

## The Cannabis Creed

Human beings have been using cannabis since we have been human, and maybe before. We first encountered cannabis during the Paleolithic era, after our march out of Africa led us to Central Asia, where the plant originated.

It was probably by the side of a river. When we were hunter gatherers, rivers often provided our most reliable source of food. The abundance of fish allowed us to stop moving, for at least a little while. In order to access the river, in order to have living space and pathways, we began to clear the plants growing on the river side. Recently cleared land of this type is the perfect environment for cannabis, so it began to grow in and close to human settlements.

Being an annual plant, it was inevitable that we humans would encounter dead and decaying cannabis in our immediate environment. Any cannabis farmer can tell you that decaying cannabis plants are distinctive because the fibers that make up cannabis stalks become visible over time. Hemp fiber is the perfect material for making string, rope and nets—all essential items to a people that rely on fish as a food source. It didn't take long for us to make that connection and start making our fishing tools and many other things out of hemp. Cannabis may have been our very first industrial raw material.

At some point, we discovered the nutritional, psychoactive and therapeutic properties of the plant and began to consume it. We may have been foraging for food, seeking the seeds nestled inside a flower. Or maybe we discovered the properties of cannabis as we searched for grasses to burn in the portable containers in which we carried fire, and maybe over time those containers evolved into the first pipes. Or maybe not. We may never know for sure.

One of the tragedies of Prohibition is that it deterred many generations of archeologists from studying the ancient use of cannabis. This is beginning to change with the work of younger scholars who are less blinded by stigma, but there is much that remains unknown.

What we do know is that the earliest archeological find of consumed cannabis thus far dates from 10,000 BCE and places cannabis squarely in a spiritual context. A bag of cannabis resin-- what we would call hashish today, was found next to the body of a shaman buried in a cave alongside the Kunar River, which flows from the Hindu Kush mountain range in modern-day Pakistan, close to eastern Afghanistan.

Shamanism is the earliest form of human spiritual practice. It is distinguished from religion in that shamanism has no doctrine, no religious texts, and no priesthoods. In shamanic practice, the connection with the divine is unmediated, and often facilitated with visionary substances. During this connection, the shaman receives answers and truths unavailable in a state of baseline consciousness.

The cave discovery lies on the far eastern edge of a region known in antiquity as Bactria. Casting our eyes west to what is now called Central Asia, we find archeological evidence that cannabis had been incorporated into more structured religious practice, a form of proto- Zoroastrianism centered around fire temples, by around 2000 BCE. Archeologists have found jars containing the botanical residue of cannabis, ephedra, and opium in these temples.

To the west of Bactria and stretching all the way to Black Sea was a vast region known as Scythia, what we would today call the Eurasian Steppes. It was populated by a wide array of nomadic

tribes collectively known as Scythians. The Scythians were lovers of cannabis, and also one of the first tribes to domesticate the horse. This enhanced mobility gave them great geographic range, and the Scythians were one of the prime factors in the spread of cannabis westward from Bactria.

Archeologists working in this region have uncovered botanical evidence of the sacramental use of cannabis over the course of many millennia from multiple Scythian sites, including ceremonial pottery that was used first to prepare and ingest cannabis during the funeral ceremonies, and then placed in the graves of the deceased.

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus, writing around 450 BCE, confirmed this archeological evidence, describing both sacramental and less formal cannabis use among Scythian tribes.

He said on more casual occasions, cannabis was just tossed on a campfire. The resulting vapor was inhaled, maybe through reeds, and eventually the participants would begin to sing and dance. But Herodotus also confirmed the archeological evidence that cannabis was an essential part of funerals, describing special funeral tents that would be built and filled with heated rocks, and cannabis placed on the rocks, and the resulting smoke or vapor inhaled.

Some Scythian tribes apparently made the ritual consumption of cannabis the core of their spiritual lives. One of these tribes, the Mysians, lived in what is now eastern Turkey, but was then called Phrygia. After the Mysians adopted cannabis, they came to be known known as the *Kapnobatai*, which means smoke walkers or smoke eaters.

The *Kapnobatai* made cannabis central to their spiritual lives, consuming it sacramentally every day. They were described by

contemporary observers as being “reverent to the Gods”. They lived in peace among themselves and with neighboring tribes and were vegetarians, abstaining from meat even though they were a pastoral tribe that herded animals.

From Scythia, cannabis spirituality spread to west to Mesopotamia, Assyria, Persia, Greece, Egypt and Judea. Slightly later archeological evidence of the sacramental use of cannabis has been found among all of these cultures and many others.

Tablets found in the Palace of the great Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, in the ancient city of Nineveh—which we call Mosul today—mention cannabis over 30 times and include a recipe for religious incense that includes cannabis. Assyrian tablets found at other locations recommend cannabis to ward off the evil eye, to treat a curse, and to forget grief.

The new generation of cannabis archeologists are still working on understanding the full dimensions of cannabis in Egyptian religion. As with the Scythians, remains of cannabis have been found in Egyptian tombs, including that of Ramses the II, who was buried with a nice stash of hashish-- and the Egyptian goddess of knowledge, Seshet, is depicted with what appears to be a cannabis leaf crowning her head. These tantalizing clues may one day lead to a more complete understanding of the role of cannabis in Egyptian spirituality.

Some of the most interesting work of the new generation of cannabis scholars focuses on the use of cannabis in ancient Greece, the cradle of what some call Western Civilization.

For the ancient Greeks; the lines between medicine, entertainment, and religion were much more permeable than in today’s mainstream culture. Many activities we would see as purely recreational, like going to the theater, they saw as having

at least some religious, spiritual connection. They ingested cannabis and other visionary plants very widely-- at symposia, at religious festivals, theaters, temples, oracles, and other mystery sites. All of these places and experiences were considered religious to some degree, and the effects of all psychoactive plants were believed to have a divine aspect.

The earliest archeological evidence of the sacramental use of cannabis by the Greeks is a *kantharos*-- a ceremonial piece of pottery used for funeral libations-- with a cannabis leaf emblazoned on it. It dates from around 800 BCE but there isn't any evidence to explain how it was used back then.

The picture starts clearing up a bit by the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, when temples to Asclepius began to open. Asclepius, the son of Apollo, was educated in medicine by the centaur Chiron. His temples accepted any patient, free of charge, and the treatment was quite remarkable. The patient went to the temple and took a potion and then went to sleep and experienced vivid dreams. Upon awakening the patient described the dream to a temple attendant, who interpreted the dream and then administered other elixirs and potions to treat the patient. Cannabis was almost certainly an ingredient in these formulations.

One of my favorite stories about the Temples of Asclepius is when the blind god of wealth, Ploutos, is taken to the temple to have his sight healed—perhaps he was suffering from glaucoma like Harry Anslinger did. After dreaming, Ploutos' sight is restored with an eye ointment, again almost certainly containing cannabis. And after his sight is restored, Ploutos makes the rich people poor, and the poor people rich. That story would be poignant even if cannabis were not involved; the cannabis connection makes it even more poignant.

Another example of the sacramental use of cannabis in Ancient Greece is provided by archeobotanical remains of cannabis recovered from the Thesprotian Oracle, an ancient temple close to Epirus dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> BCE. In this case, the archeobotanical evidence is confirmed by the writings of Herodotus who describes how those seeking the Oracle's advice would be first fed a meal containing cannabis, and perhaps other visionary plants. They would then descend through corridors dug into a cave beneath the temple until coming to a priestess, who would hear their questions and provide answers thought to come directly from the dead.

Cannabis also shows up at Greek religious festivals. In classical Athens, bi-annual festivals were organized in honor of Dionysus, the God of intoxication and ecstasy. These festivals centered around the performance of divine tragedies and comedies, and cannabis was widely consumed at these festivals, along with other visionary plants.

We know this from recovered menus listing cannabis cakes, and from the references to visionary plants woven into plays like *Prometheus Bound*, which told the story of how the god Prometheus invented psychoactive plants; and *Bacchae*, which told the story of how Dionysus brought intoxication to Greece from his homeland in Asia.

Greeks also used cannabis at symposia, which were events that combined the ingestion of psychoactive substances and feasting with intellectual explorations of history, art and philosophy—and like much of Greek life also had an aspect of spirituality and religion.

The symposia have often been misinterpreted as mere drinking parties, and it is true that wine was drunk at symposia. But our new generation of cannabis archeologists and historians have

discovered that careful reading of ancient texts reveals that wine was used by the Greeks and many other cultures as the base for a wide variety of psychoactive botanicals—including cannabis, poppy, ephedra, wormwood and many others.

The botanical infusions were extremely strong and were diluted with twenty parts of water before they were consumed in order to avoid overdoses. The amount of alcohol remaining in the solution was probably too little to account for the raucous hilarity and joyous inebriation found in contemporary descriptions of the symposia, but the amount of infused cannabis and other botanicals could easily have been sufficient.

The sacramental use of cannabis and other visionary and psychoactive plants was intimately woven through the fabric of Greek society, from the oracles and temples to religious festivals and symposia. Its use is described in the ancient texts of the Greeks, and its discovery is attributed to their deities. This fact gets some bite to it when we consider that the people most responsible for the incredible destruction of Prohibition have cast themselves as the foremost defenders of Western Civilization.

Some of the strongest evidence of the central role that cannabis has played in the evolution of spirituality and religion is found east of the plant's birthplace in Central Asia. Sometime around the second millennium BCE cannabis moved east across the Himalayas and south into India. From the time of its arrival, cannabis seems to have been associated with spirituality.

The most ancient Hindu religious writings, the Vedas, date from 1400 BCE but were based on preexisting oral traditions. The Vedas describe cannabis as a sacred plant that protects against disease and prolongs life. The text refers to cannabis by two different names. One is *Viajahia*, which means *source of happiness*; and the other is *Ananda*, which means *provoker of*

*laughter.* In the Vedic tradition, cannabis sprouted where drops of a sacred ambrosia called *amrita* fell from heaven; and it was carried down from the Himalayas by Lord Shiva, one of the principal Hindu gods.

Cannabis appears to have been continuously used in Hindu rituals and celebrations ever since it arrived in India. The plant is still used by millions of Hindu families for those purposes today, often on holidays, and it remains central to the daily practice of the famed wandering Sadhus of India.

One of our best sources on historic use of cannabis in India comes from J.M Campbell, a colonial opium tax collector who reported on religious affairs to the 1894 East India Hemp Drugs Report, which was commissioned by the English Parliament, and still stands as one of the most objective and comprehensive reports on cannabis that has ever been published.

Campbell reported that cannabis users who used cannabis in a religious context were regarded with extreme reverence as the preservers of cultural tradition. Here's how Campbell described public opinion on the subject:

*“He who scandalizes the user of hemp shall suffer the torments of hell so long as the sun endures. He who drinks bhang foolishly for pleasure without the religious rites is as guilty as the sinner. He who drinks wisely and according to rule, be he ever so low even his body is smeared with human ordure and urine, is Shiva. No God or man is as good as the religious drinker of bhang”.*

Campbell warned English colonial administrators from interfering with this deep-rooted sacramental use of cannabis. Paraphrasing public opinion once again, Campbell said, *“To forbid or even seriously restrict the use of so holy and gracious an herb as hemp would cause widespread suffering and annoyance, and to the*

*large bands of worshipped ascetics a deep-seated anger. It would rob the people of a solace in discomfort, of a cure in sickness, or a guardian whose gracious protection saves them from the attacks of evil influences, and whose mighty power makes the devotee Victorious, overcoming the demons of hunger and thirst, of panic, fear, of the glamour of Maya (illusion) or matter, and of madness, able to rest to brood on the eternal, till the Eternal, possessing him body and soul, frees him from the haunting of self and receives him into the ocean of being”.*

Campbell’s professional role placed him in good position to make these observations; but given the strength, color, and insight of his language, I suspect he was also a cannabis consumer himself.

India is a land of many faiths, not just Hinduism, and many of those religions also incorporated cannabis into their theology and practice at one point or another. These include Islam, Jainism, Sikhism.

Islam is a much younger religion than Hinduism, dating from around the year 610 C.E It was born well after the creation of writing, and its foundational text, the Koran explicitly forbids the consumption of alcohol. Cannabis is not mentioned at all, and that lack of guidance sowed the seeds of debate among Islamic scholars ever since: is cannabis *haram* or *halal*, allowed or forbidden?

That question has been argued over since the beginning of Islam. The more mystical branches of Islam; including Sufis, Ismailis, Qalandars, and the Nosairiyeh preserved some of the ancient shamanic traditions and embraced cannabis as a sacrament. They praised it as “the shrub of understanding”; as “branches of bliss”; as “the one that connects the heart” and “the one that lightens the load”.

One prayer of the Nosairiyeh, offered during the ritual drinking of a cannabis-infused potion, gives us a sense of their devotion to cannabis: *Behold this cup has circulated through the temple of the non-Arabs, throughout all the seven periods of the world. All of them are our brothers in faith and in gnosis...through the drink you have tasted the knowledge of the angelic world, and the knowledge of that which was in the first of the centuries and is throughout all the ages and cycles of the world.*

Other, more orthodox schools of Islam, like the Wahabi, are seriously opposed to cannabis. At times, this opposition over cannabis in Islam has turned violent and vicious. Early in the second millennium, in Egypt not far outside Cairo there was a resort known as the Garden of Cafour. Contemporary accounts described it as a haven for hash loving travelers, scholars and poets.

The garden sounds like a lovely place to me, but in 1251 it was set upon and destroyed by a mob of religious fanatics who were offended by the cannabis use. The available historical record doesn't provide any detail on who these fanatics were or what specific beliefs they held, but tension between the two schools of Islam—and cannabis use-- apparently continued.

A hundred and fifty years later, cannabis was still attracting enmity. Another Egyptian garden, the Regouri Gardens in Cairo, had become notorious as a center of cannabis consumption and cultivation. The ruling Sultan appears to have been deeply disturbed by this eruption of cannabis culture and spirituality-- he responded by having all the cannabis plants pulled up and punishing cannabis practitioners by pulling out their teeth in public. This was apparently a popular punishment across the region; we have reports of the same punishment being used on

cannabis consumers at around the same time by a Sultan in neighboring Arabia.

None of this hideous oppression was able to stop the . widespread consumption of cannabis in Egypt, ~~where~~ ~~where~~ it continues to this day. One contemporary account of hash consumption in Egypt describes something that still seems very close to sacramental use to me, and gives us some clues to the real underlying motivation for the suppression of cannabis. “A hashish session usually brings together people from different professions, classes and educational standards, who meet in an atmosphere of brotherhood and equality as well as freedom from social norms that prescribe certain modes of behavior”.

This tension between the freedom and equality producing effects of cannabis and the desire of governments and other elites to maintain control and preserve hierarchy can be seen across the breadth of history and geography, and I believe it is the underlying reason for its prohibition in both the past and the modern era. No earthly authority can compete with the direct authority of the cannabis experience, and that does not make earthly authorities feel very secure.

Some evidence of the sacramental use of cannabis is also beginning to emerge from China, despite the determined efforts of the Chinese totalitarian state to suppress this kind of research.

The P'en T'sao Ching, the oldest known medical medical textbook, was published around 2800 BCE, but was based much older oral traditions. It recommended cannabis for a wide range of diseases, and also described earlier, ancient shamanic and divinatory uses of cannabis.

Recently, some of the few archeologists allowed to conduct research in western China have found well preserved remains of

cannabis in ancient tombs dating from 2000 BCE, again following the familiar association with death and funerals

By the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, we know that some schools of Taoism revered cannabis as a Goddess of longevity, who they called Ma Gu, or “Auntie Hemp”. They burned cannabis in censers that were the center of their rituals and also revered Ma Gu as the goddess of Tai Shan mountain—home of the mythical founder of China.

And Ma Gu has indeed proved to be long lived. To this day, feral cannabis thrives on the slopes of Tai Shan mountain, the home of China’s mythical founder, growing from seeds scattered by pilgrims, and some Chinese restaurants in Viet Nam still serve tea in cups bearing Ma Gu’s image over the words “Long life, Auntie!”.

Cannabis came to Africa through two main vectors. One was from Egypt westward across the Sahara to the Maghreb; or what we now call Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. Morocco offers us the most extensive historical evidence of sacramental cannabis use found on the African continent to date.

That evidence tells the story of the Heddawa religious brotherhood, an Islamic order that embraced the ritual use of cannabis. The Heddawa arose in the Rif mountains of Morocco in the early 1700s CE. They ritually consumed cannabis in the mornings and evenings, embraced voluntary poverty, and proselytized the use of cannabis among people outside the order. The Heddawa grew to become one of the ten largest religious orders in Morocco, and exercised substantial political power, forcing both French colonialists and Moroccan kings to tolerate widespread cannabis cultivation and hash making in the Rif, where it continues to this day.

The other vector of entry for cannabis in Africa was many centuries earlier, most likely sometime during the first millennium CE. Arab traders brought cannabis from the Malabar Coast of India, later to ports on the east coast of Africa. As in most places where cannabis was introduced, it was rapidly and enthusiastically adopted in sub-Saharan Africa and made its way across the continent along the trade routes of pathways and rivers, including slave trading routes.

By the time of the European invasion of Africa, cannabis use was widespread and multi-faceted. Smoking on the job was widespread, especially among the porters who carried freight on footpaths. It was used as a form of payment for labor; it was given as gifts; it was smoked by leaders during political councils; it was used as medicine; and as a nutritional supplement for nursing mothers. It was used by all social classes, from the highest to lowest-- the leader of the Lunda Empire in the 1800s was known as *Xa Mariamba* or *Master of Smoking Riamba*. The Pygmies claim they have been smoking it since the beginning of time.

As in many places, historical evidence of the sacramental use of cannabis in Sub Saharan Africa is only now beginning to come to light—and teasing out the truth is challenging. Most available historic accounts come from European observers who saw African behavior through a reductive and racist lens. They had agendas of their own to promote, and those agendas influenced their writings. Complicating it further, Africans tended to hide their spiritual practices from the invaders, so misrepresentation and misinterpretation are rife in these accounts. We are left with small but tantalizing fragments, the faint echoes of a hidden and stolen history that can still be heard by those who listen carefully.

One of those echoes emanates from Ethiopia, where one the names for cannabis in the ancient Amharic language of Ethiopia is *esha tenbit*, which means *prophecy plant*. Archeologists have

found cannabis residue in Ethiopian pipe bowls dating from around 1300CE, but cannabis was stigmatized by Ethiopian Christianity, which may be why scholars have to date only been able to find one historical account of cannabis use in Ethiopia. It comes from 1905 and describes how cannabis was consumed for divinatory purposes by “thief catchers’ who after smoking could determine guilt or innocence. For now, we are left to imagine what other divinatory or sacramental uses it may have had.

Another echo comes from Zambezi Valley, where cannabis and pipes were used as grave goods. People offered cannabis to statues representing that represented dead parents, and left fires burning for the dead to light their pipes. Cannabis was also sent as tribute to rulers and important visitors, but as yet we have no clear understanding of the beliefs surrounding these practices.

There are other even more faint echoes. A British administrator’s story of a woman calling herself “the Sirdar” who incorporated cannabis and magic into a movement challenging traditional and colonial authority; a missionary’s account of a prophetess from Malawi wearing cannabis laurels; a British traveler’s report of wandering seers in Zambia who consumed cannabis and channeled spirits. One of the most charming echoes of sacramental cannabis use in Africa comes from a smoking song of the Sotho tribe, “We smoke it, and it reminds of different things. We remember the miracles of the world. We remember those far and near. We remember”.

One of the few examples of well documented spiritual use of cannabis in Africa is its use by the Khoisan people to enter trances and communicate with the spiritual world. Like many others around the world, the Khoisans mixed cannabis with other herbs—and to this day they are major cannabis consumers.

The most well documented example of cannabis based spirituality in Sub Saharan Africa is the story of the Beni Riamba movement, which took place at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE, in what we now call the Democratic Republic of Congo. The classic story of the Beni Riamba—known as the Bashilenge or Baluba before they adopted cannabis—is that they were warlike and sometimes cannibalistic until they were introduced to cannabis. After enthusiastically adopting the use of cannabis, the once warlike group abandoned cannibalism and established peaceful relations with their neighbors.

The classic story has become the subject of scholarly debate in recent years, but some facts are undisputed. The movement began when a tribal leader from the Lulua River region named Chishimbi was introduced to cannabis. Chishimbi liked cannabis so much he planted it in his garden the next morning and declared that “he would henceforth only recognize as his friends smokers of *liamba* who would constitute a society of friendship that would seek to make happiness among the Balubas and to foreigners who would like to maintain...relations of friendship and commerce”. Chishimbi called this society of friendship *lubuku*; adherents greeted each other by saying “*moyo*”, which meant *life* or *oath*; and the name *Beni Riamba* itself meant the People of Cannabis.

Chishimbi’s movement grew rapidly, especially among young people. They planted huge forests of cannabis plants surrounding Beni Riamba villages and eventually took over the entire Lulua Valley.

The sacramental use of cannabis was central to Beni Riamba life. *Liamba* was smoked by both men and women, and the theological leader of the Beni Riamba was female. Palm wine and older religious practices centered around fetishes were both banned, and the cannabis pipe assumed a symbolic meaning for

the Beni Riamba analogous to the meaning of the peace pipe for Native Americans. No holiday was celebrated, no trade agreement was made, no peace treaty was transacted, and no journey undertaken without cannabis.

Cannabis was also used in religious ceremonies, but the only descriptions we have come from European observers who failed to record any of the symbolic meaning of what they saw, and probably focused on what they considered the most sensational practices. All we really know is that Beni Riamba practitioners shaved their heads, marked their bodies with white clay; gathered together in public squares; sang, danced, shared meals around hearth fires; and copiously smoked cannabis.

Cannabis clearly played a central role in Beni Riamba life, to a degree that calling it a sacrament seems appropriate—and at least within Beni Riamba society it seems to have produced a more peaceful and egalitarian culture.

This kind of devotion to cannabis in the Southern Congo is probably what motivated one of the most epic tales in the history of cannabis. Around (date) European powers began to invade Africa and enslave Africans and ship them, in horrifying conditions, to the lands they had seized from Indigenous peoples in South America and the Caribbean. In an awe-inspiring act of love, these enslaved Africans somehow managed to bring cannabis seeds with them on the transatlantic voyage.

Perhaps they sewed seeds into the folds of the rags they were forced to wear, or perhaps they secreted them on the ship as they loaded cargo in. Old stories tell of slaves smuggling cannabis seeds inside rag dolls, and it seems like some of the slavers themselves were in on the action—but the real truth of it is that the transport of cannabis seeds happened in a myriad of different ways, many of which we will never be able to discover. What we

do know is that enslaved Africans, when choosing the one thing that they could bring with them, often chose cannabis.

One particular sub-group within the population of enslaved Africans seems to have been most responsible for carrying cannabis across the ocean to the New World. They were known as the Congos and they came from roughly the same territory as the Beni-Riamba. The largest number of them were shipped out from the West African coastline of what we know call Angola and landed mostly in Brazil, where cannabis saw rapid adoption by indigenous peoples.

Evidence of exactly how cannabis was used in Brazil is still being pieced together. It's not yet entirely clear how many African traditions of spiritual use survived the trauma of the crossing and cultural disenfranchisement and the other horrors of slavery. What is clear is that the earliest reports of Indigenous cannabis use associate it with spiritual and therapeutic practices. It also seems clear that cannabis spread inland along river trade routes. Eventually, it made its way to Colombia, which in time grew to be South America's most famous producer of cannabis.

**Columbia****Colombia** is another region where the hidden history of cannabis is still being uncovered. Documentary evidence is almost non-existent, and the ongoing civil conflict makes research efforts challenging. What we do know is that shamans from at least two different indigenous tribes in Colombia today incorporate cannabis into their spiritual practice and traditions. Shamanic practitioners from the Muisca tribe use it in ceremonies and divinations and tell ancient origin stories for the plant. So do shamans of the Amazonian Tubu or Siriano tribe, who believe that cannabis originated in the Amazon, and like the Pygmies of Africa, that they have been using it since the beginning of time.

The trajectory of the spiritual use of cannabis is clearer in the Caribbean, especially in Jamaica. There were two vectors for the entry of cannabis to the island. One of these origin stories is well known. Mostly Hindu indentured servants were brought from India to serve the British Empire. This indentured population had naturally taken their medicine and sacrament with them, and they worked in close proximity to the African slaves that made up the workforce of the sugar plantations. It didn't take long for cannabis and some notions of its spiritual properties to make the jump to the enslaved population.

There is no doubt that this happened, and that Hindu traditions of cannabis use were familiar to Afro-Caribbean slaves—but that is also not the whole story. More recent research has disclosed that cannabis was first brought to Jamaica by the Congos, and that at least some African traditions of cannabis spirituality also survived the brutality of the middle passage. These first signs will hopefully inspire new scholars to dig deeper into the still mostly untold story of how enslaved Africans brought Mother Nature's most valuable plant to the Americas.

Our earliest historians and oldest written documents confirm the ancient link between cannabis and spirituality. Pliny the Elder, a scholar of the early Roman empire writing in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, said that by that time humans already had an ancient history of exploring the earth for therapeutic and psychoactive plants. He traces the origins of botany and pharmacy all the way back to the magical age recorded in our most ancient myths, and says these texts are the earliest sources on medicinal plants, and that gods and goddesses were the original inventors of medicinal plants.

A look into those ancient texts quickly reveals Pliny was right. The long heritage recorded P'en T'sao Ch'ing is documented in other texts from across the ancient world.

The Rig Veda is one of the oldest extant books in an Indo-European language, written between 1200 and 1500 BCE. It describes cannabis as a sacred plant, and contains recipes for *bhang*.

The Rig Veda also describes another sacred beverage, Soma, which was probably a mixture of cannabis, opium, and ephedra. The ancient Iranian Zoroastrian religious text called the Zend-Avesta, written a bit later, between 10<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, contains a recipe for a sacred beverage called *Haoma*, which is thought to be similar or the same as the Hindu sacrament Soma. The recipe for haoma includes a tall stinky green plant—which was almost certainly cannabis.

The sacramental use of cannabis also shows up in the The Old Testament. *Exodus (30:22)*, describing events thought to have occurred around 800 BCE, tells of the Lord giving Moses the recipe for holy anointing oil. It is an olive oil infusion of cannabis, enhanced with other terpene rich plant products including cinnamon, cassia, and myrrh. This is the holy anointing oil Jesus used in his healings, like bringing sight to the blind.

A similar recipe is found in the Talmud, and this textual evidence of the sacramental use of cannabis by Hebrew tribes is now being backed up by a growing body of archeobotanical discoveries. One example recently discovered in Israel is the tomb of a 14 year old girl found with the remains of burned cannabis nestled in her pelvis.

This is just a very brief and partial description of a growing body of archeological, geographic, and historic evidence that establishes the fact that for the great majority of human existence, we have sought out the cannabis plant for its spiritual properties. The sacramental use of cannabis predates every known religion,

and at one time or another seems to have been incorporated into the practice of most of them.

More evidence is certain to come to light soon. A new generation of archeologists, geographers and historians is coming of age, and many of them are focusing their efforts on understanding our relationship with visionary plants. Aided by new technology that allows better collection and analysis of archeological evidence, they are uncovering evermore ancient evidence of our connection to cannabis, and publishing those findings. In the years to come, this and succeeding generations of cannabis scholars will paint the details of the sacramental cannabis more fully.

Modern science is also beginning to give us the tools we need to understand the intangible and unseen realm of spirituality that cannabis and the other visionary plants transport us to. One of the best sources of this new science is Michael Pollan's book entitled *How to Change Your Mind: The New Science of Psychedelics*.

Among many intriguing concepts Pollan introduces is the idea of the Default Mode Network. Baseline human consciousness utilizes only a small part of our total brain power and those active bits of our brain are usually only talking to a couple other active bits on either side of it.

A brain scan image maps this phenomenon as a narrow band of activity circling the perimeter of a baseline brain. This band of activity identifies the parts of our brain responsible for basic executive functioning: Where do I need to be? How will I get there? Am I on time? Where are my keys? It is called the Default Mode Network, because it's where our brain spends the majority of its time.

Out of necessity, our everyday mind filters out the majority of what we perceive, because if we were always fully aware of all we are

able to perceive, we would just sit around in a perpetual state of wonder. Nothing would ever get done.

But Mother Nature has blessed us with cannabis and hundreds of other helper plants; plants that allow us to access those lesser used parts of our brain-- and the enhanced powers of perception they bring-- at times when they are needed or desired. A brain scan image of the activated brain shows a dense web of connections crisscrossing areas that show up as mostly empty in a baseline state. Different parts of the brain that normally don't talk to each other are chattering away.

Science explaining how cannabis promotes these connections is just beginning to emerge. Some studies show that THC, one of the main active ingredients in cannabis, increases the number of connections between brain cells in the hippocampus. The hippocampus is associated with the functions of feeling, reacting, learning, and memory; and some scientists call it "the heart of the brain".

The hippocampus in turn is believed to drive functional integration of spatially separated parts of the whole brain. In other words, the hippocampus signals normally unused parts of our brain to begin sending information to each other, and thereby takes us out of the default mode network.

Cannabis also seems to quiet down parts of the Default Mode Network by suppressing activity in the parietal cortex and other parts of the brain. Unsurprisingly, neuroimaging studies have established that this suppression is associated with meditative, spiritual, and transcendent states of mind.

Much, much more of this kind of science will emerge in coming decades, as the blinders that stigma and Prohibition placed on scientists are finally peeled away-- but we know from thousands

of years of human experience that cannabis is one of the most reliable ways for us to liberate ourselves from constraints the DMN.

It's not the only way, of course. In addition to cannabis, humans have used a wide range of other psychoactive plants and substances to break out of the DMN. Over the millennia we've developed a wide array of techniques to expand our minds; chanting, drumming, dancing, yoga, meditation, hypnosis, psychotherapy, ritual sex, and performance art have all been used for this purpose. So have the stained glass, choirs, statuary, incense, and guided prayer you find in churches. All of these tools are designed to evoke the same sort of jump out of everyday consciousness and into a different state of mind.

So what's on the other side of that jump? Where do we go when we get out of the DMN? That is a question human beings have been asking and trying to answer for thousands of years.

The ancient Toltec culture of what is now called Mexico, a culture that has used visionary plants for sacramental purposes for millennia, calls this place the Dream of the Planet, and believes it is made up by all of the individual dreams of all the humans in the world.

The great psychologist Carl Jung called it the collective unconscious, and believed it contained the psychic life of all our ancestors back to the beginning. He also believed it was the source of new inventions—a notion that would be interesting to check with Francis Crick, the Nobel Prize-winning father of modern genetics. He was reportedly under the influence of LSD when he first deduced the double-helix structure of DNA over 60 years ago.

Here's what the famous astronomer Carl Sagan, a lifelong cannabis enthusiast, said about the place our minds access when we consume cannabis:

*"I do not consider myself a religious person in the usual sense, but there is a religious aspect to some highs. The heightened sensitivity in all areas gives me a feeling of communion with my surroundings, both animate and inanimate. Sometimes a kind of existential perception of the absurd comes over me and I see with awful certainty the hypocrisies and posturing of myself and my fellow men. And at other times, there is a different sense of the absurd, a playful and whimsical awareness... Cannabis brings us an awareness that we spend a lifetime being trained to overlook and forget and put out of our minds."*

My own experience with cannabis echoes Carl's words. I first experienced cannabis at age 13, when a friend invited me to a "Mexican tea party" after school. I felt nothing at first, and left my friend's house in a state of disappointment. My way home took me through a park, Sligo Creek Park, in the suburbs of Washington DC. To me, a 13 year old boy, the park was just a thoroughfare, a shortcut to get from one place to another. I passed through it almost every day and had never noticed anything remarkable—until this day.

As I walked, I started becoming aware of things I had never noticed before: the light of the sun filtering through the leaves of the trees; the sound and smell of dried leaves crunching under my feet; the warmth of the sun on the back of my neck; the soft gurgling of the creek in the background, the moisture of sweat on my forehead...and I had a moment where I felt connected to all of these things at one, a moment of transcendence where I felt at one with the web of life.

Coming out of that park, I didn't really fully comprehend what had happened to me. I knew it was good and I knew it was big and I knew this plant would always be in my life, but it took me years longer to recognize that moment in the park as my first genuine spiritual experience; and it took many, many more years to understand that in that moment I was joining a human tradition that is as old as time.

So what happened? How was cannabis transformed from an honored sacrament into the tool of the devil? How did we go from thousands of years of using cannabis as a sacrament, to banning it entirely?

The answer to that question is entwined with the history of religion.

As humans evolved, the direct and individual experience of shamanism began to develop into more formal systems of shared beliefs and rituals. These early systems of shared belief, our earliest forms of religion, developed before the invention of writing and centered on the forces of nature like the sun and the moon and wind and thunder. They were taught and learned experientially, through storytelling and ritual, and many of them preserved shamanic techniques and beliefs. Visionary plants were seen as allies in facilitating the spiritual experience, not as demonic competitors. Direct experience of the divine still remained a central feature of the earliest religions.

This began to change with the development of writing and the growth of states with more complex social hierarchies.

As scriptures were first written and then canonized, a new priesthood arose. These priests studied the scriptures intensely, became expert in them and positioned themselves as the only legitimate interpreters and preservers of the Divine.

Shamanism and the visionary plants that were central to its rituals—and the early nature-based religions that still preserved these practices-- were all suppressed because they promoted social autonomy and independent thinking-- which in turn posed a threat to the elite.

The new religions were very male. There was only one god and that god was male; God could only be accessed through the priests, all the priests were male, and women were looked upon as sources of temptation and sinfulness. So it is not surprising that their list of enemies to suppress also included the Divine Feminine.

The concept and practice of the Divine Feminine seems to have been with us human beings for as long as cannabis has. The first shamans were almost certainly women, who in hunter-gatherer societies were responsible for collecting plants and preparing them for use as medicines or food; and the very earliest religious artifacts found by archeologists are small figurines and sculptures of the Great Mother. As the nature-based religions formed, they envisioned female deities along with male gods, and empowered female priestesses to serve these Goddesses, and honored them by building them temples.

The female deities and their representatives had real power. In Ancient Greece, Goddesses like Athena and Aphrodite had their own temples, and the chief Priestess of every temple had a dedicated team of divine enforcers, who could and would use whatever means necessary, up to and including assassination, to ensure that the edicts of the Priestess were carried out.

All of the great Greek oracles were female and Kings were required to consult them on major matters like war and peace. On some occasions, when kings veered too far towards tyranny, they

could be assassinated by divine enforcers. And the priestesses and oracles had the ability to confer or deny social prestige—they were the ones who prepared and dispensed visionary plants at rituals like the Eleusinian Rites, where an invitation to attend was considered the highest honor a Greek could receive.

This whole complex of belief--the Divine Feminine, visionary plants, and nature-based polytheism came into tension and conflict with the early Christian church as it developed, and that conflict became much more lethal when the Roman Empire abandoned its old gods and adopted Christianity as its sole official religion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.

Like all enduring alliances, this one provided real benefits to both parties. The Empire had learned that freewheeling, shamanistic, nature-based polytheism promoted troublesome notions of freedom and social justice; and its thousands of local variations often served as bases of local resistance against the Empire.

Replacing this multiplicity of shamanistic, nature-based spiritual systems that existed across the Empire with one uniform system, one priestly hierarchy, and one written doctrine would strengthen the Empire and hasten its growth.

In return, the Christian Church was given a more or less free hand to attack its rivals, and it did so with zeal all across the Roman Empire. In 392 CE, the practice of paganism was formally outlawed, and what can only be described as an orgy of violence ensued to enforce the edict. Those who refused to renounce pagan beliefs and be baptized were mercilessly harassed, publicly humiliated and threatened, and often executed or exiled. Temples were pulled down and razed to the ground; sacred groves of trees were cut down; sacred springs were poisoned; wise men and wise women were burned at the stake or if they were lucky just turned out of their homes and exiled.

The Library of Alexandria, the greatest library of the ancient world was burned to the ground, with its priceless treasure of 700,000 books—as was the Temple of Hypatia in the same city. A mob of Christian monks invaded the Parthenon in Athens, where they mutilated the faces of statues, hacked off their limbs, and smashed them to pieces. The famous Academy of the Greek philosophers was closed, and the philosophers were exiled or intimidated into silence.

In Syria, Christian monks destroyed the Temple of Athena, decapitating the statue of the Goddess and hacking off her arms. In France, St. Martin, who is still a popular saint, rampaged across the countryside in search of pagan resisters. All across the empire, fervent Christians invaded people's homes, searching for banned demonic items—books, paintings, and of course any indications of the use of visionary plants. Ancient knowledge of medicine, of history, of philosophy and astronomy accumulated over the ages were all lost to a Dark Age that lasted for a millennium.

Under the new system, in order to access the divine, you had to go through a book, you had to obey a set of rules, and you had to submit to the authority of the priests.

Thus the foundation was laid for a powerful new hierarchy, a hierarchy that claimed to represent God's voice on earth. Like all hierarchies, many of the people it attracted were more interested in the love of power than the power of love, and in most places priests and kings became the best of friends.

As best we can tell, a similar history unfolded a bit earlier in China, where the shamanic use of cannabis had been preserved in Taoism. Details are much harder to come by in China, but we know that this sacramental use of cannabis declined with the rise

of Confucianism, which valued order and hierarchy and obedience. But it seems that even in China, some of the shamanic tradition was clandestinely preserved-- Ma Gu, Auntie Hemp still pokes her head up from time to time, growing on sacred mountains, memorialized on teacups.

I believe the potential for cannabis fueled mystical experience of the divine is innate in human beings. It is one of the many blessings of our endocannabinoid systems. Even when we are entirely removed from any cultural information about the spiritual properties of cannabis, our basic biology enables us to find our way back to those properties, to rediscover them and reclaim them.

For example, consider how cannabis came to the Americas. That story starts in Spain in 1492, when King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella completed their Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula, and expelled Moorish Islamic rulers from southern Spain who were part of the Islamic world that embraced cannabis. The devout King and Queen banned cannabis, which had been both legal and respectable under Moorish rule. The Roman Empire was long gone by then, but the Catholic Church continued its mission to eradicate the use of visionary plants.

In an act that seems like it must be some kind of divine payback, Ferdinand and Isabella also dispatched Christopher Columbus to the New World, and it is believed he carried the first cannabis seeds to the New World. All the sailing ships of the maritime empires carried hemp seed with them because hemp produced the ropes and sails and oakum that powered the ships. When a ship was damaged far from home, and they frequently were, sailors needed to be able to grow hemp to get back home.

The Conquistadors might not even have made the connection between their hemp for ropes and consumable cannabis, but the

Mexica people whose territory they had invaded did. In the local belief system, every plant had a divine spirit and name, so when the Mexica saw the Spanish growing a plant they had never seen before, they decided to investigate. And of course that investigation revealed all the incredible benefits of the cannabis plant, so the curanderos welcomed it into their spiritual system, and gave it a one of my favorite names for cannabis: Pipilzintzintlis. It translates roughly as “noble little lords”.

And all was good for about two hundred years until the Church realized what was going on, and launched a new Inquisition against cannabis in the New World. Cannabis was removed from the marketplace and forced underground; consumption of cannabis was banned; and the foundational myths of the modern war on cannabis were first rolled out: stories of demonic possession, communion with the Devil, depravity, insanity, and violence. But once again, even this kind of intense repression failed to stop the consumption of cannabis—refugees fleeing the violence and chaos of the Mexican Revolution, around 150 years later, brought their cannabis with them across the border to the United States.

The adoption of cannabis as a sacrament, and development of the Rastafarian faith is perhaps an even clearer example of how cannabis engenders spiritual connection. African slaves, shipped across the ocean, pulled out of their cultural context, stripped of common tradition and language, surrounded by strangeness, nonetheless had a similar reaction as the curanderos—once they were introduced to cannabis, they recognized it as spiritual tool, as a teacher plant, as a way to heal their trauma, and achieve direct connection with the divine. They began to consume it sacramentally and in ceremony, and with its guidance developed a spiritual system that values peacefulness, that advocates for the spreading of love and tolerance and the protection of nature, and embraces veganism.

So a common pattern is beginning to emerge. The values of Rastafari echo the values articulated by the Kapnobatai, the smoke eaters of Scythia who put cannabis at the center of their spiritual life and embraced vegetarianism, peace, and brotherhood. We see the same set of values again with the Beni Riamba of Africa. Before the introduction of cannabis, the hallmarks of Bashilenge culture were ferocious war and cannibalism. After cannabis was introduced, the Beni Riamba put it at the center of their spiritual life—and the ferocious warriors embraced love. They put down their weapons, they ~~became~~become more tolerant of their neighbors, they made friends with their former enemies, and they abandoned the practice of cannibalism.

All of these cultures embraced the idea of achieving peace, love and understanding through the sacramental consumption of cannabis. This common value system is the same value system that my tribe, the hippie tribe, adopted after we embraced cannabis and other visionary substances.

In spite of having no guides, in spite of the government's attempts to convince us cannabis is poison, we found our way— because the plant herself led us there. We found our way because there is a common root to all of these spiritual evolutions, a quality that is implicit in the human-cannabis relationship, a quality that awakens us and leads us to this common value set.

The kernel of that awakening is a phenomenon that my hippie tribe calls “The Stoner Epiphany”.

It is a moment of sudden realization, an instant in which a hidden truth is revealed. It works differently for everybody, but a common thread runs through the experiences.

Here's how it can work for me. I sit down on my couch at the end of a hectic day. I ingest some cannabis, and take a deep breath, and the movie of my day begins to play in my head. And somewhere in that rewind, a particular event jumps out to grab my attention. Like remembering running down the back hall of my shop, rushing to make it to a meeting on time, and blowing right by a new employee who was just trying to say hello and introduce themselves. At the time, I barely noticed it happening, but I remember now with the help of the cannabis, and that memory sparks an interior dialog.

“Dude, do you remember you just blew right by that person? They obviously just wanted to greet you.”

“Oh yeah, I do remember. That really wasn't very cool was it?”

“No, not cool at all. How would you feel if somebody did that to you?”

“I would probably feel overlooked and deflated and disappointed”

“So?”

“So I guess I should do something about it.”

“The phone is right there. Are you going to use it?”

And at that point I usually do take some kind of corrective action. In this case, it was a two minute phone chat, not a big deal, but I've seen stoner epiphanies resolve much more challenging issues. I've seen stoner epiphanies break through creative blocks, save floundering business deals, resolve thorny relationship problems, reunite deeply estranged friends and families, extend patience, inspire forgiveness and deter or interrupt all sorts of

precipitous actions that could otherwise have wrought havoc and damage. The famous comedian and cannabis farmer Jim Belushi neatly summed this effect by naming one of his strains *The Marriage Counselor*.

At its essence, what we refer to as the Stoner Epiphany is the ability of cannabis to spark an interior dialog that helps guide us to being the person we really want to be, in the innermost part of our hearts. That dialog, that conversation, the ability of cannabis to set us out on a journey to being our best selves is a very special thing, an extraordinarily precious gift. I think it is generally the goal of every sincere and well-intentioned spiritual system and religion.

Today we live in an extraordinary, epochal time of change. We no longer live in the age of the printed word; we now live in the Digital Era. Information flies at the speed of sound and light. Generations of human beings are coming of age with all the collective knowledge of human beings available at their fingertips. And just as the written word sparked a spiritual transformation, this transformation in the way we communicate and the way we think is already beginning to catalyze another great spiritual transformation.

The internet has carried the truth about cannabis and other visionary plants, and the seeds of those plants, and the knowledge of how to grow and use them, to the far reaches of the globe. No longer are we dependent on mediated channels like newspapers or textbooks or broadcast TV for our information. No longer are we dependent on priests or even priestesses to open the doorways to the divine.

This new channel of accurate science and history and knowledge—and the seeds-- has led hundreds of millions of people all around the planet to investigate and try cannabis for themselves, and over the course of the past year I've had the

great good fortune of traveling to newly legal or almost legal countries and meeting some of these hundreds of millions of people.

Most of these encounters started at a cannabis business or investment conference where the majority of attendees were motivated mainly by economic opportunity, rather than any close personal relationship with the plant. More suits than tie-dies. But there was always a core of real true cannabis aficionados, and we always managed to find each other quite quickly, even without our tie-dies. And once we found each other, there was an instant mesh.

Groups of total strangers immediately became friends, with no friction whatsoever. We differed in nationality, race, religion, economic position and levels of education, but we all attached importance to the same things and moved through the world in similar ways. We shared our ideas about philosophy and politics, and our tastes in music and art and food and fashion with each other and even when they were very different, we found a common thread of appreciation, and became very comfortable and very close to each other in remarkably short periods of time.

One morning after leaving a conference, I noticed that I was really, intensely missing some of the people I had spent the past week with. I had never met them before, but the bond we created in those few days was strong enough to really deeply touch my heart, and I started pondering how this could happen, how I could bond so deeply in such a short period of time.

And what I realized was this. No matter who we were or where we came from, how old or young we were, whether we were male or female or gay or straight, whether we were billionaires or campesinos, we all shared a common set of experiences. We all grew up under Prohibition, but nonetheless found our way to

cannabis. Once we discovered cannabis, we all had the same kind of experiences consuming the plant, we all had the same kind of stoner epiphanies. Those similar experiences and epiphanies taught us a common set of lessons, and out of those lessons we had all independently developed the same set of personal values.

No matter who we are or where we come from, the people of cannabis value individual freedom over authoritarianism; we value creativity over conformity; we value kindness over meanness, and love over hate. We are tolerant and inclusive and respectful of traditions different from our own. We walk gently on Mother Earth and respect her creations, we oppose violence and warfare, we share what we have with those who have less than us, and the only thing we cannot tolerate is a lack of tolerance.

This is The Cannabis Creed. No matter who we are, no matter where we are in the world, whether it is spoken or unspoken, whether we are aware of it or not, it is the value system we live by. We are One Tribe, following One Plant, moving towards One Love.

So let's circle up here for a minute and recap.

The human brain has an innate, biochemical capacity for spiritual experiences; and we humans have been using visionary plants to generate those experiences for as long as we have been human.

Early shamanic practices catalyzed this brain capacity, and over time evolved into polytheistic, nature-centric religions. These religions recognized the Divine Feminine and continued to use visionary plants for sacramental purposes.

With the growth of the city state and the invention of writing, more complex social hierarchies developed, these new elites came to

feel threatened by the competing authority of the oracles, priestesses and other shamanic practitioners. The elites responded to this perceived threat by throwing state support to new monotheistic religions with exclusively male priesthoods, new religions that relied on written scriptures for their authority, instead of direct mystical experiences. Together, these state and religious actors attacked the use of visionary plants and have attempted to prevent their use for the past two thousand years or more.

Today, as we move from the age of the printed word to the age of digital information, we stand on the verge of humanity's next great spiritual evolution. New science has enabled us to understand the biochemical processes of the brain that produce spiritual experiences, and the internet has empowered us to learn about and access cannabis and the other visionary plants that were the earliest roots of human spiritual practice.

Hundreds of millions of people around the world have now had direct experience with visionary plants, despite the centuries long efforts of the world's major religions to wall them off. These hundreds of millions of individual experiences have in turn led to the development of a common, shared value system, a common Creed, a Creed I call the Cannabis Creed but which really springs from all visionary plants.

It is a creed that stands up for Mother Nature. It is a creed that celebrates freedom and tolerance, and resists tyranny. It is a creed that recognizes the value and divinity of all creatures and all genders, and teaches us to live in peace, and practice love and forgiveness in our daily lives.

We have now reclaimed this ancient creed, this creed taught to us by the plants, this creed and these practices that human beings have been using to escape the default mode network and double check our own assumptions since the beginning of time.

It is back in our hands and back in our hearts, and now it is up to us to decide what to do with this new and ancient Creed. In a world dominated by the love of power, how do we mobilize the power of love? In a world of dictators and despots, how do we defend our freedom without falling into violence? In a world poisoned with industrial pollution, how do we provide for our needs without cutting down the last plant on earth, without turning the planet into a cinder?

And maybe most important of all, as we return to this ancient way of learning from the plants, how do we avoid repeating the mistakes of the past? How do we build a new spiritual system without recreating priesthoods? How do we teach ourselves and our children to be the people we really most want to be, without recreating dogma and orthodoxy? How do we ensure that there never, ever again comes a time that our species is intentionally blocked from accessing the divine?

Nobody knows the answers to those questions. I sure don't-- but I do know that today there are hundreds of millions of us, hundreds of millions of us who share this common value system.

Collectively, we are larger than almost every nation on the planet and we have vast but still nascent power.

Over the last half century or so we have managed to drag ourselves out of the darkness, to make our way through the thickets of ignorance to a path of knowledge, and at the end of that path shines a light. I believe if we faithfully follow that path, and carefully listen to Mother Nature, and take the lessons her plants teach us seriously, we still have enough time to save our species and save the planet. That is the journey I have been on my entire adult life along with the many other thousands of

warriors for love, and if you have not joined us yet, we hope you do soon. Just study the plants and follow where they lead