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## DECISIONS ABOUT DRUGS

A Letter to Students

from Allan Y. Cohen, Ph. D.

Maybe you turn on; maybe not. Perhaps you favor the legalization of marijuana; or possibly you think that all drug users are "dope fiends." But one thing is clear -- if you are a young American, you can't ignore the issue of drugs.

Our society encourages the idea of using drugs. "Cure your pains via chemicals!" That's the message of TV, radio and other advertising media. Adults set a powerful example -- that all-too-necessary cigarette, the booze before dinner, "diet" pills, sleeping pills, tranquilizers and so on. No wonder that most kids do experiment with drugs; the non-experimenter is the exception in many communities. Adults don't seem to see the naturalness of experimentation, of turning on and hoping to feel better.

Some parents see young people who use drugs as criminals, degenerates or just plain evil. They want stronger laws to punish their children (who are usually just following their elders' example.) These adults ignore the causes of drug abuse and shut their ears to the real concerns of youth. As you know, this attitude seems like a silly approach to an important issue.

### Honest Information About Drugs

You need the facts to make rational decisions about using drugs. Once you have the relevant information about drug effects and alternatives to drugs, you'll probably come up with appropriate conclusions.

Well, what are the issues? I've had to face them personally. For three years, I turned on and urged my friends to do likewise. I felt that getting high was "where it's really at".

You know, there is a new blaze of interest in the exploration of one's mind and experience, related to a search for meaning and happiness. It's a significant search for answers to very important questions: "Who am I?" and "What am I doing here?" I once thought that drugs (especially LSD, mescaline and others) would supply some answers to these questions -- and without much risk. I "tuned in, turned on and dropped out" along with many close friends, using psychedelics for three years. Later, I stopped.

I saw a friend have a terrible trip ~~that~~ never ended. He was put in a mental hospital after trying to kill his wife and child a number of days after he turned on. Strangely, he was well-prepared for his psychedelic journey. He had successfully dropped acid and smoked dope before. During this particular trip, he took "pure" LSD. (Presently, most of the drugs bought from the black market are incredibly impure and contain dangerous substances. The people who make money out of manufacturing and selling drugs aren't very interested in quality control.) He took it in the best setting imaginable, with the most competent guides. I tried to toss it off as a one in a million cases. But then again,....

### What About Pot?

We also smoked a lot of grass (pot, weed--marijuana). We didn't know much about the physical effects of grass and the psychedelics. All along, it wasn't hard to see that heroin, speed and other addictive drugs really blew your body and mind -- a very bad scene indeed. But I remember thinking that acid wasn't very harmful and that marijuana and hashish were probably even good for some people.

Well, we know better now. You are probably acquainted with the research on LSD and the strong psychedelics -- probable chromosome damage with high doses, possible damage to brain and liver tissues, etc.

But what about pot? You might be surprised that marijuana--the plant--isn't really what gets you high. It's the active ingredient that does the trick -- a chemical called THC. Hopefully, people will forget their old prejudices and realize the marijuana issue boils down to the question of the effects of THC.

Certain things are already clear. Research in Kentucky suggests that THC is a psychedelic drug and a powerful one. By weight, it may be stronger than any psychedelic except LSD itself. The early physiological research isn't going to make many potheads very happy. At this point, there is no reason to think that THC doesn't have exactly the same effects as LSD. Studies have shown that THC can produce wild hallucinations and painful psychoses, as well as destroying and deforming the offspring of laboratory animals. And the possibility of chromosomal damage cannot be discounted, even if the damage is temporary.

The myth of pot as a narcotic has been destroyed, once and for all. Those who argue that marijuana and hashish be kept under narcotics laws have no scientific leg to stand on. On the other hand, the myth of its harmlessness is also fading. The question of greatest importance now seems to be:

"How much THC (through marijuana and hash) do you have to take before these invisible symptoms catch up to you?" When you are making decisions about marijuana use, just remember that you may experience the same effects on body and mind as from taking frequent small doses of LSD.

### Drugs and Your Head

That brings us to the psychological issue. Do drugs make you permanently happier? Do they really help you to have fun? Do they assist you to become more peaceful, loving and interested in life?

After years in our little psychedelic community, I couldn't help realizing that drugs don't make better people. There were still laziness, arguments, lack of consideration, sexual jealousies and fear. It added up to "psychedelic hypocrisy." Just hours after seeing friends on a magnificent, enlightening trip, I watched them fight over who should do the dishes that morning. Sure, we talked love, brotherhood and God, and we were sincere; but if anyone became honest and objective, he admitted that drugs were not as advertised.

As I look back, I recall how drugs (especially grass and psychedelics) inflate peoples' egos: "I know where it's at...I've taken more trips than you...There's nothing left for me to learn." I have heard statements like those hundreds of times, originally from my own thoughts; more recently from some University of California drug users whom I saw during my two years as a counseling psychologist at Berkeley.

You know, drugs like LSD and pot can fake out the most intelligent and sincere people. They create a subtle self-delusion, dangerous because it is so subtle. Many acid-heads and almost all pot users never look for any bad side effects, so they never notice them.

For those of you who might want to ask yourself (or a friend) if the danger line has been crossed, here are some things to watch out for:

- ( 1) problems in concentrating.
- ( 2) a failing memory.
- ( 3) decrease in mathematical ability.
- ( 4) creeping paranoia, feelings of persecution, or thinking that certain people or institutions are getting more hostile to you.
- ( 5) exaggerated feelings of self-confidence or growing underlying feelings of inferiority.
- ( 6) passivity, loss of energy and lack of desire to do things except "lie back and groove."

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- ( 7) difficulty in speech, feeling you can't get thoughts into words.
- ( 8) increasing hangups in close relationships, especially with parents and those of the opposite sex.
- ( 9) greater impulsiveness, flying off the handle easily.
- (10) feelings of the futility of life and hopelessness about your own future, and
- (11) a total denial on your part that drugs might be harmful for you.

If you turn on and many of these signs apply to you, the symptoms could be caused from an accumulative overdose of THC (from pot) or from other mind-altering substances. It would be very hip of you to turn off for a while, say three weeks, to see if these signs improve and to discover how dependent you are on getting high.

Of course one of the big hassles with any drug (including tobacco and alcohol) is the dependency thing. The drug ethic says you can't get really "high" unless you take a chemical. That doesn't sound like freedom or fun to me; it sounds like psychological slavery. You know darn well that drugs can't really work, because every time you go up, you come down. And often, you are left a lot more "down" than you were before.

#### Knowing the Unknowable

But wait, I hear echoes of my own voice saying, "So what if there is a possibility of physical damage to brain cells or serious creeping emotional disorders? Isn't it worth the risk if you can really 'find yourself;' maybe even get a glimpse of God?" This is a crucial point, particularly with the growing interest in expanding consciousness. But is the chemical brand of consciousness (or spirituality) authentic?

Some of the people who dig drugs want us to believe that chemicals are a shortcut to the realization of God. The psychedelic proselytizers are riding the crest of the wave of current involvement in things like meditation and "mysticism." ("Mysticism" includes those sciences of self-discovery emphasizing that God is in all of us as infinite consciousness and can be attained in actual experience, usually through Love.)

But what do the real mystics say? What are the statements of those who really know, who have permanently attained higher states of consciousness? I did a lot of personal research on this question. It was fascinating and surprising to discover that every valid mystic and authentic spiritual authority stated that the use of drugs hinders one's progress in consciousness and spiritual development.



In 1964, I learned of one extraordinary spiritual master named Meher Baba (who passed away early in 1969). Meher Baba is felt to be a manifestation of God in human form, the Messiah, Avatar or Christ, the supreme spiritual authority of our time. Sincere letters to India from psychedelic users elicited his compassionate reply:

"The (drug) experience is as far removed from Reality as is a mirage from water. No matter how much one pursues the mirage, one will never reach water and the search for God through drugs must end in disillusionment. An individual may feel that LSD has made a better man of him, socially and personally, but one will be a better man through Love than one can ever be through drugs. LSD is harmful physically, mentally and spiritually."

All of my experience in the last eight years has led me to conclude that Baba is 100% right --right about the uselessness of drugs for finding oneself, and right about the possibility of developing real higher consciousness without chemicals. I saw that drug users did not live more enlightened lives, even though they thought they did.

### Waking Up

The best of drug experiences is like a dream, a dream that can lull you deeper asleep, even when you desperately need to wake up. This is very clear after you begin to wake up. Personally, I found Meher Baba's non-chemical approach to higher consciousness so much superior to drugs that turning on would bring me down. It seems to me that truth, love and real freedom exist inside us. Attachment to chemicals and other material things is an obstacle in the path to real happiness. So many young people are finding this out that turning on with drugs is "out" and putting down is "in".

It bothers me when adults put down young drug experimenters so casually. Many students are sincerely looking for something better, perhaps for real meaning and happiness or relief from the boredom or hollowness in materialistic life. But kids shouldn't have to feel guilty about their past drug use. What's past is past. The important thing is the decision you make now. Today is the first day of the rest of your life.

To those of you who are searching, I can only offer encouragement to your best instincts. There are ways to discover the fountain of inner happiness. But the use of drugs is not one of them.



After years of experience and close observation, I have to conclude that the drug game is, at best, a waste of time. What game is worthwhile?, you ask. Well, I can't think of a better way to close than with this quote from Meher Baba:

"To penetrate into the essence of all being and significance, and to release the fragrance of that inner attainment for the guidance and benefit of others, by expressing, in the world, truth, love, purity and beauty--this is the sole game which has any intrinsic and absolute worth. All other happenings, incidents and attainments can, in themselves, have no lasting importance."

#### Further References

1. On the physical and emotional effects of drugs:

Send for the bibliography of scientific and other studies supplied by The Committee for Psychedelic Drug Information, Box 851, Berkeley, Calif. 94701. (Stamped, self-addressed envelope, please.)

2. On the spiritual effects of drugs:

Send for "God in a Pill?", a compilation of statements relating to spiritual aspects of psychedelic and marijuana use. (Twenty-five cent donation to Sufism Reoriented, 1290 Sutter Street, San Francisco 94109)

3. On alternatives to drugs:

Send for a reading list from Sufism Reoriented, 1290 Sutter Street, San Francisco 94109. (Suggested introductory reading: What Am I Doing Here? By Ivy O. Duce (\$1.25) and Discourses, Vols. I-III by Meher Baba (\$4.25) --both available at above address.