

**Proposed Workshop Title:**

“Psychedelics, Ritualistic Suffering, and the Meaning of Life.”

**Presenter:** James W. Jesso

**Abstract**

I have been thoroughly impassioned by psychedelics for the last ten years. The experiences they have offered me, and the subsequent questions they awakened, occupy a large chunk of my daily psychic bandwidth.

Those questions were the sails with which I entered the seas of each succeeding psychedelic experience, but also the burden I carried during each portage. I continued to follow these questions, even when they proved profoundly disruptive the otherwise steady course of my life.

The most difficult one I have grappled with goes something like this:

*Life contains pain and suffering, a fact we cannot avoid. Furthermore, we pass through these painful experiences carrying with us, despite the best efforts of our parents, the generations of trauma that came before us. Navigating all this suffering in a way that doesn't ultimately crush us requires a sense of meaning. That meaning is typically endowed in our lives by cultural context. But culture is a human construct, an ideological contract, an illusion. The basis of meaning is an illusion; therefore there is no meaning to life. And yet we need that meaning to make life, and all its pain, worth living. So how do we live a life of meaning, when there is no meaning to life?*

It is my proposal in this lecture that the very struggle with suffering itself is what gives life meaning, and that the illusory constructs of culture are the paints by which we artistically render the stories that come with it. Furthermore, that the ritualistic suffering and strife awakened when facing uncomfortable truths about oneself, and the world, during a psychedelic experience, if you go deep enough, will not only elucidate the question posed above but also solve it in the process.