

[00:00:00]

John Moe: You may have noticed that there's a large and growing interest in psychedelics lately. Psilocybin, ayahuasca, toad venom are being closely studied by researchers for their potential in treating persistent conditions like major depressive disorder or PTSD. Potential users of these treatments are paying close attention too, because—my god—maybe something will help. You may have wanted to try some of this stuff yourself. Maybe you're in a situation where none of the more established approaches has provided you with enough relief.

You may have also noticed that trying these treatments is not so easy. You can't go down to Walgreens and pick up some toad venom. Bottles of ayahuasca are not available at the convenience store. Beer and wine, both depressives, are. But not ayahuasca. Now, to try these things out for yourself might involve traveling to some largely unregulated locations where largely unlicensed people help you trip out. And that's expensive and scary. That's why it's so valuable in this world to have journalists who will try these experiences out and let you know how it went. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Ernesto Londoño is a national correspondent for the *New York Times* and the author of a new book, *Trippy: The Peril and Promise of Medicinal Psychedelics*. It tells the story of his near suicidal depression, his experience in taking psychedelic treatments, and his exploration of this rapidly growing and sometimes disturbing industry. A lot of what happened with Ernesto's mental state and these substances ended up being pretty positive, and we're going to talk about that in some detail. The experiences also get pretty intense as well, as he relates in this conversation, and we wanted to let you know that in advance.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Ernesto Londoño, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Ernesto Londoño: Thanks so much for having me. It's a real privilege.

John Moe: Congratulations on the book. How did your interest in psychedelics and psychedelic treatment begin? What led to that first encounter?

Ernesto Londoño: Well, to make a long story short, it began as a story idea. I was about to move to Brazil for a new assignment back in 2017, and I struck up a conversation with a psychiatrist at my sister's engagement party. She also is a psychiatrist. And her colleague told me that he had been down in the Amazon and doing research into ayahuasca retreats. Ayahuasca is an Amazonian brew that is made of two plants that are psychoactive, and it's been used by Indigenous communities for many, many years in spiritual and medicinal research.

One of the things he mentioned was that veterans were starting to go on these retreats, and that struck me as very interesting, and I kind of bookmarked that as a potential story idea to

do during my time in Brazil. Fast forward a few months, I arrive in Brazil in the summer of 2017 and plunged into the most serious depression of my life—a period where I was really struggling to get out of bed, to do the bare minimum expected of me as a journalist, and really started descending into a downward spiral that felt very different than other mood slumps that I had in the past.

John Moe: Mm. And so, you put two and two together and said—I mean, if you were in a bad spot, you were probably ready to try almost anything. But this came to mind.

Ernesto Londoño: You know, it was somewhat mysterious. I would describe kind of the six months that followed my arrival in Brazil as a period of really foggy thinking. I think when you become very depressed, it's very hard to think strategically about your options. I found it very hard to think that I was entitled to seek help. For instance, to reach out to my editors and say, you know, “I want to let you know I'm struggling. Might you be able to help me out? Give me some time off?” I even found it hard to consider seeking a therapist in a new country where I was still trying to figure out the language.

And there was one particular sleepless night where, you know, I hadn't been able to sleep all night—which had become pretty standard back in that period. And I opened up my laptop around 3 or 4 in the morning. It was a very windy night. And I was having trouble sleeping because the windows kept rattling. And I googled “ayahuasca retreats Brazil”.

[00:05:00]

And you know, this is something that had been an open loop as a story I might pursue, but suddenly I felt like I had a personal interest in this. And the first thing that popped up was a YouTube video recorded by an Argentine woman who has been running ayahuasca retreats in Brazil for many years. She was kind of one of the pioneers that came up with this model of using ayahuasca as a therapeutic intervention and running them—you know, bringing people in from overseas for lengthy retreats. You know, from 9 to 11 days. And there was something about the video that was really captivating. And it's really hard for me to describe, but in that moment, I felt like this is where I need to go. And the following morning I read through the website, filled out an application form, and the wheels were in motion.

And suddenly, you know, on some level in the back of my mind, I felt—you know, perhaps this is my off ramp from this awful state I find myself in.

John Moe: You found some hope for the first time in a while.

Ernesto Londoño: I did. And you know, looking back, it was a little irrational. Because if you look at the video—you know, it's a little bit out there. And when you look at the rules of the retreat, in order to go on these retreats, you have to promise that you're going to abstain from drinking alcohol prior and during your time there, that you're going to be put on this very strict, saltless, vegetarian diet—which at the time had very little appeal. You have to abstain from any kind of sex, including masturbation. So, there were things that just, you know, at face value, for somebody who was not familiar with this world, felt very strange. But at least I felt like there was a glimmer of hope that something might shift. And to this

day, I don't understand why I put so much faith in something that in retrospect should have been questionable.

John Moe: Yeah. (*Chuckles.*) Well, what happens? So, you sign up or you apply. And then do you have to interview? Or what are the next steps?

Ernesto Londoño: There's a pretty lengthy list of questions you need to answer about your mental health, about whether you have been suicidal in the past, about which psychiatric medications you have taken or are currently taking, and then also what you're hoping to get from the retreat. So, this is fairly standard for these kinds of psychedelic retreats where they try to screen people and try to determine the extent to which they're thinking rationally and they're, you know, relatively psychologically stable. So, I filled out the form, and then I got an email from her essentially saying that, you know, I was welcome to come.

She had one concern, because at the time I was taking blood pressure medication. So, she advised that I would have to wean myself from that and try other natural means to try to lower my blood pressure.

John Moe: Was she a doctor?

Ernesto Londoño: No, she's a psychotherapist, but she's not a physician.

John Moe: Okay. Alright. Was there any trepidation in going off your blood pressure meds that you could have an event with your heart or something?

Ernesto Londoño: Definitely. Definitely there was—yeah, you know, I understood that what I was doing was risky. I'm somebody also who had very, very limited experience at the time with any sort of drug use. The extent of my drug use included alcohol, which I consumed in significant amounts at the time in keeping with the standards of my profession as a journalist.

John Moe: (*Chuckles.*) And a depressed person.

Ernesto Londoño: And a depressed person, yes. And I'd tried marijuana a tiny bit, but it was never something I enjoyed or found particularly helpful. So, going from, you know, virtually no drug use to something that's a very powerful—it's a big gun in the arsenal of psychoactive substances—was a big leap. And I did worry about my heart. But at the same time, there was just some—almost a gravitational pull that was telling me you need to give this a try, and you gotta work through the obstacles that might stand in your way.

John Moe: So, you go through all this, you're approved. And then do you go—? I'm probably unfairly imagining it. Do you go to an encampment somewhere deep in the forest, or how does that work?

Ernesto Londoño: Sylvia's retreat center is called Spirit Vine and it's a cluster of bungalows in—it's not the Amazon rainforest. It's a different rainforest in Brazil, near the beach in the state of Bahia.

[00:10:00]

So, I took a flight. And I was so, you know, kind of cognitively and emotionally unwell that one of the things that happened the day I traveled there is I went to the wrong airport. (*Chuckles.*) And when I showed up and realized what I had done, I had to buy a brand-new flight on the spot and actually, you know, required a layover. But yeah, I took two flights, and I got there one afternoon, and I got into, you know, this really beautiful compound that looks like the Garden of Eden. It's brimming with these beautiful flowers. It's got this pond in the center of it. And it's got these very basic but really nicely appointed and comfortable bungalows where the guests stay.

John Moe: Alright. Well, let's get to the ayahuasca then. How is that consumed, and what happened when it was consumed?

Ernesto Londoño: Yeah, so the way these retreats work is you go through four ceremonies. And the first one—you know, and they happen at night; they happen in a communal space known as a Moloka. And you essentially lay down on a mat in the dark with a blanket, a pillow, and a bucket. And you're given a shot glass with this dark brew. It's kind of got the consistency of Turkish coffee, and it tastes awful. It's really not a pleasurable thing to drink. And then it induces—you know, it kicks in within 45 minutes or so, and it induces a period of disruptive thinking. Your thinking mind starts operating in ways that feel radically different and new and wondrous. Sometimes you see the visions that people normally associate with psychedelic use of geometrical patterns or lights or figures, you know, that are very mesmerizing.

But the really interesting thing that started happening for me was I started getting access to memories that had either been repressed or memories that in my normal operating mind I would have deemed inconsequential or not terribly interesting. And my mind zoomed in on some of those memories as though I was being guided by an intelligent force telling me, “You have to go back to this chapter of the past, or of your life, and you need to sit with it. And you need to examine it closely.” And there was something really extraordinary about that memory retrieval process, in that you not only sort of revisited the past, the episode, like you and I would recollect a memory now if somebody, you know, asked us to go back to a meaningful day, but you sort of inhabited the emotional state at the time. And many of these memories involve things that happened in childhood or in my teenage years.

And I was just mesmerized by my ability to kind of go back in time and reinhabit what those moments felt like. Many of them were fearful. Many of them involved episodes of shame. And there was something that started happening as I started collecting more and more of these memories, where I got to go back in time and sit with these memories. Where, on the one hand, I got to stay in that place—oftentimes kind of a space of vulnerability—in a way that is really difficult to do if you're trying to do it, for instance, in therapy with a psychotherapist or while journaling. Because sometimes when we go back to difficult memories, the tendency is to kind of not remain stuck there or to sort of avoid staying in something that feels triggering or just hard to sit with.

But there was sort of a threshold of comfort that was opened by this experience, where it was kind of easy to sit with those memories and to look at them almost from a bird's eye view,

almost like you were looking at somebody else's life with a degree of detachment that allowed you to sort of reframe the memory and understand it in the full context. And for instance, things that induced feelings of shame then brought me to feelings of compassion and sort of acceptance of what I had felt at the time. And then I think more importantly, the ways in which those formative and difficult experiences early on has shaped my temperament, my personality, and my neuroses later in life as an adult.

John Moe: Can you give me an example, if it's not too painful, of one of these memories that you were able to access?

Ernesto Londoño: Sure. you know, I think...

[00:15:00]

As I kind of look back and piece together the collection, I kind of think of these as kind of reservoirs of pain that I sort of discovered in the desert of my past. Many of them had to do with feelings of shame over my sexual orientation. I'm a gay man. You know, there were moments where I recalled how frightening it felt to be attracted to men while I was in school, while I was in middle school and high school—of the attraction I felt toward some of my male friends. You know, there was this one specific scene that I write about in the book where, you know, when I was about—I must have been around 17—I somehow persuaded a classmate of mine, whom I was very attracted to, to go and visit a prostitute with me. And I can't remember how I did it or how I persuaded him to do it, but I convinced him that the way to do it was we should sort of both be in the room at the same time and take turns. And that memory—

John Moe: A female prostitute?

Ernesto Londoño: A female prostitute, yes. You know, and I was definitely not out of the closet at the time. And you know, that was the scene of—that was the moment of my life that I had had no reason to revisit or reconsider or deem important during my adult years. It was just kind of this crazy wild thing that happened when I was a teenager. And I just remember going back to that memory as though I was being guided to sit with it and reflect on what it meant and how it felt at the time and how it made me feel. And I just remember almost feeling this overwhelming sense of shame for having instigated that episode and for having, you know, felt so attracted to my classmate and having been sort of unable to act on that attraction at the time, having felt that enormous constraint that it would have been really transgressive and dangerous to act on my desires at that point.

And you know, it was a really—I mean, it's fascinating kind of the level of detail with which that memory came to the fore, the feelings attached to it. And then, you know, interestingly, just a few months after that particular ceremony, I happened to meet this classmate at a wedding. And he's not somebody I've stayed in touch with. But he came to me, you know, at the wedding and said, “You know, I've always been really disappointed that we didn't remain in touch and that you sort of drifted away from the group of friends we had back in school. And I wanted to tell you that, you know, that I've always held out hope that we can once again be friends.”

And you know, I described what had happened. I told him about this ceremony and having remembered the scene. And he was very moved by how much, you know, and how intensely I continued to feel about this incident and how resonant it remained within me. And he gave me this huge hug, and he said, “You know, I love you, and I’ve always loved you.”

And there was something so cathartic about sort of having been able to dredge up, you know, this sort of pocket of shame that had remained deep within me, probably somewhere in the bowels of the darkest corners of my mind, and be able to reflect on it as an adult and reflect on what it meant at the time, how I should think of it now. And to see it with I think the compassion and the maturity that I can now bring to bear to that memory, and then to be able to have a conversation with somebody who was a participant. And I felt like I was sort of absolved from the shame, or for my sense that I had acted in ways that were transgressive and shameful.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Just ahead, Ernesto reports on more treatments and the people who administer them.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with Ernesto Londoño, author of *Trippy*. In the book, in *Trippy*, you visit lots of different practitioners of medicinal psychedelics, I suppose. And was that because you wanted to keep finding more things out about your mind? Were you seeking treatment, were you seeking healing? Or was it more of a journalistic exploration at that point?

Ernesto Londoño: That's a good question. I think early on after my first retreat, which was in early 2018, I was really fascinated by this. Because one of the things that happened is my depression was sort of blasted away.

[00:20:00]

So, I kind of walked out of this retreat and had, you know, a couple of months where I was feeling great. And it was an instant turnaround. So, I became really curious about what exactly had happened inside my mind and whether it was sustainable and whether it was replicable. And then the more—you know, so during this period I start really kind of being ravenously curious about the origin of these rituals, how indigenous communities understood them, how they've been sort of reimagined and appropriated over the decades by different people. And so, something that is, you know, initially very much sort of a personal quest to heal and to bring a little bit of order to my mind and to build a life that was a little more stable, you know, kind of led me to see value in doing this, you know, once a year as kind of like routine maintenance. And to continue kind of, you know, becoming a better and more sophisticated student of my mind and the way it worked. And to understand, you know, why my mind so often led me to periods of depression.

And then I think toward the end of my time in Brazil, where I'd learned enough about the scene and had now a lot of questions and a lot of concerns, that I concluded there's an

amazing journalistic deep dive to be done about this wild west of medicinal psychedelics. Because on the one hand, I see that I drew enormous benefits from my entry points and the experiences I had. But I also felt that it was shaping up to be a buyer beware marketplace, where there were good actors. There were actors who were, you know, well intentioned, but in over their heads. And there were people who were outright predatory or reckless in the way they were approaching this. And I understood that these compounds are, you know, very powerful, and that they're not inherently healing.

I don't think you can take psychedelics or urge people to take psychedelics and tell them that they're going to land in a better place. I think the key is having the right environment and the right support system to do this in a way where you're going to be reasonably safe and where are you going to have some guidance and some help when it comes to sort of integrating the insights you attain during these ceremonies—or just a little bit of handholding when a psychedelic journey is destabilizing, maybe opens more things that you're capable of dealing with in real time.

John Moe: Well, and a lot of these places are either lightly regulated, I guess, or completely unregulated. The regulations haven't really caught up with this thing. It's growing so fast. Did you develop any kind of system for spotting the charlatans and the bad actors in the industry?

Ernesto Londoño: I think it's really hard. I mean, I like to think that I do due diligence. And I have, you know, a lot of skepticism as a journalist. So, I ask a lot of questions. I speak three languages, which allows me to kind of do a little bit more kind of thorough research. But you know, I think what I came to see is that given where we are now—and in large part as a result of drug loss and prohibition—much of this, you know, alternative therapy happens in shadowy environments and definitely in unregulated systems. There's very few people here in the United States who get to access these treatments in the context of clinical trials, where there's I think more safeguards and extensive vetting of participants.

But for the most part I think what we're seeing now is that the most vulnerable people seeking these treatments are people oftentimes end up gravitating toward the most reckless or least capable practitioners. And the practitioners that make the boldest and wildest claims about, you know, what people can expect from these treatments or these experiences I think understand fully who they are speaking to. They're speaking to people who are unwell, who are desperate, and oftentimes who have tried everything the mainstream mental health care system has to offer and have struck out. So, I think that can turn into a pretty dangerous dynamic where the people least equipped to be discerning—

[00:25:00]

—to ask, you know, intelligent questions and to do due diligence oftentimes wind up in the care of predators.

John Moe: Yeah. I mean, it makes me think of the mental health system in general, where it's not so much dealing with predatory medical practitioners in the United States—although there are some—but it's the complexity and the hassle and all the hurdles that somebody needs to clear to get any kind of treatment. And those are the people least equipped to leap the hurdles. It kind of echoes that a little bit.

There was a whole lot of mysticism with the people that you met and the organizations that led these different exercises, different experiences. Reality itself gets questioned or rejected. It's kind of—I mean, the book is called *Trippy*. It gets pretty trippy. Did that mysticism help your experience, or did you roll your eyes?

Ernesto Londoño: I think initially I walked in with a lot of skepticism about that. And you know, it was definitely during my first retreat when the woman leading it and other people who had more mileage in this field than I had were talking about things that were kind of out there. Like, you know, speaking with aliens or reconnecting with dead relatives. You know, I found that bonkers, and I was predisposed to—you know, to think they were delusional. I think now—you know, I'm grateful that these experiences have broadened my spiritual horizons. They've made me—you know, I used to be pretty agnostic and had a very complicated relationship with the Catholic church, which is kind of the culture in which I was raised. So, I was sort of predisposed to keep any form of organized religion or spiritual practice at arm's length.

But one of the things that happened to me after my first retreat was I felt a really strong calling to start meditating and to develop a meditation practice. And that led me to study about Eastern philosophy and contemplative practices. You know, later on, it led me to dabble in prayer and to be open to the possibility that, you know, whether or not our ancestors are still accessible in some way, shape, or form, I particularly became really interested in two of my grandparents—you know, before I was born. One of them died like months after I was born, and the other one died before. And I really enjoyed the process of sort of imagining that I could speak to them or pray to them, both in some of these retreat ceremonies but also when I was having moments of doubt or when I was feeling low. I became open to the possibility that we may have guardian angels and that there's many things that we don't understand about what happens after death.

And I didn't develop any rigid views on any of this. I didn't become a true believer in some of the wilder claims that I think some people start making after experiences with psychedelics. But there was something really centering and grounding about approaching some of these existential questions that I think religion has tried to help us think through with more humility and with more of an open mind. So, like one of the things that happened to me was I started praying to my father, who died in 2020 during the pandemic. And I started praying to two of my grandparents. And during moments when I feel like I've lost my way, or where things get hard or confusing, there's a lot of solace to having that practice and that ability to think that there may be these ancestors looking after us, and that we remain somehow connected to them spiritually.

And I don't need anybody to conclusively prove or disprove whether or not this is a thing. But had I not gone on these retreats and had I not had these experiences that made my mind a little more malleable in my belief system, a little more disruptive, I don't think I would've been as open to that. And as I look back on the things that have really helped my mental health, my meditation practice and my prayer practice have become such key pillars—

[00:30:00]

—of what I've come to see as a sort of guardrail system that sustains me through this bumpy journey called life.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Coming up, is Ernesto living depression free now, or is it more complicated than that? Spoiler alert, it's more complicated than that.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're back talking with Ernesto Londoño, author of the book *Trippy*.

You talk about the depression being gone after that first retreat. Did it stay gone?

Ernesto Londoño: No. I've had episodes of depression since. And I think I've come to see depression as something that will likely be a part of my life for the foreseeable future. I experienced it as, you know, something of a gravitational pull and a frequency that I can always sense is somewhere in the background. But I think I was able to see and understand the anatomy of my depression more clearly. I think I was able to understand the way in which my thought stream was generating beliefs and moods that would bring me down. And the more I sort of understood that, the more I came to see what would be required to sort of minimize the harm and the intensity of those periods.

So, like you know, one key thing I recognized was that I'd built a pretty lonely life for myself. You know, I was very devoted to work. I was very career oriented. And I saw very clearly that was kind of the sum of a number of choices I had made. And that if I wanted to be less alone in the world, I had to start making different choices and prioritizing different things. And you know, that may sound really logical and simple, but it took an extraordinary amount of work and being very intentional about shifting gears and about opening myself to love and convincing myself that I was worthy of love—which was a challenge. And I think it's something that many people with depression feel, that they feel so low and so depleted that it's hard to conceive why anybody would want to be around you and why anybody would want to be emotionally invested in you.

John Moe: And now you're in Minnesota because of love, right?

Ernesto Londoño: (*Laughs.*) Right. I'm part of a very select club of people who have moved to Minnesota for love in the dead of winter.

John Moe: That's real love (*laughs*) if you're willing to do it then.

Ernesto Londoño: So, I traded summertime in Brazil for February in Minnesota, which was a big shock to the system.

John Moe: Have you purchased a snowblower yet?

Ernesto Londoño: (*Laughs.*) No, we have a shovel.

John Moe: Okay. Alright. We'll give you time. You'll eventually come around. You're a national correspondent for the *New York Times*. And with this book, you are out about being a depressed person and a person who has taken a whole lot of psychedelics. Do you worry for your reputation, given those facts? Or do you think society has evolved such that it doesn't really matter so much anymore?

Ernesto Londoño: I do worry. And the intensity with which I worry about that kind of ebbs and flows. But I think one factor that shaped my thinking about whether this was something I wanted to do and whether the benefits felt, you know, stronger than the potential risks, was how I felt when I came out of the closet at 19. And I think when we live with secrets and things about our lives that feel difficult and shameful and guard them closely, they can be they can become really heavy weights on our soul and our psyche. And when I thought of how unburdened I felt after I came out of the closet, as difficult as it was and as disruptive as it was, I then asked myself the question of “how will it feel to speak openly about depression and to speak openly about the intersection of mental health and the use of psychoactive drugs?”

[00:35:00]

And I think, you know, one thing I concluded was that we do a really lousy job about having candid and constructive conversations about mental health. And when I looked at the things that have really helped me when I was feeling particularly low, it was listening to other people who have been in a dark place. It was listening to people who speak about, you know, what suicidal ideation feels like and what an awful tunnel that is and who have somehow found their way to the other side. There was one particular sort of period where I listened to a conversation you had with Ana Marie Cox when I was in a really, really bad place. And I drew so much strength and solace from hearing your voices and from hearing how vulnerable and how compassionate you were in your conversation with each other. And that played a big role in my decision later on to say, “You know, I want to be part of this conversation.”

And as journalists, inevitably we end up pissing off people when we write certain things. And I realize that the content of this book includes things that may one day be weaponized against me and taken out of context and may be used in bad faith. But that's a risk I'm willing to take in hope that there are people out there who draw strength from my story and particularly people who may be interested in using psychedelics therapeutically. You know, I hope they will find in my book both a reason for hope, but also a series of red flags that may lead them to be more careful and to know what to look for and how to protect themselves in what remains a little bit of a wild west.

John Moe: What should somebody know who is interested in trying this kind of treatment?

Ernesto Londoño: Oh, that's a great question. (*Sighs.*) I think the first thing I would tell somebody who's interested is that this is not a silver bullet. This can be a really critical way to sort of get unstuck if you happen to be in a really bad spot and if you kind of need to take a timeout from your routine and try something different. I think what I would urge people to think about is, you know, have I done work to prepare myself for something that's going to be

very difficult? And you know, have I availed myself of the value of therapy? Have I tried medication and concluded that it simply doesn't work for me? I would not think of this as kind of the intervention of first resort. I would think of it as something that you would try if many other things have failed you.

I think the more important question is what kind of support structure and system will you have on the back end? Oftentimes when people sign up for these retreats, you know, there's a limited number of days. And you're taken care of while you're in the retreat center, but after the fact, there's really no obligation of continuing care or supervision for the people who walk out of these experiences. And while I've seen many people have extraordinary turnarounds and get incredible insights and turn emotional corners in a way that almost feels too good to be true, I've also seen people who don't find answers or who walk away even more confused or more debilitated. So, I think it's very important to sort of ask yourselves what tools and what guardrails am I going to have the morning after, and to really lay the groundwork for what that support structure is going to look like.

I would strongly encourage people to seek medical guidance before they do this. I think we're in an era where there's more trained, licensed, ethical psychotherapists who are open to this and who have studied it and who understand it and who can—you know, who can help you think through whether this is the right thing for you. And who can help you think whether your background, in terms of your mental health history—whether you've had psychotic breaks, whether you have a history of things like schizophrenia in your family—may make you a really risky candidate for psychedelic assisted therapy. And then, you know, I think the other thing is I would encourage people to kind of start slow. If they're going to do this, maybe start with very low doses and sort of ease their way into this.

[00:40:00]

Don't assume that because you're doing this, you might as well go all the way and take as much as you can. I think I would also caution people to be really skeptical of the practitioners and the retreat centers that are making very bold, flashy promises. If somebody tells you're guaranteed to walk away with a miracle after spending a week, you know, drinking ayahuasca and vomiting, that's probably too good to be true. And you know, the people who are making these grandiose promises probably are more motivated by money than your welfare. So, be skeptical, get lots of advice, try to read lots of reviews, try to talk to people who have been to the places you're considering going to. If possible, if you're going to one of these places, maybe try to go with a friend or somebody who can keep an eye on you. And don't assume that this is going to be a silver bullet. It does not work for everybody.

John Moe: Do you see a future where it becomes more, I guess, mundane, more clinical, more doctor supervised, less about a retreat that you go deep into the woods for? Just more ordinary?

Ernesto Londoño: Yeah, it's really hard to imagine what this is going to look like five years from now, but I think there's efforts underway to get at least two compounds approved by the FDA for clinical use. These include MDMA, which is the drug more commonly known as ecstasy, which has been studied as an intervention for PTSD and has shown very encouraging results in clinical trials. And psilocybin mushrooms, also known as magic mushrooms, which

are next in line to be considered for FDA approval. So, I think we can look at a horizon where in the next few years, there's going to be, you know, sort of clinically accessible interventions where you can go and sit with a clinician or a therapist and undergo these treatments. There's a couple of states that have also created a marketplace for therapeutic mushrooms, Oregon and Colorado. So, they're sort of test driving, you know, these models where you go to a place and there's sort of a system in place, a protocol, and experienced people guiding this.

On the other hand, for many people, these are first and foremost spiritual experiences. And there's, you know, a long history of religious communities that have come to see psychoactive substances as sacraments. And because of that, and because of some of the case law that has emerged by virtue of those practices and those experiences, we find ourselves in a world where, you know, the clinical model is opening the door a tiny crack, but is accessible to very, very few people, and probably will remain available to very few people, and will be affordable to very few people for the next few years. And on the other hand, there's been sort of an explosion of so-called psychedelic churches offering psychedelic treatments in the United States, operating—you know, making the assertion that their use of these compounds is protected by religious freedom laws.

So, I think it's going to be really, really tricky to regulate a field that is both medicinal and spiritual. I think we have a lot of experience when it comes to regulating medicine and medicinal interventions and guidelines for, you know, the way therapists should operate and red lines that shouldn't be crossed. I think we historically have been really averse when it comes to limiting how people can practice their spirituality and their religion. And because the way this is unfolding kind of overlaps those two worlds—it's both a form of therapy and medicine, but it's also a form of spiritual practice—I think it's going to raise some really, really difficult questions.

You know, I also think they will be easier questions to grapple with the more we sort of take a hard look at whether or not our drug laws—which date back to the Nixon era—are serving us in this day and age and whether the way we regulate these compounds currently and treat them under the law adequately reflects their risks and their potential benefits. So, I think there's a conversation to be had about whether or not it's time to take a fresh look at our approach to the war on drugs.

[00:45:00]

And I think, you know, if we're able to have a debate about that and a constructive and science-based conversation about that, I think it would make it easier to start tackling, you know, the difficult questions of how do we create safer experiences for people, and how do we weed out bad actors?

John Moe: Are you still seeking out treatments?

Ernesto Londoño: I think with psychedelics, like many people, I came to see a phenomenon of diminishing returns. What has been most helpful for me has been continuing to explore the nature of my mind through meditation. So, I now have, you know, a fairly disciplined daily meditation practice that I think has sort of given me the ability to process some of the insights

that I got through psychedelic experiences and to make the process and the habit of introspection and of sort of seeing more clearly whether the thoughts in my mind as predisposed to form—which very often are self-defeating and fear inducing—whether or not I should believe them.

And to me, that's been, I think, the most therapeutic and sustainable tool at my disposal. I'm not somebody who thinks I need periodic use of psychedelics to stay afloat emotionally. There are people who I think, you know, make this a more structural sort of aspect of their lives and something they do more regularly. I'm not convinced that, once you've done a fair amount of work and have sort of unlocked a series of answers, that there's huge value in continuing to do more and more and more. But I also remain open to, you know, not knowing how I'm going to feel or what kind of adversity I might face in the years ahead, what new interventions may come online. So, you know, for now I think I'm not terribly drawn to do more and more and more. But that could change.

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

John Moe: The book is *Trippy: The Peril and Promise of Medicinal Psychedelics* by Ernesto Londoño. Ernesto, thank you so much.

Ernesto Londoño: It's been a pleasure. Thank you so much for your wonderful questions.

John Moe: Our program exists because people make it exist with their financial donations. We ask you to do the same. We want to keep the show going. We need to hear from you. Maximumfun.org/join is where to go. You find a level that works for you. You select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows, and you're helping. Another way to help hit subscribe on this podcast and give us five-star ratings and write rave reviews. We really appreciate that.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the United States and Canada by calling or texting 988. It's free. It's available 24/7.

Our Instagram and Twitter are both @DepreshPod. Our newsletter is available on Substack. Search for *Depresh Mode* there. I'm on Twitter and Instagram, @JohnMoe. Be sure to join our Preshies group on Facebook. A lot of great discussion happening over there, people helping each other out, people sharing ideas, people talking about all sorts of things. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@maximumfun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. Ernesto Londoño lives in St. Paul, which is where I live! He even dropped his book off at my house. But my studio is only set up with one mic, so I interviewed him from his house, which is only like a mile away. *Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We got booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”.

Depresh Mode is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller.

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

Kelly: This is Kelly from Chattanooga. Life is tough, but so are you.

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

[00:50:00]

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!