

The Benefits of Using Psychedelics

By Rising



Artwork: Inspire Truth by Amanda Sage

Why take psychedelics?

Nearly all cultures across the globe have used some type of psychedelic plant to alter their consciousness in order to gain knowledge helpful to their well-being. For example, shamans in the Amazon smoke large amounts of tobacco, and during these lucid awakenings, they commune with the plants that share what medicinal value they are good for. Long before western medicine knew how to make anesthesia, the Amazonians had been using a combination of 40 different herbs to anesthetize patients before performing an operation. Western explorers encountered this impressive medicine, which they then took to their labs in America and copied its components, creating a chemical synthesis known today as anesthesia. Not only did this “new” medication turn western medicine on its head in terms of growth, it destroyed the long-standing assumption that native peoples had encountered such astonishing combinations by mere happenstance – that is to say, the “trial and error” theory (Narby, 1999).

Such examples of gaining beneficial information through altered states in order to commune with nature and improve the quality of life is not unique to the Amazon, but exist worldwide and throughout history. West Central African tribes use ibogaine, and Western culture has begun using it to cure opioid addictions; Oshara natives of the Southwest use peyote; Brazilian, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, and many other peoples of South America use ayahuasca; Aztecs used morning glory; Ancient Egyptians used Blue Lily; Siberian and Scandinavian shamans use amanita mushrooms; tribes of Mexico use psilocybin mushrooms; DMT is used across dozens of cultures, and the list goes on and on. All these substances are referred to as entheogens, which are typically plant based, but not always – as in the case of MDMA, and are ingested to produce a non-ordinary state of consciousness for religious or spiritual purposes.

In tribal communities, it is the shaman's role to bring healing to their community, guiding its members on a course of health and well-being. In our modern culture, researchers, scientists, and dedicated healers have conducted countless studies, published volumes of resources, and even established clinics where medicine can be dispensed in a highly controlled environment. Taking into account the number of cultures who have utilized entheogenic practices both past and present, it seems clear that it is a natural part of the human experience to explore one's higher consciousness.

For years, government backed propaganda led people to believe that young hippies were “losing their minds” to drugs in the 70's, and sadly, many have fallen into the trap, believing LSD or mushrooms are dangerous. In reality, the real “danger” of these medicines is people achieving higher consciousness and becoming enlightened and empowered individuals who often prefer to exist outside of the status quo. The war on drugs has had a huge impact on keeping these powerful tools out of the public's easy reach. Drug use has been so highly criminalized in our culture that the benefits of using them have been undermined and largely left out of common public discourse. But things are changing: the decriminalization of psychedelics is happening in cities across the country from Denver, Oakland, and Santa Cruz, to Washington D.C., and Ann Arbor. Countries across the globe are doing the same, notably in Canada, Portugal, Jamaica, and Brazil.

Developing a practice of using entheogens to connect to the higher self can set a person on the course to finding increased self-awareness, happiness, deepened relationships, and powerful connections to community, nature, and the divine. However, knowledge is power, and any substance consumed carelessly without education and awareness can have ill-effects. Just as alcohol should not be consumed recklessly, neither should any entheogen. As well, psychedelics are not for everyone, and there are other ways to explore higher consciousness; for example: meditation, breath work, chanting, etc. Microdosing is another option that has recently gained momentum and respect, and is a great option for people who would like to enjoy the benefits of

these medicines without undergoing the full psychedelic experience. (Visit <https://microdosinginstitute.com/> for more information.)

Who should take psychedelics?

Any adult who is healthy and of sound mind, and ready to tap into their higher self can take psychedelics once they have educated themselves about how to use them. You do not need to be a shaman to place yourself on the path of this unique interpersonal work and healing, but you should always be informed about the substance you are taking before you take it, and you should always be in a positive state of well-being. When you enter this higher state of awareness, you can unlock old habits, heal past trauma - both physical and emotional – and create mindfulness around intentions and decisions in your life.

Who should NOT take psychedelics?

Many researchers of entheogenic substances agree that it is best to wait until the brain has developed beyond adolescence and matured into adulthood, after age 18 or even 21, until fully exploring psychoactive substances. Also, people who are predisposed to psychosis or mental illness should not engage in the use of psychedelics without consultation from a physician. As well, those with heart conditions should seek direction from their doctor. If you are in any way uncertain about your health and yet wish to utilize these types of medicines, it is best to seek out psychedelic-assisted therapy, of which there are numerous opportunities, where you will be guided and monitored safely. (Visit <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/psychedelic-assisted-therapy> to find a therapist near you.)

Where to take psychedelics?

Psychedelic experiences work best in environments where you feel safe and comfortable. You should be in a place where you will not need to drive or leave to go anywhere for the duration of the experience. You should always take them with other people you know well and trust. Many people enjoy being in nature, or at home, while others enjoy taking in a dance club or at festivals where music and lights enliven the effects. And yet others prefer the safe space created with a therapist. More and more research has led scientists and therapists to create healing centers that legally dose patients with psychedelic therapy, and help patients process the experience before, during and after. Your setting will undoubtedly impact the experience you will have, so it is important you feel at ease, and ideally inspired by your surroundings.

How to prepare to take psychedelics?

In most places where ayahuasca ceremonies are held, shamans encourage journeyers to maintain a “dieta” that prepares the body for ingesting the medicine for utmost success. This diet suggests refraining from meat, caffeine, or anything spicy, among a few other things. Whether you adhere

to this strict list of instructions or not, if you are going to have a positive experience, you should at least prepare yourself in the following way:

- 1) Be rested and in a good head space.
- 2) Be well hydrated. Drink lots of water! Avoid or drink alcohol in moderation.
- 3) Consume enough food beforehand to give you energy for several hours. Ideally your last meal has had time to settle before consuming any substance.
- 4) You should have easily consumable snacks on hand for when you need to refuel your body. Fatigue and lack of nutrition while tripping can have a negative effect on your mental outlook; proper nourishment will help keep you in a positive place. Know that you won't feel up to preparing anything and may not even feel like eating. Soups, smoothies, or other easily-consumed, high-nutritive foods are key.
- 5) You should be in a place that you are comfortable and will stay safe.
- 6) You should always let others know around you what you have ingested, in case of an unforeseen health emergency.
- 7) You should know your source of medicine and know that it is clean and it is reliable, which means that it is what it says it is. Dancesafe.org is an excellent resource for testing kits, and other safety information. (<https://dancesafe.org/drug-checking/>)
- 8) You should always read up on the substance you are taking so that you know the proper dosage, how long it will last, have an idea of typical reactions, etc. Knowing what to expect before ingesting a substance is key, as it will help you to relax during the experience, and enjoy yourself, instead of becoming anxious. Erowid.org is a great resource.
- 9) Set an intention. Remember, entheogens are meant to teach you something and help you to grow, so be mindful in your approach and what you hope to gain from your journey.

What to do when you take psychedelics?

Go inward. Use this time in a higher state to tune in to what your body needs. You might tell your body how to heal itself, or focus on a specific area in your life, be it physical, emotional, or interpersonal. You can even ask your body questions. Your thoughts are powerful, and your body responds to what you think. Each time you have a thought, a neuron fires, securing and then strengthening that pathway each time you have this thought pattern. Therefore, habits are strengthened – for good or bad – by repetition, and the only way to break them is to form new pathways. The main reason psychedelics are understood to have such high potency on changing old thought patterns is because of their ability to interrupt your brain's default mode network (DMN), which is a necessary part of the brain to think of ourselves in the past and future. This introspective mode is not only active when our minds wander, but is also where we have self-reflection, self-criticism, doubt, and so on. Going inward during a psychedelic experience allows the “pilot” of the brain to take a break, and allow other systems of the mind to create new solutions (Virdi, 2020).

Listen. Only when you go inward, can you find the calm needed to truly listen to messages that come in an altered state. Whether you are in the quiet surrounding of nature, or in the chillroom of an underground nightclub, there are lessons waiting for you to receive from your higher self. Inspirations do not come *from* your brain; your brain functions to transmit the messages that come from a much more elevated place – the shared cosmic field that surrounds all of us, connecting us in one shared collective un/conscious. And yet, your brain does create new solutions while in this state, and you'll have more success hearing them if you take time to step into a low-stimulus environment at various times throughout your experience.

Be Creative. Dance, draw, make music, craft, sing, do what makes you happy, tap into that part of yourself that you don't always have time to foster. Play! One of the incredible things that psychedelics do is take you to a child-like state. A state of awe, wonder, and playfulness, all of which are loaded with psychological benefits. Playfulness reduces stress, relieves anxiety, and fosters creative thinking and neuroplasticity in the brain, all of which improve longevity and overall health. Awe and wonder help you create deeper connections between yourself and nature, other people, and your own divinity.

Connect. Entheogens help foster deep relationships. Feeling the love of your community when in a state of heightened sensation helps deepen friendships and foster the benefits of being connected. Laughter nourishes the heart by opening your capillaries and flooding it with oxygen; people who laugh more live longer. There is no replacement for the enormous benefits of living in community with one another. The love we share with our friends makes us who we are, and we are but prisms of that love, reflecting it outward to the rest of the world. Additionally, taking psychedelics in nature is an opportunity to deepen your connection with it, a connection so often fractured in our modern city lifestyles. A restored sense of belonging with the earth is a healing balm to our busy lives.

Integrate. The teachings provided during an altered state should be taken into your waking life, where they can be applied and strengthened on a regular basis. Take time to process the teachings you received while tripping. Remember, the thoughts you had while you were in an altered state were helping you to form a new neural pathway, and when you recall these new ideas and put them into practice, you strengthen that pathway and form new habits, creating healthier ways of thinking and being. Journaling or discussing your experience with others is one of the key ways to integrate. Rather than leaving your emotions in the ethereal sphere of your thinking, putting words upon them can increase your ability to process new and profound experiences.

When to take psychedelics?

Develop a practice of going on a psychedelic journey a few times throughout the year; for example, bi-annually or seasonally. Tuning into significant points in the calendar year, such as New Year's Day, Solstice, your birthday, or other meaningful holidays is one way of developing a

practice that is in sync with the universe's natural rhythm. By regularly engaging with your higher self, you can get more comfortable going into the state of altered awareness and become better attuned at receiving these powerful lessons. Every few months, a personal "check-in" can help gain clarity that you are on the right path in your life (or not) and help you gain insights to shift your decision-making processes. There may be times in your life when you are at a crossroads, or place of uncertainty, and need guidance. This is a great time to take a psychedelic trip. Your higher self has powerful wisdom to share with you that can help steer you in the right direction.

Other Uses of Psychedelics

We are currently experiencing a renaissance in the field of psychedelics, and groundbreaking studies are leading to exciting applications for these medicines. For starters, in treatment-resistant PTSD cases, clinical trials by MAPS yielded overwhelmingly high success rates using MDMA in therapeutic settings (Nat Med, 2021). This has been huge in the field of healthcare for veterans and other victims of trauma. Another use is demonstrated in Dr. Roland Griffiths' studies where psilocybin reduced anxiety in terminally ill patients by enhancing personal meaning and acceptance of the life cycle. When a person can transition with a sense of fulfillment and acceptance, the heartache of loved ones can thereby be subsided, allowing more focus towards the celebration of life. A study using LSD demonstrated that scientists who were at a standstill in their research used psychedelics successfully to achieve creative breakthroughs in their research (Sheldrake, 2020). Additionally, psychedelic use has yielded positive results in the treatment of addiction and depression for decades. Advancements are being made every day, and it is likely that we will see more treatment centers, greater acceptance, and continued legalization in the next decade. Indeed, this needed shift in the way we approach healthcare and mental health is already underway. If you are interested in staying up-to-date on current research, publications, and events promoting the advancement and use of psychedelics, become a member of MAPS: the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (maps.org).

Endnote

A crucial part of using entheogens correctly is to do so with intention, respect, and reflection. I am not a doctor; I am a researcher and practitioner sharing the wisdom I have gained through my own practice, observations and personal development. I believe wholeheartedly that I would not have achieved the level of happiness and awareness in my life were it not for the use of psychedelic medicine. But it may not be for everyone. There is a wealth of knowledge available, and I encourage you to do your own research, use caution, and consider working with a licensed clinical therapist, or a trusted guide. Psychedelics are not a panacea to life's challenges, but can deeply enhance your journey of interpersonal work. I love my life, and for that I have the love of my friends, family and community, the psychedelic realm, and the divine universe to thank. There is indeed nothing stronger than the power, the glory, and the beauty of love.

Shamans in the Amazon have used psychedelics to stay in touch with nature and in tune with their role within the infinite universe for thousands of years. But you do not have to be a shaman to take hold of your divine right to explore higher consciousness. If shamans can bring medicinal knowledge to the world that has impacted millions of lives, just think of what change you can achieve in your own life by tapping into the wisdom psychedelic medicine has to offer.

Resources:

- Dancesafe.org, <https://dancesafe.org/drug-checking/>.
- Erowid.org
- Griffiths, Roland. (2006). *Psilocybin Can Occasion Mystical-Type Experiences Having Substantial and Sustained Personal Meaning and Spiritual Significance*. Journal of Psychopharmacology.
- Microdosing Institute: <https://microdosinginstitute.com/>
- Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (p. 6). URL: [<https://maps.org/>].
- Narby, James. (1999). Enigma in Rio. Jeremy P. Tarcher (Ed.), *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and the Origins of Knowledge* (p.39-40). Putnam.
- Nature Medicine. (2021) *MDMA-assisted therapy for severe PTSD: a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled phase 3 study*.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8205851/>.
- Sheldrake, Merlin (2020). What is it Like to be a Fungus? *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds, Shape Our Worlds* (p.26). Random House.
- Viridi, Jasmine, (2006). Psychedelics and the Default Mode Network. *Psychedelics Today*, (2006)(February 2). <https://psychedelictoday.com/>. Accessed 8 Aug. 2023.
<https://psychedelictoday.com/2020/02/04/psychedelics-and-the-default-mode-network/>

SPREAD THE LOVE! Pass this reading on to someone you think will benefit from it. Be sure to pass your own stories and insights along with it.

A special thanks to all who have championed the creation, development, and distribution of these sacred medicines, despite all odds and adversity. Also, thank you to Amanda Sage for her brilliant artistic contribution. You can find more of her work here: <https://www.amandasage.com/>.

Further Reading:

1. Crowley, Mike (2019). *Secret Drugs of Buddhism*. Synergetic Press.
2. Fadiman, PH.D., James (2011). *The Psychedelics Explorer's Guide*. The Psychedelic Reader, (Editor Timothy Leary). Park Street Press.
3. Grob, Charles (2002). *Hallucinogens: A Reader* (Editor Charles S. Grob, M.D). TarcherPerigee.
4. Grof, Stanislav (2019). *The Way of the Psychonaut - Volume One and Two: Encyclopedia for Inner Journeys*. Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies.
5. Harpignies, J.P. (2007). *Visionary Plant Consciousness - The Shamanic Teachings of the Plant World*. Park Street Press.
6. Leary, Timothy, et al (2021). *The Psychedelic Reader*. Citadel.
7. Pinchbeck, Daniel (2003). *Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism*. Broadway Books.
8. Pollan, Michael (2018). *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence*. Penguin Audio.
9. Sheldrake, Merlin (2020). *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures*. Random House.
10. Shulgin, Ann and Alexander (1990). *Pihkal ~ A Chemical Love Story*. Transform Press.
11. Shulgin, Ann and Alexander (2002). *Tihkal ~ The Continuation*. Transform Press.
12. Waldman, Ayelet (2017). *A Really Good Day: How Microdosing Made a Mega Difference in My Mood, My Marriage, and My Life*. Penguin Random House; Corsair; Knopf.

“I see the psychedelic experience as a birthright, and we can't have a free society until people are free to explore their own mind.”

Terrence Mc Kenna



“To get really high is to forget yourself. And to forget yourself is to see everything else. And to see everything else is to become an understanding molecule in evolution, a conscious tool of the universe.”

Jerry Garcia