



# CHOOSING WHO WILL WALK BESIDE YOU

## A Thoughtful Guide to Choosing Support for a Psychedelic or Transformational Journey

There are experiences in life we enter casually. This isn't one of them.

Choosing to explore an extraordinary state of consciousness can be one of the most intimate decisions you make. You may encounter life-affirming beauty and connection. You may touch grief you thought you had released long ago, remember something buried, laugh until you cry, become frightened, experience enormous love, or discover something about yourself you have spent years avoiding.

In other words, your experience may be completely different from anything you expected, or have heard from anyone else.

That uncertainty is part of why choosing the person who will walk beside you on this journey matters so much.

As interest in psychedelic and medicine-assisted experiences has grown, so has the number of people offering to facilitate them. And their backgrounds, experience and training can be extraordinarily different.

Some come through psychotherapy or medicine. Others through transformational work, somatic practices, indigenous or ceremonial traditions, breathwork, coaching or their own personal experiences.

A title tells you very little about the human being.

So, before you jump into this life-altering experience, I encourage you to spend some time considering who you want beside you while you have it.

### WHO IS THE PERSON BEHIND THE TITLE?

First, I am encouraging you to ask about their journey into this work. How did they get here? What did they do before they began working with altered states of consciousness, and what kind of training and experience do they actually have?

More importantly, how much experience do they have with **human beings**?

Have they worked with trauma? Relationships? Grief? Emotional release? The body? Breath? Fear? Resistance?

Have they been present when someone becomes overwhelmed and the carefully constructed ways that person has learned to protect themselves begin to fall away?

There is a tremendous difference between understanding psychedelic experiences and understanding people.

You want someone who can remain centered when you may not know what is 'center' anymore.

Someone who can tolerate silence. Someone who doesn't need to make something happen simply because nothing appears to be happening.



Someone who understands when support is appropriate and when the most powerful thing they can do is simply remain completely present.

That is capacity.

And I believe it matters enormously.

## **KNOW WHO WILL ACTUALLY BE WITH YOU**

The word *guide* can mean almost anything.

Some people remain beside you throughout an entire experience. Others begin the journey with you and check in periodically. Some work alone. Some work in teams. Some incorporate touch, music, breath, bodywork or other modalities.

Understand exactly what you're agreeing to.

Ask who will be present and what their role will be. Ask what happens if you become frightened, physically uncomfortable or emotionally overwhelmed. Ask whether notes are taken or sessions recorded, who has access to them and how your privacy is protected.

And talk about touch before you enter an altered state. This is critical.

What kind of touch might ever be offered? Under what circumstances? How is consent established? How do you withdraw that consent?

These conversations should feel comfortable to have.

Clear boundaries create safety.

## **THE JOURNEY BEGINS LONG BEFORE THE JOURNEY**

For me, preparation is part of the experience itself.

It is the time when we begin to know one another while you are completely clear and grounded. We talk about where you have been, what you are carrying, what you hope might change and sometimes what you are afraid could change.

A meaningful preparation process should make room for your physical and emotional history, medications, previous experiences with altered states, mental-health considerations and the circumstances of your life right now.

It should also make room for questions.

Lots of them.

What are you afraid of? What do you expect? What have you heard? What happens if the experience feels difficult? What happens if nothing happens the way you imagined?

And there is another question that matters just as much.

## **Does the person sitting across from you know when to say this may not be right for you?**

I have tremendous respect for practitioners who understand the boundaries of their own expertise and are willing to collaborate with or refer to physicians, psychiatrists, therapists and other professionals when appropriate.

Sometimes the most responsible answer is another path.

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## INTENTION WITHOUT EXPECTATION

“What is your intention?”

It sounds like such a simple question.

I want to heal my relationship. I want to understand why I'm depressed. I want to let go of what happened. I want to feel like myself again. I want to know what's next.

Those are wonderful places to begin.

And then I ask that you listen underneath them.

What are you really seeking? What are you willing to encounter? Is there something you desperately need the experience to give you? What might happen if what emerges is entirely different?

A meaningful intention gives us somewhere to begin without determining where we must arrive.

**I think of intention as a compass rather than an itinerary.**

There is direction with ample room for discovery.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THINGS GET HARD?

Beautiful experiences are relatively easy to sit beside.

The deeper question is what happens when grief arrives. Or anger. Shame. Terror. A memory. Resistance.

What happens when your body begins expressing something your mind cannot explain?

Ask the person you're considering how they work in those moments. Listen beyond the language of their answer and notice whether you feel confidence in their ability to remain grounded while you are experiencing something that may feel anything but grounded.

You want someone who respects the extraordinary intelligence of the human system and your inner-healer. At the same time, that person must understand when an experience requires intervention, support or medical attention.

I have spent over three and a half decades witnessing people move beyond the familiar structures through which they ordinarily understand themselves.

And that experience has taught me something important: **Intensity and transformation are different things.**

Bigger isn't inherently better. Deeper isn't inherently better. A dramatic experience isn't necessarily a transformational one.

What matters is what you can safely experience, understand and ultimately bring back into your life.

## THE BODY HAS A VOICE TOO

Transformation doesn't happen exclusively through thought or emotions.

Our bodies carry history.

Breath changes when we're afraid. Muscles brace. The chest tightens. The belly contracts. Sometimes we hold our breath without even realizing we're doing it.



And sometimes what a person cannot yet articulate appears first through the body.

My years working deeply with Transcendent Breath have profoundly influenced the way I understand transformational experiences. I have witnessed again and again how much intelligence lives beyond the thinking mind—in breath, sensation, emotion and the places within us that words sometimes cannot reach.

Breath can become an anchor.

Sometimes a doorway.

Sometimes simply a way home to yourself when thought is incapable of explaining what is happening.

Ask the person who may accompany you what understanding they have of the body, breath and nervous system. Ask how they help someone remain connected to themselves when an experience becomes intense.

Their answer will tell you something important. Listen to your body's response.

## **THEN TUESDAY COMES**

An experience can be profound.

An insight can feel absolutely clear. You can see your life, your relationship or yourself in an entirely different way and wonder how you could ever lose what you now understand.

And then Tuesday comes.

You go home. Your partner says the thing that always triggers you. Your mother calls. Your boss sends the email. You become tired. Life begins being life again.

This is why I care so deeply about integration.

**Integration is the bridge between what you experienced and how you live.**

Ask exactly what happens afterward.

When do you meet again? What does that conversation involve? What happens if something difficult emerges several days or several weeks later? How do you take an insight and begin translating it into a relationship, a boundary, a conversation, a daily practice or a different choice?

Integration can include conversation, journaling, breath, somatic work, creative expression, relationship work and sometimes additional therapeutic or medical support.

The experience may last hours.

What you do with it can unfold for months or years.

I am far less interested in whether someone has an extraordinary experience for several hours than I am in what becomes possible in their life afterward.

## **WHEN TWO PEOPLE JOURNEY TOGETHER**

A couples journey is something else entirely.

It isn't simply two individual journeys happening in the same room.



There are two people, two nervous systems, two attachment histories, two sets of wounds and protective strategies, two sets of desires and fears.

And there is something else in the room.

### **The relationship.**

If you are considering an experience together, ask whether the person supporting you actually understands couples.

What happens when one partner wants closeness and the other needs space? When long-held anger surfaces? When one person's experience becomes frightening to the other? When one partner has an enormous opening and the other seemingly doesn't?

What happens when somebody says something they have never said before?

And what happens the next morning?

Couples work requires the ability to remain connected to two people simultaneously remaining in service to both and the relationship. It requires understanding that what may be healing for one person can be activating for the other.

Then there is integration - not simply for each individual, but for the relationship itself.

That is a very particular kind of work.

## **ETHICS SHOULD BE EASY TO TALK ABOUT**

Ask about confidentiality.

Ask about the medicine and dosage.

Ask about touch and consent. Ask about sexual boundaries, dual relationships, emergency procedures, communication outside the experience, scope of practice and referrals.

Ask what happens when something arises beyond the practitioner's training.

A trustworthy person shouldn't become uncomfortable because you want to understand their boundaries.

They should welcome the conversation. This is Informed Consent.

Expertise includes knowing where your expertise ends.

## **AND THEN, LISTEN TO YOURSELF**

You have asked the questions.

You understand their training and experience. You've talked about preparation, safety, boundaries and integration.

Now stop evaluating for a moment.

Notice yourself.

How does your body feel around this person?

Can you tell them the truth? Can you disagree with them? Can you say you're scared?

Can you say **stop**?

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Can you change your mind?

Do they seem genuinely curious about you, or do they already seem certain about what you need?

Do you feel respected rather than persuaded?

And perhaps the question beneath all the others:

**Do you trust this person with your vulnerability?**

Because ultimately that is what you are considering.

## **WHY THIS WORK MATTERS SO DEEPLY TO ME**

I have spent much of my life in rooms where human beings transform.

For decades, I have had the extraordinary privilege of working internationally as a Transformational Trainer and participating in the training and transformation of more than **110,000 people**.

For **17 years**, I facilitated three progressive levels of Couples Retreats.

I have sat with couples inside the beautiful, complicated territory of intimacy, communication, sexuality, attachment, anger, hurt, forgiveness, trust and reconnection. I have watched two people who could barely hear each other find one another again.

My work with Transcendent Breath opened another doorway and humbled me to the wisdom of the body.

Again and again, I witnessed how much exists beyond our thinking mind—in breath, the body, emotion, memory and the extraordinary intelligence of the human system.

Psychedelic and medicine-assisted work became another part of my exploration of transformation.

Yet underneath all of it, the questions that have fascinated me throughout my life remain remarkably similar.

**What allows a human being to feel safe enough to open?**

What helps us move beyond defenses that once protected us and may now be limiting us?

What allows insight to become transformation?

And how do we bring what we discover back into the way we actually live and love?

Those questions inform the way I approach this work.

Preparation matters deeply to me. So do thoughtful screening, consent, clear boundaries, the environment, the body, breath and integration.

Humility matters too.

Every person who walks through the door arrives with a different history. There are experiences that may be appropriate for one person and inappropriate for another, and circumstances that call for medical, psychiatric or other specialized expertise.

Knowing when to collaborate, refer or recommend another path is part of caring for the human being sitting in front of you.

I've spent a lifetime authentically living transformation.



And after all these years, I remain in awe of our capacity to heal, reconnect, awaken and choose differently.

## **YOUR JOURNEY BELONGS TO YOU**

Perhaps you ultimately choose to work with me.

Perhaps something in these pages helps you recognize another person who is exactly right for you.

Either outcome makes writing them worthwhile.

Ask questions. Take your time and pay attention to how you feel. Learn about the experience you're considering and learn even more about the person offering to accompany you.

Because this is your journey.

And whoever you invite to walk beside you should understand what an extraordinary privilege that is.

**Curious about what may be available for you? Let's talk. :)**