

CANNABIS AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

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photo by Bhumika Bhatia

The use of cannabis as spiritual practice is not new. In the ancient Hindu Vedas which may have been compiled as early as 2000 B.C.E., the plant is revered as one of the five sacred plants and its use recommended to relieve anxiety, to bring joy, and to facilitate meditation.

As we are now in the 21st century emerging from a 70-year period of prohibition in this country, one might be tempted to ask, why all the controversy? What part of 5000 years of safe and effective use do we not understand?

Lingering concerns about buzzed driving or use by minors aside, the main controversy seems to be a matter of ethics. Is it morally acceptable to get high—to alter one’s state of consciousness by any means and for any purpose? In our materialist culture the official answer is ‘no’, but that paradigm is changing.

We tend to rely on materialist science and technology for solutions to life’s various challenges. Any state of consciousness other than “consensual reality” is distrusted as at best unproductive and at worst pathological. Contrast that with the ancient Spirit-based cultures we now disdain as primitive or superstitious.

Lacking our digital technology, they discovered that the realms of non-ordinary consciousness held untapped resources of wisdom and healing. Long before the advent of the Common Era, they explored and cataloged these realms. They also discovered various “technologies of the sacred”—safe and effective means of accessing these states and bringing back much needed wisdom from them.

The cannabis plant, being a mild psychedelic or entheogen is one of these technologies. Even though its effects are relatively mild in most cases, it is a powerful and sacred tool that deserves to be treated with care and respect. Used reverentially and with proper intention, it is capable of ushering its initiates into the realm of *savikalpa samadhi*, the portal of mystical or unitive consciousness.

So what is the spiritual use of cannabis and how does it differ from medical or recreational use? The principle effect of cannabis is the induction of a visionary trance state. In recreational or medicinal uses, this state is secondary in importance. But with spiritual use, this state is the primary focus and purpose of the session. Other characteristics of spiritual use are that it tends to be solitary, infrequent, high dose and introspective. With that in mind, the following are some guidelines to maximize the good inherent in this sacred herb:

- 1) **Intent is important.** Setting a clear and positive intention for the experience creates a metaphysical blueprint for success. A well-known principle of metaphysics states that thought determines experience.
- 2) **Create a safe and sacred space for the experience to unfold.** This includes a comfortable and aesthetically pleasing environment free from cares and distractions. This also includes a definite space in time where one will not be pressured by interruptions, phone calls, or intruded upon by anything or anyone from the outside world. Allow at least 3 hours of sacred time space for this purpose. You deserve it!
- 3) **Give careful attention to “set” and “setting”.** “Set” refers to what one brings to the experience in terms of thoughts, intentions and physical condition. “Setting” refers to the external environment. If one is not in a place that feels comfortable, or is experiencing fatigue, illness or emotional upset, the experience should be postponed to a later time.
- 4) **Consider means of ingestion and dose.** Even though it is impossible to ingest a lethal overdose of cannabis, it is still possible to have too much of a good thing as those of us who have lived through moments of fear, paranoia, restlessness or racing heartbeat can attest. Usually such symptoms are quick to pass and can be mitigated by walking, focused breathing or finding other ways to temporarily distract the mind. But the best course is prevention by controlling the dose. When cannabis is vaped or smoked, this is easy to do since the full effects of each toke are evident within 3-4 minutes. With edibles, regulating dose is more difficult since the delay between ingestion and onset can be up to 2 hours. So take it slow. It is better to be underwhelmed than overwhelmed. Fortunately, with the rise of a legal and regulated cannabis industry, packaged edibles are

clearly labeled with the amount of THC (the psychoactive alkaloid in cannabis) they contain. An “average” dose of THC in an edible is 10 mg. But it needs to be noted that individual sensitivity varies greatly from person to person and even from day to day in the same person. So take it slow.

- 5) **Meditative techniques and benefits.** Cannabis and meditation naturally go together. This is because the visionary trance state induced by cannabis is virtually identical to the deep contemplative states reached by adept meditators. And while some of them might be unwilling to admit it, the states of consciousness available through cannabis use can even be deeper than those achieved by seasoned meditators without the years of discipline and training. With cannabis, meditation usually happens spontaneously without effort. All one need do is still the body, turn within and release resistance. Everything else just happens. Some meditation purists suggest that the use of cannabis to achieve these states is artificial and ultimately impedes spiritual progress. The truth of the matter is that any and all forms of spiritual practice impede progress if they are looked at as ends in themselves. Spiritual practice of any type should be regarded as “training wheels” toward the goal of Self-realization which is in effect the ongoing and stable realization of our Divinity—our oneness with the One of all existence. So we meditate with or without cannabis to remind ourselves Who we really are. By stilling our thoughts, which is to say becoming less a pursuer and more an observer of them, we develop the mental habits of being less reactive and more at conscious choice. These habits then carry over into the rest of our lives resulting in less stress and collateral damage and more ease and grace as we move through life.

I feel honored and privileged to be able to share with you the use of this “technology of the sacred” and to share together with you the sacred realms that bind us all as One. Should you have any questions or desire further spiritual guidance of any kind, please don’t hesitate to contact me at (760) 364-9097 or tesheron@aol.com.

Namaste.