

SUMMARY

A REALLY GOOD DAY

AYELET WALDMAN



Summary of “A Really Good Day” by Ayelet Waldman

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Learn about how microdosing made a mega difference in Waldman’s mood, marriage, and life.

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Introduction

As Ayelet Waldman sat at her table to write, she took a vial of LSD and placed two drops on her tongue. As the drug flowed through her veins and into her bloodstream, she didn't experience her table coming to life or her keyboard exploding in psychedelic fireworks, lightning bolts didn't shoot from the letters *R* and *P*. She wasn't zoned out in bliss and she didn't undergo some transcendent experience in which she felt one with the universe. Contrary to popular belief, Waldman simply felt normal. She felt content, relaxed, busy but not stressed. Waldman took a microdose of LSD. "A microdose of a psychedelic drug is approximately one-tenth of a typical dose. A recreational user of LSD looking for a trip complete with visual hallucinations might ingest between one hundred and one hundred and fifty micrograms of the drug." Waldman took ten micrograms. Popularized by psychologist and former psychedelic researcher, James Fadiman has been experimenting with microdosing of LSD and psilocybin (a chemical found in certain varieties of mushrooms) since 2010. After dozens of reports, Fadiman found that people experimenting with microdosing were experiencing "a really good day." For many, that is all they ever want.

Waldman has been a prisoner of her moods for as long as she can remember. When she feels good, she is productive, cheerful, and affectionate. She has what her kids call "swag." Other times, however, she is crippled by guilt, shame, and hopelessness. While she's never had serious enough depression to become hospitalized, her mood swings were affecting her personal and professional life. As a result, Waldman has spent hundreds of hours in the offices of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and family therapists. Nothing worked. Then one night, she found herself considering steering the wheel hard to the right and hurtling herself off the Richmond Bridge. After that experience, Waldman was diagnosed with bipolar II disorder. After many medications and hours of research later, Waldman's diagnosis changed to mild PMDD (premenstrual dysphoric disorder). Her behavior worsened as she began to enter menopause and she found herself in a perpetual state of irritability.

Searching for a cure to help save her relationships and her career, Waldman turned to microdosing. This is the story of her experience with LSD. The story of her search for *a really good day*.

A Blue Bottle from “Lewis Carroll”

Author Ayelet Waldman has only experimented with illegal drugs a few times throughout her life. Having smoked marijuana a few times, she was eventually prescribed medicinal marijuana in California to help end her dependence on the sleeping pill Ambien. Additionally, she’s tried MDMA a handful of times, cocaine twice, and mushrooms once. Similarly, Waldman wasn’t much of a legal drug user either, she didn’t like the taste of alcohol or its effects. Instead, her drug of choice is tea.

However, after researching the effects of microdosing LSD to improve mood, she knew she had to get her hands on the illegal drug. But how? She imagined going to the streets and asking drug dealers if they had lysergic acid diethylamide and if they took Visa! Plus, how could she trust a drug dealer to give her the real thing? For instance, people today ingest what they believe to be MDMA (commonly known as Ecstasy or Molly) but are sold a very dangerous, synthesized combination of bath salts and methamphetamine. So how could she get her hands on this legitimate illegal drug?

Luckily, Waldman received a message from a friend who knew a professor nearing the end of his life who no longer had use for his remaining LSD. Strange, right? Well, just two days later, Waldman opened a package covered in brightly colored stamps with a return address listed as “Lewis Carroll.” Inside the package, wrapped in tissue, was a tiny cobalt blue bottle with a note that read:

*“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."

Waldman knew the whole situation was weird, yet kind of adorable. But freaky. Her first step was to test the liquid to ensure it was true LSD like the sender promised. Her efforts were in vain considering the liquid had to be incredibly diluted to make its contents only 5 mcg per dosage. Nevertheless, she trusted the contents of Lewis Carroll's bottle, took the drug, and went on to have a really good day.

So how does it work exactly? The principle is simple: Waldman would take a tiny dose of LSD and monitor her mood throughout the day. Over the next two days, Waldman would not take the drug but would still monitor how she was feeling. On the fourth day, she would take another microdose and repeat the process all over again. As mentioned in the introduction, Waldman took just 10 micrograms a day, the amount shown to deliver an improvement in mood without experiencing hallucinations, either positive or negative. Over the course of 30 days, Waldman repeated the process and documented her experience.

The First Positive Experience

On the first day of her experiment, Waldman took her first microdose. She experienced a slightly heightened feeling of awareness as if her consciousness was hovering at a slight remove, watching her as she tapped the keys of the keyboard. The trees looked prettier than usual and she could smell the fragrant jasmine from the garden. She realized that she felt more *mindful*, a feeling that she had tried to achieve through meditation but always came up short.

For the first time in a long time, Waldman felt *happy*. Not overly happy but content and at ease with her life. Instead of the usual anxiety and irritability she feels when thinking of her family, she feels a gentle sense of love and security. Similarly, instead of feeling overwhelmed with work, she feels optimistic and full of new ideas. Despite these calming sensations, she is not overly manic, she simply feels calm and content. Is this simply a placebo effect? Even if it is, Waldman welcomes the good mood.

On Day 2, known as transition day, Waldman wakes up feeling tired and grumpy. She didn't get much sleep and was up tossing and turning from her shoulder pain. Fadiman's protocol notes state, "Many people report that the second-day effects are as positive or even better than the first day." She found herself thinking, *Why can't I just be like everyone else?* By the end of the day, however, she is both productive and content. Even though she felt a bit irritable at times, she didn't argue with anyone which was a nice change. While she didn't pour out as much work as the day before, she still experienced good productivity.

Day 3, known as the control day, is for Waldman to experience her first *normal* day since microdosing. On this day, she felt her usual, irritable mood return and longed for the feeling of peace and productivity of the previous two days. So on day 4, Waldman took her next microdose and began to feel a sense of control over her emotions again. For instance, her children that morning had been playing around at breakfast and, as a

result, were late for school. However, Waldman didn't feel the need to be anxious or upset; instead, she was unphased by the situation. Later that morning, she experienced control again when her dog jumped up on her, causing her to spill her tea all over her book. As the dog looked at her with big eyes expecting a scolding, Waldman simply just let it go.

Misrepresentation of LSD

So why had LSD been having such a positive effect on Waldman? What was the drug doing to alter the chemicals in the brain and make her feel happy? LSD increases the interaction between serotonin, glutamate, and other factors in the brain, which leads to new connections and networks. These *new* connections allow patients to experience life from a new perspective and even view their problems in a positive light. In fact, researchers at UCLA and NYU have recently proven that psychedelic treatment can reduce anxiety and give patients facing death a better perspective about their situation.

Unfortunately, the stigma against LSD as being a dangerous drug has led to its bad reputation. First synthesized by Swiss research chemist Dr. Albert Hofmann in 1938, Dr. Hoffman consumed the drug throughout his entire life until his death at 102-years-old. However, the War against Drugs has long put psychedelics like LSD in a bad light. Rumors abound as people hear horror stories of LSD-users suddenly experiencing flashbacks later in life and hurling themselves off buildings due to a psychotic episode from LSD.

You may be surprised to know, however, that according to a 2008 review in *CNS: Neuroscience and Therapeutics*, there have been no documented deaths from LSD overdoses. In 1972, eight people in San Francisco were admitted to the hospital after accidentally snorting LSD thinking it was cocaine. While five of the eight people slipped into comas, the others vomited uncontrollably. Despite the overdose, all eight not only survived but made full recoveries after a grueling 12 hours. So even the worst cases of an overdose don't sound too bad!

Now, this doesn't mean that every experience with LSD is a positive one. There are few people, many of whom already have an existing mental illness, that experienced psychosis when taking the drug; however, rumors of people falling off buildings and committing suicide are all simply urban

legends. Contrary to popular belief, a study published in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology* revealed that lifetime psychedelic users were 36 percent *less* likely to commit suicide. So why the bad reputation? Well, in the 1960s, the drug became associated with the youths of America who protested the Vietnam war, supported civil rights, and enjoyed the recreational use of marijuana and LSD. Since then, LSD has been mislabeled as dangerous and risky.

LSD's Contributions to Breakthrough Ideas

Did you know one of the benefits of LSD is higher concentration and a better work ethic? You see, society believes that users of psychedelics are lazy; however, the contrary is true. In fact, many famous billionaires credit the drug as one of the reasons for their success. For instance, Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple, once stated that taking LSD was one of the most important things he ever did. Similarly, Waldman experienced greater concentration and noted that she was able to fully immerse herself in her work.

But Waldman and Jobs aren't the only two who have experienced a greater work ethic while using LSD. Kary Mullis, the co-winner of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry, was recognized for his contributions to the polymerase chain reaction (PCR), which allowed for many breakthroughs, including gene cloning and DNA sequencing. When addressing one of his greatest life-changing experiences, Mullis stated that taking LSD opened his mind to new perspectives and was one of the most important courses that he ever took. In fact, he believes that if it weren't for LSD, he would have never invented PCR.

So while these are all great stories about the benefits of LSD, is there any merit to them? Or are they simply just flukes? Well, one study used MRI machines to track the brain's reaction to LSD. In the study, they found that the drug results in hyper-connectivity of the brain, meaning unrelated regions of the brain can suddenly communicate with one another. This communication allows users to form new perspectives and new ideas. But LSD can be linked to more than just breakthrough ideas, it can also be linked to inspiring creativity.

For example, James Fadiman once ran an experiment in which he recruited senior research scientists from innovative businesses. From those who designed silicon chips to those who invented the computer mouse, Fadiman wanted to see if LSD could help these scientists become more creative. Each

scientist was working on a project with many problems that needed to be solved, so Fadiman gave each one a 100-microgram microdose of LSD and began conducting psychometric tests. From those tests, Fadiman found that the participants' performance on those tests improved; more importantly, each scientist reported experiencing a moment of intellectual inspiration that solved many of their problems. According to Fadiman, many patents and products can be attributed to this particular experiment.

Today, LSD is still illegal and still has a negative reputation; however, the drug is becoming increasingly popular in many areas, like Silicon Valley, as users attempt to open up new connections in the brain and create breakthrough ideas.

The War on Drugs and the Greatest Risk of LSD

The War on Drugs has made possession of even a small amount of LSD a prosecutable offense with severe consequences. In fact, even the small amount that Waldman had in her possession could have been enough to lead to a three-year prison sentence. Unfortunately, the United States has made simple drug possession a serious offense. As a result, prisons are littered with people who were caught with small quantities of drugs like LSD and marijuana.

So why wasn't Waldman worried about prosecution? Simply put, she was a white wealthy woman with privilege. The War on Drugs has always been about race and class, about prosecuting minorities and allowing the white, wealthy class to succeed. For example, the outlaw of opium in the 1870s was created to prosecute poor Chinese immigrants; meanwhile, large numbers of white, middle-class residents were addicted to laudanum. Eventually, anti-drug campaigns were created to warn the public about drugged black people attacking white women and marijuana-madmen from Mexico. The War on Drugs simply aimed to instill fear of the *other*.

Today, racism is still prevalent. For example, for every white person convicted of a drug offense, ten African Americans are incarcerated. Even worse, white people are five times more likely to abuse drugs than African Americans. The War on Drugs hasn't seemed to do anything other than fill prison populations and contribute to the racial injustice of African Americans. In fact, people are just as likely to use drugs today, many of which are harmless, like LSD and marijuana. Meanwhile, drugs like heroin and cocaine are becoming increasingly cheaper!

In fact, did you know that LSD was originally aimed to compete with Ritalin and Adderall? Sandoz Pharmaceuticals, the company that discovered and synthesized LSD, could've released a microdose version to the marketplace; however, when the drug became illegal in the 1960s, that clearly became

impossible. Regardless, research into microdosing LSD has continued, particularly by Fadiman. Fadiman has largely promoted the three-day model that Waldman used and has accumulated 50 reports of people who have used it. Out of those 50 people, only 2 of those reported having negative reactions to microdosing. One simply experienced extreme fatigue while the other stopped due to “life circumstances.”

Overall, the overwhelming percentage of patients experienced a mixture of benefits, including emotional, intellectual, and physical. Additionally, many reported seeing improvements in their relationships as well. The vast majority reported experiencing reduced anxiety, greater happiness in life, greater creativity and focus, and reduced conflict. Some even reported some rather unusual effects, including one person who experienced a new perspective on their diagnosis with Parkinson’s disease. While the symptoms of the disease continued, the patient experienced less depression. Meanwhile, another user reported seeing a clear alleviation of his stutter!

Of course, Fadiman believes that a proper clinical study will further prove the effectiveness and safety of microdosing. Today, there are two potential projects in Australia and Europe, so hopefully, a proper microdosing study will soon become a reality.

The Overall 30-Day Experience

After 30 days, Waldman reflected on her experience and the 10 microdoses of LSD. She states that the days she took the doses were the days she experienced abnormal sensations, such as nausea and dizziness. On these days, Waldman was also more prone to becoming moody and irritable. For example, on one microdose day, Waldman and her husband got into a major fight. Despite the anger, she still reported some positive experiences. Instead of the usual feeling of shame, guilt, and depression for fighting with her husband, she felt more forgiving of herself and was able to avoid the downward spiral of shame.

Another positive experience occurred when Waldman revealed to her children that she had been experimenting with medication to improve her mood. Her children were unsurprised and had noticed a clear improvement in their mother's moods over the past month. Her youngest daughter even stated that Waldman seemed much more in control of her emotions, even when she became angry. One of her sons simply stated that she was nicer and happier while another stated that Waldman had successfully dealt with her stress without the usual shouting and yelling.

Overall, Waldman believes that the experiment had a positive effect on her life. Each night before going to sleep, Waldman had been able to say that *"today was a good day."* Now that her experiment is over, she hopes and fights for a change in our drug-obsessed nation. For instance, a doctor has no problem prescribing a benzodiazepine, a drug that is both highly addictive and has links to Alzheimer's. Meanwhile, Waldman found a drug with zero side effects that works; the only problem is that it's illegal.

Final Summary

In today's society, drugs like marijuana and LSD are becoming increasingly useful for alleviating anxiety, depression, and a myriad of other mental health problems. These drugs offer little to no side effects and have been proven to work; meanwhile, a vast population of people is being prescribed legal medications with harmful side effects. Even worse, they offer little success. The microdosing of LSD, while illegal, has shown vast improvements in many people's lives; including Ayelet Waldman, who experienced the benefits of LSD in relation to her mood. Furthermore, LSD has no known harmful side effects, making it one of the healthiest ways to combat mental illness. Waldman hopes that society can one day improve their mindset on drugs and open their eyes to the many benefits that come along with microdosing. In the end, she hopes that she can live in a world where others, like herself, can experience really good days.



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