

Psychedelic Therapy in the Holy Land: MAPS Israel Conference, 2005



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Having discovered MAPS in 2003 via a donation to Erowid, we were intrigued upon hearing about the MAPS conference in Israel this March. Following an impromptu decision, a ten-hour plane ride to Tel Aviv, and a shared cab, we

arrived in Jerusalem to begin one of the most memorable vacations of our lifetimes.

After checking into the Beit Shmuel Hotel in Jerusalem (located at the World Union for Progressive Judaism), we adventured out on our own through the Old City before meeting up with the MAPS crew for dinner. We had arrived later in the week than most of the group, so that night we met and got to know other MAPS members, including researchers, scientists, doctors, benefactors, artists, organizers, and dedicated supporters, and learned why they would travel so far to be a part of what was happening at this conference. We discussed the state of MDMA research worldwide, and emphasized the importance, indeed the necessity, of the work MAPS does, particularly within the context of global prohibition.

Early the following morning, the MAPS bus loaded up for the trip from Jerusalem to Rishon LeZion, a suburb of Tel Aviv. The conference took place at a hall called Beit Haam, which means “House of the People” in Hebrew. Luckily for us, the conference was conducted almost entirely in English. Among the approximately 30–40 people in the audience was Dr. Moshe Kotler, Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at Tel Aviv University’s Sackler School of Medicine, and principal investigator of the MAPS-funded Israeli MDMA-assisted psychotherapy pilot study. A spirited introduction by the ever-persistent “dutiful surfer of the bureaucracy” Dr. Rick Doblin got things underway.



The conference was a great success, and we were impressed by how knowledgeable and professional all the speakers were. Each delivered a polished slideshow presentation, containing comprehensive scientific data, showing significant (and in some cases, preliminary) results from research with psychedelics. [The lectures can be seen at: <http://www.maps.org/avarchive/index.html#israel2005>]

It was great to gain an international perspective and experience the opening of a more global dialogue on the subject. We were honored to be there, and humbled by the expansive and dedicated research being done on these medicines that hold so much untapped potential.

The following night, some of the MAPS team (including ourselves) attended a rave in Jerusalem, held in the parking garage of the Israeli Supreme Court building. We were guided to this event by MAPS member Dan Sieradski (<http://orthodoxanarchist.com/>). It took place during the Jewish holiday Purim, which is quite the party in Israel. The rave featured three rooms of music and dancing, and at least two bars (it was sponsored by Goldstar, an Israeli brewing company). We danced the night away into the morning, to solidify our work from the day before. Rod Mann, director of the upcoming movie release *Entheogen: Awakening the God Within*, remarked to us that a wise person once said, “when we dance, we are dancing to save the world.” It is our hope that we are moving in this direction through ongoing psychedelic research.

We returned home to Boston feeling grateful to know that there are such good people out there who are making psychedelic research a reality.



(top) Church of the Holy Sepulcher.
Photo by René Ruiz.

(left) The Dome of the Rock. Photo
by Brandy Doyle.