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## RESPONSE TO SHOULD I SMOKE DOPE DOCUMENTARY

The botanical name *Cannabis sativa* may sound unfamiliar but the names Indian hemp, marijuana, weed, dope, or pot is far more likely to register with anyone over 13 years of age. Marijuana is an herb that has existed for thousands of years. Initially, the plant stem was harvested and was employed in making strong fibers for the maritime industry. The fibers were used especially in those places where strength and durability were of the essence. Earlier, other uses of cannabis were discovered among the Sumerians who employed the herb in their religious rituals in order to enable their priests and acolytes to fall into trance. Other rituals, which they performed, included the use of different psychoactive plants like some species of mushrooms.

Several peoples of other cultures used the herb as well, for example the Chinese. Archeologists have discovered evidence of usage of the hemp plant in making ropes, paper and fishing nets. Some facts, pointing to its usage as a food source, date as far back as to the Stone Age. When the extraction process for the plant was eventually developed, resins and extracts from the plants were employed for medicinal purposes, to cure or provide relief of pain. However, it ultimately lost out in the ideological



conflict about the place of the psycho-stimulant of choice for Chinese practitioners of former times. Opium became the psycho-stimulant of choice for the Chinese and the use of Indian hemp was restricted to the usage of fibers that could be extracted from its stem.

In several countries the legality of marijuana use has been a subject of debate for a while. The issue has more recently come to the fore specifically because of its medical application for people with HIV and various forms of cancer. The drug has a calming effect on the digestive system as well as a sedative effect on various aches and pains. Today many cancer sufferers have properly documented permits for using marijuana as it helps alleviate the pains that are typical of cancer. It also helps sufferers to take their food and more crucially their drugs, because intake of marijuana gives a massive appetite (this last property is of special importance for AIDS patients). Glaucoma patients are another group of people who have legal permits to own and use marijuana as a palliative for their eye conditions. People with kinetic disorders like Tourette's, Parkinson's and Huntington's chorea as well as other medical conditions like neuropathy, muscular spasticity (like MS), and migraines have medically verified reasons for the use of cannabis.

Now apart for the strictly medicinal smoking of marijuana, there is more widespread but illegal (in most countries) smoking of cannabis for recreational purposes and this is where the problem lies. Social workers, psychologists and the general public view marijuana as a harmful substance and probably more importantly as a gateway drug. The term gateway drug implies that the use of marijuana actually exposes the user to other stronger psycho-stimulants, including the opiate class of drugs such as heroin. The claim is well-grounded. Most people who have ruined



their lives by drug addiction often point to marijuana as the first step on the road to addiction. If a young person succumbs to peer pressure and takes a puff of weed, s/he significantly increases his/her chances of being convinced to try something even stronger than just marijuana. In addition, a joint could actually be a cocktail of several compounds that might be unknown to a user.

As it stands the Netherlands is the only country that shows tolerance for marijuana use. The fact has led to an upsurge of tourists who want the freedom of so-called legal highs. It results in the erroneous notion that the drug is legal in the Netherlands. The fact is that the cannabis is highly controlled and can be enjoyed only in many “coffee” shops around the country. The BBC documentary *Should I smoke dope?* actually shows that specifically in Amsterdam the coffee shops sell very carefully monitored varieties of marijuana that are graded on different kinds of portions which they give to customers. However, smoking cannabis on the streets will get you in trouble with the police. In the UK, cannabis was downgraded from a class B drug to a Class C drug. According to the new legal status, the penalty for dealing the drug is unchanged, but the penalty for using it or being caught in possession of it is much less than it was when it had B status.

Not including legal and non-legal issues, the question is whether dope should be smoked or not. Pain relief, calmness, relaxation, appetite and anti-emetic effect make up a spectrum of advantages that are provided by marijuana. But does smoking of this drug have any deleterious effect? As the documentary evidences, cannabis smoking does very serious damage to the airways of a smoker. The video points to the conclusion that a cigarette with pure cannabis does as much damage as will do three

regular tobacco cigarettes. It is important to mention that lung tissue, unlike any other tissue in the human body, is particularly ponderous when it comes to healing or getting rid of damage. Consequently, any damage that is done to lung tissue and the cartilaginous airways is essentially irreversible. And marijuana smokers are very liable to suffer from lung collapse due to the damage done to their lung tissues.

It is also mentioned in the movie that a prolonged use of cannabis can double the risk of psychosis. Putting that in layman's parlance, one could lose their marbles from smoking cannabis. It is important to note that susceptibility to such an effect is genetically determined. It means that some people are genetically predisposed to suffering extensive damage, while others are more resistant to the effects of the same substance.

If the above facts are not sufficient to dissuade anyone from starting or continuing cannabis use, there is the emerging news from the authorities that the dope being smoked on the streets today is three times more powerful than it was about ten years ago. Even when compared to the cannabis that is available abroad, the current UK street variety is much more potent. Unfortunately, in the last year tests have shown that the marijuana, which is available on the streets, is adulterated with glass beads. Normally, cannabis has some beads on it that are actually resins containing Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC is the active ingredient in cannabis. Today, instead of the active resin, people are inhaling molten glass beads that have been ground into the cannabis which is sold on the streets. It cannot be healthy by any means.

By trial and error vendors of marijuana have developed skunk, which is a homegrown variety of cannabis containing higher concentration of THC



than it is normally obtained in cannabis. It is particularly significant because THC alone has mind altering properties. The video showed the subjects who were exposed to THC and had a significant change in mood. They became depressed and admitted to the desire to take the drug (the obvious option here would be a chemically induced drug). It lends credence to the opinion that cannabis is indeed a gateway drug. Instability of mental and emotional state over time can cause development of psychosis, especially if a person, who experiences these chemically induced instabilities, is genetically predisposed to psychosis like schizophrenia.

Even regular cannabis is not safer at all as it is able to alter perception of a smoker. A test, carried out in the documentary, showed that both coordinative and cognitive skills were significantly impaired and even diminished by minuscule amounts of cannabis. Consequently, it is not hard to imagine that with prolonged usage of this substance, the mental abilities of a smoker will experience a significant decline in acuity. Such a person could face a range of mental issues ranging from impaired memory and dementia to schizophrenia. Everyday use of marijuana actually reduces the productive capacity of a person. The time that is spent spaced out or high is actually the time when no meaningful productivity is going on.

It is essential to consider all of the facts again. Smoking of marijuana will cause irreversible pulmonary damage; it will also diminish cognitive and coordinative abilities. Its usage can increase a likelihood of developing psychosis up to 3 times or more, depending on the genetic predisposition of a user. Finally, as if the above is not bad enough, it is known that glass beads are included in newer varieties of skunk that additionally contain

more THC, a psychoactive ingredient. There is no sufficient evidence to prove that smoking marijuana by a healthy person has any advantage whatsoever. In essence smoking dope is impossible unless your longevity and sanity is of no value to you.

