

A Comparison of Perspectives: My View and Eliade's View on Narcotics and Shamanism

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Eliade takes a very negative view of the use of narcotics in Shamanism. In several instances, he mentions that since the Shamans of a certain area can no longer enter the ecstatic state naturally, they have to induce narcotics to get that effect. However, in mentioning this, he seems to make it a point to say that when narcotics are used, it is not a genuine ecstatic experience. Eliade's view can be summed up in one quote:

“Narcotics are only a vulgar substitute for "pure" trance. . . Narcotic intoxication is called on to provide an imitation of a state that the shaman is no longer capable of attaining otherwise. . . We constantly find this strange mixture of "difficult ways" and "easy ways" of realizing mystical ecstasy or some other decisive experience” (Eliade 401).

I tend to agree with Eliade. I do not condone the use of narcotics to induce an ecstatic state. I believe we should be able to reach an ecstatic state naturally, and the use of narcotics is a quick and easy way to achieve a similar experience.

The use of narcotics to achieve the ecstatic state seems to me to be the easy way out because no excessive training or time is spent on trying to achieve that state. It is induced chemically through the digestion of a foreign substance. I believe that upon entering an ecstatic state, we should be free of all foreign substances and as pure as possible. What I mean by “pure” is both physically clean and mentally peaceful. One's mind should be completely disciplined and focused only on obtaining that ecstatic experience. Instead, narcotics allow us to enter the ecstatic state in an impure form and without a clear mind. I believe this affects the experience greatly.

During an ecstatic experience using narcotics, I believe the mind becomes highly subjective to the thoughts just prior to the experience. Chemically induced states have different effects on our brains than do states induced by concentration. These chemicals have side effects that might cause a completely different experience.

I agree with Eliade's point-of-view on narcotics and their use to induce an ecstatic experience. I

believe it is the easiest way to achieve that state. I also believe the state produced by the chemical induction is similar but exactly the same. One should achieve to be the best and the recreate the ecstatic experience.