

In Search of the Ultimate High

Some Survey Results

The following has been excerpted and adapted from surveys presented in the book *In Search of the Ultimate High*, by Nicholas Saunders, Anja Saunders, and Michelle Pauli.

Respondents were asked about the type of deep spiritual experiences they might have experienced as a result of using drugs, what the experiences meant to them, and where these experiences have led them. Later, respondents were asked if such entheogenic experiences have made them want to explore spirituality in other ways and, if so, in what ways.

In Search of the Ultimate High is available from Amazon.com and from Mind Books (www.promind.com). Or see www.ultimatehigh.org.uk for further excerpts, accounts for which there wasn't room in the book, sections the publisher removed, and other resources.

A GRAND CELEBRATION (LSD, DMT, 2C-B, ketamine, psilocybin): The most common spiritual experience is an overwhelming joy at the wonder and splendor of all that surrounds me. A grand celebration of life, death, the universe and everything. Raves are great for this kind of experience. Alone I tend to be more apt to explore the workings of the cosmos and the nature of life and death. With friends, it can vary wildly, but it tends to include sharing my experience whatever it may be. But I feel it is important to note that I never really know what is going to happen. I can guess with accuracy, but there have been times when my guess was way off.

MESSAGE FROM ECSTASY (MDMA): I have entheogenic experiences primarily with my eyes closed in an inner environment (not while socializing). The one situation that most stays in my mind was when I was trying to sleep once while I was still high on "E." I closed my eyes and found myself in a scene. It was an old lady and an old man in a house. I was watching from above. The old man started to have a heart attack and was about to die and the old lady was panicking. Although I was watching from above, I was actually—in a way—the old lady, although her actions were her own. She was trying to phone for help—for an ambulance. I could feel her fear as though it were mine and her helplessness. I could also feel the old man dying. It was too late for him. But then, beyond the feelings, I knew that he was dying from a heart attack due to smoking cigarettes all his life and it was as if that was a message to me... through the floods of pain that I felt and the hopelessness and the life of the old man slipping away. It could have been my imagination conjuring it up, but I opened my eyes wide awake and just thought MY GOD. At that very point I was in no doubt that it was supernatural, the feeling was so strong. I didn't give up smoking immediately (although I did stop for two weeks after the

"dream"), but in the months since I have given it up for good.

SPIRITUAL TELEPATHIC EXPERIENCE (MDMA): My friends and I went to a really seedy nightclub early the next morning after a big night out. We were out of place and I felt very uncomfortable. I decided to leave on my own if my friend didn't come soon. Now, I'm not a religious man, but in that place—after I was being touched up by old men—I decided to pray. I asked "God" to let my friend just realize what was up, find me, and leave. In a couple of minutes he was there and we left. Once we were out he told me that he was on the dance floor but felt uncomfortable, and then when he closed his eyes he saw an image of Jesus. Now, I'm no church-goer and am somewhat agnostic, even after that experience. I believe it was more a telepathic experience than anything else. Since my group of friends have been together for a decade we do have an extremely fraternal closeness that Ecstasy made us acknowledge existed, although we always realized it was there. This was the most obvious "telepathic" experience I've had, but we always have these little experiences and on Ecstasy when our emotions and souls seem to become more fluid and it seems that several people can enjoy the feeling of being part of a single entity. I always joke that my friends and I suffer from Single Personality Disorder.

OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCE (MDMA, ketamine): The experience that had the most impact on me took place one night in the middle of winter, when I was out with some acquaintances at Chaos, a lounge/bar in Manhattan. To make a long story short, I literally left my body and was watching the whole entire scene from a different vantage point. I had no feeling, but yet I knew I was there and was extremely aware. I saw myself without any biases and was disgusted by my values and priorities at the time. I could hear everything that everyone

was saying and it was so obviously apparent to me, who was lying and who was ridiculous (something I had always had a hard time telling when not in this state and still sometimes do). I saw everyone I know and all of a sudden I was overcome with how ridiculous it all was...how ridiculous we all were. I was completely disgusted and for the first time saw the extreme shallowness and seriously skewed sense of priorities that I was living with and contributing to. It blew my mind...I have never seen things the same. I've had a few different experiences of varying degrees, but this was the one I think that impacted me the most.

WHERE TO NOW?

The majority of respondents said that their entheogenic experiences had led them to explore spirituality in other ways.

One respondent wrote: "They have made me strive towards living in a way that every act, to every extent possible, is performed as a spiritual act." Others felt their experience had acted as a trigger: "I've always been relatively spiritual but these experiences have made me more active in my spirituality. For example, actually buying incense and using it, actually attempting meditation—not just leaving all these things in the 'One Day' box and never getting around to doing them." Some respondents were more tentative in their explorations, for instance: "I've gone on-line and joined a few spiritual chat groups."

There was a clear bias towards solitary spiritual paths. Three in particular stood out: yoga, meditation, and martial arts (*tai chi* and *aikido*). Yoga was described as a "slow process compared to acid [but] once the *dhyana* state is achieved, you can have as many free trips as you want because *dhyana* state is very similar to deep acid experience." Other forms of spirituality that were mentioned by more than one respondent were Buddhism (predominately Zen), Native American teachings, and a variety of "new age" practices. These included reiki, dream analysis, auras, journeying, and *qi* massage.

"Traditional" religions were mentioned by three respondents. One said: "I have become more interested in (liberal) Judaism." Another replied: "I will always wonder if my first 'E' trip (the closest I have ever felt to God) was due to the fact that I was to be baptized the very next day as a Catholic." Yet another described a conversion: "I was born into a Church of England family, but I couldn't get on with anything I was told. I kept hearing all these extracts from the *Bible*, and thought they all sounded fairly pathetic. Even from an early age, I thought that religion was just a conspiracy to keep the people of the world happy. I've become a Quaker now, and it seems perfect for me. Unlike other religions we don't have any kind of book that we hold sacred, and we are not told what to believe." Two others took up Buddhism: "Following initial 'ego death/clear light' experience, I explored the writings from various mystical/contemplative

traditions, eventually settling on Buddhism, with particular interest in the Zen schools, and finally taking up formal practice with the London Buddhist Society." And: "Both the drugs and the rave scene have incited an interest in meditation, and prior I considered myself an atheist. I've developed an interest in Buddhism. From the time I've been in the scene until now my interests have been narrowing into making my experiences more emotionally/mentally/spiritually meaningful. It has made me want to explore spirituality to improve creativity, to improve my concentration, my consideration, kindness, and love."

Most, however, were still exploring possibilities. One respondent said: "I was previously very anti-religious, anti-spiritual, anti-mystical. I have looked into wide and various areas, including Magick (Aleister Crowley), nature worship, and even the *Bible*...my future areas of inquiry are Buddhism and Sufism. I guess I'm a little eclectic." Another remarked "[My wife and I] have included a number of Native American and pagan practices in our spiritual life, but are not part of any organized group or church. I guess you could call us spiritual pragmatists."

There were very few straight "no" answers to the question as it was asked. One replied that he "wished to access the cognitive state that supports intense mystic experiencing and insight, without relying on any method other than mental activity [but] concluded that meditation can produce only weak effects, and requires excessive time and effort, and is not compatible with other activities." He felt that, "With LSD, you can ingest it and then go about various activities, rather than having to just sit." Another respondent felt that his entheogenic experience had been so intense there was no need to explore spirituality in other ways: "I have experienced what I consider the truth, personally of course. I feel that I can achieve a direct communion with God." A further "no" respondent disagreed with the notion that spirituality can be sought in the way implied in the question: "I don't go look for the experience...it comes to me when I need it or not. It's not something I anticipate or look for. It just happens, and when it does it's a bonus."

Other respondents did not feel it was a matter of cause and effect, so much as entheogens and an interest in spirituality working in tandem. For example: "I was always spiritually inclined, and in the environment of my youth, drugs were the only way I knew to get more information about what exists beyond my 'skin encapsulated ego.' As soon as I was able to connect with a meditation teacher, I stopped using drugs altogether for a time, and applied myself to drug-free means of inner exploration. Now, I am learning to balance the discipline of spiritual practice with the discipline of using sacramental catalysts." And: "My experiences with drugs have been combined with my study of philosophical/religious teachings, both before and after. I guess my studies have given me much more than drugs, but it would not have given me as much without drugs." •