

**FOREWORD**  
**by Dick Dorworth**

The premise of this book and the larger issues it encompasses are common to every human being, not just the climbers, skiers and other high-level athletes you will meet in its pages. It is crucial to an appreciation of *The Alchemy of Action* to hold in mind that just as every person is different from every other in obvious ways, they are much more alike and have much more in common in ways both palpable and, at first glance, invisible. This includes similarities and differences in culture, time and place, which are often enough examined and discussed in the popular media, and our common human metabolism, which is not.

I mention this because this book grew out of a particular place in climbing and a specific American time and culture in which that place (Yosemite) was a high-pressure, free-form, colorful laboratory for the experiments of the culture, the rebellions of the time and the expansion of consciousness of its lab rats. The time was the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the turned-on, tuned-in, dropped-out culture was counter to the mainstream—rebellious against, among other things, Vietnam and the American mentality and values that allowed it. Consciousness altering drugs—LSD, peyote, marijuana, psilocybin and others—were an intrinsic aspect of that culture, and several (not all) of the finest rock climbers of that time were icons and leaders in the process of both expanding consciousness and raising climbing standards.

One of them was Doug Robinson, who was/is prone to pay more attention to the ongoing experiments of his own person than most, and whose tenacity and curiosity as a researcher, philosopher's breadth of thought, and literary skills have delivered to the fortunate reader *The Alchemy of Action*. This book has been a lifetime of the author's in the making. As a young teenage distance runner Robinson noted a shift in his perceptions, a different clarity of thought and, of course, a physical heightened awareness during and just after long runs in the hills around Los Altos, California, where he grew up. Later he came to climbing and noticed similar alterations in his

being. And then came the '60s and the cultural changes and the drugs and the (sometimes) purposeful exploration of consciousness, which had nothing to do with climbing. Or, at least, so he thought for a while.

By 1969 he was confident enough that the act of climbing could and did alter consciousness that he wrote the seminal essay "The Climber as Visionary." It was published in *Ascent* and caused a stir in the climbing community for suggesting that "There is an interesting relationship between the climber-visionary and his counterpart in the neighboring subculture of psychedelic drug users" and that climbing and its attendant fear "...produces a chemical climate in the body that is conducive to visionary experience." And the climbing literature from John Muir to Yvon Chouinard to Ueli Steck is filled with beautiful descriptions of that experience.

Doug Robinson knew he was onto something meaningful and little explored. He spent the next 40 years—along with climbing, guiding, writing, raising children, continuing his own laboratory experiments with various drugs and expanding consciousness and the other demands of responsible citizens of planet Earth—investigating that something which he describes as:

...effort plus a degree of fear shifts your brain in the direction of seeing more sharply, more clearly—and feeling more deeply. It does that by shifting the dynamic balance of hormones in your head. And then, transforming some of them. The upshot is a change in metabolism that becomes literally psychedelic.

Human metabolism is too complex to be described in a few words or an entire book, and *The Alchemy of Action* is certainly not the final word, but it is an invaluable step, a beautiful and important addition to the literature of human consciousness. As one of the lab rats of Yosemite in the '60s and '70s and a member in good standing of the counterculture of the time (as well as being a longtime friend of Doug's and presented in the book as an example of its premise), I immediately identified with it and am grateful to him for a better understanding of consciousness (they are not the same thing). It has been nearly 30 years since I became aware that I didn't need psychedelics in order to expand my consciousness and center both mind and being, and I quit using them. I also quit using alcohol, which is certainly a mind-altering substance but, so far as I have been able to

determine, has never produced clarity of thought or expansion of consciousness among its many users. *Au contraire*.

Doug Robinson was the right person in the right time to take the experiences and lessons of Yosemite in the '60s and '70s and turn them into a metabolic exploration of a state of being common to all people that has been described as “flow,” “the zone,” “peak performance,” “self-awareness” and the like. *The Alchemy of Action* is a metabolic guide to that state, and, as Doug writes, “We’re all metabolic voyagers, every day.”

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