Episode 504: Paul Austin of Third Wave on Understanding and Using Psychedelics for Transformation
This episode is sponsored by Wellnesse, that's wellness with an E on the end. It's my personal care brand of products that I created when I realized that some of my friends and family members were still using some pretty toxic personal care products simply because they worked better. I set out to create truly natural products that outperformed conventional alternatives, and Wellnesse is the result. Our super popular whitening toothpaste has been helping families create healthier oral microbiomes for a couple of years now. And our hair food, hair care nourishes the scalp from the outside in, which is why we get so many testimonials about hair regrowth and thicker, healthier hair. But today, I'm excited to tell you about our brand new silk floss. Most floss is actually plastic and can be coated with some pretty unsavory ingredients that you’re rubbing directly into your gums. Since what goes in the mouth goes into the rest of the body, we created a truly natural silk-based floss that is gentle, yet effective at keeping your teeth and gums clean and fresh. Check out our floss and all of our products at wellnesse.com.

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Katie: Hello, and welcome to the Wellness Mama podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and wellnesse.com, that's wellnesse with an e on the end. And this episode goes deep on a topic I've gotten a lot of questions about since talking about my experience, and that is psychedelic use. I’m here with Paul Austin, who is an entrepreneur and public speaker and educator. He has founded two companies in the emerging psychedelic space, ThirdWave and Synthesis.

Within ThirdWave, he and his team are building an educational platform to ensure psychedelic substances become responsibly integrated into our cultural framework. ThirdWave offers long form psychedelic guides, online micro dosing programs, and the industry best network of clinics and retreat providers. And because of his work in this intersection of psychedelic use, personal transformation, and professional success, he’s been featured in everything from BBC to Forbes and many others.
And I felt it was important to have this conversation here on the podcast because this is something that I've talked about before as being very, very profoundly impactful to me personally. It's also something that is becoming more widespread in use, and talked about more. There's still a lot of misinformation out there. I also think that, and I've said this many times here, that when women, and moms, especially, have an understanding about something, that's when we see societal shifts start to happen, and I wanted to start this conversation here.

In this episode, we go into everything from the broad definition of different psychedelic substances, what actual impact they're having on the body in a physiological way, also in a mental way, their safety, the long spread history of psychedelics in various cultures, including early Christianity, how Paul got into this field, and then what the current research is saying about different psychedelics, compounds, and their impact on things like PTSD, trauma, depression, addiction, and a lot more. It's a very wide-ranging conversation.

I think you'll learn a lot, and I'm going to include a lot of links to specific resources we mention in the show notes at wellnessmama.fm. So, if you are curious about learning more, definitely check that out to really delve into the research and all of the resources available. But, without further ado, let's jump into this semi-controversial topic with Paul.

Katie: Paul, welcome.

Paul: Hey, Katie. Thanks so much for having me on the show today. I'm so excited.

Katie: I am excited to chat with you because we are gonna tackle kind of a bunch of topics related to a single topic that I've gotten a lot of questions on since I started speaking publicly about it. But before we jump into that, I have a note in the show notes that you have traveled to 60 plus countries. And I'm so curious which would be maybe your top three that you would go back over and over, or that you loved the most.

Paul: So, I lived in Turkey for a full year coming out of undergrad, I taught English there, and so I know the culture, I know the language, I know the food, I know the customs, I know the people. And so that's always a place that is close to my heart, a place that I continue to go back to again and again. Really, really loved the hospitality and the warmth that is present there in Turkey. The second place would be Nepal. When I was 23, I went hiking in the Annapurna Circuit for 3 weeks, which is a more sort of touristy part or area. And while preparing for that trip, read a book called "The Snow Leopard," which is all about the Dolpo sort of Upper Mustang region in Nepal, where it's like very few westerns I've gone. And so I'd love to go back and trek there.
And then just for kicks, a place that I haven't been yet but really would love to go is Russia. I'm someone who studied history in undergrad, I'm obsessed with history, and I've read so much about Russia. And in fact, I'm going there in March, April to do like a 10-day hunting trip in Siberia with a friend I know from Austin. So I love adventure, I love travel, and it's something I've been doing. I think the first trip I had internationally was at the age of 11 when I went to Costa Rica. And ever since then, I've just been really curious about the world at large.

Katie: That's really cool. I recently met a friend who plays elephant polo in Nepal. They work in an elephant sanctuary and I was like, now I have a new life goal is to go play elephant polo in Nepal. Well, the topic I was so excited to have you on today to really tackle is the topic of psychedelics. And this is I think, a somewhat new and maybe potentially delicate topic for some people in my audience. But like I said, I've spoken publicly about how use of psychedelics in certain situations was really profound for me in trauma recovery and in my own journey. And so I wanted to have kind of an evidence-based and just kind of wide-ranging discussion about this. But I would guess most people in today's world have at least heard the term, but can you kind of just give us a broad overview of what technically qualifies as a psychedelic and maybe some of the different ones that are more commonly used?

Paul: For sure. So I think the best place to start for that is where the word psychedelic even comes from. So psychedelic means soul manifesting, psyche, being soul, delos meaning manifesting comes from Greek. And the word came about in the '60s when Aldous Huxley, who some listeners may be familiar with had a correspondence with the man named Humphry Osmond, who was sort of the Johnny Appleseed of LSD in the 1950s and '60s. And they're going back and forth on what do we name these novel compounds, particularly LSD? And they came on this word, psychedelic, as part of it.

And so the classic psychedelics are known largely by being 5-HT2A agonists. So the 5-HT2A, it's a serotonin receptor, one of 14 serotonin receptors. And so the classic psychedelics activate their 5-HT2A agonists, and those would be things like LSD, which is a lysergamide, psilocybin, which is a tryptamine, and also Mescaline, which is a phenethylamine. And so the classic psychedelics have that activation. But then, you know, within this sort of topic and conversation of this third wave of psychedelics that's going on right now, other people would say that ketamine can be a psychedelic or MDMA can be a psychedelic or Ayahuasca is a psychedelic.

So, you know, on our Third Wave website, we have guides for every major psychedelic. And at this point in terms of well-known common psychedelics, there's probably anywhere from 12 to 15. Even some people would consider cannabis to be a psychedelic. But there are literally now hundreds of compounds that are psychedelic-like that have been invented in labs over the last 30 or 40 years.

Katie: Got it. And I know there's kind of a confusing history and a lot of misinformation floating around the internet related to psychedelics. And this is part of your mission is to help really provide fact-based information for people. Before we go into that though, I'd love to hear a little bit about your backstory. I know some of this personally, but for the sake of the listeners, how did you come to work in this field?
Paul: So I grew up in West Michigan in a place called Grand Rapids, which is a fairly, I would say, traditional and relatively conservative part of the United States. You know, I grew up in the church, going to church every Sunday. My parents were quite religious. There was clear boundaries around what was good and what was bad from a morality perspective. And so at the age of 16, I tried cannabis for the first time, found it to be interesting. And then at the age of 19, when I was in college, tried both psilocybin mushrooms and LSD for the first time at slightly higher dose levels. And in particular with LSD, just had a sort of the classic mystical experience with psychedelics where I experienced ego-dissolution, ego-death. I was able to see that death itself is largely an illusion of the ego and that by letting go of that, I could actually have the courage to really create and live the life that I wanted to live.

So psychedelics were very influential in helping me to chart the path that I wanted to follow for at least my 20s, and that path that I chose, I thought it best for it to be unconventional. You know, many of my friends were going to graduate school or getting into a sales job, or living a more normal lifestyle. And because of that work that I did with psychedelics, I really thought, how cool would it be to, you know, move to Turkey and teach English there for a year, then move to Thailand and build my own business. Because a lot of people don't take risks necessarily because they're afraid of failure. But through psychedelic experiences, I was given the courage to really chart a more unconventional path and they were always very near and dear to my heart.

And so that was probably 2010 when I first started working with psychedelics. And then in 2015, I was living in Budapest and was taking LSD with a couple of friends. And we were just sort of reflecting on the growth of interest in psychedelic acceptances, all this clinical research that was coming out of Johns Hopkins and NYU. You know, influential podcasters like Tim Ferriss were starting to publish public podcasts about the medical research around psychedelics. So then just generally the reframing culturally around cannabis, which is really the first substance that was previously illicit and illegal, that there was a lot of propaganda around and the was reframed to be seen as this actually helpful thing. And so it was clear that psychedelics were following in that path.

And so in 2015, I started the website the Third Wave as a way to really educate the broader populace around the responsible and intentional use of psychedelics. Because through my own experiences, personal experiences, but also through my own research, because once I become interested in a topic, I just, you know, I read, like, 20 books around it, right? So, I just went down that rabbit hole and I found out that, wow, we as humans, we've been using these for thousands of years, for millennia, for religious and spiritual purposes in places like the Amazon, or in Mexico, or Ancient Greece, or even in Göbekli Tepe, the cradle of civilization. They found psychedelic-like compounds in there.

And then of course, in the '50s and '60s, you know, with the second wave of a psychedelics, over a thousand clinical papers were published about the efficacy of psychedelics to treat a range of clinical condition, but all of that research was buried because of what happened in the counterculture and how LSD, in particular, was tied to the protests against the Vietnam War. And of course, because of our civil rights, the government at the
time couldn't make protesting illegal, but they could make the drugs that the protesters used illegal, and so they cracked down on psychedelics as part of that.

So there was this rich history and it was clear that these were beneficial and that if used in a way with intention and responsibility they could help a lot of people, and I thought, you know, more people need to know about this. And the other element was, this is clearly going to become more and more of a thing and what went wrong last time like in the '60s, it was really hard to make the leap from clinic to culture. And so the intention then behind Third Wave, was how do we help with education and literacy? How do we amplify micro-dosing as a topic to help make that leap so that these substances could be properly integrated into our culture at large? So that's a little bit about my personal experience, but also more so like where are psychedelics at this point in time, and why are they important and relevant for the broader public?

Katie: Yeah, I think that's really helpful because it seems like a lot of people maybe only have the context of the '50s and '60s, and kind of the counter-cultural reaction to them. And so they kind of have a negative taste in their mouth for anything that's loosely kind of grouped into that substance category of psychedelics. But like you've explained, there's so much nuance within that. And it was surprising to me as well when I started going down that research rabbit hole is how much actual published data there is. That was really surprising because certainly I grew up like you in a very religious household, and it was very much a black and white, all drugs are bad, period. And it turns out, like you said, these things have been used and researched, and well-studied before, and we're seeing appropriately named kind of the third wave of this now. And we're seeing now emerging research...I know I've seen recently some really fascinating research. What are some of the current research you're looking at when it comes to psychedelics?

Paul: That's a great question. So the research has largely been focused on what we could call mental health issues or clinical conditions. And there have been two in particular, that had been a focal point for research, one is depression. And so there's been a lot of research on the efficacy of psilocybin for major depressive disorder as well as treatment-resistant depression. And then there's also been a lot of research on PTSD and how in particular MDMA-assisted psychotherapy can help to heal deep PTSD, complex PTSD. So I would say those are the two core elements, depression and PTSD, that are the farthest in FDA clinical trials. MDMA is in phase three, which is the final stage before approval, and psilocybin is about to go into phase three.

But there's also, you know, there's research on smoking cessation. So the NIH just funded the first psychedelic research in over 50 years where they're exploring how psilocybin can help people to quit smoking. There's research on OCD, there's research now on anti-inflammatory conditions or inflammatory conditions, there's research on a range of other, you know, issues as it relates to mental health and clinical conditions. And I think one element where there's growth and it's something that we're exploring through Third Wave, and there's been some research on it is, what's the relationship between psychedelics and performance, or psychedelics and leadership, or psychedelics and creativity, right?
There's been a little bit of research published in the '60s and in the now on that, but I do feel like it's an important thing to continue to grow and evolve. And it's been my personal story. It's been less for me about trauma healing and more so about, I don't know, evolution, or consciousness, or performance, whatever that might be. So I see that as an element of, or an area of research that we'll have a lot more attention and energy as psychedelics become more widely accepted in culture.

Katie: And you also talked about the history of psychedelic use, and I think this is another misconception, or people maybe just don't realize how long of a history these compounds have. I know I recently, I'm curious your take on it, but I read the book, "The Immortality Key," and it talked about how there's evidence that these substances could very well have been used throughout many religious traditions, including Christianity throughout history. But can you talk a little more about what we know from historical research on how and when these compounds were used?

Paul: So there's, I would say, speculation that they've been used for 10, even hundreds of thousands of years that our ancient hominid ancestors, as they were traveling across the Savannas of Africa, found psilocybin mushrooms, and that psilocybin mushrooms helped visual acuity. It helped with language and communications. So the evolution of consciousness, the growth of the brain, which is really what differentiated humans from all the other animals on the earth. Terence McKenna wrote about this in "Food of the Gods." So we could go back as far as that, but I think in terms of more established anthropological research, that's been done. Again, we look at, I mentioned Göbekli Tepe earlier, which is the cradle of civilization in Turkey. There've been psychedelic sort of sacraments that have been found in Göbekli Tepe, which is like 8,000 BC, you know, almost 10,000, more than 10,000 years ago.

But I think relevant for this audience is the tie-in with psychedelics and the Ancient Greeks, you know. There's this sort of common phrase that use that "All of Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato," right? And so Plato's philosophy is the foundation of our belief systems and our values in Western culture and philosophy. And so Plato, as well as Aristotle, as well as many major prominent thinkers in ancient Greece went to something called the Eleusinian Mysteries, which were held in a place called Eleusis about 20 miles outside of Athens. And every so often the Greater Mysteries were hosted at Eleusis, where the participants would drink a beverage called kykeon. And kykeon was developed from ergot, which is a fungus that grows on rye, and it was a psychedelic beverage. In fact, kykeon, being from ergot, it's the same thing that LSD is made from. LSD is also derived from ergot.

And so there's this really interesting tie-in that it's really no coincidence that kykeon, the original beverage that helped Plato to open up and form some of his core philosophies came back in the form of LSD as a re-introduction for Western culture and society to look at psychedelic substances. And so in "The Immortality Key" specifically then, the author, Brian Muraresku tracks how kykeon was the sacrament that was used by the ancient Greeks. And it was for the god Dionysus. And so what then is tracked is how that ritual, let's say, led into early Christianity, the parallels between Dionysus and Jesus, and the parallels between kykeon and the actual sacrament of Jesus's blood, the wine, right? Because for the first 300 years, let's say of Christianity, or maybe like 200 years of Christianity, it was a cult. It was underground, it was oppressed.
And so any time the early Christians wanted to meet, they had to do so underground, and they often did so with a sacrament. But in 307 AD when Constantine, the Roman Emperor at the time made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, they had to cut out all the underground stuff, neuter the sacrament that was being used so that it was just wine, it didn't have that psychedelic component. And essentially, at that point in time was when psychedelics left sort of the Western Pantheon and went totally underground.

So that's more the Western philosophy. I think it's really relevant for your audience, our audiences, because we largely come from a Western background. But, you know, ayahuasca, which a lot of people may have heard of, this brew that's from the Amazon that's been used for thousands of years. There was also Soma in ancient India, which was written about Upanishads in the Bhagavad-Gita, which people think was a mushroom that was used from a psychedelic perspective. So we have that sort of deep, deep root-in in psychedelic compounds. And then I already mentioned some of the recent history with the second wave and, you know, the counterculture and all that as well.

Katie: Yeah. I'll definitely link to that book in the show notes for anybody who wants to go deeper on that. I was fascinated to hear just how strong of evidence we have, or we think we have about the historical use. And like you mentioned, there's now been a big resurgence in modern culture, people talking about it, we are studying these compounds in various different ways. For people who aren't familiar or maybe haven't had a first-hand experience with this, what are some of the reasons people can have such profound experiences on psychedelic compounds?

Paul: So again, a great question, let's come at this from a few different perspectives, right? One is going to be more from a clinical research perspective. So in 2006, Johns Hopkins published a groundbreaking research paper showing the relationship between psilocybin and a mystical experience. And they defined a mystical experience as having these five qualities, it was noetic, it was ineffable, it was, you know, transformative, and there were like a couple others in there as well, right? And so what those researchers proved was that psilocybin at higher doses occasions a mystical-type of experience, which is essentially this direct connection to Source, to God, to the mystery, to the unknown. And that that mystical experience is then responsible for the healing that comes from psychedelics for depression, addiction, alcoholism, end of life anxiety. Again, I mentioned this earlier in the show, but that's because when we have this mystical experience, we realize that the ego is largely an illusion and that there's this greater self that rests beneath the ego that is immortal, essentially.

And when so we have this mystical experience, we realize that all of this fear that we have of death is not necessary and that it allows us to let go of a lot that we normally hold on to in everyday waking life. So I think that's one element of it. And what's been really interesting about that research is they showed in the research that the stronger the mystical experience, the greater longevity of the healing for things like depression, addiction, and alcoholism. And so what they're looking at and what they've tied together with that research then is a lot of our current mental health issues are actually tied to a deep disconnection from God's source,
the mystery, something greater than ourselves. And that by healing that disconnection through high doses of psilocybin, we actually heal the symptoms of depression, addiction, alcoholism, which are just symptomatic of a greater disconnection to ourselves, to source, to nature, etc., etc.

So that's, I would say, one more mystical, spiritual element that's going on. I would say if we were to root it a bit more from a physiological perspective or neuro-biological perspective, what happens when you take a high dose of a psychedelic, in particular psilocybin, or LSD, or some of the...or DMT, or ayahuasca, these classic psychedelics, is they interrupt something called the default mode network. And so the default mode network is the network in our brain that's just our default waking state. You know, it's like when we're daydreaming or when we're just out in the world, but we don't have anything that we're actively engaging in. And oftentimes those who have things like depression or struggling with addiction, or alcoholism, the default mode network is very tight, it's very rigid, it's very constricted. And so what psychedelics do is they interrupt that and they loosen up the default mode network so that way people can relax, they can expand, they don't feel like they're sort of gripping onto life so hard.

So by interrupting the default mode network, it allows people to sort of reset, have a new perspective, and then come back into life with more energy. A metaphor that's often been used to describe this is that in our normal everyday waking life, we have these ruts that we always follow. These habits, these patterns that we always go through much like on a ski hill. When you go on a ski hill, you have the normal tracks that you follow, that everyone else has been down before. What psychedelics do is they cover that ski hill with a totally new layer of fresh powder, right? And so when that layer of fresh powder is laid down, then you can ski down that same ski hill, but create new tracks and new paths.

And so that's essentially what psychedelics help to do is that by interrupting the default mode network, they engender something called neurogenesis, right? And neurogenesis is the ability for the brain to become more plastic, to become more malleable. And through that plasticity then, people who are working with psychedelics can actually integrate new behaviors into their everyday waking life, because there is quite a bit of healing that comes from the psychedelic experience itself. Like I said, this mystical experience, connection to something that's ineffable. There's a lot of value that comes in that, but if integration isn't paid attention to and isn't honored, then that can often just be another fleeting drug experience, and there's not necessarily any tangible changes that happen in everyday waking life. And so what's just as critical, if someone is looking to work with psychedelics, what's just as critical as the actual experience itself is what changes and shifts do you make after the experience?

And again, because the psychedelics help to engender neuroplasticity, it's much easier to change and shift, and that could be diet, exercise, sleep, that could be starting a meditation practice, doing yoga, doing breathwork. That could be changing the dynamics of your relationship with a partner or spouse or significant other, right? There's lots of ways to navigate that. It could also be healing trauma, right? You had mentioned that part of your own path in this was a lot of trauma healing that needed to be done, right? So what psychedelics also do within this is they open up the subconscious and the unconscious, right?
And so when we have a classic psychedelic experience, oftentimes, again, in our normal conscious waking everyday life, we've sort of stuffed or repressed a lot of difficult traumatic things that have happened to us because we needed to navigate life, and what psychedelics do is they open up the basement, so to say, where we've stored all those skeletons and psychedelics almost force us to have the courage to face those dark parts of who we are, those dark parts of our history, the shadow parts of who we are. And that in itself is a catharsis. And so by sort of dredging up those more difficult elements of our life and facing them head-on, we actually transform them into power and energy, that then gives us the capacity to make these changes that are gonna help us to live a more balanced, peaceful, loving existence, essentially.

Katie: That was certainly my experience of just basically being able to touch things in my subconscious that 10 years of talk therapy was completely ineffective at. And in a way that felt both challenging and safe as well. I think it was Hume who said "Until we make the subconscious conscious, it will rule our lives and we will call it fate." And I feel like for me personally, psychedelics were a thing that helped me to be able to be aware of some of those things and then face them. But I'm so glad you brought up integration because I think important, very important things to talk about, especially for anybody listening, who maybe has not ever tried psychedelics and is considering it, that I'm so glad you educate so well about, is the importance of set and setting. So how, and when you're going to use psychedelics, in what capacity, the dose, all of that. But then, like you said, the integration piece, which I feel like often gets ignored and is now being talked a lot more about, thankfully. But maybe in some of this going back underground for a while, that part wasn't as talked about because there just weren't as many resources about it. So can you give any just general helpful guidelines? I'll link, as well, of course, to your site. I know you write about this, but on figuring out good set and setting and then maybe some integration practices?

Paul: Yeah. So when we look at having a psychedelic experience, there are three elements to pay attention to. One is how you prepare for the experience. You prepare your body, you prepare your mind, you prepare your spirit, you prepare your entire self to enter a state of transformation, right? And so for preparation, that might mean journaling, it could be meditating, it could be cleaning up your diet, it could be just quieting things for a couple of days beforehand, maybe doing some fasting. The preparatory protocols just depend on the type of medicine, the amount of medicine and the group that you're doing it with. But preparation is important to prepare the mind, the body, the self, to really go into that and have a beautiful experience.

And then the psychedelic, really are what are called nonspecific amplifiers. And so what that means is wherever you are, let's say emotionally or spiritually, or even physically set and setting when you're doing that psychedelic, the psychedelic will amplify what it is that's inside of you. And so it's really, really important that you feel psychologically safe when setting up a psychedelic experience. That is the number one critical factor of having a productive and tangibly transformative psychedelic experience is creating a set and setting where you feel safe, right? Safety matters most. And so let's say if someone is listening to this and they're looking to have their first psychedelic experience, or maybe they've done psychedelics in college, like some mushrooms at a concert, but they're really looking to have a more transformative experience, picking a place where you feel comfortable like your home, or, you know, ideally somewhere inside that you can control the.
environment, I would say that's important. Doing it with a guide. For some folks that could just be in a trusted friend or a trusted partner or trusted spouse. It can mean you could also hire a trained therapist or doctor who can sit there and guide for you when you're having that experience.

And then having a great playlist, having some music, having some sense, having a thing that brings sort of an aesthetic energy that you wanna go into when you’re having that experience. So to me, set and setting is really how are you preparing, right? What's your mindset? That's where set comes from. What's your mindset going into the experience? Is the place that you're doing it. Do you feel psychologically safe in that space? Do you know that space is that environment comfortable for you? Are you doing it with a trusted friend, loved one, guide, therapist who you trust can hold space for you as you go into that? And then do you have some music? Do you have maybe some art, some painting, something that you can experience from more artistic perspective? And so that's the actual experience itself. And then what we often say is that's like the 20% of transformation, but integration is really the 80% of integration.

So integration is, okay, I've had this beautiful life-changing psychedelic experience. There are all these insights that came through some beautiful and inspiring, some difficult and challenging. How do I now reenter society, reenter my family life, reenter my work life, and integrate those insights into who I'm becoming? And so for this, this is why we're training coaches through Third Wave, through our training program, because having a coach, or a therapist, or someone who knows it firsthand, there's to support you, to keep you accountable, to guide you, is so critical and important with this. Because psychedelics are very volcanic and catalytic, and they bring up a lot of stuff and people need support as they're going back into everyday life in terms of how they integrate those new ways of being.

And so the way that we look at integration is, you know, mind is one in terms of emotional stability. Do you have a practice that's gonna help you to stay emotionally centered? Physiological elements are one, you know, a lot of people are depressed or they're anxious, or they have an addiction or whatever it is. And if they were to just dial in sleep, or take certain supplements, or clean up their diet, that would do a lot to address some of those things. So we work a lot on physiological elements. And then there's also relational elements, you know, like how do you cut out toxic relationships in your life? How do you engage with people who are really supportive and loving of you and how do you make those shifts in such a way where you don't sort of totally lose your own sense of stability and centeredness. Because that is often the challenge with integration is sometimes these experiences are so powerful that people lose their center, right?

And they wanna make all these changes and shifts or they make really dramatic moves and that can sometimes be more harmful than helpful. And so what's really important in integration, you know, something that's often talked about, is to not make any major, major life decisions for at least the month after you have a psychedelic experience. Because people will go and, you know, let's say drink ayahuasca in the jungle and they'll come back and they'll go, "Okay, I'm gonna quit my job, I'm gonna divorce my wife, I'm going to move to a foreign country, and I'm gonna live this whole new thing." And then, you know, over the span of the next month or so they come to realize that actually, I don't wanna quit my job, and actually, maybe that's not the right move to divorce my wife. So it's important to let the dust settle so to say, and to make incremental
improvements in that integration phase, because I think what's important to recognize is oftentimes what a psychedelic experience does is people feel like they need to be in a rush. They need to make all these changes right away.

But what you and I both know is that it's a journey that could last years and years and years and years. And so oftentimes the psychedelic experience is the first opener, but we always wanna approach our relationship with psychedelics and integration as if we will be integrating for the rest of our lives, and that this is just the path of who we're becoming. So I think keeping both the short-term in mind about what are some behavioral changes that we can make, and keeping the long-term in mind, that we will continue to cultivate awareness and discipline, and expansion for the rest of our lives. So there's no rush to make all these dramatic changes right away. Let's let the dust settle and see how that journey unfolds over the next month, 6 months, year, 10 years, whatever that timeline might be.

Katie: Yeah, that's a really great point. I'm glad you brought that part up. I think another side effect of psychedelic use being pushed back underground in the '50s and '60s is there was a lot of misinformation. And it seems like a lot of people have the perception that psychedelics are or can be dangerous, physically dangerous, or harmful. And I think this is another important topic I'd love to just delve into a little bit with you now because I think there's so much misinformation floating around. So from like a biological perspective, you've explained so well, these things can have a profound psychological effect and so they should be treated with care because of that ability. But on the physical side, can you talk about the safety data that we have related to different psychedelic compounds?

Paul: So there was a study published in 2010 by David Nutt, who at the time was working for the UK government. And essentially David Nutt established that LSD and psilocybin are the two safest drugs that we have available to us. Safer than tobacco which is legal, safer than alcohol, which is legal, safer than opioids in particular, which are legal, safer than cannabis, even which is legal. And so a large reason for that is because the classic psychedelics are anti-addictive. So they are not physiologically addictive whatsoever. If you take, let's say a lot of people are interested in micro-dosing now where they'll microdose for two or three times a week for a month or two months, if you just stopped doing that, there'll be no physical withdrawals whatsoever. And so I think that's the first key important part is not only are psychedelics anti-addictive, but there's actually established clinical research that psychedelics heal addiction, right?

And so when people think of drugs or illegal drugs, they think of cocaine, they think of heroin, they think of meth. They think of all of these drugs, largely stimulants, but also depressants like heroin that are addictive, right? And so they naturally lump psychedelics into that category. Well, psychedelics are also illegal, so they must be addictive, when in fact they are not physiologically addictive whatsoever, which I think is really important to emphasize. They're also very physiologically safe. You can take a ton of LSD, you can take a ton of mushrooms and you will not die. There are no deaths physiologically from LSD, physiologically from psilocybin. It's just not possible to overdose on the substances at all.
Now, what the risks are are some people become, I would say, psychologically dependent on the substance, almost in a disassociative way where they do so much ayahuasca, or they do so much psilocybin, or they do so much LSD, that they become attached to that altered state of consciousness without actually really fully integrating what it represents. They keep going back, keep going back, keep going back, but they never really ground some of those insights and truths. And so that is, it's a minor risk, but it is a risk to become psychologically dependent. And then, of course, people who have a predisposition to schizophrenia or who are borderline, or maybe who have struggled with bipolar, need to be very careful about working with psychedelics because they can sometimes engender a psychotic break. And so people probably have heard the stories about those who took LSD and jumped out of a window or, you know, something along those lines. And that's, again, why set and setting is so important because if you have a guide, if you're in a safe space, and if you take a reasonable dose level, that will never happen because you are taken care of and you're safe.

Usually when experiences like that happen, it's because way too much was taken, there was no attention paid to set and setting. There were usually other drugs involved, particularly alcohol that were involved. And so, so much of the risk profile of psychedelics can just be mitigated, again, by honoring what we talked about when it comes to set and setting prep, the experience, and then of course the integration. And then I would say the biggest risk for psychedelics at this point in time is that they're still largely illegal, right? So in almost every jurisdiction in the world, there are a few exceptions like the Netherlands and Jamaica, Peru, Brazil, but in almost every jurisdiction in the world, all of the psychedelics are illegal. That's changing quickly, but still, I would say of all the risks, that's probably the biggest one at this point in time.

Katie: That was a great overview. I think what might be relevant to some people listening is that anti-addictive property, I've certainly heard first-hand accounts from people who were able to quit smoking even to quit harder drugs from psychedelic use. The one I've heard most from people in my own life is the anti-addictive nature related to food. So I think people who did psychedelics in a good environment, good set and setting, and then integrated properly after, I've seen that and felt first-hand in myself as well. It kind of re-changing our relationship with food if there's an underlying food addiction, that's maybe not even really realized, I've just seen that profound shift in people afterwards. You've also mentioned micro-dosing a couple of times, and I'm guessing most people are familiar with that term, but I think it's important to define kind of what micro-dosing is and how that differs. And maybe one of these bigger, more profound doses.

Paul: So when we look at micro-dosing, the best way to think about it is micro-dosing and macro-dosing, we're both, you know, both are obviously with psychedelics, but micro-dosing is more like the AM dial and macro-dosing is more like the FM dial. So you're still getting a transmission, but it's different. The high doses are much more about connecting with God, transcendence. You know, having this really deep breakthrough transformative experience. It's usually done once, let's say every three to six months, it's not done that often. And before and after shift is significant. Micro-dosing is more like someone is whispering at you. You know, if a high dose is, like, super intense and someone is shaking you, and someone is yelling at you, micro-dosing is more like someone is whispering to you. It's a very, very low dose, what was called a sub-perceptible dose. So that means when you take a microdose, there's nothing that changes in your visual field, there's nothing that changes significantly in your tactile sensations. You just notice that you have a little more energy, you have a little better mood, you're a little more motivated, right?
And so oftentimes with micro-dosing and what micro-dosing really is, it's not just taking a low dose once and seeing what happens, but it's really committing to a protocol where we take a microdose of, let's say, LSD or psilocybin two to three times a week for a period of, let's say four to eight weeks. And just like mindfulness meditation, right? When we start meditating, we don't just sit down in the cushion for the first time and meditate for 15 minutes and expect to see God, and expect to be enlightened. When we start meditating, we meditate every day and then by the end of those 30 or 60 days, we notice some of these changes, it's the same with micro-dosing, right?

We microdose two or three times a week and we pay attention to how is my life shifting and changing after I've been micro-dosing for a period of time. And even more importantly, how can I weave in new behaviors with micro-dosing to make sure that these changes last? So what we often teach in our programs is to start a meditation practice, to start a yoga practice, to start some sort of grounding practice as you're micro-dosing, because it will help to amplify whatever is going on. We also talk about, like you said, physiological changes. How can you be more mindful about the food that you eat, about your sleep cycles and patterns, about the way that you move and exercise, right? So what's critical with micro-dosing is not just relying on the substance itself. That's what we've been taught through the current medical model. You know, just take Prozac, or just take Zoloft, or just take Xanax, whatever, and that'll fix it. That's not the case. That's not true. With micro-dosing, the medicine helps, it opens up that window for change, but it's still up to the individual to choose to make those changes. Micro dosing just makes it a little bit easier. There's less resistance from the ego to actually changing who we are. And that I think speaks to the importance and efficacy of micro-dosing.

Katie: And I'd love to talk a little bit more about the coaching side because this is something that you're doing that's very unique. And we've talked about integration being such a big part of this, but like you mentioned, until these are all fully legalized in most areas, they can be hard to get ahold of, but also it's hard to find potentially a therapist or someone who knows what to do with the integration side. So talk a little bit more about what you're doing in this space and how you are helping train these coaches?

Paul: So, as we mentioned at the beginning of the podcast, the focus in the psychedelic space thus far has largely been clinical, right? How can psychedelics be helpful for PTSD, for depression, for addiction, for alcoholism? And so there are probably at this point 10 to 20 programs that are training therapists, that are training medical doctors, that are training clinicians, you know, clinical psychologists to be able to guide a client through the preparation, the experience, and the integration for trauma healing in particular, right? To heal their depression, to heal their addiction, to heal their alcoholism. And it's important, it's necessary that we train clinicians in how to navigate this space because right now they really are the frontline for this type of work. But as I mentioned before, the emphasis with Third Wave, in this third wave of psychedelics is how do we steward the leap from clinic to culture?

We've been here before with psychedelics, we've had the clinical use in the '50s, and then when it tried to hop to culture, it went very sideways. And so, the way that we're training our coaches is more so how to hold
space from a broader cultural perspective and not necessarily from a clinical perspective. So we're really training coaches who are focused on leadership, so executive coaches, we're training wellness coaches, those who are looking at biohacking or those who are looking at physiological fitness, or those who are looking at blood work. How can psychedelics be weaved into that to help clients? We're looking at spiritual and life coaches as well in terms of helping purpose and meaning. You know, we have some clinicians, some therapists, some medical doctors in our program as well, but the core differentiator between our program and all the rest of the programs is again, all the rest of the programs are focused on trauma healing.

We're focused on what I call the creative orientation. How can psychedelics be used to inspire a new way of being, a new way of becoming for both individuals, but also what we're collectively becoming as a culture in society, through the transmission of what we call the skill of psychedelic youth, right? Because when people hear about psychedelics, you know, we laid out a pretty good foundation in today's podcast, but it's a lot of information. It's a lot of knowledge. It can be quite overwhelming. And when we think about psychedelics, what I often like to teach is just like you can learn to cook, just like you can learn to write, just like you can learn to do something like jujitsu, you can also learn to use psychedelics for yourself in a skillful way between micro-dosing, higher doses, and nonpsychedelic modalities. And so what we teach our coaches is, "Hey, if you're working with a client, right? What is core to the success of your work with that client is getting them to shift their behaviors."

Tangibly, they're looking to change, they've come up against some sort of ceiling, some sort of struggle, and they're struggling with actually shifting their behavior to step into this new way of being. And as we laid out in this entire podcast, psychedelics help tremendously with catalyzing behavioral change because of what they're doing with neurogenesis, because of what they're doing from a spiritual perspective, etc., etc. So if we can train and teach coaches on, okay, you have a client who's struggling with X, Y, and Z. How can you weave in higher doses, micro-dosing, and also meditation, yoga, breathwork, all these other things? You can actually help those clients shift in a significant way in a short period of time as well because it's very accelerated in terms of what we're doing. And that creative orientation is important because although the emphasis right now publicly is on the clinical work and the mental health, you know, this being a podcast about wellness, we know that the line between clinical and nonclinical is very thin, right?

It's a thousand shades of gray in between that. And what I feel to be true is culturally, especially in the medical model, we focus so much of our intention on trying to fix something, fix a problem, fix what's wrong. And I find that perspective to be inherently broken. I think it's much better instead of trying to fix something to ask, what is it that we wanna create with our lives, with our business, with our health, with our family, with our community? And then how, as a leader, both for ourselves and for the people that we surround ourselves with, how as a leader, can we step into that power and help manifest that creation? And so psychedelics are powerful tools for that. And the more we can train coaches and how to weave that into the practice, I think the more successful this leap will go from clinic to culture.

Katie: And I will make sure to link to some specific resources from Third Wave because I've done a lot of reading on your site, but as we mentioned, this is in the process of becoming more widely available and
legalized, or at least decriminalized in some states, but there are certainly still those hurdles. You also mentioned that there are a few exceptions throughout the world, but for someone who maybe has PTSD or is really resonating with something we've talked about today, what are some good starting points and resources to begin to even like, figure out where to go on that journey?

Paul: So we have a directory at Third Wave, which I think would be great to link to because in that directory, we have legal vetted verified clinics, retreats, therapists, and pretty soon coaches who people can work with. And I think if someone let's say, who is listening to this podcast who has PTSD or struggling with depression and is really looking for support in that, the best two options are to either do a retreat overseas in a place like Costa Rica, or Mexico, or Jamaica, or the Netherlands, or South America somewhere. Right? And we have a lot of those retreats that are listed in the directory. Or what is currently illegal is something called ketamine and ketamine-assisted psychotherapy. And so there are a number of clinics now that are in the United States that are legal to access that treat clinical conditions with ketamine-assisted psychotherapy.

And so I think it would be wise then for someone to first explore, okay, can I go to a retreat or can I go to a clinic as a first option? But let's say for whatever reason, that's not feasible for an individual. What we also have at Third Wave is we have a grow kit and a grow course. So what's just as important is to empower individuals to be able to have their own medicine, to grow their own medicines. And with mushrooms, that's actually quite easy. And so there's a lot of folks now who are just looking to take matters into their own hands, are growing their own psilocybin mushrooms, which is in a very gray area in places like Oakland, and Denver, and Detroit, and other places that...Seattle, Oregon, Colorado, places that have decriminalized it, it's perfectly legal to do. In places where it's not decriminalized, it's one of those things that it's the lowest priority for law enforcement.

So I think as a sort of grassroots, or if people wanna take it into their own hands, getting a grow kit and being able to grow their own mushrooms. And again, going back to what we talked about before, making sure that they then do that with a guide, a therapist, a friend, in a safe set and setting starting at a low dose, right? If someone is gonna work with these substances in a nonclinical or non-retreat format, start at a micro-dose level and just do progressive dosing, where you go from micro-dosing to mini-dosing, to museum dosing, to moderate dosing. There's no rush with this. It's much better to learn how to sort of navigate the shallow end of your consciousness before you open up Pandora's Box and go into the deep end of your consciousness.

And I think that's especially true if there's trauma, right? If someone has PTSD or has significant depression, that's often tied to significant trauma. And so you really wanna make sure you have the necessary psychological support to help you navigate and guide that because as you probably know, Katie, and as I certainly know through my own experiences, although these are transformative, they can be very difficult. They're not necessarily, you know, all fun and games. Facing the shadow, going into the unconscious, doing that work takes a lot of courage, psychedelics help with that courage. But it can be very, very difficult to face those things. And so it's really important that anyone who is considering going through this experience, again, has support as they're starting to walk this path, because that could be the difference between it being very helpful or potentially it being traumatizing or re-traumatizing to some degree.
Katie: That is such an important point. I’m glad you brought that up and important to mention, because we’ve talked about how many people have mystical-type experiences with psychedelics. I know of many cases that have been recorded and some of this research even, of people who were atheists, who then emerged from these with certainty of the existence of some kind of either higher power or collective consciousness, etc. But also, we don’t wanna downplay that like you said, while they can be extremely helpful, and often sometimes I think the more challenging ones can become the most helpful. That doesn't mean that the experience of every psychedelic during the process is just gonna be blissful and mystical and wonderful. It teaches you some of the dark parts of yourself that maybe you’ve been afraid to face, and that isn’t always the most comfortable experience.

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What do you see and or hope for is the future of psychedelic use as we are kinda, it feels like in a very pivotal point when it's starting to be decriminalized, there's talk of legalization, it's in clinical studies. What do you hope the future looks like?
Paul: My sense of the future is that we are really stepping into a future of both and, meaning it will both be approved through the FDA for clinical use, psilocybin for depression, MDMA for PTSD, right? We’re looking at doing that both in North America and Europe. And so you’d be able to go to a psychiatrist or a clinician and get prescribed a synthetic psilocybin to treat your depression. I think, by and large, it will be at micro dose levels and there’ll be some folks who choose to do a really high dose level. But my sense is only 5% to 10% of people are really cut out to do a very, very high dose. I think these lower dose levels are gonna be helpful for those who don’t necessarily wanna just fully plunge into the deep end. So we’ll see FDA approval for MDMA in 2023 and for psilocybin by probably 2024 is what we’re looking like in the next few years.

Now, parallel to the sort of federal approval process is what's happening at the state level and at the local level. So Oregon legalized psilocybin therapy in the most recent presidential election. In 2023 is psilocybin will be available through specific service providers where you can go into a retreat or a clinic and you can get psilocybin and do it in a retreat or a clinic with a guide, both for medical and non-medical purposes. And so that will be the case in Oregon by 2023. California has a similar bill, they're looking by 2024 that will be the case. Michigan as well has a similar bill by 2024. And then we've had cities like Denver, Seattle, Oakland, Detroit, and a handful of other smaller cities that have decriminalized all psychedelics. And so what that means is in those cities, psychedelics are now the lowest priority for law enforcement. And not only is it the lowest priority, but they're also creating structure so that way there can be ceremonies and experiences that people can go to in places like Denver, Oakland, Seattle, and Detroit.

So in the next, I would say 5 years, we'll go from probably 5 major cities to my guess would be 30 to 40 major cities who will have decriminalized all psychedelics. We'll go from, right now we have, I think, 4 states, Oregon already legalized psilocybin, California, Michigan, and Massachusetts have bills four states to, I would say we'll probably have 15 states in the next 3 to 4 years who will either introduce bills or pass bills through the legislature. And so what that is gonna do is it will create access through insurance networks for FDA approval so more people can have that. But at the state and local level, there will continue to be accessibility, there will continue to be an emphasis on group experiences, on community.

And again, my sense is the future is decentralized, right, where we’re moving as a post-industrial, a post-centralized, post-mass standardization future. And we’re stepping into this sort of my Mycelial future, if you will, with cryptocurrency and Web 3.0, and the Metaverse in psychedelics and the sovereign states that are gonna start to pop up. A mutual friend of ours is looking to do this in Texas in terms of setting up a city. There are plenty of people in Costa Rica. So my sense is the future is decentralized. So in the next 10 to 20 to 30 years structures that support the decentralization of psychedelics, meaning outside of the purely clinical FDA approval, will generate more value, will generate more attention and energy. And that in the far off future, it will become very easy to access microdoses, so you can microdose to access a guide, or a coach, or a therapist, who will walk you through some of these experiences.

And that within, let's say, 20 to 30 years, psychedelics will be widely available. And that the education, most importantly, will go from where we are now, which are most people are largely ignorant or know very little to everyone will at least have a baseline of understanding of psychedelics, right? To go back to the skill
metaphor, you know, right now, if we look at cooking, we're in the stage of psychedelics where no one can really cook and we wanna get everyone where they can make an omelet, they can make a sandwich, they can actually just provide the basics for themselves through micro-dosing or these other psychedelics. And so that's, again, my core focus through Third Wave and through what we're doing is how do we educate a broader populace so they actually understand these basics of psychedelic use?

Katie: It's an exciting time for sure. I'm really excited to watch what the next decade especially will look like for this, but also even understanding that it's still not widely available and still not legal in some places. I felt it was so important to start this conversation because as I often say on here, I think the tide of society really starts to shift when moms shift their opinion. That's when we see the vote change, that's when we see purchasing power change. And there's this amazing group of really educated women and moms who listened to this podcast. And so even though I know it's a little bit of a controversial topic and a scary one, it felt very important to me to share my personal experience about it, and now start providing resources with people like you to start opening up that conversation. Because I think especially when women and moms get involved, it's a great way to help usher in this change in a safe way with the awareness about the intentionality and the set and setting and using it for transformation and kinda dispelling some of these myths that have existed for the last few decades.

So I'm very grateful for you in sharing so much of your personal experience and your research today. I hope this conversation was helpful to a lot of people. And a final question I love to ask, and I'm really curious your answer is if there's a book or a number of books that have profoundly impacted your life and if so, what they are and why?

Paul: So "Walden" by Thoreau comes up. It's a book I read in my early 20s quite a bit, just about minimalism and the need for less, and how so much of life and the fulfillment of life is in nature, and in beauty, and in gratitude, right? And that anything that is on top of that, is on top of that. And Thoreau actually influenced Tolstoy. And so the second book then is this book that I read when I was 25 called "The Kingdom of God is Within You," which is by Tolstoy. It's a book he wrote after "Anna Karenina" and "War and Peace." And Tolstoy was the pre preeminent sort of philosopher around nonviolent existence. And so the philosophy that Tolstoy laid out in "The Kingdom of God is Within You" is what influenced Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela to make the significant societal shifts that they made in the places that they did.

And so I really see that, and that philosophy is instrumental in terms of what we're doing now with psychedelics, because the work that we're doing through Third Wave and the work that I've done is definitely civilly disobedient. And it's also critical to the evolution of humanity, and our spiritual evolution, and our healing evolution. And so those two books I think, have really helped me to find what my grounding is, sort of my core philosophy. And from that Third Wave synthesis, all these sort of projects that I've been able to bring to life have really resonated, not so much, I mean, the business part is important, but more so the societal change. I'm really driven by how do we shift humanity in a positive direction? And I think psychedelics more than almost any tool that we have available can do that in an accelerated timeframe, which is, I think very important at this point in time.
Katie: I love it. I'll link to those as well. Paul, thank you so much for your time, for breaking all this down so clearly, and for your research. Like I mentioned, I will link to a lot of the different articles I've read from your website and some of the resources we've talked about. For any of you guys listening. Those will be at wellnessmama.fm. Thank you so much for your time.

Paul: Thank you, Katie. This was so fun.

Katie: And thanks as always, to all of you, for listening and sharing your most valuable resources, your time, your energy, and your attention with us today. We're both so grateful that you did. And I hope that you'll join me again on the next episode of "The Wellness Mama Podcast."

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