

Photo of *Salvia divinorum* by Daniel Siebert.

Salvia divinorum and Ecological Awareness

Ethnobotanist Daniel Siebert discovered the psychoactive effects of salvinorin A, the primary psychoactive component of the Mexican hallucinogenic plant *Salvia divinorum*, which is currently being studied for a variety of medical applications. Salvinorin A is considered by a number of researchers to be an attractive compound for pharmacological development because it is a selective and potent kappa-opioid receptor agonist with unique structural properties, strong effects on human mood, and low toxicity. There has been increasing scientific evidence that the pharmacological properties of salvinorin A and/or its chemical analogs may have applications as an antidepressant and pain reliever, as well as possibly treating some types of stroke, Alzheimer's disease, and stimulant drug dependence.

An Interview with **Daniel Siebert** by David Jay Brown



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David: *Do you think that Salvia divinorum helps to increase ecological awareness and one's connection to nature?*

Daniel: In some sense. I think that when salvia is taken at moderate doses, people often find that they do feel tremendously connected with the natural world. People often describe that as a wonderful feeling, like an extension of their sense of self, where they feel that the ordinary boundaries that divide their sense of self from the world at large dissolve. They feel that their sense of self has expanded, and they feel at one with the natural world--especially when people take it outdoors in a natural setting.

There's this tremendous connection with the natural world. Birds fly by, and you feel like you understand what it feels like to be a bird. Things like that. Often people feel that there's a sense of life in the natural world that they were

Unfortunately, I think that most people experimenting with salvia these days are taking excessively high doses. Most people are smoking these highly concentrated extracts--that are widely available commercially--and are having really brief, extraordinarily intense, disorientating experiences that people are just baffled by. Often these intense experiences are entirely internal, because in high doses people lose all awareness of the physical environments around them. So, when people do it that way, I don't think that they're connecting with the natural world at all, except with their own internal natural world. To use salvia in a way that fosters a reconnection with the natural world, I think, it's best to take it orally, in an outdoor setting, away from cities, people, and those kinds of things. •

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that they were unaware of before.

unaware of before. All of the plants seem to have an existential property. Suddenly they have the presence of individual beings, and sometimes this sense of aliveness extends even beyond living things--to where the mountains, the clouds, and everything seem like living entities. So, in that sense, yes it does foster a connection with the natural world, and, I think, a greater appreciation for it. But that's not something that it does reliably for everybody. It's something that seems to only be somewhat related.