



# MAPS

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**“In the future, it [MDMA/Ecstasy] will be called Despair.”** So speculated Jerry Frankenheim, Ph.D., a National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) official, in closing NIDA’s July 19-20, 2001 scientific conference on MDMA (Ecstasy). It causes “what look like holes in different little areas [of the brain]”. So explained a well-intentioned physician describing a graphically manipulated and misleading 3D brain scan of an Ecstasy user, as shown by Oprah Winfrey to her millions of viewers on September 28, 2001. “It’s like living with an Alzheimer’s patient.” So lamented a mother to Oprah about her Ecstasy-using seventeen-year-old son’s memory problems. In Illinois, simple possession of 15 doses will now get you a mandatory minimum four years with no parole.

In the future that MAPS is working hard to create, MDMA-assisted psychotherapy will become a regulated treatment for despair, not its cause. Fear, grief, guilt, sadness and despair are all emotions that can, in some circumstances, be worked through effectively with the aid of psychedelic psychotherapy. MAPS is currently funding the world’s only government-approved study of the therapeutic use of MDMA. The research is taking place in Madrid, Spain and is in the early stages with three subjects treated. This dose-response study evaluates the use of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy in women survivors of sexual assault who suffer from chronic posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). (<http://www.maps.org/research/mdma/spain/mdmaspain.html>)

MAPS has been seeking for several years to sponsor MDMA/PTSD research at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. (<http://maps.org/research/mdma/israel/index.html>) The proposed protocol is an effort to expand the

## **Letter from Rick Doblin, Ph.D., MAPS President**

exploration of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy’s healing potential to include patients with PTSD due to terrorism and war. The most recent opportunity for MAPS to discuss the MDMA/PTSD research project with Israeli Ministry of Health officials took place in Israel at the International Society of Addiction Medicine Conference, held in Tel Aviv from Sept. 9-11. Dr. John Halpern (p. 8), Dr. Evgeny Krupitsky (<http://www.maps.org/research/ketamine/ketrussia.html>), and myself attended the conference for MAPS.

On Sept. 9, I learned that regulatory approval in Israel would come after the FDA had approved an MDMA/PTSD protocol, but not before. On Sept. 11, Prof. Benny Shanon (p. 48) joined Dr. Halpern and me for lunch. During our conversation, Prof. Shanon informed us that several days before, a friend of his had been killed in a suicide bombing at a train station. After lunch, I walked by a beachside restaurant with a TV tuned to CNN, and watched with horror the events that have shaken our foundations. Stranded in Israel for several more days, I had time to reflect on MAPS’ mission, the reason I found myself far away from my wife and children in Boston at such a difficult time. I emerged out of that period of reflection with a renewed commitment to MAPS and its work. Struggling to help people access and use psychedelic tools to facilitate insight, acceptance, inspiration and healing seems at first a weak and feeble counterbalance to virulent hatreds and wholesale slaughter. Yet in the long run, trying to integrate psychedelics into legal contexts can lead to transformation through personal healing and cultural change.

On October 1, MAPS and Dr. Michael Mithoefer submitted our MDMA/PTSD protocol to the FDA. (<http://www.maps.org/research/mdma/index.html#fdamdmaptsd>) MAPS has finally completed its two year, \$70,000 MDMA literature review project (<http://www.maps.org/research/mdma/protocol/litreview.html>) and a \$10,000 MDMA/PTSD protocol development process. By the time you read this, the FDA will have given its initial response to the protocol.

In the future, MDMA need not be called Despair. If MAPS members continue their generous support so that we can fund sufficient research and educational projects, and if the FDA continues to place science over drug war politics, then MDMA, other psychedelic drugs and marijuana will in the future be called...FDA-approved!

- Rick Doblin, Ph.D., MAPS President