

Why Islam Prohibits the Recreational Use of Marijuana

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Marijuana is the most widely used illegal narcotic in the United States and Europe. According to some annual surveys, after 2007, more teenagers smoked marijuana than cigarettes in the United States. Many young Muslims need to become aware of the Islamic position on marijuana because of its popularity. Does Islam condone the use of marijuana? Does Islam forbid it? If Islam forbids it, what does it say about cases of medical necessity? It is imperative that young Muslims know the answers to these questions. One must refer to religious authorities in order to ascertain the Islamic position on this drug. These authorities review the verses of the Quran, the prophetic traditions and Islamic principles in order to derive religious rulings. Various schools of thought within Islam agree on some fundamental principles. Sayyid Ali Khamenei, a religious authority and the current head of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was asked a question about the use of drugs, including marijuana

The following is quoted from his book Practical Laws of Islam:

"Q[uestion]1392: What is the ruling in the matter of using narcotics, such as hashish, opium, heroin, morphine, and marijuana, be it by way of eating, drinking, smoking, injecting or applying them anally? And what is the view on selling, buying, and dealing in them in general, i.e., carrying, transporting, storing, or smuggling? A[nswer]: It is haram [religiously forbidden] to use narcotics in any way because it results in considerable adverse effects in terms of personal health and social cost. By the same token, it is haram to deal in narcotics in any way, i.e., carrying, transporting, storing, selling, buying, etc."

Sayyid Ali Sistani, another popular religious authority currently residing in Iraq who oversees the Islamic Seminary in Najaf, was asked about hashish. Hashish is a drug which is derived from the same plant as marijuana. Marijuana is derived from the dried flowering tops of the cannabis plant while hashish is made from the resin and is more potent. They are both classified as cannabis. On his website he is asked about the Islamic ruling of the consumption of hashish. He states: "It is impermissible."

Sunni scholars also prohibit the use of marijuana. As an example, in the question-and-answer section of the sunnipath website Shaykh Muhammad bin Adam al-Kawthari of Dar al-Iftaa in Leicester states: "Drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, opium, etc are all unlawful (haram) due to the various harms connected with them." He then establishes that marijuana is an intoxicant and supports his verdict with a tradition from Sahih al-Bukhari which states that the Messenger of God said: "Every intoxicant is prohibited."

One can examine the effects of marijuana on one's brain in order to understand why it is religiously prohibited. Most drugs, including marijuana, produce a 'high' by stimulating brain cells to release a chemical called dopamine. The active ingredient in marijuana, delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, commonly referred to as THC, stimulates specific receptors in the brain called cannabinoid receptors. When these receptors are activated THC interferes with normal brain functioning. Most of the cannabinoid receptors are found in parts of the brain that influence pleasure, memory, thoughts, concentration, sensory perception, and coordinated movement.

Marijuana disables one's ability to create new memories. Memories are formed in a part of the brain called the hippocampus. THC alters how information is stored in this area of the brain. The majority of evidence supporting impaired memory stems from studies performed on animals. A study performed on rats shows that rats exposed to THC in utero or adolescence displayed severely impaired memory in the later stages of their lives. The hippocampus of these rats' brains even showed structural changes as they aged. Balance is regulated in the cerebellum and basal ganglia. THC interferes with the normal functioning of these parts of the brain leading to a loss of coordination. Therefore, driving while under the influence of marijuana is incredibly dangerous. Furthermore, the performance of difficult tasks and athletics in this state would be greatly impaired.

Finally, marijuana also affects cannabinoid receptors found in the cerebral cortex. The cerebral cortex is responsible for sensory perception. Therefore, THC may cause one to have an altered sensory experience in areas such as taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing. A few supporters of marijuana approached me and tried to argue a case for the permissibility of this drug. One of the arguments that they used was that marijuana does not intoxicate; rather it merely relaxes one who consumes it and increases their appetite. This argument cannot stand up to the scientific evidence.. First, THC stimulates brain cells to release dopamine which causes one to become intoxicated. Then, it impairs one's memory, disrupts one's coordination, and alters one's sensory perceptions. Therefore, marijuana is definitely an intoxicant.

There is another group of Muslims who ask about the use of marijuana in specific circumstances. For instance, they state that cannabis can be used as an effective analgesic for pain relief, can be used as an effective treatment of glaucoma, and can stop breast cancer from spreading to other areas of the body, thus becoming a non-toxic alternative to chemotherapy.

Apparently, one would be able to consume cannabis if the treatment of these, or other,

diseases is dependent upon it and a trustworthy physician prescribes it. Once again, in Practical Laws of Islam, Sayyid Khamenei was asked "Is it permissible to use narcotic drugs for the treatment of diseases? And assuming that it is permissible is it absolutely permissible or in case that it is the only way of treatment?" (Question 1393) His answer was: "There is no objection to it provided that the treatment and the eventual recovery are dependent on their use and it is prescribed by a trustworthy physician."

Due to the popularity of marijuana amongst teenagers in the United States and Europe, it is imperative that young Muslims know the Islamic stance on the drug. Religious authorities have clearly stated that the narcotic is religiously prohibited. One of the reasons that it is prohibited is because it is an intoxicant which, in addition to stimulating the brain to release dopamine, affects one's memory, coordination, and sensory perception. Therefore, Muslim youth must be weed-free and "just say no."

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