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# Timothy Leary

(Wed, Jul 27, 2005) -

Posthumous Timothy Leary Talks To Bob Dobbs

October 18, 1996

Bob Dobbs: Can you locate Timothy Leary? He was born in 1920 and died in May 1996.

Evergreens: Oh yes, we have this one.

Bob: Timothy Leary died at the end of May 1996, did he go to sleep when he died, or was he aware enough to go through the death process and not go through the sleeping/dreaming period?

Evergreens: He says, "What I'm expected to say is: I saw this as just another trip. It wasn't".

Bob: It was new?

Timothy Leary: It was new. It was not a compendia or an extension or a kaleidoscope of something else, it was new.

Bob: It was not like the TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD outline?

Tim: Nothing like it at all. Useful for Tibetans, not for this one.

Bob: What did you say about the Tibetans?

Tim: Useful for them to have a book of the dead, but if you notice, books of the dead are often written by the living.

Bob: But then, Tim Leary, you wrote a book making the LSD experience parallel to the TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD. Was your death experience anything like the psychedelic trip outlined in that book?

Tim: Not a whit.

Bob: So it was surprising?

Tim: It was surprising.

Bob: Was it a challenge, does one go through anxiety in that experience?

Tim: There was not anxiety, there was not emotion.

Bob: Not emotion?

Tim: Not emotion other than a feeling of "Well?", a feeling of "So?", a feeling of "What's next?", a feeling of not anxiety but a feeling of "What now?". And so "what now" unfolds itself, but no, it was not a psychedelic experience nor would any experience of psychedelics have prepared me for this, nor was it what would be a traditional supposology. It was just new.

Bob: In the publicity about your death, many people are noting that you said "Why, why?", then "Why not?". Is that accurate that you died after saying "why not?" several times?

Tim: Yes.

Bob: And was that dying process videotaped by associates of yours?

Tim: Not that part, an earlier portion, yes.

Bob: But no one was around when you died?

Tim: No, not at that point.

Bob: Then how do they know you said "why not?", that was the last time that someone was near you?

Tim: Yes, last time.

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Bob: And then you died half an hour later, maybe?

Tim: Approximately thirty (or thirteen?) minutes later.

Bob: And what did you mean by "why not?", what were you talking about and questioning?

Tim: You see, at that point, my mind was saying it's ending, there's an end to the physical, this is going to be the end of the physical, whether I wanted it or not was immaterial, had as much choice at that particular moment, so I believed, as a raindrop does in falling. There is an inevitability. And then I realized if it is an inevitability then why not, why not just let it be and let it happen, let it unfold as it should unfold if it were going to unfold or what it was going to do from the perspective of being one moment alive and the next moment not and yet still perceiving, yet not perceiving. It came with such newness that it intrigued by it's very self. So, to me death was an intriguing event.

Bob: And the period up to that acceptance, represented by the "why not?", you were still thinking in terms of surviving and maintaining physical existence.

Tim: Yes.

Bob: Up till five minutes before you were saying "why not?", so to speak?

Tim: Exactly.

Bob: I have a question from a friend who always wondered that when you were arrested around 1972-73, you were caught in Afghanistan, and this friend wondered if you knew that the CIA was waiting for you in Afghanistan and there was some kind of deal made or you went to Afghanistan to be caught so that you could come back into mainstream society and figure out a new situation. I guess the question is: did you make deals and did you know you would be caught in Afghanistan?

Tim: No deals, did not know, but could use it to advantage.

Bob: Did you know that by being in Afghanistan you would be vulnerable?

Tim: I was vulnerable anywhere.

Bob: So you were ready to get caught?

Tim: If it was to be, then was would be. But how could one use it? You see, if the CIA was going to be foolish enough to do it, then I could be smart enough to use that foolishness.

Bob: And you successfully did that while in captivity after that capture?

Tim: Yes.

Bob: And you got out of jail within a couple of years, I think?

Tim: Not long. But you see, still used it to my advantage.

Bob: Of course, the question among a lot of your associates in those days: did you betray anybody's involvement in drug dealing, or whatever information the Establishment would want? There always was a controversy whether you betrayed people.

Tim: If I had, then there would not have been a jail sentence, would there?

Bob: Well, how would that be? You would have still gone to jail.

Tim: Not necessarily.

Bob: Oh, you mean you would have gotten off completely?

Tim: Yes.

Bob: Because I remember reading an article where you looked quite beat-up when people saw you in jail. Were you beat up by the authorities?

Tim: Yes, "pushed around", "tripping over my own feet" it was described as. It's not official policy.

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Bob: So they did try to beat confessions out of you?

Tim: They let it be known that if I didn't say something, it could get worse. And so, therefore, I said let it get worse. And it stopped.

Bob: So you maintained your integrity and it worked.

Tim: It worked. But if they are foolish enough to do that, then I'm smart enough to use it. And once that was over, I was almost, not quite, but almost untouchable.

Bob: And that's the kind of confidence you had when you came out of jail that inspired people like Robert Anton Wilson and your old friends?

Tim: Yes. No betrayal, because if there had been betrayal there would have been other events that would have followed that and I would have been out of that confinement PDQ. But no deals made, no names said. And then they realized they've made a mistake.

Bob: Because eventually you would get out and exude this confidence.

Tim: Yes.

Bob: So from that point on you knew you'd won?

Tim: And they knew it, too. So I was almost untouchable.

Bob: Now, do you remember meeting me in May'93 with Nelson Thall?

Tim: Yes.

Bob: What did you think of our encounter because in the middle of our interview with the TV personality, I can't remember her name, this was May 14-15, 1993, you left the room because you found Nelson and I rather intense or having quite a different view about McLuhan's knowledge than you did. Why did you run out of the room at that point?

Tim: I just wanted to. Have you ever been in a situation where you just want to leave it?

Bob: Did you need to get a better perspective on us, and you had to leave the room?

Tim: Yes, that helped. But also, if you will remember as it was, I was tired at the time.

Bob: Yes, it went on too long into the day.

Tim: And when you're tired sometimes you need to go somewhere just to think things over - unless you say something that you shouldn't do.

Bob: Say that again?

Tim: Unless you say something that you shouldn't say.

Bob: But your fatigue was aggravated by our intensity and our energy.

Tim: Yes, but realize the basis was the fatigue.

Bob: In other words, if you were rested you wouldn't have had to do that?

Tim: No, I may have chosen. But if there had been more rest, yes, it could have turned out different.

Bob: So, did you meet Marshall McLuhan yet on the spirit plane?

Tim: Oh yes.

Bob: And I discussed this in May'93 with you: how you were a Johnnie-come-lately in realizing the value of McLuhan after the Berlin Wall went down and the events of the early Nineties. Did you discuss that with Marshall, did you discuss your belated understanding or appreciation of him?

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Tim: It was not the understanding, it was the breadth, the implications across a number of events, across a number of disciplines, across a number of fields. If you say briefly "the medium is the message" for which McLuhan was well known, then you start thinking media such as television, radio, newspapers, periodicals. But it also means billboards, it also means sunsets, it also means philosophies, it also means countries, it also means the beliefs within countries, and so on and so on.

"The medium is the message" is very interesting but it has not been applied to the fact that often the medium is a diplomat to represent his country. But it was the number of media that suddenly became known to me. It was not just "media" as in the conventional sense but the concept of everything as a medium and what it says and what it does and how it's perceived and how it affects the mind and how it affects the thinking and how it affects the life. It's not as simple as some people make it out to be, it's remarkably complex.

Bob: Did you have this insight after the Berlin Wall went down or in the early Nineties or earlier?

Tim: Beginning to get it, beginning to get it.

Bob: In '89-'90?

Tim: Yes. You see, what could be said made a change was when I realized that there is no such thing as carpet. Have you thought of that?

Bob: In some ways.

Tim: If you look at carpet, all that's necessary if you want to have carpet as a sound deadening, something soft to walk on, then why not just have a carpet factory and everybody get carpet and put it on their floors and that's it. But no, there is no such thing as carpet, there's blue carpet, red carpet, green carpet, high tufts, low tufts, there's Afghanistan, there's Indian. You see, carpets are carpet. Carpet is a choice and some people put carpeting on their floor that costs more than several hundred dollars a square yard. And some people put carpeting on their floor that they can buy for eleven dollars a square yard, but carpeting is a media, clothes are a media.

Why do certain teens wear their caps backwards, with the long baggy pants with the crotch about the knees, and a T-shirt, and they all look the same, but each one of them saying they're individual. But what do their clothes say, what does a suit say, what does a dress say, what do slacks say? You see, it moved into me realizing that media is everywhere around. Lampshade's a media. If there is an intent behind an expression, then that means of expression is a media.

Bob: I see. For me, when you asked me if carpet exists, I thought of it in terms of what McLuhan said for years in the '60s when he was asked "Will there ever be silence?", he said "Objects are unobservable, only relationships among objects are observable".

And I would say when you thought of the object as medium, you realized the multiplicity of relationships between and within media and they weren't just isolated nominalistic objects.

Tim: True. But also the definition of media is what expanded. What I say is that if a message is given through any object, then that object is of course media whether it's a carpet, a pair of pants, or a lampshade.

Bob: Media is communication per se.

Tim: Per se. Media is more of the concrete of the expression. But what shifted in me is realizing the wideness of what media constituted.

Bob: Yes, and I felt I understood that for many years, and that gave me an advantage in understanding McLuhan.

Tim: Yes. But me, I was still thinking at one time that this would be a cool medium, this would be a warm medium, which one was cool - the radio or the television? You see, it's not taking media by singularity but among media in its totality and its totality of ramifications.

Bob: Yes. Now, I want to move on so I appreciate you saying that and I think that's clear. I've heard through a friend that someone wants to interview you through a medium and I guess they probably want to do it on videotape and I thought I would present this dialogue through the Evergreens to them if I meet them, and I probably will. Would you like to come through the Evergreens in a videotaped interview or maybe the one that we've just had would be what you would like to be presented, or is there another medium you will take to speak through if these people are serious about documenting this?

Tim: Whoever they choose, it's up to them.

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Bob: Okay, one last question, Mr. Leary, am I Bob Dobbs?

Tim: You are... you're not... you were... you will be... you are.

Bob: Thank you, it was good talking to you, Mr. Leary. THE END