated a corresponding goal: the reclamation of the self as the supreme source of religious authority.

III: SADHANA, TRUTH, AND THE SELF

Discovering the True Self in the Adhyatma Tradition

Adhyatmis utilized tantric poetry and *dhyana* (meditation) as spiritual vehicles to reach non-ordinary states of consciousness. The desired non-ordinary state of consciousness for adhyatmis is the state of *svasamaya* or *paramatman* or the pure self. To adhyatmis, seekers must look inward for spiritual knowledge and guidance. Unlike other Jain teachers of this time who stressed ritual conduct, adhyatmis, like Kundakunda and Anandghan, asserted that religious practice does not supersede the spirituality potency of self-exploration. Adhyatmis advocated that the sole requirement for gaining knowledge and moksha is the exploration of the *paramatman*.

For Kundakunda, *atman anubhava*, or the mystical experience of the self, is the ultimate teacher. Through self-exploration, one realizes that true knowledge and liberation come from the inner self. To experience the true nature of the self ultimately requires no external forces. In his seminal work, *Samayasara Nataka* or *The Essential Nature of the Self*, Kundakunda communicates that inner visions of truth, though they are not easily or instantly attained, are within reach to all through the experience of the atman (v. 8). Kundakunda alludes to the *atman anubhava* by refuting qualities that are not of the soul to realize the intrinsic attributes of the soul.³⁴ This form of *dhyana* used continuously in the *Samayasara* is what Kundakunda calls “discriminative wisdom”. In verse 182, Kundakunda says:

³⁴ Kachhara, Narayan Lal. “Basic Principles of Jainism”, *Jain Vishva Bharati Institute*, pp.65, https://www.jainfoundation.in/JAINLIBRARY/books/basic_principles_of_jainism_035317_data.pdf

That seer who is apprehended by discriminative wisdom is in reality the ‘I’.
Whatever mental states there are (besides) all to be known to be other than
‘mine’.³⁵

By discerning the *sva-samaya* (pure self) from the *para-samaya* (empirical ego), one can know the true self, rid themselves of karmic bondage, and eventually obtain *siddhahood* (liberation). In tandem with the contemplation on the supreme self, Kundakunda prescribes the observance of the three jewels³⁶ to reach the ultimate mystical experience of the self and discover the truth about the world.

Like Kundakunda, Anandghan believed that inner yogic experience forms the basis of religion. Rather than use a meditation on discriminative wisdom, this Adhyatmi used a form of tantric poetry to help facilitate his audience’s experience of the self. Although Jainism does not have a structured tantric path, certain aspects of tantra existed during this time.³⁷ Jainism is not a tantric tradition; rather, it contains components that can be described as tantric. Taking from Ellen Gough’s development of the process of “tantracization,” this Jain version of tantra does not take an antinomian approach like the Hindu and Buddhist tantric paths.³⁸ However, unlike the mantra-based practice used in

³⁵ Kunda Kunda. “Samayasara Nataka”. Translated by Hiralal Jain and A.N. Upadhye, *Bharatiya Jnanapitha*.

³⁶ A Jain doctrinal teaching that is meant to be a practical guide to final liberation. The three jewels are Right Faith, Right Knowledge, and Right Conduct.

³⁷ Bangha, Imre. “It’s A City-Showman’s Show!: Transcendental Songs of Anandghan”. India, *Penguin Books*, 2013. p xxv-xxvi

³⁸ Tantracization is the process of putting a practice or concept that is not usually understood as tantric under the tantra category. Gough does this with a 44-line litany of praises to ascetics.

Gough's analysis, Anandghan's vernacular tantric poetry was not given upon initiation into monkhood. Anandghan's devotional songs were available for lay practice and mendicant use. Using Acharya Shubhacandra's categories of tantric virtuous meditations found in the *Jnanarnava* ("Ocean of Knowledge") as a guide, this form of tantric practice fits the category of *padasthadhyana* (the meditation engaged in words).³⁹ This form of tantric virtuous meditation is not one method but various practices of using mantras and mystical symbolism to control the mind and concentrate toward one point.⁴⁰ Anandghan's songs are tantric because they contain mystical abilities to incite a religious experience in the reciter. The recitation of these Jain bhakti (devotional) songs were *upasna* or spiritual vehicles that aided his audience in reaching toward the transcendental experience of the self.⁴¹ His bhakti expression was a form of devotion to the "cloud of bliss"; the *paramatman*, "supreme self," within all living beings.⁴²

³⁹ I could not access an English-translated version of Acharya Shubhacandra's work, so I extrapolated this categorization from a summary of the *Jnanarnava*. See Korematsu, Hiroaki. "Mystical Union between a Meditating Subject and Meditational Objects in Tantric Meditation in Jainism: The Meditation Engaged in Forms in *Jnanarnava* by Shubhacandra of Digambara." *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, vol. 68, No.3, pp.1120-1123, 2020.

⁴⁰ Hiroaki, Korematsu. "Mystical Union between a Meditating Subject and Meditational Objects in Tantric Meditation in Jainism: The Meditation Engaged in Forms in *Jnanarnava* by Subhacandra of Digambara." *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, vol.68, no.3, 2020, pp. 1121.

⁴¹ Bangha, Imre, and R.C.C Fynes, "It's A City-Showman's Show!: Transcendental Songs of Anandghan". India, Penguin Books, 2013, pp. xlv.

⁴² Jain bhakti expression does not fit the typical understanding of bhakti within Indian religion. Anandghan's work is reminiscent of Nirgun Sants. For a more thorough engagement with Jain bhakti practices see Cort, John E. "Bhakti in the Early Jain Tradition: Understanding Devotional Religion in South Asia." *History of Religions*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2002, pp. 59–86. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3176384>.

The message of Anandghans's transcendental songs is transmitted through complex imagery. "Lord", "cloud of bliss", and "lover" are some of the many metaphors used to represent the pure self. To Anandghan, no material source of religious knowledge could compare to the direct experience of inner reality. Rather than directly describe the nature of *atman-anubhava*, Anandghan stimulates the individual to partake in their own journey towards the realization of the self. In *Raga Belavala 1*, Anandghan sings:

Why do you delay, you dimwit? Cross and reach the far shore of the waters of existence! Meditate on the Cloud of Bliss, the form full of consciousness, the pure, untainted god. Hey, you dullard, why are you asleep? Get up, awake! ⁴³

In line with his Adhyatma lineage, Anandghan saw that an individual must mystically experience truth to know what it is truly. It is up to the individual to take charge of their spiritual progression because no material language or teacher can deliver pure knowledge like the experience of the self.

Discovering Truth in the Psychonaut Tradition

20th-century psychonauts Terrence McKenna and Alan Watts accessed non-ordinary states of consciousness through psychedelic substances. To them, perennial knowledge was attainable to all through the psychedelic experience. In order to gain epistemological insight, all one had to do was embark on a psychedelic experience. The frequency of usage of psychedelics during this period varies greatly depending on the psychonaut

⁴³ Bangha, Imre, and R.C.C Fynes, "It's A City-Showman's Show!: Transcendental Songs of Anandghan". India, Penguin Books, 2013, p. 23.

and the specific drug under review. Some psychonauts preferred a more recreational approach, while others tripped only a few times and yet were still highly influenced by the revelatory experiences. Influenced by the psychonautic topography left behind by Huxley, these psychonauts sought to describe the awakening revelations and religious wisdom brought on by psychedelics.⁴⁴

Being a child of the 1960s LSD revolution, McKenna's consumption of psychedelics started at the age of 16 with morning glory seeds.⁴⁵ As an ethnobotanist and student of shamanism, McKenna was a major proponent of plant-based psychedelics such as cannabis, plants containing an active derivative DMT, and psilocybin mushrooms. While exploring the Colombian Amazon in search of *oo-koo-hé*,⁴⁶ McKenna, his brother Dennis, and a group of fellow young adventurers, extensively experimented with the psilocybin *cubensis* mushroom. After his psilocybin experiments in La Chorrera, describing and contemplating the mystery of the mushroom occupied McKenna for over twenty or more years.⁴⁷ His use of mushrooms and the experiences he underwent led him to be a major

⁴⁴ Huxley set up the psychonautic topography when he discussed his mescaline experience as a religious experience in his book *Doors of Perception*. His way of describing the trip created a map that helped other psychonauts describe and recount their own psychedelic experiences. See Shipley, Morgan. "Psychedelic Mysticism: Transforming Consciousness, Religious Experiences, and Voluntary Peasants in Postwar America", *Lexington Books*, 2015, pp 47-49.

⁴⁵ Kent, James. "Terrence McKenna Interview Part 1", *Tripzine*, 2003, <http://www.tripzine.com/listing.php?id=terence1>.

⁴⁶ An orally ingested DMT-containing hallucinogen made from the resin of the Cohoba tree mixed with plant ash.

⁴⁷ McKenna, Terrence. "Wasson's Literary Precursors". *The Sacred Mushroom Seeker: Tributes to R. Gordon Wasson*, edited by Thomas J. Riedlinger, Park Street Press, 1990, pp. 165-175.

proponent for the human right to explore consciousness with psychedelics responsibly. For McKenna, psychoactive tryptamines beckon our attention. They teach that the only spiritual path worth following champions personal experience and dialogue. In one of his numerous public lectures on psychedelics, McKenna describes these drugs as “a siren song calling us back to what is authentic, *what is real*, and opens our future options”⁴⁸ When taken responsibly and with honest curiosity, psilocybin mushrooms and DMT act as spiritual vehicles that bring the experiencer to the realization that “the only experience that matter is your own.”⁴⁹

Terrence and his brother’s familiarity and extensive direct insight into the mushroom led them to propose the “stoned-ape theory.” This theory postulated that the evolution of early hominids into the species *Homo sapiens* was due to the ingestion of psilocybin-containing mushrooms. The stoned ape theory suggested that consumption of the mushroom led to and continues to lead to evolutionary advantages in human beings. Non-ordinary states of consciousness induced by psilocybin consumption provide humans with religious impulses and symbolic imagination. McKenna saw the psychedelic experience as an evolutionary catalyst that served as an epistemological tool that enabled humans to be directly touched by the cosmic giggle. By dissolving boundaries upheld by the

⁴⁸ “Dialogue with a Psilocybin Mushroom Experience (Terrence McKenna).” *Youtube*, uploaded by MckennaCountrCulture, 24 March 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahVfkwxxy6aw>.

⁴⁹ “Terrence McKenna: Conversations At The Edge of Magic 1994.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Deus Ex McKenna~Terence McKenna Archive, 13 July 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RaeaNNt3lo>

ego and cultural programming, psychedelics give the individual seeker direct contact with the unknown, the soul, and an authentic religious experience.

Alan Watts utilized psychedelics to access non-ordinary states of consciousness though not as often as McKenna; he still emphasized their impact on his spiritual path and identity. Watts believed psychedelics were tools that help one gain preliminary mystical insight that can be deepened through various forms of meditation. He likened the psychedelic experience to a phone call, “if you get the message, hang up the phone.” Like complementary psychonaut Richard Alpert or Ram Dass, psychedelics led Watts to study the ways of the East. His literary works show an effort to create a meeting ground between Eastern mysticism and western scientific rationalism. In his 1962 work, *Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness*, Watts totalized his occasions with pharmacological mysticism into a poetic account. According to Watts, “despite the claims of certain religious disciplines to be the sole means to genuine mystical insight, I can find no essential difference between the experiences, induced under favorable conditions”.⁵⁰ As long as the use of these powerful substances was taken seriously and respectfully while under “favorable conditions,”⁵¹ these powerful substances could deliver profound and genuine mystical insight. In the *Joyous Cosmology*, Watts reports the psychedelic experience with poetic imagination:

I am not looking at the world, not confronting it; I am knowing it by a continuous

⁵⁰ Watts, Alan. “The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness”, *Vintage Books*, 1962, p. 14.

⁵¹ Watts identifies a psychedelic trip's favorable conditions as a proper setting, supervision of a sympathetic and religiously oriented chaperone, and a comfortable mood.

process of transforming it into myself, so that everything around me, the whole globe of space, no longer feels away from me but in the middle.⁵²

As an instrument, the psychedelic experience delivers a transformation of the self through the realization or feeling of the soul and/or God.

This religious movement of chemical mystics was tapping into a larger phenomenon identified by scholar Arthur Versluis as “immediatism.” In the 1950s and 1960s, many psychonautic revolutionists were proclaiming a sudden sense of spiritual belonging and purpose, “...a religious assertion of spontaneous, direct, unmediated spiritual insight into reality (typically with little or no prior training), which some term ‘enlightenment’”.⁵³ A common criticism of psychedelic-induced enlightenment is that they are a naive and unstable means to an end. Labeled as instant mysticism, spiritual awakenings caused by psychedelics are seen as erroneous because they do not require or yield much effort and spiritual training. The means of obtaining enlightenment may seem like it is not as sophisticated as other traditional modes of awakening, but this is not the case. Like the *atman anubhava*, psychonauts use the psychedelic experience as *pramana* or a means of obtaining true knowledge. Watts forewords in his work:

The reaction of most cultured people to the idea of gaining any deep psychological or philosophical insight through a drug is that it is much too simple, too artificial, and even too banal to be seriously considered. A wisdom which can

⁵² Ibid., 19.

⁵³ Versluis, Arthur. “American Gurus from American Transcendentalism to New Age Religion.”, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 2.

be ‘turned on’ like the switch of a lamp seems to insult human dignity...⁵⁴

Although this is a typical sentiment, the perspective is ignorant of the true nature of the psychedelic experience. Foremost, the psychedelic experience is not a facile thing to endure. Mentally, physically and spiritually, trips can be arduous work. Everyday perceptions of self, emotions, time, space, movement, and reality are reevaluated at a level imperceptible to our everyday consciousness. Again, psychedelic drugs are not semantically synonymous with intoxicants. Rather than dull the senses and cause addictions like narcotics and alcohol, psychedelics “sharpen the senses to a supernormal degree of awareness”.⁵⁵ These noetic substances deliver an intense experience that requires a lot of courage, endurance, and flexibility from a person. The lessons received during a trip can be so much to process that some psychonauts do not touch psychedelics for months or years after a breakthrough experience. After the experience, psychonauts report having strong feelings of spiritual transformation. With psychedelics as a means of self-exploration, these psychonauts felt that they were returning back to authentic knowledge. In his book, *True Hallucinations: Being an Account of the Author’s Extraordinary Adventures in the Devil’s Paradise*, McKenna proclaims:

I am yet more sure that the answer to all the mysteries that disequilibrate our view of the world are to be understood by looking within ourselves. When we look

⁵⁴ Watts, Alan. “The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness”, *Vintage Books*, 1962, p.14.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

within ourselves with psilocybin, we discover that we do not have to look outward.⁵⁶

By expanding his awareness with the ingestion of the mushroom, McKenna felt he could access infinite intelligence that resides within inner space.

Comparative Analysis: The Limitations of Language and Conceptual Reality

This summation concludes that both adhyatmis and psychonauts advocated the individual's right to the attainment of perennial knowledge through the utilization of non-ordinary states of consciousness as epistemological sources. Both philosophers received religious revelation without the need for sacerdotal facilitation through the psychonaut's use of psychedelic drugs and adhyatmi use of strategic meditation and tantric song. If it were not for psychonauts and adhyatmis willingly undergoing non-ordinary states of consciousness, these mystics' religious and philosophical legacy would be nonexistent. The similarity between the two traditions lies in the results of their experiences. The personal religious experiences of these men did not cause them to claim authority on mystical knowledge; instead, they wanted others to have religious experiences of their own. These mystics held individual mystical experiences as the guiding force of religious truth. They advocated for the individual to go forward with compassion and confidence and discover the truth for themselves through lived moments of religiosity. By emphasizing that true

⁵⁶ McKenna, Terrence. "True Hallucinations: Being an Account of the Author's Extraordinary Adventures in the Devil's Paradise." *HarperOne*, 1993, p. 160.

knowledge is lived experienced, these mystics further pushed the idea that the only valid religious authority was the individual seeker.

Since these two mystical traditions saw true knowledge as lived experience, they also championed the idea that mystical knowledge cannot be directly communicated. Non-ordinary experiences that yielded expressions of perennial truth lead both adhyatmis and psychonauts to their epiphanies about the barrier of language and the inevitable persistence of ineffability. Adhyatmis and psychonauts emphasized the ineffability of truth and the self. To these noetic mystics, attempts to communicate through language only partially expressed the nature of truth. Adhyatmis and psychonauts advocated the individual's right to attain perennial knowledge through a philosophical emphasis on the ineffability of experience and truth.

According to Rahul Parson's analysis of ineffability in Adhyatma literature, adhyatmis, like Kundakunda and Anandghan, "...mobilized a very specific understanding of the ineffable, one that resists language and logocentrism as sources of delusion and conflict".⁵⁷ The adhyatmik understanding of ineffability is displayed through terms like *anubhava* (experience) and *avaktavya* (non-assertable). To these adhyatmis, any attempts to describe the ineffable (the experience of the self) in words will show the failure of language and merely point the way.

In the *Samayasara*, Kundakunda asserts that the *paramatman* cannot be apprehended through our everyday sense-perception or *parasamaya* (empirical ego). The direct

⁵⁷ Parson, Rahul Bjørn. "Untold Tales of the Self: the Ineffable in Early-Modern Jain Poetry". *Journal of Dharma Studies* 1.2, p. 215.

knowledge of the self, *pratyaksa*, is beyond the purview of words. Language is the act of the *parasamaya* and the *vyavahara-naya*, the conventional viewpoint that is superseded by the absolute viewpoint that focuses on meditation. The blissful and omniscient nature of the *svasamaya* (pure self) is understood to be free from the shackles of description. From his understanding, we can describe the conditions and modifications of the self from the *vyavahara* point of view. However, these conditions point to the verbal differentiations used to describe the soul in mundane reality. They do not point to the absolute reality of the soul. The soul cannot be grasped by the *vyavahara* point of view and can only truly be understood by *anubhava* (experience). Kundakunda proclaims that scripture, sound, visual form, smell, touch, and effort are not the sources of true knowledge. Since the true self is always within the purview of the *nishcaya* (absolute) point of view, it is always knowing and cannot be differentiated from knowledge itself (v. 230). Due to this, Kundakunda suggests that his audience test the validity of his claims, and if they do not meet the criteria of the *atman anubhava* then his claims can be rejected (v. 9). By continuously stating what the soul is not in the *Samayasara*, Kundakunda hopes to show his audience that true certainty can only be known if one reorients their focus onto the self and breaks free from ordinary, conceptual perception.

In *It's a City Showman's Show!: Transcendental Songs of Anandghan*, Anandghan uses poetic imagery to suggest towards *atman anubhava*. Throughout his songs, he insists that the omniscient truth of the soul can only be experienced. In one of his songs of love, Anandghan sings:

The advocate of a standpoint clutches at straws, my dear, he makes place of fight

ing... 'A substance perceptible by inner experience'—that's the way to know him.

The great king, the Cloud of Bliss, my dear, isn't one to say or hear.

What sign shall I indicate, then? Through speech, his form is not perceptible.⁵⁸

This song propounds the belief that *atman*, a “great king” and “cloud of bliss,” cannot be perceived or transmuted through a logocentric medium. His metaphor of an “advocate of a standpoint” could be a jab at any individual who upholds a one-sided viewpoint or a critique of language itself. Anandghan sees that language contributes to “one-sided opinion, bias, and conflict” on the path to spiritual liberation.⁵⁹ Anandghan and Kundakunda’s philosophical emphasis on the ineffability of truth and the experience of the self ensures that religious knowledge stays outside of doctrinal power. Since *atman anubhava* cannot be taught, the mystical knowledge of truth does not stay contained in an ideological text or esoteric monkhood; it stays in the inner world of the individual.

Like the Adhyatmis, psychonauts had an issue with language’s ability to reflect experiential truth. It is important to note that the psychedelic experience is not the same experience every time. The quality and descriptions that can be attributed to the mystical visions vary greatly depending on the individual, set and setting,⁶⁰ dosage, and the specific substance. A religious experience on psychedelics can be challenging to describe be-

⁵⁸ Bangha, Imre, and R.C.C Fynes, “It’s A City-Showman’s Show!: Transcendental Songs of Anandghan”. India, Penguin Books, 2013, p. 40.

⁵⁹ Parson, Rahul Bjørn. “Untold Tales of the Self: the Ineffable in Early-Modern Jain Poetry.” *Journal of Dharma Studies*, vol.1, 2019, pp. 215-227.

⁶⁰ Set and setting is a phrase popularized by psychonaut Timothy Leary in 1961. “Set” refers to a person’s mental and emotional state, and “setting” refers to the physical space in which a person is going to trip. Proper set and setting are crucial to avoiding a negative experience.

cause language is no longer a valuable tool for communicating phenomena perceived beyond our empirical ego. A defining factor of a psychedelically induced mystical experience is a “feeling that you could not do justice to your experience by describing it in words”.⁶¹ Alan Watts claims that during the psychedelic experience:

“...the superconscious method of thinking becomes conscious. We see the world as the whole body sees it, and for this very reason there is great difficulty in attempting to translate this mode of vision into a form of language that is based on contrast and classification”.⁶²

Like Anandghan’s view, when language is used to describe mystical visions, it creates divided opinion and conflict. Watts’s notion of the “whole body” is similar to the *nishcaya* perspective. Under this experience, the “whole body” has an omniscient point of view that sees the world with absolute truth. Like the *nishcaya* perspective, the superconscious perspective of the “whole body” cannot be translated through words.

Similar to the loss of the *vyavahara* point of view during the adhyatmi experience of the self, a quintessential characteristic of a complete mystical experience on psychedelics is ego dissolution or “ego death.” “Ego death” can be described as a complete loss of typical sense of sense, “when the ‘I’ that is inside can talk no more, is gone and cannot

⁶¹ Barrett, Frederick S, and Roland R Griffiths. “Classic Hallucinogens and Mystical Experiences: Phenomenology and Neural Correlates.” *Current topics in behavioral neurosciences* vol. 36, 2018, p.393-430. doi:10.1007/7854_2017_474

⁶² Watts, Alan. “The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness”, *Vintage Books*, 1962, p.25.

form thoughts, but simply is a part of all that is, and is no longer separate”.⁶³ The feelings and subjectivity of ego dissolution cannot be conveyed by systematic reasoning or linguistic expression. In his lecture, *Taxonomy of Illusion*, Terrence McKenna states that “... psychedelics stretch and pull and melt and re-cast the illusion-producing machinery of language.” The sense of self-transformation brought on after the experience of ego death is not something you can get from scripture, ideology, or any outside teacher. After contemplating his intimate experiences with psilocybin mushrooms in *True Hallucinations*, McKenna asserts that an individual cannot be touched by the cosmic giggle by working a day job or studying at a university; they have to push the borders of the phenomenal world. By emphasizing the ineffable nature of the psychedelic experience, psychonaut philosophers like Watts and McKenna highlighted the individual’s role in spiritual practice. Rather than relying on external forces, psychonauts remind us that intuitive and authentic knowledge is inside ourselves.

⁶³ “Ego Death & Psychedelics.”, MAPS: Psychedelics, Death, and Dying, vol.20, no.1, 2010, <https://maps.org/news/bulletin/special-edition-psychedelics-death-and-dying/>.

IV. REVOLUTION TOWARDS AND NON-ABSOLUTISM AND EQUANIMITY

Adhyatmis and psychonauts advocated the individual's right to the attainment of perennial knowledge through a reconsideration of their respective society's religious and philosophical status quo and the advocacy of philosophical position of pluralism and the feeling of equanimity. Adhyatmis and psychonauts campaigned for self-exploration as a means to knowledge and personal liberation.

Questioning Jain Orthopraxy

The Adhyatma movement was a countercultural movement composed of Jain laity and ascetics who reconsidered and influenced adaptations in the tradition's prevailing beliefs. Jain orthopraxy considered the observance of doctrine and puja as necessary measures for spiritual liberation.⁶⁴ Adhyatmis reevaluated commonly held perspectives about spiritual practice and institutional authority by reframing religious belief and practice to center on self-referential experience. As a trailblazer of this lineage of spiritual reformists, Kundakunda invited Jains to reconsider the sincerity of institutional sources of *jnana* (knowledge). Kundakunda introduced the idea that the internal processes of will and intention supersede external actions. If one's convictions and intentions are not in accordance with the knowledge gained from the mystical experience of the self, then karmic bondage will ensue. Kundakunda found the strict observance of scripture, ritual

⁶⁴ Parson, Rahul Bjørn. "Individualisation and Democratisation of Knowledge in Banārasīdās' Samayasāra Nāṭaka." *Religious Individualisation*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019, pp. 884.

practice, and image worship to be secondary to the authoritative knowledge of the *atman*. Since the soul is understood to be synonymous with correct knowledge: “Those who are outside the presence of the Supreme Self even though they observe vows, restraints, and rules of conduct and practice austerities are devoid of right knowledge” (Kundakunda v. 111). For him, one is not truly in good faith if they act by routine. Even the most learned and ritually trained monk does not stop the influx of karma and progress in his path to moksha if he has not realized the true source of mystical knowledge— the self.

Like Kundakunda, Anandghan thought religious belief and praxis were clouded with ignorance if the seeker did not experientially understand the essential nature of the self. Anandghan’s mystical poetry challenged popular Jain notions of asceticism, showed evidence of interreligious dialogue, and empowered self-revelations over guru-disciple relationships.⁶⁵ There is not much textual evidence to advise on the life of Anandghan. His lack of recorded history may suggest that he frequently traveled alone. Despite this, his poetic literature does display some signs of the nature of his behavior as a Jain monk. As a Jain ascetic, Anandghan’s songs show he did not seek to proselytize Jain precepts. In his poem, *Raga Maru Jangali*, Anandghan says:

A sorcerer met me and made me a sorceress; a monk made me

a nun;

A devotee grabbed me and made me a devotee; one intoxicated

with belief made me a believer.

⁶⁵ Cort, John E. Foreword. In I. Bangha & R. C. C. Fynes (Eds.), *It’s a city-showman’s show: Transcendental songs of Ānandaghana*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, pp xi-xiii.

My friend, no one at all left me impartial!

I longed so much to be impartial; slowly they whispered their own opinions
into me.⁶⁶

In this poem, Anandghan highlights how knowledge given by instruction will never lead to a genuine position of neutrality. The omniscient perspective of the soul is truly gained when one dives into the inner dimensions of the atman. Anandghan proclaims:

The supreme being is different from the visible world; in the
pot of the body the window is subtle.

With the practice of the self, the exceptional shines and glimpses the pole star.

Ascetic, why are you sleeping in the body's temple? Wake up, look in the vessel.⁶⁷

Similar to Kundakunda, Anandghan trivialized typical Jain mendicant conduct. Strict religious conduct, like biding in the temple, does not determine one's ability to liberate. Anandghan's idea accommodated the common believer's position within the tradition. Since salvation ontologically depends on the inner self, the layperson does not have to wait for the next life to obtain *moksha*. They can liberate themselves in this life by individual initiative and traverse the mystical experience of the self.

Overall, adhyatmis went against the grain of typical Jain orthopraxy, believing that one's spiritual options should not be limited to logocentrism and instructed religious knowledge. Similar to the countercultural nature of the adhyatmis and the *atman anubhava*, psychonauts used psychedelics and the psychedelic experience to reclaim religious

⁶⁶ Bangha, Imre, and R.C.C Fynes, "It's A City-Showman's Show!: Transcendental Songs of Anandghan". India, Penguin Books, 2013, p. 50.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 12.

authority to be in favor of the individual. In *Situating Psychedelics and the War on Drugs Within the Decolonization of Consciousness*, Joshua Falcon argues that non-ordinary states of consciousness evoked by psychedelics are epistemological tools of cognitive resistance. He claims psychedelics are renegade agents that help decolonize spaces of consciousness restricted by hegemonic epistemology. The idea that an individual's mystical experience can be used to counter mainstream philosophical and religious ideas is complementary to this comparative discussion. Like psychonauts, adhyatmis used the *atman anubhava* to reclaim the self as an authoritative figure in the Jain tradition.

Handling Societal Hypocrisy

Even though LSD, psilocybin, and mescaline were classified under Schedule 1 of the 1967 United Nations convention on drugs substances by the United Nations, psychonauts continued to advocate the powerful benefits of psychedelics (Nutt 2019). The United Nations convention concluded that these substances had “no potential for medical use.” Psychonauts countered these official claims by discussing the spiritual healing potential of the psychedelic experience. McKenna found these government-mandated restrictions to be preposterous attacks on religious sensibility and a dignified human birthright. In his lecture, “Non-Ordinary States Through Vision Plants,” McKenna said, “DMT is in the brain and yet still it’s a controlled substance. People have been made illegal”.⁶⁸ For McKenna, denying the exploration of the self with psychedelics was a trivial-

⁶⁸ Zapotec Blue. “The Non-Ordinary Conhibition Rhetoric of Terrence McKenna.” *Erowid*, 19 February 1995, https://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/mckenna_terence/mckenna_terence_conhibition.shtml!

ization and restriction of life. The potential of the psychedelic experience offered a “healing of the breach between science and morality”, and immense problem-solving abilities.⁶⁹

In a public-access lecture uploaded to YouTube entitled “Dialogue with a Psilocybin Mushroom Experience” by McKennaCountrCulture, Terrence McKenna argues that psilocybin-induced mystical experiences are a source of gnosis for the modern man. Unlike the answers and opinions of dominant politics and society, the “voice of the mushroom” holds promising problem-solving abilities. Straight forward and without the bias of materialism or money, the message of the mushroom offered human beings various answers for major world issues. He claimed that during his visions, the non-human species conversed with him and gave solutions to problems that plague the entire planet, like the world population issue, scarcity of natural resources, and the environmental destruction caused by the West’s economic materialism. Through a mushroom trip, a person could realize patterns in their behavior and thinking that may contribute to these societal issues. For McKenna, the psychedelic experience indiscriminately shows us that we should not assume these world problems are insoluble.

Alan Watts supported the individual’s right to attain perennial knowledge by reconsidering public policy on psychedelic drugs and advocating for one’s freedom to adventure through consciousness. While discussing drug prohibition in the mid-1960s at San Jose State, Watts said, “I feel very strongly that in a country where we value freedom, we

⁶⁹ McKenna, Terrence. “Excerpted Chapters of True Hallucinations from TalkingBook Version.” *Erowid*, https://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/mckenna_terence/mckenna_terence_oversoul.shtml.

must not attempt to legislate morality, especially morality that is simply the concern of the individual towards himself.”⁷⁰ He argues that if mainstream monotheistic ideas about moral standards express that the essence of ethical behavior is voluntary, then public policy should reflect that sentiment. When it comes to whether you will change your state of consciousness, you have a certain responsibility to judge for yourself.

Watts frequently called upon Catholic and Christian theology to justify the validity of mystical insights gained through tripping on psychedelics. In *Joyous Cosmology*, Watts gives thought to the resemblances between Christian theological concepts of sacrament or “means of grace” and the feelings of religious communion brought upon by the psychedelic mystical state:

The experience corresponds almost exactly to the theological concept of a sacrament or means of grace—an unmerited gift of spiritual power whose lasting effect depend upon the use made of it in subsequent action. Catholic theology also recognizes those so-called ‘extraordinary’ graces, often of mystical insight, which descend spontaneously outside the ordinary or regular means that the Church provides...Claims for the exclusive virtue of one’s brand is, alas, as common in organized religion as in commerce...⁷¹

⁷⁰ Watts, Alan. “Being in the Way: Episode 7- Drugs: Turning the Head or Turning on.” *BeHereNetwork*, <https://beherenownetwork.com/alan-watts-being-in-the-way-ep-7-drugs-turning-the-head-or-turning-on/>.

⁷¹ Watts, Alan. “The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness”, *Vintage Books*, 1962, p. 15.

Like a business watching out for competition, the government and the Church see the effects of psychedelics as a threat to their objectives as societal institutions. Watts argues that the hegemonic political and philosophical opinions about psychedelics' morality, qualitative effects, and genuine religiosity are hypocritical and unfounded. Watts's position is that these social institutions cannot maintain control if an individual's perspective is shifted from mainstream thought. These experiences allow the individual to awaken from a culture that idealizes good over bad and makes people feel guilty about themselves. Watts says during a psychedelic trip, "...you feel that everything outside of self is not opposite, but it just goes with it. You feel that the figure always goes with its background. You see all human behavior goes together in such a way that you can't have saints without sinners..."⁷² Like the *nishcaya* point of view experienced during the *atman anubhava*, the psychedelic experience awakens a perspective of neutrality and equanimity unbound in normal Western philosophy and religion.

Awakening Perspectives: Non-Absolutism and the Feeling of Neutrality

Adhyatmis and psychonauts both reconsidered their society's religious and philosophical status quo in favor of the individual. For these mystics, the right to discover truth lies in the hand of the individual person. No mainstream clergy or law enforcement could take away one's religious autonomy and right to explore inner space and knowledge.

⁷²Watts, Alan. "Being in the Way: Episode 7- Drugs: Turning the Head or Turning on." *BeHereNetwork*, <https://beherenetwork.com/alan-watts-being-in-the-way-ep-7-drugs-turning-the-head-or-turning-on/>.

A distinct quality of the *atman anubhava* and the psychedelic experience is awakening an individual's understanding of their place in the world and how they relate to other living beings. These mystical experiences reorient behavior to incorporate greater empathy, understanding, patience, and acceptance. These mystics' attitude of humility could have stemmed from the intense sensations accompanying the mystical experience. With Rudolf Otto's theory concerning the numinous and the *tremendum* as a reference, I argue that as a *mysterium tremendum*, the eye-opening experience of awakening from the *vyavahara* perspective to a mystical point of view can be humbling and inspire change.⁷³ Upon awakening into this absolute, mystical point of view, both adhyatmis and psychonauts experience a state of equanimity or *samata*.⁷⁴ By viewing things "as they are," these mystics walked forward after these experiences with greater compassion in mind for all life and the conviction that all humanity has the right and ability to experience these truths. Rather than announce themselves as prophets, these mystics accepted the multifaceted nature of truth. For these mystics, the state of *samata* or equanimity showed that all appear equal, and that truth is *anekanta* or pluralistic.

⁷³ Rudolf Otto asserts that the mystical experience or "numinous" tends to challenge our day-to-day ways of perceiving reality. The numinous can be experienced in differing forms, one being the *mysterium tremendum* (awe-inspiring mystery). The overpowering nature of the *tremendum* can inspire change and induce humility in the observer. The sense of the submergence of the self can lead to changes in ethics and force those who experience it to reconsider their place in the universe.

⁷⁴ I am using *samata* as defined by Rahul Parson in his analysis of adhyatmi literature. He defines *samata* as equanimity and a "counterpart" of anti-dogmatism. See Parson, Rahul Bjørn. "Untold Tales of the Self: the Ineffable in Early-Modern Jain Poetry." *Journal of Dharma Studies*, vol.1, 2019, p.221.

In Jainism, *anekantavada* is the acceptance of philosophical pluralism and non-absolutism. This philosophical assumption sees all truth to be relative. The origins of this ontological concept can be traced back to the teachings of the last great Tirthankara, Bhagavan Mahavira. *Anekantavada*, or the doctrine of many-sidedness, is a method of analysis:

It is a mental eye that is open from all directions and all sides. It refuses outright to view, from a broken or an incomplete angle, any subject of knowledge, thinking and conduct. It tends to be partial to all thinking and behaviour from all different angles of vision possible.⁷⁵

The pluralistic and nonpartisan philosophical position of *anekantavada* and the feeling of *samata* are key to the attainment of the highest goal of liberation in the Jain tradition, and the adhyatmis undeniably hold these tenets in high regard.

In his *Samayasara*, Kundakunda offers his two-perspective logical model. According to Kundakunda's theory, the state of awareness from the perspective of *nishcaya* reveals that perennial knowledge can have many iterations when expressed in the *vyavahara* perspective. This multitude of iterations may make truth ineffable. However, the philosophical acceptance of all the viewpoints leaves an opportunity for the individual to verbally interpret *atman anubhava* in a multitude of ways. This is consistent with *syad-*

⁷⁵ Kachhara, Narayan Lal. "Basic Principles of Jainism", *Jain Vishva Bharati Institute*, https://www.jainfoundation.in/JAINLIBRARY/books/basic_principles_of_jainism_035317_data.pdf, p.53.

vad (maybeism), the doctrine that “analytical stand-points refer to partial truths”.⁷⁶ The many ways an individual can express *atman anubhava* in the *vyavaharanaya* are *syadvad* or relative. Kundakunda’s elaboration on the essence of *anekantavada* in his *Samaysara* displays that truth is not an exercise of exclusive possession. The self may contain the essence of absolute truth, but we are all capable of knowing the self without outside mediation. Kundakunda says:

From the *vyavahara* point of view, conduct, belief, and knowledge are attributed as different characteristics of the Knower, the Self. But from the real point of view there is no differentiation of knowledge, conduct, and belief in the Pure Self.⁷⁷

When one discusses the *atman* with language, it is described with many attributes. These attributes are not actually the truth but pieces of the truth. Only when one experiences the *atman anubhava* and enters a state of *samata* can they see beyond relative truths and see truth as mystically one thing.

Anandghan’s tantric songs have reminiscent themes of *anekantavada* and *samata*. In one of his “Songs of Wisdom, Anandghan refers to the doctrine of *anekanta* by mentioning the *syadvada* system called *saptabhangivada* (seven predicate theory).⁷⁸ In his poem about the shackles of attachment, Anandghan says:

⁷⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁷⁷ Kunda Kunda. “Samayasara Nataka”. Translated by Hiralal Jain and A.N. Upadhye, *Bharatiya Jnanapitha*. p. 15.

⁷⁸ In their analysis of Raga 10, the authors interpret the word “sevenfold” as a direct reference to the seven predicate theory in Jain Logic. The seven claims concerning a single object support the overall religious theory of pluralism; *anekantvada*. See Bangha, Imre, and R.C.C. Fynes. “It’s a City-Showman’s Show!: Transcendental Songs of Anandghan.”, Penguin Books, 2013, pp.73-74.

Equanimity is the daughter of the jewel-giving ocean, her
brother the moon of experience.

Leave the deadly poison in the cup of worldly existence; yourself take the nectar.
Truthful brother, wander with equanimity. Ascetic, do not be
tainted by Attachment.⁷⁹

In this verse, *samata* and *anubhava* are the effects of the atman, which is the “jewel giving ocean.” The “moon of Experience” is *atman anubhava*. The experience looks over the “jewel giving ocean.” the atman. Anandghan urges others to experience the self and enter a state of neutrality and peace. Do not attach yourself to things; instead, experience the neutral state of the atman.

During the psychedelic experience, psychonauts are susceptible to feelings of mystical unity reminiscent of the Jain notions of *anekantavada* and *samata*. This state of mystical unity “...involves recognition of the oneness of all, in which one finds unity at the core of the inner subjectivity or inner reality of all things despite the diversity or apparent individual identity and separation of all things”.⁸⁰ During this state of harmonious neutralization or *samata*, psychonauts begin to see subjectivity or *syadvad* as pieces of a puzzle that reflect the absolute nature of truth. After experiencing this state of unity and expanded awareness of the self and reality, psychonauts come back from their trips determined to morally act with this sense of unitive interdependence in mind.

⁷⁹ Bangha, Imre, and R.C.C Fynes, “It’s A City-Showman’s Show!: Transcendental Songs of Anandghan”. India, Penguin Books, 2013, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Barrett, Frederick S, and Roland R Griffiths. “Classic Hallucinogens and Mystical Experiences: Phenomenology and Neural Correlates.” Current topics in behavioral neurosciences vol. 36, 2018, pp. 393.

Reminiscent of *anekantavada*, Terrence McKenna suggested maintaining the position of an open-minded skeptic and witness. As a direct rejection of the hegemonic monotheistic philosophies of the 20th century, McKenna advocated for individuals to avoid allegiance to one interpretation. McKenna saw allegiance to ideology as an insult to human free thinking. For him, what humanity needs is a sense or feeling of unity. The surrendering of the ego and the mundane point of view during the psychedelic experience shows us humans that we have the ability to change the world and be more harmonious and compassionate. This notion of equanimity does not come from ideological institutions but from a feeling derived from a personal act of courage and surrender made by the individual. He called for a “radical intervention in our social psychology” that favors pluralism and democracy. For McKenna, this radical intervention is the psychedelic experience.⁸¹

Alan Watts believed in the coexistence of all views of reality. To him, “...nothing is wrong, nothing is even stupid. The sense of wrong is simply failure to see where something fits into a pattern”.⁸² In *Joyous Cosmology*, he describes a profound sense of equanimity felt during his psychedelic experiences. While contemplating the distinction between himself and the outer material world, Watts realizes:

At root, there is simply no way of separating self from other, self-love from other-love. All knowledge of self is knowledge of other, and all knowledge of other

⁸¹ “The Importance of Unity- Terrence McKenna.” *Youtube*, uploaded by Knowledge Is Power, 6 August 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3edGUIC4534>,

⁸² Watts, Alan. “The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness”, *Vintage Books*, 1962, p. 27.

knowledge of self...In the features of everything foreign, threatening, terrifying, incomprehensible, and remote I begin to recognize myself.⁸³

This sense of harmony amongst all opposite things ignites a deep sense of compassion.

Through the experience of *samata*, Watts gained an ethical insight. Rather than inflating a false sense of self, he claims that this sensation forms a basis for social love and order.

The moral authority an individual gains during these mystical experiences is constructed from a view of compassion that sees the intrinsic harmony amongst all things. Rather than relying on outside institutions to provide a moral compass, adhyatmis and psycho-nauts advocate the use of mystical experience to reach inner realizations of plurality and equanimity amongst all beings.

⁸³ Ibid., 23.

V. CONCLUSION

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James theorizes that individual religious experiences are central to all religions. He says we learn more about religion from the mystics and prophets than the conventionally religious. So far, this work has surveyed how adhyatmis and psychonauts have complimented James's theory by placing deep mystical experience at the center of all religion. The religious and philosophical information gained from these transcendent states enables one to be morally and religiously autonomous. Although their specific means of reaching perennial knowledge may differ, adhyatmis and psychonauts traversed the depths of being and came back out to tell the world, "jump in the water's fine". Rather than rely on centralized religious belief and praxis to guide one's spiritual progression, adhyatmis, and psychonauts relied on self-referential knowledge gained by mystical experience. These mystics promote the notion that we are all our own gurus. By championing inner exploration as an epistemological source of knowledge, these mystics empowered the role of the individual in religion.

My intentions with this research were to provide an honest reflection on the effects of the mystical experience on religious autonomy and individual empowerment. With this research, I sought to uncover how these mystics used their visions to effectuate the transformation of the individual's role in religious authority. Adhyatmis and psychonauts advocated the individual's right to attain perennial knowledge by utilizing non-ordinary states of consciousness as epistemological sources, emphasizing the ineffability of the self and experience, reconsidering the status quo, and advocating for philosophical plural-

ism and equanimity. Adhyatmis surrendered to the *atman anubhava* through tantric poetry and meditative practice, while psychonauts embarked on the psychedelic experience by ingesting psychoactive drugs.

Despite my attempts to be exhaustive with this comparison, there are some areas for improvement in this research. My survey of philosophical pluralism and feelings of equanimity in both traditions can serve as an introduction to further in-depth analysis. I entered this research assuming that sources on psychedelic mysticism were scarce, but this was not the case. I found rich and extensive material pertaining to Terrence McKenna and Alan Watts. My study of the Jain voices in this project were confined to the available translations of the texts by Kundakunda, Anandghan, and Banarasidas. While this survey considers a few mystics from each group and does not aim to limn an exhaustive picture, it is one of the first attempts to put in conversation the mystics and philosophers from such different religious traditions. Moving forward from this project, I hope to further research occurrences of underground mysticism and continue to explore the intersection between Western psychedelic mysticism and Indian religious traditions.

For these mystics, knowledge is a source of power that all deserve to benefit from. Adhyatmis and psychonauts did not wish to capitalize off their mystical revelations. With a deep and experienced sense of compassion for life, these mystics felt compelled to share the wealth of mystical exploration. Kundakunda summarizes this sentiment beautifully: “The Self, which mounted on the Chariot of knowledge roams about as it pleases (shedding the light of wisdom)...” (v.236). To profit off the power of mystical knowledge is to go against the message of the *atman anubhava* and the psychedelic experience. A

mystical experience is a tool of spiritual empowerment that informs the individual of their innate spiritual power. Reflecting on this innate inner power reminds us that we all have a role in this universe as beings bound together by interdependence.

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