

1. Hampton Sides, *High Science: Science Seeks to Unlock Marijuana Secrets*, National Geographic June '15 <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2015/06/marijuana-science-drug-research-legality/>
Then one day in 1963 a young organic chemist in Israel named Raphael Mechoulam, working at the Weizmann Institute of Science outside Tel Aviv, decided to peer into the plant's chemical composition... Further testing found what the world now knows: This compound is the plant's principal active ingredient, its mind-altering essence—the stuff that makes you high. Mechoulam, along with a colleague, had discovered tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)... For these breakthroughs and many others, Mechoulam is widely known as the patriarch of cannabis science... In 1992 Mechoulam's quest for quantification led him from the plant itself to the inner recesses of the human brain. That year he and several colleagues made an extraordinary discovery. They isolated the chemical made by the human body that binds to the same receptor in the brain that THC does. Mechoulam named it anandamide—from the Sanskrit for "supreme joy." (When asked why he didn't give it a Hebrew name, he replies, "Because in Hebrew there are not so many words for happiness. Jews don't like being happy.")

Medical Marijuana

2. Talmud, Bava Kama 91b

Why does the Torah say that the Nazirite must bring an offering to atone for the sin he committed 'against a life?' Against whose life has he sinned?! It is because he pained himself by withdrawing from wine.

3. Rabbi J. David Bleich, *Treatment of the Terminally Ill*, Tradition 30:3 (1996), pg. 62

Judaism affirms that everything in creation is designed for a purpose. Alleviation of otherwise intractable pain is a known beneficial use of heroin. Marijuana is effective in alleviating nausea that is a side-effect of some forms of chemotherapy. There is every reason to believe that these drugs were given to man for the specific purpose of controlling pain and discomfort. Jewish teaching would enthusiastically endorse legislation legalizing the use - with adequate accompanying safeguards - of those substances in treatment of terminal patients.

4. J. Zalman, *Orthodox Union Certifies Medical Marijuana Products, Deems Their Use a 'Mitzvah'*, Tablet 12/20/15

In Vireo's announcement, the CEO of OU Kosher, Rabbi Menachem Genack, said: "Judaism prioritizes health and encourages the use of medicine designed to improve one's health or reduce pain. Using medical cannabis products recommended by a physician should not be regarded as a *chet*, a sinful act, but rather as a mitzvah, an imperative, a commandment."

Recreational Marijuana Use

5. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (20th century USA), Letter

I am in receipt of your letter of October 18th, which you write in the name of your friends and in your own behalf, and ask my opinion regarding the new drug called L.S.D., which is said to have the property of mental stimulation, etc.

Biochemistry is not my field, and I cannot express an opinion on the drug you mention, especially as it is still new. However what I can say is that the claim that the said drug can stimulate mystical insight, etc., is not the proper way to attain mystical inspiration, even *if* it had such a property. The Jewish way is to go from strength to strength, not by means of drugs and other artificial stimulants, which have a place only if they are necessary for the physical health, in accordance with the Mitzva to take care of one's health. I hope that everyone will agree that before any drugs are taken one should first utilize all one's natural capacities, and when this is done *truly and fully*, I do not think there will be a need to look for artificial stimulants.

I trust that you and your group, in view of your Yeshiva background, have regular appointed times for the study of Torah, and the inner aspects of the Torah, namely the teachings of Chassidus, and that such study is in accordance with the principle of our Sages, namely "The essential thing is the deed," i.e., the actual conduct of

the daily life in accordance with the Torah and Mitzvot, prayer, Tefillin, Kashruth, etc., etc. This is only a matter of will and determination, for nothing stands in the way of the will. I trust that you are also using your good influence throughout your environment.

6. Zerrin Atakan, *Cannabis, a complex plant*, Therapeutic Advances in Psychopharmacology, Dec. '12 (2:6) Cannabis is a complex plant with over 400 chemical entities of which more than 60 of them are cannabinoid compounds, some of them with opposing effects. Cannabis is also the most widely used illicit drug in the world and its use has been associated with various mental health problems, particularly in the young [Hall and Degenhardt, 2007; Degenhardt *et al.* 2010]. Despite the links made between its use and the development of mental health problems, it is also known that not everyone who uses it is affected adversely in the same way.

7. Rabbi Moses Maimonides (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deiot 4:1
Having a healthy, whole body is from the paths of Gd, as one can neither understand nor know anything about Gd when ill. Therefore, one must distance himself from anything which damages the body, and one must accustom himself to behaviours which increase health and strength...

8. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (20th century USA), Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah 3:35
It is obvious that this is prohibited because of several biblical legal principles. First, it corrupts and destroys the body. Even if there are healthy people who are not harmed to that extent, it still corrupts the mind, and they cannot understand concepts fully, and this is even more serious...

9. Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (20th century Israel), Maadanei Shlomo pg. 431
There certainly is an actual legal prohibition against taking drugs, because taking drugs as is done in the street certainly harms the body, and it is prohibited because of harming one's body, which is completely prohibited.

10. Rabbi Ezra Batzri (21st century Israel), Dinei Mammonot IV pp. 117-118
This destroys the body, and we may not cause harm to the body. And strong drugs are eventually fatal.

11. Talmud, Berachot 40a
Rabbi Chama, son of Rabbi Chanina said: One who regularly uses *ketzach* will never come to heartache. But didn't Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel say: *Ketzach* is one of 60 poisons, and one who sleeps east of its granary is liable for his life! No problem – one is regarding smelling it, the other is regarding tasting it. Rabbi Yirmiyah's mother baked bread for him, and she stuck *ketzach* to it and then peeled it off.

12. Rabbi Eliezer Shlomo Schick, Asher baNachal Vol. 34 pg. 33-34, #5478
Our master was very, very careful not to drink intoxicating wine, for it causes one to forget mitzvot. And it is known in our community that we do not drink liquor, called *arak*, at all, but only wine for kiddush and havdalah and no more... And so our master was careful not to smoke any cigarettes or nargilah pipes and not to smell tobacco, and this is a great principle in our community... In my view, one may give a person who uses or sells drugs to the police, for he is a murderer...

13. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (20th century USA), Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah 3:35
Aside from keeping himself from proper Torah study, it also keeps him from prayer and the Torah's mitzvot, for practicing without appropriate mental focus is as though one had not fulfilled them... And [drugs] also cause many other transgressions, aside from this.

14. Sewell/Poling/Sofuoglu, *The Effect of Cannabis Compared with Alcohol on Driving*, Am. J. Addiction (2009) 18:3
Cannabis and alcohol acutely impair several driving-related skills in a dose-related fashion, but the effects of cannabis vary more between individuals than they do with alcohol because of tolerance, differences in smoking technique, and different absorptions of Δ^9 -tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the active ingredient in marijuana. Detrimental effects of cannabis use vary in a dose-related fashion, and are more pronounced with highly automatic driving functions than with more complex tasks that require conscious control, whereas with alcohol produces an opposite pattern of impairment...

15. Genesis 2:16, and Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man* pg. 5
And Gd commanded upon the man, saying: From every tree in the garden you shall eat...
Gd takes man-animal into His confidence, addresses him and reveals to him His moral will.

16. Rabbi Yaakov Ariel (21st century Israel), www.toraland.org.il

Question: What is the prohibition against taking soft drugs, which broaden sensation and imagination?

Answer: Your question was addressed by Nachmanides... He calls this "degraded with the Torah's license", one who licenses himself, for example, to gorge himself on wine, meaning to be alcoholic. The sensation and imagination of which you speak are counter to the human destiny of truly actualizing one's potential and fulfilling the command, "You shall be holy." Even if we would ignore, as it were, the problem of addiction, and the harm which, Gd-forbid, a person who takes drugs could inflict upon himself or others, a person's entry into a situation in which he loses intellectual control, entering the influence of drugs upon his sensation and imagination and elevating them over his intellect, would be a great corruption.

17. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (20th century USA), *Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah* 3:35

Further, it causes great craving, greater than cravings for food and the like which are necessities for personal survival. Some cannot reduce and eliminate their cravings! This is the serious prohibition stated regarding the rebellious child, regarding his great craving for eating – even though it is for kosher food. Certainly, one may not bring himself to even greater craving, and for something which a person does not need; this is prohibited.

Why not prohibit wine?

18. Psalms 104:15, and commentary of Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak)

And wine which gladdens the heart of man, making faces shine more than oil does...

Drinking it in measure it will improve his intellect, for a joyous heart improves the intellect, as seen in the prophets.

19. Talmud, *Pesachim* 117a

Gd is manifest not in laziness, sadness, laughter, frivolity or empty speech, but only via mitzvah joy, as is written [of Elisha], "'Now, take a musician for me!' And when the musician played, the hand of Gd was upon him."

20. Isaiah 28:7-8

These people, too, have erred in wine and wandered in intoxicating drink; the priest and prophet have erred in intoxicating drink, have been swallowed up in wine, have strayed due to intoxicating drink, have erred in the seer's words, have stumbled in judgment. For all of the tables are filled with vomit and filth, without empty space.

21. Talmud, *Berachot* 57a

Some drink it and it's good for them, as in, "And wine which gladdens the heart of man." And some drink it and it's bad for them, as in Proverbs 31:6, "Give intoxicating drink to the doomed, and wine to those of bitter spirit."

22. Talmud, *Yoma* 76b

Why is [wine] called both *yayin* and *tiroshe*? *Yayin* because it brings wailing [*yelalah*] to the world, and *tiroshe* because one who starts with it becomes poor [*rosh*]...

23. Likutei haPardes of Rashi's school, Inyan haBerachot (in greater detail in Shibbolei haLeKet, Berachot 140)
Alternatively: Because wine causes shame, bringing a person to intoxication, foolishness and destruction. The text says, "And wine *yisamach* the heart of man", and the Sages said (Yoma 76b), "If one merits, it gladdens him; if one does not merit, it destroys him." Therefore, one says, "Pay attention, my masters," meaning, "Set your minds to drink wine," and he says this out of fear, lest they come to corruption. Thus he says, "To life," meaning, "Our desire and thought is to drink for life," so that they not come to corruption. And they reply, "Amen, L'Chaim."

24. Rabbi Moses Maimonides (12th century Egypt), Moreh Nevuchim 3:8

Gathering for intoxicating drink should be an even greater shame to you than gathering of people without clothing, with their privacy exposed, excreting and urinating in daylight in a room together. Meaning: excretion is a necessity, and there is no means of delaying, but intoxication is the choice of an evil person...

25. Rabbi Moses Maimonides (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deiot 5:3

When a wise person drinks wine, he drinks only enough to irrigate the food in his innards. Anyone who becomes intoxicated is a sinner, degraded, and destructive to his own wisdom. Becoming intoxicated in front of laity desecrates Gd's Name...

26. Rabbi Avraham Danziger (18th-19th century Prague, Vilna), Chayei Adam II 155:30

The Sages obligated intoxication, or at least drinking more than normal [on Purim], to remember the great miracle. In truth, one who knows regarding himself that he would then degrade any mitzvah, in hand-washing or blessings or blessing after meals, or he would not pray minchah or maariv, or he would act light-headed – better that he not become intoxicated. All of one's deeds should be for the sake of Heaven.

One more point

27. Rabbi Jonathan Muskat, *Alcohol in our synagogues: Should our shul go dry?*,

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/alcohol-in-our-synagogues/> Nov '19

Some members in our community noted that when a fancy bottle of scotch is put out at a Kiddush, it generates a lot of excitement, which is undoubtedly noticed by our teens. Others mentioned that a new liquor store just opened up in the Five Towns and they were advertising bottles of scotch valued at over \$200. I believe that when it comes to alcohol use, it's more than simply a question of protecting our teens from addiction, drunkenness and dangerous behavior. It's a question of teaching our teens what we, and in turn they, should value. What is central and what is ancillary in the eyes of the Torah? What should generate our greatest excitement, and where should we exercise moderation?

When our teens see that our excitement for a bottle of the latest scotch far exceeds our excitement for what shul is really supposed to be about, Torah and Tefillah, then they receive a twisted message about what are and what are not the central values of our synagogues. It is true that wine plays a significant role in Jewish ritual life, but it almost always is featured in an ancillary role, not in the central role. When we celebrate a marriage ceremony, we add significance to that ceremony by reciting a blessing over wine. When we celebrate a brit milah, we add significance to that ceremony by reciting a blessing over wine. When we sanctify the Shabbat, we add significance to that sanctification by reciting a blessing over wine. In all these instances, the wine is meant to enhance something which is worthy of our celebration, but it is not the central event. Certainly, in a synagogue setting, our communal holy space, we should clarify to our teens and to ourselves, frankly, what is central and what is not in our lives.

Review Questions

- How would Jewish tradition look at medical marijuana?
- What are the four concerns surrounding recreational drug use?
- What are three reasons why Judaism is more tolerant of wine?
- What was the position of Maimonides regarding drinking alcohol?