

# DIVINER'S SAGE



Diviner's Sage (*Salvia divinorum*) is a cultivated Mexican mint species has a long history of use by Mexican shamans, who use it as a "plant ally" to experience higher realms. Divinorum is a true entheogen, a chemical compound that leads to connection with "god" or the divine mind. It is also known as the Herb of Mary, because of its powerful yet gentle psychoactive effects. Divinorum's active ingredient, Salvinorin A, is structurally unique among psychoactive drugs, and receptor binding studies have revealed nothing, which could indicate a previously unknown pathway in the brain.

The plant is native to Mexico. It is known only in cultivation, and it rarely produces seed, suggesting a chance or unstable hybrid, although the genetics have not yet been investigated. *Salvia divinorum* is traditionally used for, among other things, divination -- hence its scientific name. Native to the Sierra Mazateca, Mexico, the tiny number of clones in circulation have adapted well to cultivation by enthusiasts in cooler, drier climates throughout the world. There are no known toxicities in Divinorum nor is it addictive. Many users experience powerful encounters with "divine energy," while others have disturbing "mechanical" visions, and a very small percentage have no reaction at all. According to shamans, the drug reveals the sacred geometry of god, and much of the visual experience is geometric. Divinorum is short acting (10-60 minutes) and the visual phenomena can usually be halted by simply opening the eyes.

## Herb of Mary, the Shepherdess

By Sean Whitcomb



*Salvia divinorum* is a member of the mint family (or *Lamiaceae*) native to the mountains of Oaxaca, Mexico. It is used by the Mazatec Indians of the region, in a manner similar to psilocybian mushrooms and lysergic acid-containing morning glory seeds, as a ritual entheogen (hallucinogen) and divinatory aid. It is propagated vegetatively by the Mazatecs, and no wild specimens of the plant have been observed by researchers. The diterpene salvinorin A is the chemical responsible for the visionary effects of this species. The plant now enjoys limited use among "basement shamans" in the North as an entheogen similar to LSD and psilocybian mushrooms, and is sometimes cultivated for this reason.

A collection of *Salvia divinorum* suitable for identification was originally made by Wasson and Hofmann in 1962 and described by Epling and J. Tiva-M. as a new species (Epling and J. Tiva-M. 1962). The description was later amended by Reisfield. The plant is a perennial herb with trailing stems that grow from 0.5 to 1.5 m tall and have a square shape characteristic of mints. The flowers are white, turning blue with age, and borne on racemes (Reisfield 1993). It was originally described by Schultes as having all blue flowers, due to the fact that the calyces are blue (Ott 1996). Nutlets are rare among greenhouse cultivated plants, and have never been observed in the wild (Reisfield 1993).



The cloud forests and tropical evergreen forests of the Sierra Mazateca mountain range provide the ideal conditions for *S. divinorum* growth. It lives in dark, humid areas at an elevation of between 300 and 1800 m. Propagation is vegetative, through rooting at the nodes of the long trailing stems (Reisfield 1993).

The evolutionary origins of *S. divinorum* are unclear. The plant was once thought to exist only in cultivation. However, one Mazatec shaman has indicated that the plant grows wild in the Sierra Mazateca highlands, and "wild" stands (possibly escaped cultivars) have been observed by field researchers (Valds 1994). It has been suggested that *S. divinorum* is a hybrid, but support for this assertion is lacking (Reisfield 1993).

## Shamanic Use

The Mazatec Indians of mountainous Oaxaca know *S. divinorum* by several names. Most of the names illustrate the relationship between the plant and the Virgin Mary, such as *ska Maria Pastora* (the herb of Mary, the Shepherdess), *hojas de Maria* (leaves of Mary), and *yerba Maria* (herb of Mary). The plant is believed to be an incarnation of the Virgin Mary, and is treated with great respect (Valds et al. 1983). The names are clearly influenced by Catholic iconography, but the Biblical Mary was not a shepherdess and the sheep is a post-conquest introduction, so this linguistic connection is rather puzzling (Epling and J. Tiva-M. 1962).

The plant is used as a substitute for psilocybian mushrooms (*Psilocybe* spp.) when the fungi are not available (Wasson 1962), and as the first step in shamanic initiation. When one wishes to become a healer, one must master *ska Maria* to "become acquainted with the 'way to Heaven.'" Then, the apprentice must learn to use morning glory (*Rivea corymbosa*) seeds, and finally, mushrooms, the most powerful of the Mazatec entheogens (Valds et al. 1983).

*Ska Maria* is used by healers to discover the "cause" of a patient's illness, to divine the future, and to answer important questions. It is also given to patients as a direct cure for illnesses such as diarrhea, headache, and rheumatism (Valds et al. 1983).

The first reference to *S. divinorum* use in modern literature was probably made J.B. Johnson in 1939. He mentioned the existence of an infusion of a plant called *hierba Maria*. Dr. Blas Pablo Reko also noted its use in 1945, in a work on entheogenic mushrooms. He noted the use of a plant called "divination leaf" by the Cuicatecs and Mazatecs, which was probably *S. divinorum*. Use of the plant in a divining ritual was later described by Robert Weitlaner (Wasson 1962).

## Effects

Wasson participated in a *ska Maria* ritual on July 12, 1961, the first non-Mazatec ever to do so. The fresh leaves of the plant were counted out in pairs and nibbled by the participants. Wasson was unable to chew them because of the extremely bitter taste, so 34 pairs were squeezed and the juice diluted with water and drunk. This procedure is often used for toothless people, with the leaves sometimes being ground on a metate, or grinding board. The effects of the plant--"dancing colors in elaborate, three dimensional designs"--were similar to the initial effects of mushrooms, but were "less sweeping, and lasted a shorter time." (Wasson 1962).

A more detailed description of a *ska Maria* ritual was given by Valds in 1983. Valds was given a "beginner's dose" of an infusion made from 20 pairs, while the other two participants each received 50 pairs. In keeping with Mazatec tradition, two people abstained to watch over the others. The curandero, or shaman, blessed the preparations with an oration addressed to "The Holy Trinity, Saint Peter, the Virgin Mary, and other Saints." The session lasted about an hour and was characterized by visions of kaleidoscopic shapes, colors, landscapes, and columns of smoke. In a later, less formal, ritual, Valds ingested an infusion of 50 pairs and experienced stronger visions, which were more "realistic" and lasted more than 2.5 hours.

In addition to the visual changes produced by *S. divinorum*, Valds noted physical sensations such as a feeling of flight, dizziness, slurred speech, and decreased heart rate. Despite these sensations, the participants' "minds seemed to be in a state of acute awareness." He concluded that despite claims of the plant's mild effects, an intense long-lasting experience can be achieved in the proper setting (Valds 1983).

## Chemistry

Albert Hofmann, the chemist who invented LSD, attempted to isolate the active principles of *S. divinorum*, but was unsuccessful. He assumed that the chemicals were unstable. Later work by Diaz was also unsuccessful. The active compound was eventually isolated by Valds and colleagues and named divinorin A(1). A related inactive compound named divinorin B(2) was also isolated. Before this work was published, it was reported that Ortega, Blount, and Marchand had earlier isolated the same chemical, but with no report of pharmacological activity, and had named it salvinorin A. For this reason, divinorins A and B are now known as salvinorins A and B (Valds 1994).

Salvinorin A is a furanolactone neoclerodane diterpene, the first in this class of compounds to exhibit hallucinogenic activity. All of the other major hallucinogens are alkaloids. Salvinorin A was first thought to be active only at relatively high doses. However, it is now known that it can induce intense hallucinations by smoking 200 to 500 mcg. This makes it the most potent naturally occurring hallucinogen isolated so far (Valds 1994).

## Non-Shamanic Use

*S. divinorum* and its active compound salvinorin A are now used by many non-Mazatecs. The dried leaves are often smoked, a use originally unknown to the Indians. Ott first encountered this use in Mexico City. He determined that five or six puffs of the smoke from the dried leaves will produce a mild experience similar to

ingestion of fresh leaves, which lasts 1-2 hours. He has also found that swallowing the fresh leaves or their juice is unnecessary. A quid made up of as few as six fresh leaves may be held in the mouth, producing a visionary experience that lasts over an hour (Ott 1993).

There is now a market for both dried leaves and whole plants, which remain legal and are relatively easy to obtain. Several varieties are available through specialty greenhouses, including clones of the plants originally brought back by Wasson and Hofmann and a "palatable" clone that is less bitter (Valds 1994).

*Ska Maria* is attractive to entheogen users for several reasons. It is still legal, which makes it much safer to use than other illicit drugs. The effects come on quickly and subside in a short period of time, making its use more convenient than longer-lasting entheogens such as LSD. The effects seem to be more controllable and easier to willfully terminate than other more powerful drugs. It is also fairly easy to grow, making it available virtually anytime for very little money. Salvinorin A can also be isolated with ease by anyone possessing a little knowledge of chemistry. These reasons have caused some to be concerned that *S. divinorum* and salvinorin A have the potential to become "drugs of abuse" (Valds 1994).

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*Sean Whitcomb is an ethnobotanical researcher who does not necessarily endorse or support the products and opinions expressed in the Crucible Catalog. Visit the Ethobotanical Leaflets website at [www.siu.edu/~ebl/issue3/summer98.htm](http://www.siu.edu/~ebl/issue3/summer98.htm) for the original article.*

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# ***Salvia Divinorum* User's Guide**

Perhaps a friend gave you a *Salvia divinorum* cutting, or maybe you bought dried leaves, an extract, or a living plant. If so, you need to read this guide. It was written to teach you how to work with this herb in a way that is personally rewarding, and how to do so as safely as possible. It will also teach you how to grow and care for your own *Salvia divinorum* plants.

Many more people are trying *Salvia divinorum* now than were several years ago. It is becoming both popular and controversial. *Salvia divinorum* is a powerful visionary herb--it is no placebo. But Salvia is unique. It is not "legal acid." It is not "legal pot." It is not a substitute for any other drug. It is not an analog of any other drug. It is extremely important that you know about its effects, its possible dangers, and how to avoid the dangers before trying it.

Do not use Salvia until you have read through this guide. No matter what other drugs you may have used, they do not prepare you for Salvia. Salvia is unique. It has much to offer: fascinating psychoactive effects, sensual enhancement, magical journeys, enchantment, apparent time travel, philosophical insights, spiritual experiences, and perhaps even healing and divination, but Salvia is intolerant of ignorance. If it is used stupidly it can turn on you. By learning what is written here you can avoid serious trouble.

## **SALVIA DIVINORUM BASICS**

*Salvia divinorum* is a species of sage (the genus *Salvia*). There are approximately 1000 species of sage worldwide, but *Salvia divinorum* is the only vision-inducing species known. Salvia is a member of a very large family of plants known as the Labiatae. Because mint is a well-known member of this family, it is sometimes referred to as the mint family. *Salvia divinorum* makes a beautiful house plant, and it can be grown just for that reason, but most people who grow this plant are interested in its fascinating psychoactive effects.

The botanical name *Salvia divinorum* means "Sage of the Diviners." Under the right conditions, taken in the right way, Salvia produces a unique state of "divine inebriation." For hundreds of years, it has been used in religious and healing ceremonies by the Mazatec Indians, who live in the province of Oaxaca, in Mexico.

At present (Sept. 29, 2000), neither *Salvia divinorum* nor its active principal, salvinorin A, are controlled substances anywhere in the world. It is completely legal to grow, buy, and sell Salvia plants or leaves. The effects of Salvia are very different from those of alcohol; but like alcohol, it impairs coordination. Never, ever, attempt to drive under the influence of Salvia, Doing so could prove fatal.

In many ways *Salvia divinorum* is in a class by itself. No other herb or drug is really very much like it. It is misleading to compare it to other psychoactive substances. It is a truly unique visionary herb.

Salvia contains a chemical substance called salvinorin A (often referred to just as salvinorin). Salvinorin is responsible for Salvia's mind-altering effects. It is not chemically related to any other psychoactive drug. Unlike most visionary compounds, it is not an alkaloid. Although it is not habit forming, pure salvinorin is extremely

strong. Doses of only several hundred micrograms (millionths of a gram) will have an effect, and doses above 1 milligram (1/1000 of a gram) are too much for most people to handle comfortably. Because of its extreme potency, Salvinorin should never be used unless the dosage has been precisely measured with extremely accurate chemist's scales. Fortunately, Salvia leaf is hundreds of times weaker than pure salvinorin; therefore, Salvia leaf can be used much more safely than pure salvinorin.

Salvia leaf is physically quite safe. It is very gentle on the body. No one has ever died from a salvia overdose. Salvia is not a stimulant, it is not a sedative, it is not a narcotic, it is not a tranquilizer. Like many entheogens, it can induce visions, yet it is quite different from other entheogens. Dale Pendell, in his book *Pharmako/Poeia*, assigns *Salvia divinorum* to a unique pharmacological class, which he calls "existentia." This term alludes to the philosophical illumination salvia seems to shine on the nature of existence itself. Daniel Siebert has proposed the term *enchantogen*-a neologism, meaning "a substance that produces enchantment." No one knows how salvinorin works in the brain. We do know it works differently than any other known psychoactive substance.

### **SALVIA IS NOT A PARTY DRUG**

This is important to understand. Salvia is not "fun" in the way that alcohol or Cannabis can be. If you try to party with Salvia you probably will not have a good experience. Salvia is a consciousness-changing herb that can be used in a vision quest, or in a healing ritual. In the right setting, Salvia makes it possible to see visions. It is an herb with a long tradition of sacred use. It is useful for deep meditation. It is best taken in a quiet, nearly darkroom; either alone (if a sitter will not be used, see below for discussion of sitters), or with one or two good friends present. It is should be taken either in silence or (sometimes) with soft pleasant music playing.

### **SALVIA TRIPS: WHAT TO EXPECT**

Salvia trips range in intensity from subtle, to extremely powerful. This holds true for chewed leaves and smoked leaves, and for oral tinctures, such as "Sage Goddess Emerald Essence®." The strength of the trip will depend on how much you take, the way you take it, and your individual body chemistry. Salvia trips differ from those produced by other visionary drugs or herbs, and Salvia has many advantages:

- You cannot take a fatal overdose of Salvia leaves.
- Salvia is not habit forming.
- Salvia is legal.
- Its effects are brief in duration, so you quickly return to normal.
- Salvia seldom produces adverse side-effects or hangover.

Noise and distraction will interfere with the trip. When on Salvia, watching TV is nothing but annoying; sitting around a campfire in the woods at night, is wonderful. Because *Salvia divinorum* can alter perception and behavior, it must never be used in a public environment--doing so would draw unwelcome attention. Especially if you are not used to it, or are taking a potent preparation like an extract, you should have a sober baby sitter there to make sure that you don't do something dangerous, like knocking over lit candles, or walking out a window.

When Salvia is smoked the effects come on very quickly: in less than a minute. When it is chewed the first effects come on at about 15 minutes and full effects at about 30 minutes. If taken as a tincture held in your mouth, the effects come on in 15 minutes or less. Usually a Salvia trip lasts from 15 minutes to an hour. Occasionally trips may last up to 2 hours. To be on the safe side, it is important not to drive or use machinery for several hours after the trip appears to be ended. Most people have no hangover from Salvia; however, some people sometimes report a mild headache. If Salvia is smoked the smoke may irritate your lungs.

### **S-A-L-V-I-A TRIP RATING SCALE**

Salvia trips seem to occur in levels. The so-called S-A-L-V-I-A scale has been constructed to rate trips. Each letter of the word *SALVIA* stands for another level of tripping. The scale describes six different levels of intoxication, each one more intense than the previous. The overall intensity of Salvia trips is scored according to the highest scale level attained during the course of the trip.

Level - 1 "S" stands for SUBTLE effects. A feeling that "something" is happening, although it is difficult to say just what. Relaxation and increased sensual appreciation may be noted. This mild level is useful for meditation and may facilitate sexual pleasure.

Level - 2 "A" stands for ALTERED perception. Colors and textures are more pronounced. Appreciation of music may be enhanced. Space may appear of greater or lesser depth than is usual. But visions do not occur at this level. Thinking becomes less logical, and more playful; short-term memory difficulties may be noted.

Level - 3 "L" stands for LIGHT visionary state. Closed-eye visuals (clear imagery with eyes closed: fractal patterns, vine-like and geometric patterns, visions of objects and designs). The imagery is often two dimensional. If open-eyed visual effects occur, these are usually vague and fleeting. At this level, phenomena similar to the hypnagogic phenomena that some people experience at sleep onset occur. At this level, visions are experienced as "eye candy" but are not confused with reality.

Level - 4 "V" stands for VIVID visionary state. Complex three-dimensional realistic appearing scenes occur. Sometimes voices may be heard. With eyes open, contact with consensual reality will not be entirely lost, but when you close your eyes you may forget about consensus reality and enter completely into a dreamlike scene. Shamanistic journeying to other lands--foreign or imaginary; encounters with beings (entities, spirits) or travels to other ages may occur. You may even live the life of another person. At this level you have entered the shaman's world. Or if you prefer: you are in "dream time." With eyes closed, you experience fantasies (dream like happenings with a story line to them). So long as your eyes are closed you may believe they are really occurring. This differs from the "eye candy" closed-eye imagery, of level 3.

Level - 5 "I" stands for IMMATERIAL existence. At this level one may no longer be aware of having a body. Consciousness remains and some thought processes are still lucid, but one becomes completely involved in inner experience and loses all contact with consensual reality. Individuality may be lost; one experiences merging with God/dess, mind, universal consciousness, or bizarre fusions with other objects--real or imagined (e.g. experiences such as merging with a wall or piece of furniture). At this level it is impossible to function in consensual reality, but unfortunately some

people do not remain still but move around in this befuddled state. For this reason a sitter is essential to ensure the safety of someone voyaging to these deep levels. To the person experiencing this the phenomenon may be terrifying or exceedingly pleasant; but to an outside observer the individual may appear confused or disoriented.

Level 6 - "A" stands for AMNESIC effects. At this stage, either consciousness is lost, or at least one is unable to later recall what one had experienced. The individual may fall, or remain immobile or thrash around; somnambulistic behavior may occur. Injuries can be sustained without pain being felt; on awakening, the individual will have no recollection of what he/she did, experienced, or said in level 6. People cannot recall what they experience in this very deep trance state. This is not a desirable level, because nothing can latter be recalled of the experience.

### **METHODS OF USE**

Salvia is never taken by injection. There are many different methods of use. The two traditional Mazatec methods are quite inefficient in that they require many more leaves than do the other methods. But they are very safe. Traditionally the leaves are taken in a semi-darkened room as part of a healing or religious ceremony. At least one sober person is present to watch over the people who have taken Salvia. A water-based drink made from ground-up fresh leaves is one of the traditional Mazatec ways of using this herb. It requires a lot of leaves and tastes somewhat unpleasant, so this method is seldom used by non-Mazatecs. Salvinorin is very poorly absorbed from the stomach so it requires enormous amounts of leaves to make the drink effective. But it does work, and trips from the drink last longer than from any other method. Chewing and swallowing a large number of fresh leaves is the other Mazatec method. When this is done the leaves are nibbled slowly for about 1/2 hour. Although the chewed-up leaves are swallowed, most of the effect is due to salvinorin that is absorbed through the tissues of the mouth during the chewing. This is a less efficient way of chewing Salvia than the quid method (see below). Most people find chewing and swallowing fresh leaves to be unpleasantly bitter, and for some, it causes gagging.

In the so-called Quid Method, a ball or cylinder of rolled-up leaves is made. This is called a quid. It is to be chewed. The leaves are chewed slowly--about one chew every 10 seconds. They are kept under your tongue between chews. For half an hour keep the quid that is being chewed, and the juice that forms, in your mouth. If you can, hold it in your mouth without spitting or swallowing. Then, after the half-hour chewing time is over, spit it all out. Have a bowl to spit into, and a towel handy. Salvia juice stains carpets and other fabrics, so be sure the bowl won't tip over.

Quids can be made from either fresh leaves or dried leaves. Those made from dry leaves are less bitter. To make a quid from dried leaves, weigh out 2-8 grams of dried leaves. A gram scale accurate enough for this can be purchased for under \$50. If you have no scale, count out 8 to 28 large whole dried leaves. Place the leaves in a small bowl of cool water for 10 minutes. Once the leaves are wet and have been soaking for about 10 minutes, remove the leaves from the water, squeeze the excess water out of them, and ball them up into a quid. Some people skip this soaking step when they are in a hurry, but chewing on brittle dry leaves may be unpleasant. If you wish, you can sweeten the quid with sugar, honey, Stevia extract or an artificial sweetener like Equal®. This will make it less bitter and more pleasant to chew. If fresh leaves are used instead of dry ones, you will need from 8 to 28 large fresh leaves.

The effect of *Salvia* quids can probably be increased by first treating your mouth in a special way to increase its ability to absorb salvinorin. To do this you will need a toothbrush and an alcohol/menthol containing mouthwash such as Cool Mint Listerine®, (or any other brand that contains alcohol and menthol). Gently brush the lining of your mouth, including the tissue under your tongue, and the top surface of your tongue. This removes layers of dead cells normally present. Do not brush hard enough to cause bleeding. Then rinse with the mouthwash for at least 30 seconds. Be sure to get mouthwash everywhere in your mouth, including under your tongue. Then spit out the mouthwash and rinse once with water. You will experience very little in the first 12 to 15 minutes of chewing. don't be misled by this. Full effects are usually felt by 30 minutes (the time you spit out the quid). They remain on this level for about 20 minutes more, then start to decrease. The whole trip seldom lasts much longer than an hour and a quarter, but this varies.

Dried leaves can be smoked in a pipe. They need to be smoked hot and the smoke must be inhaled deeply and quickly to have an effect. Because salvinorin requires high temperatures to vaporize, it is best to hold a flame immediately above the leaves, drawing it down into the leaves the whole time you inhale. The leaves can be smoked in a short-stemmed tobacco pipe, in a bong, or in a "steamroller" pipe. Fill up a medium size bowl with leaves. Use a hand-held butane lighter that will go out when you are no longer pressing it, not a match. Have a large ashtray or tip-proof bowl to set the pipe in when you feel you've had enough. Remember that when tripping you may forget you are holding a lit pipe. You could drop it, causing a burn or a fire; therefore, it is best to have a sitter present when smoking. First effects will be noticed within a minute of inhaling. After 5-6 minutes the effects will gradually begin to subside. The total duration of the trip may be less than 30 minutes or as long as an hour.

There is now a commercially available *Salvia* tincture. This fluidextract of *Salvia divinorum* is intended to be kept in one's mouth until its salvinorin content has been absorbed. While it can be taken undiluted, it is quite irritating to the mouth if taken in this way. The irritation is due to its high alcohol content. It is better to take it diluted with hot water. The amount of alcohol taken even in a large dose of the extract is not sufficient to produce alcohol intoxication. The effect of the tincture is that of *Salvia*, not that of whiskey. The alcohol is in the tincture solely as a solvent. The tincture comes with two droppers, one for the tincture, and a different one for the hot water. And comes with detailed instructions regarding its use and appropriate dosage. A simple method of using the extract is to dispense the measured dose into a small glass such as a shot glass and then add an approximately equal volume of water that has been heated to the temperature at which one drinks coffee. Immediately after mixing the two, sip the contents of the shot glass, and hold it in your mouth without swallowing. Keep your tongue elevated above the floor of your mouth to allow the sublingual tissues (those under the tongue) to absorb the salvinorin. This means keeping the liquid in your mouth until either the desired effect has been reached or 1/2 hour has passed. Then swallow it or spit it out, whichever you wish.

Quid trips come on slowly but last longer. They are better for exploring *Salvia*'s world. They are better for deep meditation. *Salvia* tincture has the same effects as a quid trip, however the dosage can be adjusted more precisely, the effects come on somewhat faster, and holding the not unpleasant tasting tincture in one's mouth is much nicer than holding chewed up leaves in your mouth. The only side-effects reported that are unique to the tincture have been "burning" of the lining of one's mouth. This occurs if the alcohol in the tincture has not been sufficiently diluted. It

may leave one's mouth mildly sore the next day, in much the way that it would be if you drank soup that was scalding hot. This problem can be prevented by diluting the tincture with enough water.

Until you know how sensitive to Salvia you are, do not experiment with extracts, vaporizers, or salvinorin. Chewing quid, using tincture, or smoking leaves, will take many people all the way to level 5. There is no need for these people to experiment with stronger and more dangerous ways of taking Salvia.

There are some people--albeit a minority--who, even after many experiments, find they remain "Salvia-hardheads." They never experience more than a slight Salvia effect from smoking, or from a quid. Some of these hardheads will get satisfactory results if they chew a quid, and then immediately smoke after spitting out the quid. Others will find even this ineffective. For them, extract-enhanced leaves are necessary to produce effects. See how sensitive you are before experimenting with stronger forms of Salvia. With a little practice, quid chewing, or smoking, or combining the two ("boosting"), works quite well for most people. Many people find it takes several meetings with Salvia before a "breakthrough" experience occurs. So don't label yourself a "Salvia-hardhead" too soon.

### **SITTERS and SAFETY**

A sitter is absolutely essential if you are taking doses on which you may freak out, become confused, injure yourself, fall, set your house on fire, or do anything that might harm others. Have a sitter present if you are new to Salvia, are experimenting with a stronger form than you have used before, or are using a more powerful way of taking it. An experienced Salvia user who is chewing a quid, may often choose to do it alone, and may be quite safe in doing so. But having a pleasant, sensible, sober sitter is an absolute must if you are trying vaporization, smoking extract enhanced leaves, or using pure salvinorin. Smoking leaves usually falls in between in terms of risk. Many people do so without a sitter, but a sitter is never a bad idea. Use sound judgment.

The sitter must remember that no matter how crazy the tripper acts, Salvia trips are short lived. don't take the tripper to the emergency room (unless, of course, there is a true medical emergency). Keep the person safe and wait it out. If you can't keep the person safe, get help. Otherwise keep the matter private. Within an hour or so (usually much less) the tripper will be back to normal. It's very reassuring to hold onto this knowledge if things get messy. It helps to have experienced Salvia yourself before baby-sitting another person. Experience with other visionary materials may be only partially helpful. The sitter should know that Salvia is different from these. Touching to "ground the tripper" works for some trippers on some entheogens, but may be very threatening for someone on Salvia. If you plan on touching, clear it with the tripper before the trip starts.

The most important job of the sitter is to keep the tripper, and others who may be present, safe. This comes before all else. The main danger is accidental injury. Your job is to be a gentle guardian. Be as unobtrusive as possible, but remain alert incase the tripper should suddenly start moving about recklessly. Do not use physical force unless nothing else will do. Use of physical force may result in the tripper or you getting hurt. It could be misinterpreted as an assault. Never let salvia be used where firearms, knives, or other dangerous objects are present. Take the tripper's car keys for safe keeping before the trip starts. Keep the tripper safe from falls, head

banging, sharp objects, walking into walls, walking into furniture, walking through windows, wandering out into the street or other public areas, open flames, hot surfaces, and breakable objects. But let the tripper move about in a safe area. Do not grab or try to physically restrain him/her, unless absolutely necessary. Redirect. Speak softly. Gently take dangerous objects away. Use the minimum touching necessary (the confused tripper may think your touching is an assault or rape and react to the imagined danger). You may have to handle unexpected intrusions of strangers and other awkward social situations.

The second job of the sitter is to reassure. Often, simple repeated explanations may help a frightened tripper, e.g. "You're safe, I won't let anything harm you." "You're just having a bad trip, you'll feel better in a few minutes." "Your name is....." "I'm your friend ....." If speech is not called for, be silent. Silence is often less threatening to the confused tripper than trying to decipher what a sitter is saying.

The third job of the sitter is to help the tripper later recall the trip. There are several ways. Use a notebook and record all the tripper's odd doings and sayings. Later you can ask about these. This may help jog the person's memory about what was experienced. Another technique, if the tripper is not too far gone to talk during the trip, is to ask repeatedly "what are you experiencing now?" A notebook, or a tape recorder, can be used to record responses. Since some trippers will prefer that you remain silent and don't record, clear it with the tripper in advance.

### **COMMON SENSE GUIDELINES**

- Never use Salvia if guns, knives, or other dangerous objects are within easy reach.
- Never drive when taking Salvia.
- Choose the time and place of your trip carefully. Privacy and safety are essential. Be very careful about heights, and open flames such as candles. Do not take Salvia when you may be interrupted by phone calls, visits, pets, children, etc. Turn off your telephone and set your answering machine to silently record incoming calls. You can return the calls in a couple of hours once you are sober.
- Give careful thought to how much you will take, and how you take it.
- After all smoking material is safely out, lie down in bed, on a couch, or on a carpet. You are much safer lying down than you would be stumbling around. Stay put for the rest of the trip. You can trip best with your eyes closed.
- Have a sitter, especially for first time use of Salvia.
- Volunteer to be a sitter for others.
- If you have mental health problems, don't take Salvia without first discussing it with your therapist, or doctor.
- Practice and encourage responsible use. don't give Salvia to minors, or to violent or unstable people. don't share it with strangers. Know who you are giving it to and know why they want to use it. Why ask for trouble?
- Never take Salvia while at work or in public. Keep it private. It's not for concerts. It is not for raves. It's not for large noisy parties. Better to use it in a quiet safe private place in the company of a few good friends.
- Mixing Salvia with other drugs or large amounts of alcohol may cause out-of-control behavior, or terrifying trips. While experienced Salvia users have experimented with combinations, these are not for Salvia beginners, and are certainly riskier than just using Salvia by itself. While there are no known toxic drug-drug interactions between Salvia and anything else, this has not been studied scientifically.

- Be extra careful of flames (candles, lighters, fire, etc.) when using Salvia.
- Be very careful about using vaporized extracts, vaporized leaves, or smoking extract enhanced leaves. These require a sitter to be present. Chewing quid or smoking leaves is much less likely to produce out-of-control behavior than these are.
- Never use pure salvinorin unless the dose you are taking has been weighed with an ultra-accurate balance that can weigh out doses in micrograms, and you know exactly how much you can safely take. Even if you do meet these requirements, you still should have a sitter present.

Having read this far, you now know enough to start on Salvia's green path. Whether you choose to is up to you. If you do, may you always find it a path with a heart. May this most remarkable teacher-plant guide you toward greater self-knowledge, harmony, wonder and joy. As you get to know this miraculous plant, please keep in mind that Salvia's fate is in your hands. For Salvia to remain legal, you and others must use it safely, responsibly, and privately.