



AHF Congressional Reception  
October 19, 2005  
(Remarks by Stephen István Szára M.D., D.Sc.)

Thank you Mr. Nagy:

Let me briefly thank to some of the people without whom I wouldn't be here today accepting this award.

It was almost exactly 50 years ago (in the fall of 1955) that I have conceived the project to test the hallucinogenic activity of DiMethyl-Tryptamine (DMT for short). The idea was inspired by an article in the Journal of American Chemical Society by Fish, Johnson, and Horning who found DMT and Bufotenin in a snuff-powder, called "Cohoba", which was used by native Indians in South-America, Haiti, and Puerto Rico in their religious ceremonies (1). This article suggested that Bufotenin might be the psychoactive ingredient but they did not know whether DMT was active or not. Apparently nobody else did, so I decided to start a project for testing it. First I had to have the compound itself. So I went back to my old lab, where I did my thesis work in organic chemistry and my colleague and friend, Miomir Mészáros allowed me to synthesize about 20 grams of DMT and maybe a dozen homologues of it.

Then the director at my working place at the National Institute for Mental and Nervous Diseases in Budapest, Dr. Gimesné, Lili Hajdu gave me permission to do the required preclinical and clinical studies. In this I was joined by three other psychiatrists András Sai-Halász, Zoltán Böszörményi, and Györgyi Brunecker who helped me to recruit, and test about 30 volunteers (2). I sent in a short preliminary report to the Swiss journal *Experientia* (3) in the summer of 1956 before the Hungarian revolution happened.

After crushing the revolution by Soviet troops I was forced to flee my country and Dr Joel Elkes, after reading my report, offered me a job at the National Institutes of Health here in Bethesda, without previously seeing or talking to me, and I started working the next day after I arrived in Washington in 1957. I had the good fortune to spend two years with Julius

Axelrod, the Nobel-prize winner biochemist (4), and later I collaborated with Hans Weil-Malherbe in writing a monograph on the biochemistry of psychoses which was published in 1971 (5). This monograph has been cited by pharmacologists at Eli Lilly pharmaceutical company as a major inspiration for developing a new class of antidepressant drugs, the first one of which, under the name of Prozac, becoming a runaway bestseller in the 1980's.

I would like to thank all of these professionals who had been very helpful in various aspects of my work.

At a different level I would like to thank my family and my friends whose support and understanding helped me to pursue my work in developing the new discipline of psychopharmacology.

At still another level I would like to thank the United States of America, which took me in as a refugee, gave me a new home, a job and the freedom to continue my life's quest in search for the secrets of the brain and of consciousness (6).

Finally, I would like to thank again, the American Hungarian Federation for the great honor of giving me this medal that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

## References

1. Fish, M.S., N.M. Johnson and E.C. Horning. "Piptadenia Alkaloids Indole bases of *P. Peregrina* (L.) Benth. and Related Species." J. Am. Chem. Soc., 77:5992-5895, 1955.
2. Sai-Halász, A., G. Brunecker and S. Szára. "Dimethyltryptamine: Ein neues Psychoticum". Psychiatria et Neurologia, 135:285-301, 1958.
3. Szára, S. "Dimethyltryptamine. Its Metabolism in Man; the Relation of its Psychotic Effect to Serotonin Metabolism." Experientia, 12:441, 1956.
4. Szára, S. and J. Axelrod: "Hydroxylation and N-demethylation of N.N-dimethyltryptamine". Experientia, 15:216, 1959.
5. Weil-Malherbe, H. and S. Szára. Biochemistry of Functional and Experimental Psychoses. Monograph published in the Living Chemistry Series of C.C. Thomas, Illinois, 1971.
6. Szára, S. "Dimethyltryptamine and Consciousness: A Life's Quest." In: Ban, T.A., Healy, D., Shorter, E. (Eds): The Triumph of Psychopharmacology and the Story of CINP. Budapest: Animula Publ. House, 2000. (pp. 20-24).