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## **LSD: Nirvana or burnt out?** <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

I've recently dropped acid about 5 times a week for oh... about 3 months now. I have grown mentally and spiritually in ways unimaginable. But friends tell me I am in a false reality now; this brings me off my trip although I now only trip mentally (without the drug). In your opinion, has acid hurt me or helped bring my level of consciousness to a higher level? Am I reaching a state of Nirvana or am I simply a burn out? Please answer this question... I haven't the gall to ask anyone else.

sincerely,  
Zeldar

### **Answer**

Dear Zeldar,

Unfortunately, it's not a simple task to gauge if your drug use is helping you reach a state of nirvana or burning you out. Though you feel that lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) has helped you grow spiritually and mentally, it may also be causing you to struggle to differentiate between reality and falsehood. Moreover, repeatedly using LSD might cause flashbacks and other health risks which may occur on their own or as a symptom of hallucinogen persisting perception disorder (HPPD). As such, it may be best for you to refrain from using LSD, use it far less frequently, or exercise heightened caution if you do continue to use. If you're concerned about your health or your experiences with LSD, you may wish to speak with a health care provider or mental health professional. Eager for a dose of more information? Keep on reading!

For those who are unfamiliar, LSD (also sometimes called "acid") is a psychedelic and recreational drug which can be found in liquid, pill, gelatin, or paper form. After it's consumed, it typically takes an hour to kick in, with trips lasting up to twelve hours. Soon after ingestion, it targets receptors in the body that are responsible for regulating the production of serotonin <sup>[2]</sup>, a "feel good" hormone which promotes feelings of happiness and well-being. As such, it's no surprise that many people who use LSD report that it improves the way they view themselves and the world. Oftentimes, they experience harmless flashbacks (distorted visual perceptions) that many users describe as relaxing and temporary. Yet, people who take LSD may easily

experience unpredictable and bad trips, as well as a series of harmful short-term and long-term health consequences including increased heart rate, blood pressure, anxiety, confusion, and terror.

It's possible that you feel you're reaching nirvana because you're experiencing flashbacks. Flashbacks may mirror those experiences you have during your LSD trips and could include halo effects and bright spots of light across your visual field, falsely perceived motion in your peripheral vision, and flickering patterns. You may experience flashbacks even on days that you haven't taken acid, due to residual amounts of the drug in your system from previous trips. While flashbacks may occur on their own, they might also occur as a symptom of HPPD. However, as compared to other flashbacks, those triggered by HPPD are more likely to be chronic, uncontrollable, and potentially distressing.

You might be asking yourself, what's HPPD? It's recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as a rare post-hallucinogen intoxication disorder that occurs after stopping LSD use. Diagnosis is rare because of the DSM's strict criteria and because many health care providers are unfamiliar with HPPD. However, symptoms include re-experiencing perceptual symptoms mimicking those from their hallucinogenic trips, which can't be explained by another diagnosis, such as a general health condition or another mental health disorder. Also, in order for diagnosis to occur, former users experience significant emotional, social, or occupational distress or impairment due to re-experiencing symptoms.

It's also worth mentioning an unclear and complex relationship between LSD use and mental illnesses exists. It appears that LSD use may either exacerbate pre-existing mental illness, or encourage their onset. Additionally, many former LSD users with HPPD continue to experience [panic attacks](#) [3], anxiety, or depression beyond their trips. Current research suggests that people with family histories of anxiety, visual issues, and concentration and attention problems may be more at risk for HPPD.

In terms of whether or not you've reached nirvana, that's difficult to say as spiritual experiences such as those you've described are individual. Reflecting on the effects of your LSD use on your day-to-day life may help determine its overall impact on your health beyond the spiritual ones you've noticed. For example, how do you function on a daily basis? What, if any, physical or mental symptoms do you experience that may impede your functioning? If you want to further discuss your concerns about how your LSD use may affect your experiences of the world and how you function within it, you may find it helpful to speak with a health care provider or mental health professional.

Best of luck!

Alice!

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