

MARIJUANA : ¿ANGEL OR DEMON ?

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Tarapoto, PERU,
8 de marzo de 1997*

Published in the magazine *TAKIWASI*, N° 5, pp 63-77, Tarapoto, **PERU**, 1997

Marijuana (*Cannabis Sativa*) has become in our days a constant theme of debate, therefore it symbolizes the perfect conflict between the supporters of the total liberalization of consumption in psychoactive substance in one hand, and on the other the opponents against all tolerance towards them. These new found positions almost automatically obligate us to choose between these two "closed" options: the first, modestly wraps itself in the cloak of tolerance, liberty and a pseudo "angelical" approach to the "herb"; the second one, demonizes all induced modification states of conscience and evokes horrific figures effectively bloodcurling in the numbers of drugaddicts in the world. When rising the subject to the surface, one risks in becoming the tyrant executioner sent by the "establishment" to sustain moral order, or an irresponsible fallen behind fantasy of a hippie completely unable of facing and dealing with the challenges of the modern world

We wish to open a third position, a mediating road, located at an equal distance from both groups that reinforce themselves mutually by presenting postures that we consider distorted from reality and based to a certain degree on self-deceit if not imposture. However, we would like to direct our priority to the supporters of the unconditional use of cannabis since our position cannot be suspicious for those biased in favor of a blind prohibition in the use of all psychoactive substances. Since the first edition of this magazine we have mentioned that the group that promotes a total prohibition of any psychotropic substance undergoes the risk of threatening the individual liberty, and participates towards a suffocation of indigenous culture which could also finally and disastrously lead to drugtrafficking (Mabit J., 1992). Far beyond the words, the institution of Takiwasi demonstrates throughout its pedagogical and therapeutical activities, with evaluations of psycho-clinical investigation (Giove R., 1996) that a correct and respectful use of the psychoactive plants is not harmful but can also bring forth a powerful and helpful tool in the treatment of drugaddicts.

We believe it is necessary to insist from the beginning about our conviction of the indisputable and unquestionable value of the *Cannabis sativa*. It's medicinal virtues are undeniable, demonstrated and supported within empiric proof for centuries which unfortunately has taken the toll towards blinding our memory for so long and denying its wisdom to seed in the soul. It also possesses aptitudes for the expansion of our conscience and a spiritual education that permit it to classify it without a doubt under the group of sacred or master plants.

It is precisely because of this, as all natural psychoactive substance and of sacred and ancestral use, it screams for deserving another treatment in its use rather than a generalized and blind sentence of conviction, but it cannot also be object of a degrading, indiscriminate, and for that matter a disrespectful use in consumption not exempt from menacing danger. Regrettably, its defenders tend to lend themselves to a position, that far from support strong arguments which can open up the way for tolerance, and instead guide the path for an enormous confusion of criterias which in the end only incite little or none comprehension. We firmly believe it is necessary to throw light on the debate analyzing the actual position of marijuana in our contemporary society, and the distance between speech and facts based on our privileged points of observation.

Contributing factors of the encounter with Marijuana

I believe that it is no longer necessary to demonstrate that the effects of the use of any psychoactive substance depend on three contributing factors: substance, consumer and context.

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Anyone could see the difference between the consumption of a strong adulterated alcohol by a child of twelve years of age in a gang related marginal urban population, from the consumption of quality champagne in the bosom of a family to celebrate a marriage or the ritual use of wine during a Christian Eucharist. It is always about the consumption of a psychoactive substance, in this case alcohol, were there is more than enough scientific case studies demonstrating its potential harmfulness, the risks of addiction and an enormous social and economic cost.. No surgeon would cross its services from morphine in the name of the Macao opium smokers or those of the heroin addicts of Geneva. One does not see campaigns against the abuse of refined sugar and it's addictiveness on top of the increasing health issues it brings upon its consumers and the collective damage that it weighs on an important fraction of society just by this product. And the list goes on...(Mabit, J., 1995).

In the same manner, is the consumption of bhang similar in the initiatic societies or by the yogis in India, or the traditional consumption of hashish by the farmers in Morocco, the playful consumption of "herb" amongst the youth in the urban occidental societies, the mixed consumption of ayahuasca in the Churches of Santo Daime in Brazil and the mixture of cocaine paste in the "ghetto slums" of the marginal neighborhoods of Latin American metropolis? What marijuana are we talking about? To which type of consumption are we referring to?

Substance

When we speak of factors that are related to a substance we refer to its quality and dosage which includes the quantity and frequency of its use. Cannabis has multiple forms of use and various qualities of plants. However, the scientific studies demonstrate a toxic potential already known by traditional societies by how it is pointed out by the famous Alain Daniélou, "the leaf is smashed in between two stones, and soaked in *abundant water, which permits the extraction of the pernicious elements*. An almond milk drink is prepared, mixing the equivalent of a thick olive of Bhang that is ingested by each one with respect." (Daniélou A., 1992). It is about a procedure of detoxification, one which is ingested through cold by the digestive process rather than by the hot respiratory process. The inhalation of smoke modifies the pharmacodynamics of the product: the natural protection is evaded by the digestive barrier and the blood transpulmonary assimilation process is increased meanwhile the combustion generates new metabolites. Daniélou adds, with the authority granted by his forty years of living together intimately with the group of initiated in the India in which he belonged too, that "the practice of smoking hemp is strongly discouraged in India, the toxic elements are not eliminated...

Individual

As for any psychoactive substance there exists a high degree of individual susceptibility, this susceptibility is manifested in the intensity in the immediate effects as well as in the possible dependence. There are individuals that have been affected to a smaller degree to marijuana when comparing to others that respond quickly with strong alteration both in their ideas and their conduct, states of confusion with scattered and unorganized behavior. This factor must not be ignored when proposing the free, outspoken and independent disposition of marijuana.

In the same manner, even though it is cataloged as a "soft drug", it could create upon certain people dependences that are extremely strong towards marijuana. The characteristic of this dependence, according to our observation, are the following:

- ✓ **A gradual distortion of perception of reality:** the slowness and subtleness of this phenomenon does not permit the individual to identify it and make it conscious. Here we are not facing "dramatic" effects comparable to the use of heroin, cocaine paste or crack, for which it is easier for the individual to ignore his own transformation and not clearly identify it.
- ✓ **Phenomenon of awareness:** the perceptual field focuses to a mental level, imperceptibly erasing the emotional affections. The individual progressively substitutes his "heart" for his "mind" and confuses between "feeling" for "thought". Healers would say that their energy is concentrating in their head. Those who consume marijuana intuit very well for the realization of an intellectual job and stimulate their mental capacity. What can also be an inoffensive and temporary use can become a permanent and pathologic way of perceiving the world.

- ✓ **Disembodiment:** the mental hyper arousal provides the sensation of resolving numerous problems, having "great" ideas, understanding complex matters. However it is common to observe that those same individuals have extreme difficulty when the time comes in making their ideas concrete, in inscribing them into the matter, and realizing them in the daily activities. It is known that university students generate "brilliant" ideas for their thesis, the same they can never conclude. We can attempt to illustrate it by saying that the individual expands up in the air and loses grounding on earth, lending itself to dematerialize.
- ✓ **Projection in a virtual reality:** the marijuana addict will believe that thinking and living are the same thing. A great part of his being takes hold of an imaginary or virtual world only perceived or shared in an evanescent form with his peers of consumption. I find this aspect to be dramatic when the spiritual realm is embraced, because it transforms a living spiritual experience into a mere ethereal dream, a brilliant reasoning perhaps but incongruent to daily life, leaving no compromise whatsoever with the ordinary reality. He recreates symbolisms, connections, interpretations that never come to be sanctioned by reality. From there grows an appetite for the esoteric, the magical, the parallel worlds....that permit an easier evasion than the here and now.

Context

The encounter between the substance and the individual is given in a context that has a powerful influence over the effects of the consumption. We find with great frequency that the adept to a free access of marijuana claims its benignity towards the fact that it is a plant which has been consumed for centuries in traditional societies without determining any pathology. However, it is contradictory noting that it is precisely in the contemporary context that those who defend this posture do not belong to any of these traditional societies, do not know them from the inside (something that requires time and dedication) and do not respect their criteria for its use and consumption. Especially, besides the specific mode in which it is ingested, when ignoring indispensable ritual elements for a correct approach to a spiritual dimension inherent in all sacred acts such as ingesting a master plant. The acquisition of this knowledge demands apprenticeship and initiation guided by the same fountains of ancestral wisdom: who has made this effort to follow this road amongst the legion of marijuana consumers (according to a recent official report there are at least 15 million consumers only in the United States)?

The habitual context of marijuana consumption in modern society is a playful priority. It constitutes as a means of identification in marginal surroundings, and manifests a distancing with the formal establishment. Evoking a rebellion of adolescent features located between the messianic-political movement of the "rasta" and an evanescent spirituality free from all connection to an institution or church. Allows sharing with friends without social commitment, evoking a relaxing atmosphere, euphoria, sensual enjoyment where food can eventually be associated, drink and sex. It is for some the end of the day rest or the weekend one, an escape in a pleasing dream where ones imagination is given to run loose, recreating their most imaginative ideas, letting thought digress and wander of rambling, letting go of multiple tensions induced by obligations in the modern world. It is: giving oneself a break, a parenthesis.

The playful aspect should not be turned down and responds to a natural need of the human being. What we find most deplorable is the exclusiveness in which this way of consumption has taken place and the systematization of the contexts of induction that finally exclude all approach to something really sacred and lock the experience of its use in a childish value system or perhaps an adolescent one. It is no longer about rest but about evasion and it is here where the addictive attitude reaps up its plot. In this scheme of consumption the individuals have no incentive to intervene and weave in a social net, manifest active compassion, or be actors in their field. They tend to get stuck on verbal or written speech, many times prolific, reaching verbal diarrhea, maybe brilliant (intellectual fascination) but indigestible (heaviness untranslatable in acts). Some New Age spokesmen seem perfect prototypes of this default: their speeches fascinate the mind, excite our neurons but lack enthusiasm (in-theos) and inspiration from a burning spirit, the only one capable of touching the heart. Finally they become the most passive and submissive individuals when facing a social order which they pretend to avoid and one that they become satisfied fighting verbally without action. In this context, being "cool" seems to evoke a state of resignation rather than authentic serenity.

I cannot but help calling out attention that precisely the consumption of marijuana begins in 90% of the cases in adolescence (12-14yrs). It corresponds to a phase of rejection towards what the adult world has to offer and sees them as boring and pressing. When facing the obligations that stand out there exist the temptation of maintaining childhood, not grown up, preferring fantasy and magic rather than reality that presents itself in a far too sad manner, monotonous, habitual, lacking inspiration, with very little enthusiasm of any kind of spirit of adventure. What is understood as a classic crisis to the changing of age, it becomes worrying when it petrifies the individual at an older age with adolescent behavior. Regular use of marijuana since adolescence with that social context does not help to evolve but tends to keep the individual in a prolonged state of immaturity, reminding us the figure of "puber aeternus", the eternal adolescent".

We understand that it is in a collective context of a society with little stimulating projections for the individual that favor the appetite for this type of evasion. But, we also understand that blaming only society corresponds again to an attitude of neglecting all responsibility of the individual. No one is obligated to smoke marijuana or to continue doing it.

However, the precocious feebleness of an individual that was not able to enter the adolescent stage if not childhood, to structure and shape a very own personality, facilitates the establishment of a dependency towards marijuana. It cannot be ignored that there exists a number of real and serious cases of people who depend on marijuana: some cases arrived here at our Center. And as we already pointed out, it is a dependency hardly recognized by the individual and with a greater reason if the "alternative" context foments a pernicious approval about the benignity of marijuana. The "pothead" feels comforted by the "new age" influence in its assiduous consumption as is the alcoholic in a cultural society constructed around wine. When smoking marijuana is the norm of a group, (students, artists, journalists, etc.) then, who perceives the distortion, if it is widely shared.

No one ignores that the grounds in which it is based is fundamental for a true addiction to install itself. There exists previous background that created the conditions favorable to the development of drug dependencies. But we precisely believe that the great majority of individuals in our post-modern western society do not go beyond a childish and adolescent structure of character. The rites of passage have been lost, no transmission of ancestral knowledge exists, and it has been devalued in relation to the "latest advance of science". The systems of social protection tend to neglect the responsibility of the individuals, etc.: all of society is sick! By this we consider that the individuals apt for falling in love with marijuana are numerous and in that case much greater than those accepted and recognized by the active defendants of marijuana that, and, of course, self-exclude themselves automatically from the group of dependants.

On the other hand, in some cases, once the interest in the "benignity" of marijuana the consumer will seek out more intensive effects exploring his reactions to more powerful substances. In our experience, 90% of the patients in Takiwasi that are in treatment to fight off the destructive cocaine paste, initiated their addiction with the consumption of marijuana. During treatment we observe that the symptoms disappear in regressive order where the first syndromes that are erased are the ones that appeared last. It calls our attention that once the ideas and behavior related to cocaine paste are overcome, just then, the ones produced by marijuana are manifested. On their own, the explosive effects of PBC are difficult to obviate by the same addict, the reality of confronting those of marijuana represent a higher obstacle an even more difficult challenge. A strong resistance and tendency to disassociate the effects of cocaine paste and those of marijuana is noted as if they did not occur on the same individual and supported by the same structure of the personality. Therefore, the treatment for the marijuana addict becomes difficult and many times much more arduous than with other substances apparently more harmful. It is difficult to forget these facts when there is a free access to marijuana.

At Takiwasi, the use of medicinal plants according to the Amazonian shamanic teaching, induces a state clairvoyance and the ability to perceive the energetic body of the patient. The regular consumers of marijuana always manifested opacity in their energetic body, an excessive concentration of energy at a mental level, a lack of earth-center, and at times a disconnection of the physical body and the energetic body. All of this generates confusion and disorder both internally and externally. When an energetic purification is operated with purgative plants (Aristolochia didyma), it is often seen that a blockage of energy exists at a higher hepato-biliary level that often provokes violent and suffered vomits. The access to the teachings given by the

ayahuasca become harder to grasp at first, especially to go deep inside in consciousness and knowledge of oneself, existing a marked tendency to project outside of oneself. What purpose does it serve to stroll about in inter-galactic worlds and have conversations with cosmic beings, baste sophisticated theories and elaborated metaphysics, if one is unable of harmonizing with daily life and regulate the relation with its surroundings? How to build to ascend without previously establishing solid foundations where one could lean on?

Marijuana and Spirituality

Cannabis used in religious acts in various cultures has undeniable benefits. These traditional societies integrate this use inside a sacred context that always includes a ritual inherited from a initiatory tradition. The plant is considered as a master because inside of it inhabits a live spirit, apt to teach how one must approach it. In other words, the ritual is not an imaginary construction of the individual but a code of communication dictated by the same essence of the plant, its nature or proper structure. It is not about an artistic creation based on esthetics nor of as theatre play destined to favor suggestion, where in each one can employ its own priest, but it becomes an operating action, effective, a sacred technology as a result of a long apprenticeship. As with all language, it requires rigor and precision to be efficient and not harmful. The objective is to allow a communication with the essence of the plant, its "soul", a live and intelligent entity.

It is understood that an attitude of profound respect is proposed towards the "gods" and that a sacred act with a sacred plant requires a sacred development both inside as well as outside. Thus, for example, Danielou, insists on the attitude of respect adopted in India that includes a bath ritual, the wearing of clean clothes and specifies that "the spirit of the hemp is upset and offended when one is affected by other activities." (op.cit)

The addiction then is understood as a result of a transgression where the offended spirit of the plant takes possession of the individual. The cure for this possession will be an exorcism destined to calm the interested spirit and convince it to abandon his victim.

He concludes by saying that: "The spirits of the hemp, tobacco, poppy plant, coca leaf, are friendly divinities of man who permit us to soften suffering and open up for the doors of subtle worlds, its prohibition as well as its irrational use are equally wrong and provoke malevolence to the divinities that are being offended." (op. cit)

Many people that find themselves in a path of personal "search", marijuana tends to block their evolution. They get caught up in mental games and sometimes get lost in serious states of confusion that makes them choose inadequate or dangerous conducts as we have been able to observe in various opportunities.

The addiction to marijuana, we repeat, is rarely admitted by the individual. It never ceases to amaze multiple tricks, typical of the need to justify by the addict that is presented by someone dependant of marijuana. This period permits the evaluation of the level of dependency to marijuana. Its "love" is such that no reasonable speech can reach a profound state of total irrationality. However, in a sincere person, you may request to measure the absence of alienation through a trial period without any consumption of cannabis. This period permits the evaluation of the level of dependency to marijuana.

Between the heavy consumer and the one who remains in abstinence, there exists a whole range of states and a relationship more or less stretch with marijuana. Numerous consumers have a control of their consumption just like many people know how to savour a good wine without reaching alcoholism. In this case let us not refer to this as a spiritual quest but simply as a moment of relaxation. The defenders of the use of marijuana point out, and with reason, that many people used to an episodic or regular use can still "function" well. It is understood that their habit does not go to the core of immediate consequences that are harmful to the rest of society. But, I ask myself if the relation with sacred plants deals only with "functioning" and if the absence of obvious consequences at a short period within a social level is not underestimated in a long term period by the progressive detachment of a true citizen participation, by the gradual incapacity of specifically transforming reality for a common well being. The little physical wearing away induced by marijuana reinforces the idea of its safety when the induced disturbance is above all at energetic and psychic-spiritual levels.

Posteriori, some friends whom we considered addicted to marijuana and finally agreed to leave it for a while, could give testimony of an unquestionable improvement physically, psychic and spiritually. To me this counter-proof seems very convincing. The same phenomenon is observed in patients that come to Takiwasi.

The echo of New Age

The phenomenon of awareness finds its echo in certain pseudo-spiritual literature that permits one to float in amicable divagation without major change in the reality. We wish to illustrate it briefly with the example of two prominent figures of the New Age, Castañeda and Osho: any other visit to a "esoteric" library or a international airport transit zone counter will complete the list.

In effect, it is initially surprising the parallelism between the consumer of marijuana and the affinity with the Works of Carlos Castañeda. The "potheads" are perfectly comfortable with this type of literature. This author had the merit to sensitize many people and other aspects of reality and to reveal the existence of a powerful current in Eastern society hungry for spirituality and a change of perspective. He has known how to traduce the contemporary existential uneasiness in a fine and stimulating literary expression. However, he presents a fantastic world without clear methodology to proceed and practically unreachable by a normally constituted individual. On another hand he maintains an absolute silence about the essential: affective life, the daily, the concrete. We are immersed in magic, witchcraft, parapsychology, strange phenomenon...an evanescent world where human beings of flesh and bone do not exist, nor do ordinary and common people such as me and you. We come close to a virtual reality escaping farther away, slipping past all apprehension and with a distinguished speech proper to feed the confusing mind games. Even the same Castañeda seems like a ghost of whom one discusses the authenticity of the experiences, the nationality, the social status, the real level of knowledge and personal evolution. Why so much secret and darkness when there are dozens of thousands of issues being published? Perhaps the truth is hidden, the light is covered? After much walk in the middle of this current of people in search I still hope to find the disciple of Castañeda who can speak clear, transmit with method their experience and demonstrate in person an evident advance of personal evolution. Castañeda allows us to dream but he does not proportion the recipe to make the dream come true: there is where I see its affinity with smoked hemp in our society, finding it volatile and disembodied, seductive and confusing.

I would like to briefly quote the influential Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, promoter of the consumption of marijuana and of a philosophy of undifferentiated love. The invasion of his books goes hand in hand with an inflation of the ego which is more convincing for his supporters when more unbelievable. The "illuminated master" does not doubt to sharply affirm: "I am the beginning of a totally new conscience", nothing less. According to our observation, the supporters of Osho show an important disorder with ordinary reality and in healing sessions with Amazonian plants, they reveal great energetic disturbances. Marijuana and indiscriminate sex are the basic tools utilized by Osho to seduce and transmit to new disciples. Responding to a typical western tendency of consumerism, libertinism confused with freedom, evasion of suffering, and a blind devotion to a guru who assumes the pseudo role of an irresponsible father. Involution by means of fusion and undifferentiation (especially in sex) opposes to the path of individuation (in junguian terms) and differentiation that obligatory goes through the crossing of suffering and solitary confrontation with oneself.

It is important to note that both "gurus" that preach the detachment to material things do not distinguish for being particularly uninterested in money and material goods.

The introduction to smoking marijuana in the Brazilian rituals of Santo Daime (ayahuasca) has been the preponderance factor in the split of the initial group of the "maestro Irineu", stimulating the conflicts and competence, according to the confessions made by his wife to us. It acted as an element of division and confusion, inflating the ego of some disciples and escalating to successive schisms: now there exists more or less than ten different sects. That improvised association seems to respond more to the demand of urban sectors than coming from the initiation of ayahuasca. Shamans of the Peruvian Amazon that we know reject sharply the smoking of marijuana during a session with ayahuasca. However, being a dynamic medicine

always available to enrich us with new contributions, promoting an empiric investigation with an end to explore the virtues of this sacred plant. They possess a methodology of which is basically for it to enter entheogens prepared visionary trance to then progressively ingest an infusion or decoction to "see" the spirit of the plant and establish a respectful negotiation with it. It is understood that this procedure needs experience and adequate preparation from teachers and not only the daring of rookies.

Conclusion

I fear that the primary defenders of the unconditional use of marijuana might be finally the best providers for arguments in favor of its prohibition. Great part of it is owed to the irresponsible use when facing a social risk: it cannot be ignored that a child or an adolescent is not apt for the consumption of a substance without guide that can potentially confuse him or her, making the individual an addict and possibly inducing them to greater dependencies. That is why its free disposition is unacceptable as an inoffensive product and it is also unacceptable as a blind prohibition. I fear that a number of adults in our society do not have more than 12 years of age in their psycho-affective maturity... All debate about the legality requires a previous consideration on the criteria of legitimacy.

When using the ancestral use as a reference, it would also be honest to specify that marijuana should not be smoked according to this ancient wisdom and there exists precise conditions for its correct ingestion. Then we would have to distinguish between the uses of marijuana: medical, recreational or religious. Each one requires a different mode of preparation and a context of ingestion that is adequate. An entheogenic plant can be applied at those three levels. If preparing a relaxing infusion is what it's about, one does not require a complicated and long ritual because what is being asked from the plant is only a physical effect. But if one is asking the plant for a lesson, a discovery of the subtle worlds or an exploration of the unconscious, the indicated ritual with an interior attitude of sincere consideration becomes indispensable for not operating a promethean transgression that only ends in harm and damage.

Marijuana is not substance, term which gives it objectivity but strips it from its live dimension, energetic and spiritual. The habitual mode of its contemporary use reduces it to a simple product of consumption in a typical attitude of western materialism. Here is where we find strict opponents and bitter defenders: both rigid followers of a vicious materialism, promoting agents of a mental dictatorial, confused in the group of those who deny the heart. As Daniélou wisely concludes: "It is because of their misunderstanding of the subtle reality of the world modern materialism became its victim"

It is about time to find a path that permits protection to the access of these sacred plants, creating the conditions for a respectful approach, controlled, guided, safety guaranteed and an authentic spiritual experience. The western motto "everything now and at no cost", the same that addicts use as perfect representatives of a deconsecrated society, has no validity in this third way. This motto typifies an addictive attitude, psychic matrix that regrettably predominates between the consumers of marijuana. The solution will be progressive, not immediate and with an individual as well as collective cost, including for all their share of suffering freely accepted.

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