

Twenty Reasons to Stop Taking Drugs

Preface

I smoked my first joint in late 1965, and after that, it was only a matter of time before I was smoking 5 or 6 hash bongs a day, dropping acid, occasionally shooting speed, taking opium, ether, cough syrup and anything else I could get my hands on. Over a two-year period, I saw my character change from a relatively moral and optimistic person to someone steeped in pessimism and cynicism, who cared nothing for his own personal health, was willing to break the law, cheat his friends, abuse others psychologically and physically, and although I never killed anybody, at least to threaten them.

As my character eroded, I felt myself being gradually drawn into the criminal element of society – there was something demonic about what was happening to me, and as much as I didn't like what I saw, there was also something about it that attracted me. It was the mid-sixties then, our beloved president had been assassinated, my parents were having marital problems, and there was mass confusion and disagreement about the Vietnam War, with a growing subculture of freewheeling hippies and protesters, encouraging everybody to “turn on, tune in, and drop out,” and a general lack of knowledge about the dangers of drugs.

So I kept on doing drugs, wanting nothing more in life than to get stoned and stay stoned, until it was almost too late – but fortunately the circumstances of my life changed, and I was able to quit (I'm sorry to say that my younger brother was not so fortunate). At that point, I had lost considerable weight, was suffering from fatigue, memory loss, disorientation, food and chemical sensitivities, and a self-loathing for what I had done to myself, an emotion I had never experienced before. From that time on, it was an uphill battle to regain my health and mental clarity. So you can see that what I'm about to tell you is not preaching from the pulpit, but an actual sharing of something I learned through my own personal experience.

Introduction

Addiction to recreational drugs is a growing worldwide problem,¹ with hard drugs like heroin infiltrating new sectors of society,² a recent increase in worldwide cocaine production,³ and an explosion in popularity of more modern synthetic drugs

¹ An estimated 208 million people internationally consume illegal drugs. See <http://www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts/the-truth-about-drugs.html>

² <http://drugabuse.com/heroin-use-increasing-across-new-demographics-study-finds/>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com › World › Colombia>

like methamphetamine and ecstasy, especially among the younger generation.⁴ And this does not even begin to take into account the millions of persons worldwide hooked on pharmaceuticals.⁵

Addiction is defined as a physical and/or mental dependency, characterized by compulsive engagement in rewarding stimuli, despite adverse consequences. Most illegal drugs, as well as alcohol, cigarettes, and many pharmaceuticals, are physically addictive; others, like marijuana, have a lower incidence of physical addiction, but can be psychologically addictive. In this article, we will explore the insidious nature of recreational drugs, the physical and psychological repercussions of drug use, how addiction develops, and why it is so dangerous.

Twenty Reasons to Stop Taking Drugs

1. **Regular use of recreational drugs has health-related consequences:** The physical repercussions of recreational drug use include addiction, memory loss, impaired brain development, AIDS and hepatitis, organ damage, chromosome damage, food and chemical sensitivities, loss of appetite, dental problems, inability to sleep, accidents (while under the influence), and the degradation of the immune system.

On a more subtle level, drug toxins and/or the trauma of a particular drug-related experience can impede the flow of energy through the body's meridians and chakras.⁶ According to Balinese healer and meditation teacher, Pak Merta Ada,⁷ using drugs can weaken the mind base,⁸ and, by doing so, affect areas of the subconscious that control our thought processes and emotions. This can result in a loss of mindfulness⁹ and vitality, as well as inexplicable phobias, neurosis and other mental disorders.

2. **Using drugs also affects non-users:** The physical and psychological afflictions of drug users are often exceeded by the heartache, despair, and physical abuse

⁴ <https://www.cedarpointrecovery.com> › Blog <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37156380>

⁵ As of 2005, pharmaceutical depressants, opioids and antidepressants were responsible for more overdose deaths in the US (45%) than cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine and amphetamines (39%) combined. The most deaths used to take place in inner cities in African-American neighborhoods, but they have now been overtaken by white rural communities, primarily due to the increase in pharmaceuticals. The same trend can be seen in the rates of hospitalization for substance abuse and emergency hospitalization for overdoses.

<http://www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts/prescription/abuse-international-statistics.html>

⁶ According to research done by a swami in India, regular use of LSD can put holes in the chakras.

⁷ Founder of Bali Usada Health Meditation. See <http://www.balimeditation.com/index.php>

⁸ Mind base: organs, cells and elements of the body where consciousness resides.

⁹ Mindfulness: in Buddhism, awareness applied closely to an object (or series of objects); it is characterized as "not floating away from its object" and functions as non-confusion and non-forgetfulness; a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment.

suffered by those in their personal circle of influence: parents, friends, family members, colleagues and the innocent victims of drug-related crimes.

3. **The ill effects of drug use on pregnancy:** The use of recreational drugs during pregnancy can result in miscarriage, low birth weight, premature labor, placental abruption, preterm birth, birth defects, children born addicted, behavioral and learning problems, fetal death, and even maternal death. Women who engage in this kind of behavior are not only harming themselves, but the future generations as well.
4. **Doing drugs is like playing Russian roulette:** The harmful results of recreational drug use are cumulative and may not produce a noticeable effect for as many as 10, 20 or even 30 years. On the other hand, it's possible someone might have a severe reaction the first time he or she takes a particular drug, and no one can predict when that will happen, what drug it will be, under what circumstances, and at what potency or purity. Like playing Russian roulette, we cannot know beforehand which chamber holds the bullet.
5. **Different strokes for different folks may mean the difference between life and death when it comes to drugs:** We're all different – what one person can do with impunity might kill another. One whose mind is gross and has a strong constitution may not be overtly affected by even massive doses of a particular drug, especially if he or she has built up a tolerance to it, while a more sensitive person could not tolerate even one-hundredth of that amount. Some factors are predictive, such as body size and alcohol/other drugs consumed at the same time, but are rarely taken into account when the opportunity to take the drug arrives. The point here is that one cannot judge one's own capacity to tolerate a particular drug by another's standards. That's why doctors who prescribe prescription drugs often want to know the medical history of their patient. Don't think your friendly drug dealer is going to ask for your medical history.
6. **Like attracts like:** Birds of a feather flock together, like attracts like. If we take drugs, we will automatically seek out a circle of friends who do the same – friends who will no doubt encourage us to continue taking drugs as a justification for their own drug use, just as we will encourage them. The end result is to drag each other down in the process.
7. **Drug use supports crime:** By using illicit drugs, we are supporting a criminal network of drug dealers, violent mafia-like cartels, and their inevitable drug

wars. Illicit drug sales are an estimated half-trillion dollar annual business,¹⁰ bringing enormous profits to an extremely narrow sector of society and providing little, if any, economic benefit to the average working person.

8. **Drug users often become criminals:** As a corollary to point 7, there is a very real temptation for people who buy illicit drugs to start selling them, first to their friends, and then to an ever-widening circle of drug users. Selling drugs is an expedient way to support one's drug habit, and a natural evolution, along with theft and burglary, in the growing addiction of the user. The more one becomes a part of this criminal element of society, the more he or she adapts to its criminal code and lifestyle.

The downside of dealing drugs is obvious: (1) It gives the dealer greater access to drugs; (2) If he/she gets caught, he's going to jail; in some countries, this could mean the death penalty; (3) In the world of drug dealers and drug cartels, it's kill and be killed. Anyone who's contemplating a career in dealing illicit drugs should know that it's a high-risk profession.

9. **The evolution of addiction:** Through repeated usage, the drug user gradually becomes attached to the pleasant sensations and emotional highs that are part of the drug experience. The greater the attachment, the more inclined he or she is to repeat that experience,¹¹ and thus the user becomes caught in a vicious cycle. This is the stage of psychological addiction.

While under the influence of a particular drug, the user may experience a temporary boost in self-confidence, a feeling of lightness, clarity, expanded or altered consciousness, energy, aggressiveness, relaxation, creativity, sexual arousal, a lessening of inhibitions, a lessening of physical pain, or have insights and hallucinations, and in some cases, even develop supernormal powers, making it possible for that person to engage in certain activities in a way that he/she could not have done before. One discovers a new sense of freedom, and this certainly has its positive side. The problem arises when the user begins to rely on the drug in order to engage in those activities, and all too quickly, his newfound freedom turns into another form of dependency (sometimes referred to as a drug use disorder). The more one relies on such a chemical crutch, the less he is able to perform those activities without it and the more dependent he becomes. This process is reinforced by the irritability, emotional lows and other withdrawal symptoms that are experienced at the end of "the

¹⁰ See <http://www.talkingdrugs.org/report-global-illegal-drug-trade-valued-at-around-half-a-trillion-dollars>

¹¹ In behavioral psychology, this phenomenon is known as operant conditioning, a type of learning where behavior is controlled by consequences.

trip,” when the user is coming off the drug.

As the user gradually adapts to the drug, the sought-after substance becomes less pleasurable, and he or she needs to take larger quantities of it in order to experience the same high¹² (and eventually in order to just feel normal). Each repetition of the drug experience reinforces the cycle: the more one relies on the drug, the more frequently he will take it, the more painful the withdrawal becomes, and the more he will need it. Thus, what began as a purely psychological addiction morphs into a psychophysical addiction, undermining the user’s health, his relationship with others, and ultimately, his future happiness.

10. **Drug addiction’s harmful psychological effects:** One natural consequence of drug addiction is to undermine our character.¹³ Why does this happen? First of all, due to its compulsive nature, addiction destroys free will. Without free will, we are little more than automatons, unable to make a rational or intelligent decision, because our mind is controlled by our attachment to the drug. Secondly, taking (recreational) drugs is just plain selfish, and whatever we do for purely selfish reasons is bound to sooner or later erode our character. This is because selfish actions are lacking in generosity, kindness, compassion, tolerance, forgiveness, and other noble qualities that form the basis for a good character.

But you might ask, “How do you know that taking drugs is selfish?” and I would answer your question with a few questions of my own: “Can you think of one person that you’re helping by getting stoned or smashed out of your mind?” or “How would you feel about toking up or shooting up in front of your children – do you think you’d be setting a good example for them?” The fact is, this kind of behavior does nothing to make the world a better place, and the more you do it, the deeper it gets imprinted on your consciousness, and the less altruistic and more self-centered you become.

¹² Here is the biological reason: Most drugs affect the brain's "reward circuit" by flooding it with the chemical messenger dopamine, which controls the body's ability to feel pleasure (nicotine increases dopamine levels by 200%, heroin by up to 300%, cocaine by 400%, and amphetamines by 1,000%). This overstimulation of the reward circuit causes the intensely pleasurable "high" that can lead someone to take a drug again and again. As a person continues to use the drug, the brain adjusts to the excess dopamine (and other neurotransmitters) by making less of it and/or reducing the ability of cells in the reward circuit to respond to it. This reduces the high that the person feels compared to the high they felt when first taking the drug—an effect known as tolerance – which in turn requires higher dosages to achieve the same high. One result of tolerance is that the person with a drug disorder begins to feel withdrawal symptoms when not taking the drug.

See <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction>

¹³ Character: the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual, synonymous with terms like integrity, honor, moral strength, rectitude, uprightness, and willpower.

As your character erodes, so does your morality. Eventually, you sink to a level where it means nothing to lie, steal, cheat your friends, commit adultery, and ultimately, if the addiction is severe enough, to kill others.

11. **Increased dosage means greater health risks:** When the user increases the drug's dosage, he is placing greater stress on his nervous system and vital organs, and thus increasing the risk of overdosing.
12. **More time doing drugs means less time for everything else:** There is a simple truth – we cannot be in two places at the same time. For every moment we spend hanging out with fellow drug users, shooting up or getting high, that's one less moment spent at the local church/temple/mosque, practicing yoga/meditation, feeding the hungry, planting trees, saving the oceans, studying for a degree, spending time with our family, or whatever else might have been. The more time we spend doing the one, the less time we have for the other. Life requires choices and sacrifice. Unfortunately for drug users, the more hooked they become, the more difficult that choice becomes, and the greater the sacrifice.
13. **Drug use reinforces wrong views:**¹⁴ Generally speaking, whatever we do in life needs to fit into a belief system that we feel comfortable with – if we don't have a reason or justification for doing something, chances are, we won't do it.¹⁵ The rationale for taking drugs will vary from person to person, whether it is part of a genuine spiritual quest, for medical reasons, for hedonistic reasons, or somewhere in between. For example, there are tribes of indigenous peoples living in the rainforests of Brazil and Peru who use the psychoactive drug ayahuasca for cultural, health and/or spiritual reasons. Similar cases can be made for the use of certain psychoactive mushrooms and cacti.

Although some people from the “West” may fall into this category (of taking drugs for spiritual reasons), they are bound to be a small and short-lived minority, since most western societies are founded on the principles of consumerism and the pursuit of sense pleasures, which do not accord well

¹⁴ Wrong view: According to the Buddhist teachings, an erroneous belief, opinion or theory, rooted in the false belief in a self. There are numerous wrong views in this world, such as those about the nature of the world, karma and karma result, God and man, existence and non-existence, etc. When clung to, such views can easily grow into dogmas, belief-systems and ideologies, and thus become a source of great suffering, both for oneself and others.

¹⁵ Of course, sometimes, under conditions of great stress, it is possible for someone to act in a way that is not in accord with his or her belief system. Once that type of behavior becomes habitual, however, as in the case of addiction or schizophrenia, that person may, for the sake of sanity, change his view or develop a secondary, although temporary, conflicting belief system, in order to justify behavior that would otherwise be repellent to him.

with the simple lifestyle and animistic practices of most tribal peoples. Even if such persons are sincere in their efforts to adopt an aboriginal/indigenous lifestyle, their cultural accretions all too often end up playing interference, to prevent them from achieving their goal.

Far more predominant than the first category are those who start taking a prescription drug for medical reasons (or find it in their parents' medicine cabinet) and end up hooked. This is a growing category and one that is dangerous precisely because most people think pharmaceuticals are safer than illicit drugs (which is not always the case). Another problem with pharmaceuticals is that they can act as a gateway to the use of other drugs, both legal and illegal.¹⁶

As we go down the list of reasons for taking drugs, we find that each person has a slightly different reason. One person may take drugs to heal an illness, another to explore his psyche, and a third person as a way to face deep, subconscious fears. Others may take drugs as a way to relax, to relive pain, to become more creative, as a stimulant, an escape, a punishment, a reward, to make a social or political statement, for sex arousal and performance, to play mind games with others, as a rite or ritual, or to just plain feel good, and the list goes on and on.

Additionally, users often have more than one reason for taking drugs, and these reasons can be combined with various physical and psychological triggers, such as lack of sleep, a feeling of discomfort, a person, a memory, etc. In my own case, taking drugs was primarily for partying and feeling good, but there was also an element of searching for something, a self-destructive element (which was somehow connected to the Vietnam War and my disillusionment with the American dream), and a definite element of rebellion – a desire to test my own (and society's) limits. Being the mid-sixties then, my reasons were very much influenced by the times.

Another set of reasons falls into the social-usage category: “Well, I only smoke a little pot on the weekends, and pot's not dangerous,” or “Why should I offend my friends when they offer me a joint?” or “Hey, dude, it's legal in Colorado,” or “It's a great way to meet chicks/guys,” or “Hey, what's wrong with pot? You should be happy I'm not hooked on crack or meth,” etc. If we examine the various reasons mentioned above, we find that all of them, with the exception of the first two, are based on a fundamentally wrong view of life. Let's look at a few of them:

¹⁶ According to an article in the Huffington Post, “prescription drug abuse is the biggest gateway to the use of hard drugs.” Alcohol would also be major offender.
https://www.huffingtonpost.com/desirae-hoover/legal-painkillers-are-the_b_12343306.html

a) Have we considered that some explorations of the psyche can pose risks that we may not be ready to deal with? Therefore, if we are really serious about exploring our psyche, wouldn't we be better off doing it in a traditional way, under the guidance of a competent instructor, counselor or psychologist? There are lots of time-honored approaches that can help us achieve a sure and consistent result without the risk.

b) If we wish to become more creative as an artist, better at sports, to overcome a handicap, or to excel in a particular discipline, nature's tried and true way is to develop the necessary skills through our own hard work and effort. It may take longer to achieve our goal without a chemical crutch, but the result is also longer lasting, since it doesn't disappear as soon as we come off the drug. Besides giving us a sense of accomplishment and independence by having to work for what we get, at the very least we are not short-circuiting our reward center with a chemical, which can lead to over-stimulation and the resultant adaptation-addiction cycle.

Of course, we all know that taking drugs is justified when someone is sick, but when health is regained, it is time for the patient to stop medicating and move on. So what kind of message are we giving others, if we don't stop? We are telling them that we are still sick, and, in a sense, this is true, since our attachment to the drug is in itself a kind of illness. This attachment, which begins as soon as we feel the desire to repeat a particular drug-related experience, is the seed of addiction. Clinging to the memory of that initial experience, we move further and further away from the conditions that originally created it, every time we take the drug, and the more we cling, the deeper we fall into bondage.

c) Those who want to feel good for purely selfish reasons (in this case, by taking drugs) will find that the end result of wanting to feel good is to feel bad. This is due to the operation of cause and effect on a psychophysical level.¹⁷ The result may come during or after the drug user's high/trip, as a headache, fatigue, irritability, paranoia, psychosis, or other withdrawal symptom, or it may be cumulative and long-term, not showing up until much later.

d) As for the "pot's not dangerous" group (and that's bound to be one of the biggest), long term pot smoking has been shown to affect the memory and

¹⁷ According to the law of karma, whatever action arises from an unwholesome volition (craving for sense pleasures would qualify as an unwholesome volition) is bound to produce an unwholesome and unpleasant result.

brain development of teenagers,¹⁸ and although we may feel there's only a 10% chance that long-term pot usage is going to affect us or our children, are we willing to play Russian Roulette with our/their physical and mental health?

Even if we think there's only a 1% chance that smoking pot is going to affect us, it doesn't hurt to investigate the facts. First of all, we might want to check with some post-druggies, to see what induced them to move on, and how their lifestyles changed after they quit. In my own case, I quit for several different reasons: 1) I no longer had access to my drug of choice; 2) I didn't like the changes that I saw taking place in myself, either on a physical or psychological level; 3) It just seemed it was time for me to move on, and since I didn't like the direction I was headed, I decided to go in the opposite direction. For me, this consisted of becoming a vegetarian, taking up yoga and meditation, and immersing myself in the practice of Buddhism. I decided that the best way I could help others was to set a good example for them by helping myself. As a result, my health improved, and I regained much of the vitality and optimism that I had lost during my drug days.

This is not to say that I'm recommending for the reader to follow my path, I'm only putting it out as one option. Each person has to find his or her own way. What's important is to make sure we're headed in a positive direction and not hurting anybody else in the process.

After examining the ones who quit, let's take a look at some of the veteran potheads, who've been toking up for the past 30 or 40 years. Leaving aside the fact that they're still smoking pot, which already tells us something about their belief system, we know there's going to be a percentage, who, by all appearances, seem to be totally unaffected. Nevertheless, subtle, incremental changes are taking place in their character on a subconscious level every time they toke up or imbibe their beloved weed. This is because one of the ways that karma works is as a conditioning agent, to build up habit patterns that affect the way we think and act. Although most people are unable to recognize these changes on a moment-by-moment basis (see point 20), they can often see them after the passage of 10, 20 or 30 years. Some, however, who are sensitive to the flow of subtle energies, can see them right away.¹⁹

¹⁸ Results from the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables, SAMHSA, CBHSQ.

¹⁹ I remember talking to a friend in the early 90's, who relayed the following incident to me: when he went to meet Swami Satchidananda at the guru's Virginia ashram, after not having seen him for several years, the swami looked him in the eye and immediately told him that he needed to stop smoking pot. My friend was surprised to hear that, because he hadn't mentioned to him anything about it. I think the swami must have seen the effect of his pot smoking in my friend's aura.

And what about all the others who somehow missed their mark and never quite made it back from their nocturnal wanderings to that broad and ubiquitous category called “normalcy”? Maybe some of them fell into the trap of groupthink or some psychic niche and found the walls a little too steep to climb out. Perhaps some felt more comfortable alienating themselves from others with “alternative” lifestyles or by rubbing others the wrong way with their pothead humor and never-ending sarcasm, or maybe they just seemed to “go with the flow” a little too often, “hanging so loose” as to make people wonder if they weren’t just a little too loose for their own good – what makes us so confident that we will not end up like one of them?²⁰

One last point here is that we may start off as social drug users, but as we get habituated to the party scene, our perspective changes, and we find that we also enjoy getting high while watching TV, eating nachos, going to a concert or just being out in nature. Slowly and surreptitiously, marijuana infiltrates our daily life, and we begin to feel the need to get high more often. What began as a casual relationship transitions into something much more serious. Like going steady, we feel it’s time to be in a committed relationship with Mary Jane, and that relationship is known as a marijuana use disorder. Recent data suggests that 30% of those who use marijuana may have some degree of marijuana use disorder.²¹

As our behavior becomes more compulsive, the disorder morphs into addiction, and we start looking for ways to increase the amount and potency of the drug, as well as the frequency. We’re probably smoking at least one or two joints a day now, and more on the weekends. Along with the increase in consumption, we will need to create a belief system to support our addiction, a point of view that will allow us to act, at least temporarily, against our better judgment. There is also the possibility that we may want to try something stronger, like coke, meth, LSD, ecstasy or heroin. Even assuming that we had no initial interest in anything other than using marijuana as a social drug, interests can change, thoughts can change,

²⁰ Just a note: It’s been more than 50 years now since I last smoked hashish, so it’s quite possible that my perspective on the current-day drug scene is a bit skewed and out of touch. Disregarding those who use cannabis for medical reasons, maybe there’s a whole new generation of pot smokers out there who are highly motivated, moral and conscientious members of society – maybe so, but if there are, my guess is that they’re in the minority. Even if Joe Factory Worker is now smoking pot instead of drinking beer during his weekend/weekday TV football games, I still question if there aren’t more productive ways that he could be spending his time.

²¹ See Prevalence of Marijuana Use Disorders in the United States Between 2001-2002 and 2012-2013. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2015;72(12):1235-1242. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2015.1858.

mistakes can happen, and, even an iron will, if exposed to a corruptive influence long enough, can finally be broken.

Whatever our justification for taking recreational drugs, it must, by its very nature, be selfish, and that which is selfish is also deluded,²² for why else would we ignore the pleas of our friends and family, and be willing to exchange the long-term benefits of a healthy and productive life for the cheap thrills of a drug-induced euphoria, not just once or a hundred times, but every time we take up/shoot up and get high.

Nothing is free in this life – everything has its price. To think otherwise is in itself a kind of wrong view, for it denies the cause-and-effect nature of karma. A corollary to this view is to think that a selfish, degenerate lifestyle is not going to produce negative consequences.²³ As a man thinks, so he acts, and as he acts, so he becomes; thus one’s own thoughts are what ultimately determine the quality of a person’s life. Add up someone’s thoughts, and, in particular, his wrong views, and their sum total creates a filter through which that person sees the world, filtering out the truth and leaving him with a distorted and deluded vision of reality. To embrace that vision is to bind oneself to the wheel of suffering.

14. **Drugs reduce mindfulness and distort perception:** Taking drugs is like whipping a horse to make it run faster or pull a heavy load – sooner or later, all that running and pulling (against the horse’s natural inclination) is bound to make it tired. Similarly, it’s only natural for us to feel “burned out” and disoriented when we come down after a period of chemically whipping ourselves with drugs. Some may take days, even weeks, to recover their full strength and vitality, and some (usually long-time drug users) never regain the lost mental acuity of their pre-drug days.²⁴

²² According to the Buddhist teachings, all the wrong views in this world have their foundation in one fundamental wrong view, called “identity view” – the notion of an individual and permanent self – an “I,” “me,” and “my,” so deeply embedded in our subconscious minds, that we have learned, over countless lifetimes, to unquestionably accept this “self” as real. At the base of all selfish actions is this belief in a self. Thus, to be selfish is to be under the sway of wrong view, and to be under the sway of wrong view is to be deluded.

²³ This wrong view and the previous one both deal with the operation of karma, and are two of the most egregious of all wrong views, for not only do they deny the benefit of hard work, effort and accomplishment, but they also justify a host of harmful activities (including taking drugs), in the belief that there will be no future consequences.

²⁴ A study from New Zealand conducted in part by researchers at Duke University showed that people who started smoking marijuana heavily in their teens and had an ongoing marijuana use disorder lost an average of 8 IQ points between ages 13 and 38. The lost mental abilities didn't fully return in those who quit marijuana as adults [note that other (hard) drugs can have a much more deleterious effect]. See <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana>

This cumulative and sometimes long-lasting loss of vitality and mental clarity can affect the user's ability to maintain mindfulness, leading to periods of forgetfulness, confusion, disorientation, a feeling of inertia or ennui, and a lessening of problem solving skills. Without mindfulness, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to go through daily life without a mishap.

An example might be helpful here: Let's say someone is walking down the street, having a conversation with a friend. There's a puddle in front of him, but he's so engrossed in the conversation that he doesn't see the puddle, and ends up stepping in it. With strong mindfulness, however, chances are he won't miss seeing the puddle.²⁵

Like the person walking down the street, the person hooked on drugs is no doubt going to end up stepping in a lot of puddles, because his "conversation" (with the drug) is distracting him from seeing where he's going. If he cannot "stop talking" long enough to get a grasp on the situation, he may need to seek help in an environment where he can undergo a proper course of detoxing and receive assistance in the therapies of his choice (see footnote below²⁶ about the benefits of meditation as therapy).

15. **Drugs make us more susceptible to psychosis and possession:** The use of psychoactive drugs can deplete our vital force and alter perception to such a degree that we become susceptible to possession by discarnate beings and parasitic entities.²⁷ These guests in residence prey upon our blood and energy, and block the flow of chi through our meridians, causing organ malfunction, nervous system imbalances, and other inexplicable symptoms. In extreme

²⁵ This is because most (maybe 90%) of the average person's thoughts and feelings flash through his conscious mind so rapidly that he remains unaware of them (although he is still aware of them on a subconscious level). With strong mindfulness, however, it is possible to increase the level of conscious awareness up to 30-40% (and sometimes higher), making it possible for the mindfulness practitioner to gain greater control over his peripheral thoughts, feelings, and actions.

²⁶ According to Pak Merta Ada, meditation with strong mindfulness increases the body's production of dopamine, serotonin, GABA, endorphins and other hormones, which can help to break the addiction cycle. In a landmark 2002 study at the John F. Kennedy Institute, researchers found that dopamine levels of meditation practitioners were boosted by an amazing 65% during meditation. Just as important, their dopamine levels remained in an optimally healthy range when not in meditation; in other words, there were no withdrawal symptoms. See

<https://eocinstitute.org/meditation/7-reasons-meditation-can-naturally-beat-addiction/>

²⁷ According to the book "Spirit Release Therapy" by Dr. William Baldwin, altering the consciousness with alcohol or drugs, especially hallucinogens, loosens one's external ego boundaries and opens the subconscious mind to infestation by discarnate beings. The same holds true for the use of strong analgesics and the anesthetic drugs necessary in surgery. A codeine tablet taken for the relief of pain of a dental extraction can sufficiently alter the consciousness to allow entry to a spirit [note that heroin is 50-60 times stronger than codeine, and a new designer drug called "flakka," with a high number of reported cases of psychosis, seems to be even more risk-laden than heroin, cocaine and amphetamine-based drugs]."

cases, the uninvited guest(s) can become the “owner of the house,” forcing us into a state of complete submission, where we are no longer in charge of our thoughts and actions. Anyone who has ever witnessed a “demonic possession” knows that this is no laughing matter, sometimes even leading to physical violence, and in rare cases, suicide.

16. **Natural plant-based psychoactive drugs can also be dangerous:** Natural alkaloids and hallucinogens, which are extracted from trees and plants often have medicinal properties and are generally less toxic than their synthetic counterparts. When these natural plant remedies are used medicinally, under the guidance of a qualified health care professional or shaman, their use is certainly justified. Some people even say that when we extract and use these plant remedies in a proper manner, we can establish a relationship with the spirit of the tree or plant. Such spirits, including earth and tree devas,²⁸ are generally, but not always, benign and can help us heal from various maladies and disorders. In fact, most of our early medicines came from trees and plants via healers and shamans, who were able to communicate with these plant spirits and get the recipes for their remedies directly from them. Thus, there’s a lot to be gained from the proper use of these nutraceuticals.

That being said, if we don’t use these plant remedies properly, they can be just as dangerous as their synthetic counterparts.²⁹ Medicines are for healing disease, and healing disease is not a form of entertainment or a path to self-aggrandizement, nor is it meant for the practice of black magic, for calling up demons, or to increase one’s power and ability in the field of psychic warfare. If we want to use plants in a selfish or harmful way, no one’s going to stop us. Once the paradigm changes, however, our relationship with the plant also changes, and what was once benign and beneficial may suddenly and unexpectedly become the wrathful deity that we so often see depicted in the art of indigenous cultures.³⁰

One last thing: earth devas and plant spirits are not enlightened beings, and although they are worthy of our respect and gratitude, they do not have the

²⁸ Fairies, gnomes, elves, leprechauns and a vast array of earth-bound angelic beings, many of whom live in trees and plants.

²⁹ Sometimes, we may even use them properly, and yet, due to some past unwholesome karma (or karmic connection with a malevolent spirit), or perhaps just a concatenation of various supporting factors, a malevolent spirit may move into our sphere of consciousness and take over. Unexpectedly and all too suddenly, after dozens of good trips, we find we’re having an extremely bad trip for no apparent reason (which might continue for a long time, even after we come off the drug).

³⁰ For more information on the relationship between humans and devas, see: “The Nine Freedoms” (p.109-111), Dr. George King.

ability to lead mankind to liberation from the cycle of birth and death.³¹

Therefore, if we want to take refuge in something of lasting value, let it be in the highest truth or in an enlightened being who is a manifestation of that truth. Trees and plants are our friends, and we can learn a lot from them, but let us not make them into something they are not.

17. **If Jesus, Buddha, Moses and Mohammed didn't take drugs, why should we?** One who is on a genuine spiritual path does not try to cheat his way to enlightenment or salvation by taking drugs. To do so is to disrespect the path and to devalue our ability to walk it. Talk is cheap, especially when you're stoned or smashed out of your mind. Therefore, if you want to get high, then do it the way the saints of yore did – they got high, stayed high and died high, and didn't debase themselves in the process. They were the true alchemists because they could turn their hearts and minds into pure gold. Let's be like them, instead of the opposite.
18. **Drug use is contrary to meditation:** As one gains proficiency in the practice of meditation, and the mind becomes more subtle, the meditator can actually experience how even a single joint or beer can alter perception and adversely affect one's clarity and mindfulness. That's why there's a Buddhist precept against the use of alcohol and drugs (except for medical reasons) – not only because they can interfere with meditation, but also because their use can easily become a supporting factor other unwholesome activities.
19. **Drugs abuse – the path to spiritual bankruptcy:** Every human being is born with a spiritual bank account. Call it God's grace, if you will, the sum total of that person's past wholesome karma, or, on a more material level, the inheritance of his parent's DNA and the evolution of human society manifested through the individual. As one goes through life, there are some activities that help to build up this account, and some activities that tend to deplete it. Activities that build it up include acts of kindness, tolerance, generosity, prayer and meditation. Activities that deplete it include acts of greed, anger, stinginess, cruelty, mental distraction, and any other act that increases one's selfishness and egotism. Anyone with an open heart and a modicum of wisdom can discover the truth of this principle on his or her own.

On a physical level, this account consists of the child's inherited constitution, providing it with a given number of years on this earth – so many years of good health and so many of illness. With a healthy or unhealthy

³¹ The cycle of birth and death: the ongoing cycle of rebirth, in which beings are bound by their ignorance and craving to different realms of existence, where they continue to transmigrate and undergo various afflictions, in accordance with their past karma.

lifestyle, however, the child can build on that inheritance or deplete it, and to some degree – maybe 10, 20 or even 50 years – lengthen or shorten its life.

As the child ages, its lifestyle not only affects its physical health, but also its mental, emotional and spiritual health. With the right attitude and approach, the child can be constantly evolving, refining its character, and building up its spiritual bank account; with the wrong attitude and approach, he or she reverses the process.

In the same way, before we start taking drugs, each of us can be likened to a newborn child, coming into this world with a fresh bank account, replete with a predetermined stock of merit and the aggregate of moral and spiritual qualities inherited from its karmic gene pool. Every time we take a trip on drugs, however, we have to pay for that trip with our spiritual credit card, and, penny by penny, our account is gradually depleted.

We may not notice the decline in our account right away, but if we keep on using our spiritual credit card without replenishing the account, one day our spiritual bank account is going to be completely empty. This is zero balance, at which point our whole world is finally consumed by the thought, power and action of the drug. Now our creditors start coming after us, hounding us to pay off our karmic debt. In this state, we have no choice but to declare spiritual bankruptcy, and thereafter, “owe our soul to the company store.”

If we die in this state, we are headed for a dark future existence, perhaps in hell, as an animal, or as a human in a state of great suffering. For those who don't believe in heaven or hell, or karma, or an afterlife, then at the very least, such a life is a discredit to one's parents and a setback in the evolution of humanity.

Each of us, whether we know it or not, is endowed with a spiritual bank account, the purpose of which is to support our journey through life, that we might, with the right effort and dedication, accomplish something of lasting value. If drugs are an obstacle on that path, the first thing we need to do is to recognize that we actually have a problem, and that this problem is due, at least in part, to a wrong understanding of our behavior. Only then will we be in a position to overcome that obstacle and set our account right.

20. **Every moment counts:** In Buddhism, time is divided into mind-moments, each one lasting about a trillionth of a second. When the mind is not in a state of deep sleep or dormancy, most of these mind-moments are involved in producing either wholesome or unwholesome thought-patterns, which form the basis for all our actions. Although one may not be aware of it, every wholesome or unwholesome thought-pattern registers a karmic imprint on a person's character and moves his or her life in one of two directions: toward darkness and bondage, or toward freedom, unconditional love, and light. No

one can go in both directions at the same time, so at some level of the mind, with every new thought process,³² that person has to make a choice between one direction and the other.

If we apply this logic to the taking of drugs, the following question arises: Is our desire to take a particular drug truly altruistic or does it contain an element of selfishness, pride, egotism or attachment? If our answer tends toward the latter, then we need to excise that desire from our mind and change our behavior accordingly. And the time to make that change is in this very moment, for even a single mind-moment is a window of opportunity to blaze a trail into the wilderness of powerful, seemingly impregnable habit patterns and re-form them according to our will.

No effort is wasted, so even though we may not succeed on our first attempt, that very effort constitutes a wholesome volition, which will make it easier to succeed the next time. If we feel we don't have the strength to make the necessary effort on our own, then we should humble ourselves, pray for guidance, and seek the assistance of others who are in a position to help. If we can change our lives, even to some small degree, that in itself is a great victory and a harbinger of greater things to come. Therefore, I encourage each of you to decide here and now that you will do what needs to be done in order to make that change. The decision is yours – no one else can make it for you – and in that decision lies the seed of your future success.

Bhikkhu Moneyya
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³² Thought process: Buddhist Abhidhamma describes two basic types of mental processes: a sense-door mental process and a mind-door mental process. What we need to know here is that a single sense-door mental processes generally lasts 17 mind-moments (still less than a billionth of a second), and a single mind-door mental process generally lasts 12 mind-moments.