

the israeli opportunity

WHILE IN ISRAEL attending my cousin's wedding this June, I arranged a meeting with the Chief Scientist of the Israeli Ministry of Health, Dr. Michael Silbermann. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the likelihood of MDMA research being legally approved in Israel, perhaps for use in treating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), or in helping reduce pain and distress in terminal cancer patients. To my delight, Dr. Michael Silbermann indicated that the essential elements in the decision to permit MDMA research in Israel would be the safety of the human subjects and the scientific rigor of the protocol design.

My main question for Dr. Silbermann concerned the possible existence of any overriding political concerns that might prevent medical research. In particular, we discussed the fact that the use of MDMA in all-night raves in the Jerusalem hills had been reported in the Jerusalem Post, and that the practice was looked on with disfavor by the police. Dr. Silbermann indicated that such non-medical uses were no secret, but that research into the medical use of MDMA would be considered on its own merits.

We then discussed the possibility that MAPS might help arrange a two-day scientific seminar in Israel with scientists from the United States coming to Israel to lecture on the topic of medical research with MDMA, ibogaine, DMT and psilocybin, marijuana, and drug policy. Dr. Silbermann thought the idea had promise and suggested that it might be possible for an organization on whose Board of Directors he serves, the American-Israeli BiNational Science Foundation, to sponsor the meeting. The key to such a sponsorship is finding an Israeli scientist to co-sponsor the meeting.

Fortunately, Dr. Joseph Zohar, an Israeli research psychiatrist who focuses on OCD research, is interested in MDMA's potential in treating patients with OCD who do not respond to other treatments. He is considering helping to plan the seminar, and said he would contact a few other scientists in Israel who might be interested in the topics.

I am now in the process of drafting a proposal for the meeting, to send back to Dr. Silbermann for submission to the American-Israeli BiNational Science Foundation. If this seminar actually gets arranged, it will probably take place sometime in middle or late 1995. ■

update: research in germany continues

LEO HERMLE

GOOD NEWS REGARDING THE CONTINUATION OF OUR STUDIES in the field of experimental psychosis in Germany: We have finished the study with psilocybin (N=12 volunteers, double blind with placebo). The aim of the study was to assess the changes of facial expression and cognitive functions during the drug's action, and to evaluate psilocybin metabolism and pharmacokinetics. The results will be published in different well-known journals.

We are now beginning comparative studies with psilocybin, MDE, methamphetamine, and placebo using Positron Emission Tomography (PET), VEP, and different neuropsychological assessment strategies.

Another pilot study (8 volunteers, double blind) will be conducted with R and S-enantiomers (isomers) of MDMA using functional Magnetic Resonance techniques and different psychometric scales in order to understand the basic differential mechanisms of action of the entactogens. We assume that the S-MDMA represents the pure entactogenic effects and can be distinguished from the racemic MDMA (Hermle, Spitzer, and Kovar).

Editor's note: Every molecule is actually a composite of its R- and S-enantiomers, two identically structured molecules which are the mirror image of each other. Because of the exquisite sensitivity of the human brain, the R- and the S- enantiomer of a particular molecule often have different effects. Racemic MDMA refers to MDMA in which both enantiomers are present in equal proportions. Racemic MDMA is what is being used in Dr. Grob's research, and is also what is sold in the illicit market. ■