

A Really Good Day: How Microdosing Made a Mega Difference in My Mood, My Marriage, and My Life

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Ayelet Waldman

(Image by Claire Lewis)

Day 1

Microdose Day

Physical Sensations: Heightened awareness.

Mood: Excited. Nervous. Delighted.

Conflict: Who, me? Even the idea seems absurd.

Sleep: Hard time falling asleep. Woke up early.

Work: Astonishingly productive, lost track of time.

Pain: My shoulder—frozen for the past year and a half—is killing me.

Today I took my first microdose. My senses are ever-so-slightly heightened, a feeling all but unappreciable, so perhaps it's psychosomatic, though that word carries little meaning when anything that might be happening to me right now has inevitably to do with the interaction of mind and body. I feel a tiny bit more aware, as if my consciousness is hovering at a slight remove, watching me tap the keys on my keyboard, rub my ankles together, sip a mouthful of tea and swallow it. The trees look prettier than usual; the jasmine smells more fragrant.

It suddenly occurs to me that I feel mindful, a feeling I have tried to achieve through meditation, though I always come up with zip. I am finding it a little bit easier to notice both my thoughts and my body moving through space. Though, even as I write this, I fear the sensation has passed.

Even more thrillingly, for the first time in so long, I feel happy. Not giddy or out of control, just at ease with myself and the world. When I think about my husband and my children, I feel a gentle sense of love and security. I am not anxious for them or annoyed with them. When I think of my work, I feel optimistic, brimming with ideas, yet not spilling over. There's nothing hypomanic about this mood. My mind is not racing. I feel calm and content. Surely, the results cannot be evident so quickly? This is, in all likelihood, nothing more than the placebo effect. But even if it is all in my mind, even if the mood passes, I am grateful for this respite.

When I woke up this morning, I crept out of my house to the place where I hid the little cobalt blue dropper bottle that contains my microdose of diluted LSD. Careful not to hold it up to the light (LSD degrades when exposed to ultraviolet light—ironic, considering all the black-light posters users have stared at while feeding their heads), I shook the bottle a few times, filled the dropper, and carefully deposited two drops under my tongue.

“An intriguing and thorough look at the therapeutic possibilities of an illegal drug... An engaging and deeply researched primer on a taboo subject and a compelling case for more research on it.”

—Nora Krug, *The Washington Post*

This was certainly not the first time I had tried an illegal drug, though I have never been what you would call a regular drug user. I smoked marijuana a few times in high school, a dozen or so times in college, once or twice as an adult, and then not again until I was prescribed medical marijuana (I live in California), first to end my dependence on the sleeping pill Ambien and then to ease the pain of a frozen shoulder. I have used MDMA six or seven times.* In college, I tried cocaine twice, and those mushrooms that purported to be magic once. All together? More than some people my age, less than Presidents Obama and Bush.

Nor am I an avid user of legal recreational drugs. I don't like the taste of alcohol, and am too readily susceptible to its effects, so even when I'm not taking psychiatric drugs I rarely drink. Though I've certainly been mildly intoxicated, I remember being inebriated only twice: once in high school, when I threw red wine up on the shoes of a boy I liked (he drove me home, helped me up the stairs to my bedroom, muttered an awkward excuse to my mother, and disappeared from my life), and once in college, when I was convinced to try a beer funnel (I threw that up, too). Tea is my stimulant of choice, and on a workday I can go through a pot or two before noon, when I stop in order not to spend the night wide awake.

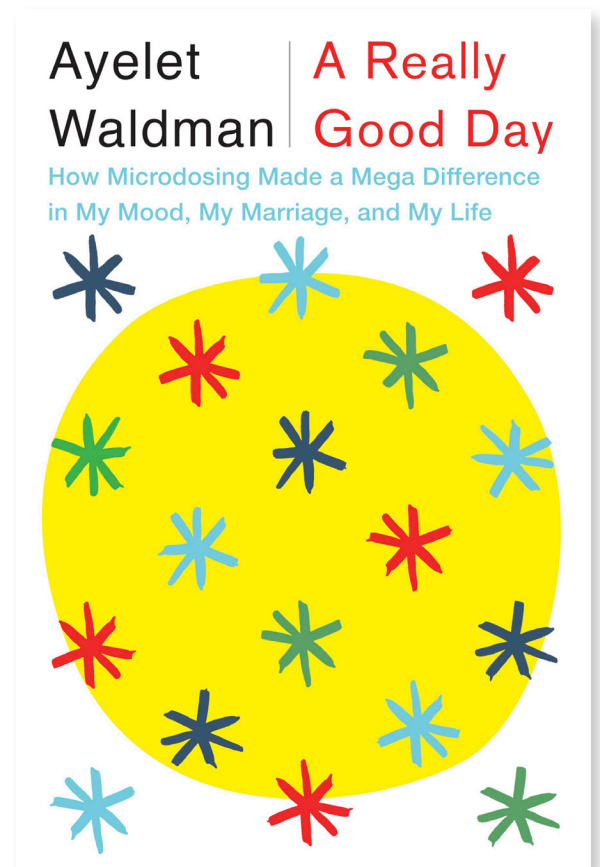
I have never purchased drugs from a drug dealer. Whatever illegal substances I've ingested have been passed to me at a party or given to me by friends. When I decided to try the protocol, despite living in Berkeley, a place I'd always assumed to be the psychedelic capital of the world, I had no idea how one would go about buying the drug. Should I wander down to People's Park and hit up one of the dealers who ply their trade among the homeless teens? How would that go?

“Hey, lady, smoke, shake?”

“Why, yes! Do you happen to have lysergic acid diethylamide? And do you take Visa?”

Having dismissed the possibility of a street hand-to-hand, I found myself in yoga class one morning, staring at the grubby-footed young woman on the mat next to mine. Her sweat-stained Interstate 420 T-shirt was a good sign, but then I noticed the Tibetan mandala tattoo on her ankle. How can you trust someone who inscribes permanently on her body something specifically designed to symbolize the transitory nature of the material world? I couldn't buy drugs from an idiot, especially a dirty one.

It then occurred to me that, like all middle-aged women in the Bay Area, I have a



Available for purchase at
maps.org/store.

* Stay tuned. You'll read more about how and why I've used MDMA later on in the book.

healthy supply of gay male friends, most (though by no means all) of whom are childless. Surely, they still knew how to party! Or at least maybe knew someone who knew someone who knew how to party. I started calling.

Unfortunately, it turns out that the gay men of my acquaintance no longer jet around from one circuit party to the next, but, instead, spend their weekends in the same domestic torpor as I do. Binge-watching episodes of *Orange Is the New Black* is the closest they get to criminality. My former-stoner friends were similarly useless. The guy who used to grow hydroponic weed in his dorm room closet? He's the third-grade room parent, his only remaining allegiance to the counterculture the Darwin fish bumper sticker on his Prius.

I was at a loss, so though Fadiman stresses the importance of discretion, I began tentatively bringing up the subject of microdosing in conversation. If the response was familiarity or even curiosity (or really anything other than befuddlement or disgust), I'd mention that I was looking for a reputable (or at least not entirely disreputable) source. After some time, an acquaintance told me that he had heard a story about an elderly professor who had been microdosing with LSD for years. He didn't know the professor's name or anything about him, but he'd pass a message along to the person who had told him about the professor. Maybe that person would reach out to the professor on my behalf. The entire tale had the ring of the apocryphal, and I had little faith that anything would result from this attenuated game of telephone with someone who I wasn't sure even existed.

I continued my fruitless quest. I even momentarily considered trying to log on to the dark web, but since I am only marginally more technologically savvy than my mother, who has yet to figure out how to turn on her cell phone ringer, I realized that with my luck I'd probably end up soliciting drugs directly from the DEA homepage. I only ever got as far as Googling LSD and finding endlessly threaded message boards where eager seekers were told by more experienced keyboard shamans that when they were truly ready the drug would come to them. Obviously, these guys were high. I gave up.

About a week later, I received a message from my acquaintance. The possibly mythical professor was sympathetic to my predicament. Moreover, he was nearing the end of his life and no longer had use for his remaining LSD. He would send it to me. The story seemed preposterous, but two days later, I opened my mailbox to find a brown paper package covered in brightly colored stamps, many of them at least a decade old. The return address read "Lewis Carroll." Inside the package, wrapped in tissue, was a tiny cobalt blue bottle. On a scrap of white paper, printed in sans-serif italics, was the following note:

*Dear Fellow resident of Berkeley,
Because of a request from an old friend, you will find 50 drops
of vintage quality in the small bottle. Take in two drops portions
(5 mcg per drop).
Our lives may be no more
Than dewdrops on a summer morning,
But surely,
It is better that we sparkle
While we are here.
L.C.*

Weird. Very, very weird. And yet also kind of adorable. And freaky. I was ready, and it had come to me.

My first order of business was to test the drug. When I began flirting with the idea of trying the protocol, I ordered an LSD test kit. Without the security of the FDA,

I wanted to make very sure that what I was taking was actually LSD and not some toxic substitute. Far too often, what is sold on the street as one drug is something else entirely. For example, as the precursor chemicals to MDMA (commonly known as Ecstasy or Molly) become harder to find, hundreds of new psychoactive substances, some of which are very dangerous, are being synthesized and sold under the name. According to the DEA, the vast majority of what is currently being sold as Molly is in fact something else, often a synthetic cathinone (known as bath salts), methamphetamine, or most likely a combination of a variety of substances, some benign, some very dangerous. My eldest child attends Wesleyan University, where a group of students ended up in the hospital after consuming what they had been told was pure Molly. The kids suffered respiratory distress, and at least one of them nearly died. It took six shocks with a defibrillator and an intubation to save that young man's life. It appears that what the kids took was not MDMA but AB-Fubinaca, a synthetic cannabinoid commonly known as "Spice" or K2, which is far more dangerous. Similarly, toxic substances have been sold as LSD, leading in at least a few cases to death. I was not about to consume a drug without testing it first, no matter how cute a note it came with.

From where did I order this testing kit, you might wonder? I already told you I'm too nervous for hand-to-hand purchases and too inept to log on to the dark web. I got my LSD testing kit from the Internet's largest purveyor of toilet paper, half-hour dramas, and discounted books. That's right, I bought it on Amazon. And it qualified for Prime two-day shipping!

Squinting at the fine print on the box through my reading glasses, I read through the directions twice—I didn't want to make any mistakes. I delicately squeezed a single drop from the cobalt blue bottle into the opening at the top of the test kit and squeezed the rubber sleeve, which broke the thin glass barrier between the drop and the testing solution, allowing them to mix together. The solution was meant to turn bright lavender in the presence of LSD, but I saw only the faintest shade of purple. I reread the directions. Stared again at the solution. Was it even purple I was seeing so very faintly, or was it my imagination? Suddenly I realized what the problem was. LSD is effective at infinitesimal doses. A single drop of pure LSD would contain a massive amount of the drug. For this reason, LSD, even in its liquid form, is always diluted. "Blotter acid," for example, the most common way LSD is sold, is a piece of paper, generally decorated with some kind of design, soaked in a diluted solution of LSD and perforated into little squares. One single confetti-sized square is designed to contain the standard dose—approximately one hundred to one hundred and fifty micrograms of LSD.* If a single drop of Lewis Carroll's solution contained a mere five micrograms of LSD, it had to have been so vastly diluted that it would barely register on the testing kit. After an hour of Web surfing (there seem to be a limitless quantity of Web sites offering information about psychedelic drugs, including how to test them), I made a decision to have faith that the contents of Lewis Carroll's bottle would not make me grow either very big or very small. Or kill me.

I took the drug, and went on to have a really good day. 🌀

* Or at least that's what it says on the Web and in the thirty-two books about psychedelics I bought and neurotically pored over in anticipation of beginning this experiment because I am a good student and an anxious nerd and I like to do my research before taking anything resembling a risk. I haven't ever actually seen a tab of acid in person. According to DEA data from confiscated samples, the actual range of LSD on blotter is from thirty micrograms (if your dealer's a cheapskate) to a hundred and twenty.