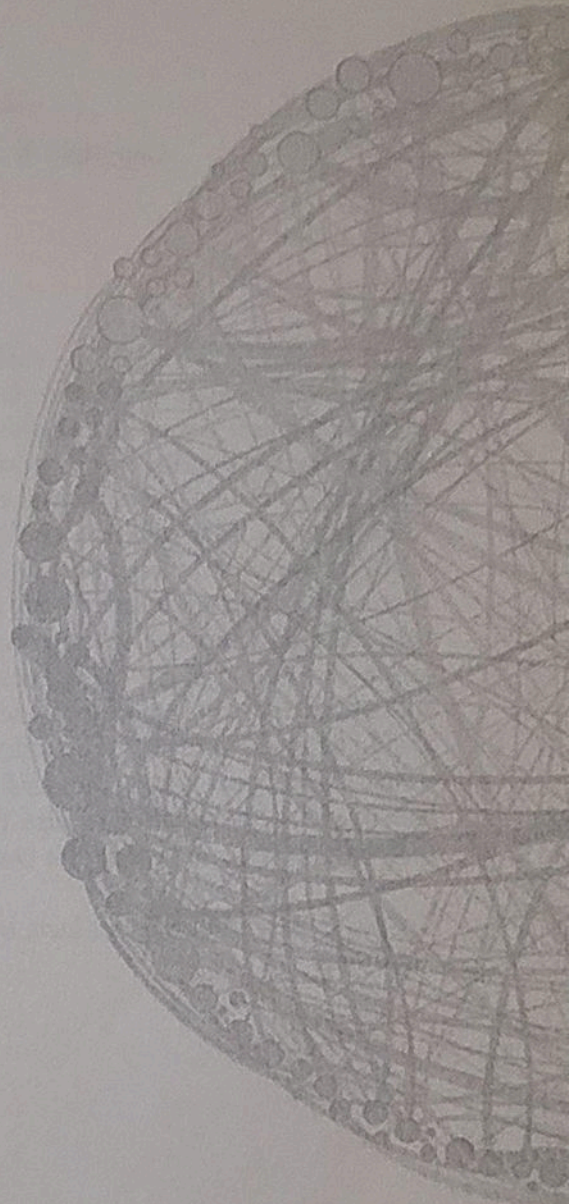


# How to **CHANGE** Your Mind

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trials and white-coated clinicians and *DSM* diagnoses, offers one such container; the underground guides offer another.

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YET THE FIRST COUPLE of guides I interviewed did not fill me with confidence. Maybe it was because I was so new to the territory, and nervous about the contemplated journey, but I kept hearing things in their spiels that set off alarm bells and made me want to run in the opposite direction.

Andrei, the first guide I interviewed, was a gruff Romanian-born psychologist in his late sixties with decades of experience; he had worked with a friend of a friend of a friend. We met at his office in a modest neighborhood of small bungalows and neat lawns in a city in the Pacific Northwest. A hand-lettered sign on the door instructed visitors to remove their shoes and come upstairs to the dimly lit waiting room. A kilim rug had been pinned to the wall.

Instead of a table piled with old copies of *People* or *Consumer Reports*, I found a small shrine populated with spiritual artifacts from a bewildering variety of traditions: a Buddha, a crystal, a crow's wing, a brass bowl for burning incense, a branch of sage. At the back of the shrine stood two framed photographs, one of a Hindu guru I didn't recognize and the other of a Mexican *curandera* I did: María Sabina.

This was not the last time I would encounter such a confusing tableau. In fact every guide I met maintained some such shrine in the room where he or she worked, and clients were often asked to contribute an item of personal significance before embarking on their journeys. What I was tempted to dismiss as a smorgasbord of equal-opportunity New Age tchotchkes, I would eventually come to regard more sympathetically, as the material expression of the syncretism prevalent in the psychedelic community. Members of this community tend to be more spiritual than religious in any formal