

# CANNABIS, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND INNER DEVELOPMENT

ANTHONY MECCA AND LISA ROMERO

A conversation between biodynamic farmer Anthony Mecca and Lisa Romero, a teacher of anthroposophical meditation and inner development and a complementary health practitioner.

Anthroposophy, or spiritual science, is the source and path of development developed by Rudolf Steiner that stands behind the wisdom of biodynamic agriculture. An understanding of inner development and the soul-spiritual nature of the human being is central to furthering the work of biodynamics if we are interested in supporting the evolving human being and fostering healthy communities.

**AM:** The topic of Cannabis is really complex and there are a lot of different layers to the issue, so I'm excited to explore it with you. I'm specifically interested in how we can find clarity about how Cannabis affects the soul and spiritual aspects of the human being, from an anthroposophical understanding. To start, I thought we could look at Cannabis in terms of its effects on human consciousness in both its recreational and medicinal uses.

**LR:** Yes, it's an important topic, and I think as a teacher of anthroposophical meditation this is definitely the central question for me—around consciousness and also the necessity of true inner development in our times. Specifically at issue here is the idea of a substance “doing it for you,” having something change your consciousness instead of having that change come out of your own inner freedom. That said, there are times when we are sick and we need someone or something to do things for us because we can't actually do them for ourselves. So, obviously, in terms of personal care when we are very unwell, this need for the other to do it for us comes up in various ways, from ameliorating pain to putting us to sleep, to feeding and toileting, etc. This is also the case with something like a broken arm, which requires a cast to heal properly. However, if you were to leave the cast on far longer than necessary for the healing process, you would actually do detriment to the arm.

**AM:** In an agricultural context, it makes me think of the health and benefit of temporarily separating a newborn calf and its mother from the herd, which, if prolonged, would be of detriment to the calf, its mother, and the herd as a whole. In the plant world, I think of the utility of spraying a crop or the soil with a substance that can help stimulate its growth forces but, if continued, would not allow it to form its own sustaining relationships with the soil, etc. Could you give an example of medicinal Cannabis where it can serve in this way—providing something that the human being cannot do for itself?

**LR:** From an anthroposophical understanding, what is happening in a seizure, for instance, in epilepsy, is that the astral and etheric bodies are struggling to be in right relationship to one another. They are “bouncing off” each other in an attempt to form a new connection. The astral body can't find a harmonious relationship to the etheric or physical sheath, and specifically to a particular organ. In anthroposophical medicine, harmonizing that poor relationship would be the approach, but would not have an instantaneous effect. What we do in stopping seizures through other means, and the reason marijuana is useful in this context, is that it has the effect of pulling out the astral body so that it no longer tries to find the right relationship and the sign of that—the seizure—also stops. The lifting out of the astral body is exactly what is happening in other instances of Cannabis use, medicinal or recreational: it lifts you out of your normal waking-day experience. So, while we can understand its medicinal use in this context, this idea of the potential detriment of something doing something for you would exclude a great majority of the reasons that people are using Cannabis.

**AM:** Right, so I can imagine that with any substance there is a fine line in discerning whether it is necessary to have something done for us, or whether it would be better to seek a more conscious strengthening process. How can we better understand how we can make this discernment in striving towards holistic health and healing?

**LR:** We need to be vigilant about when we actually need something done for us and for how long. That's the question, and I think that line has become blurred in our comfort-orientated society; we don't live with discomfort very easily. Too often medicine is about comfort and it's not about the individual's consciousness. So when do you actually need something to do it for you, and when do you think you need something to do it for you? If you say to your doctor, “I need something to do it for me,” versus “I have a child who's having seizures and that's the only thing that's working,” these are clearly different situa-

tions. We're actually attracted to someone or something doing it for us in this day and age, and it is part of the culture of comfort. On the other hand, it's also because of the imbalanced way that we live our lives. If someone lives so materialistically into their day, not only outwardly spending many hours on the computer, under artificial lights etc., but also inwardly if their thinking, feeling, and internal will all engaged in a material existence—then they often become so gripped into their bodies that they then look for something to release them from that experience. They may smoke marijuana at night to get this opposite effect, to release them from this grip. They could say, "That's medicinal marijuana!" because they need to let go and release, they need to change their state of mind. However, they're using a substance to do something for them instead of doing something out of themselves, they're not looking at the whole picture of the imbalance, or working consciously to change their lifestyle in a way that helps the human being to be healthy.

**AM:** There is growing support for Cannabis in today's society, and I wonder if there is some connection here between this support and humanity's interest in things that "do it for us"?

**LR:** When we talk about the recreational use of marijuana, it is what I would call the next "big nipple" for humanity—meaning the thing that rocks us to sleep—and it's understandable. The world is getting harder and rougher, but comforting ourselves with something that weakens the human being is not the way to go. All consciousness-altering substances disengage the higher ego, and our direct connection to the true spiritual world. And it's worth mentioning that it may be quite useful for collective control: individuals don't rebel against the state if you can be guaranteed the comfort of getting out of the pain of life with a joint! Marijuana disengages an individual's will forces. So, for instance, although an individual who is under the influence of alcohol is more likely to act out the unconscious will impulses that live in him or her (in an age when, as Rudolf Steiner described, we need to be cultivating the self-consciousness soul), a marijuana user is known more for lethargy, apathy, etc. And the way we work into our will is such an expression of our individuality and our capacity to create change. Out of anthroposophy, we know that our conscious individual will is the spirit expressed in life, and this individualized will doesn't come under the direction of the ego until the ego comes into full expression—around nineteen to twenty-one years of age or later. As such, using Cannabis, especially prior to this time, while the brain is still developing, can have a great impact. I deal with so many cases of major problems from marijuana use. If the ego forces can

develop properly as a teenager, inner development can be more readily taken in hand in adulthood and the capacities that an individual brings can more readily unfold to support the progression of humanity.

**AM:** There are a lot of people who point to various points in history where marijuana had a notable place in culture and society. How can we make sense of these earlier uses and understand how they relate to the needs of humanity today?

**LR:** Yes, people come in and say, "Oh look, it's a natural substance with a history of use," but the reality is that the consciousness of humanity was very different at earlier points in history. In the distant past, indigenous and First Nation peoples had a very clear and direct relationship to the elemental world. Unlike the waking-day consciousness of today, they lived and breathed with the elemental realities just as we now live and breathe with physical realities. For these people, the elemental world was far more real than physical life. They could make use of that world in order to unite with the group soul of the animal kingdom, and here they would also meet the thoughts of their ancestors. Substance use by indigenous cultures only began once their earlier states of consciousness that connected them to the elemental world were being lost. It's important to point out that even then it was only particular people who would make use of substances in this way, and it was on rare or special occasions. It was part of a task that required preparation, and was done with the aim of helping others. Who really does it like that today? And, even if that is the purpose, the help we need now is stronger inner capacities that we freely develop by taking hold of inner realms consciously.

**AM:** I think this connects to the fact that some people praise marijuana with regards to their experiences of creativity, artistry, and innovation. How could these experiences be explained, and are they fundamentally useful in today's self-consciousness soul age?

**LR:** That's right. While there is this expression of marijuana as one of apathy and lethargy—that it's a "downer"—it's not the only experience of someone taking marijuana. In being open to the elemental world, you can sometimes feel this creative flow of thoughts and you can perhaps connect to other thought forms to which you otherwise couldn't connect on your own—because you're in the sea of the thought world. However, from Rudolf Steiner's perspective, that's akin to putting your head into an ant's nest, so to speak. That's not something you would necessarily want to do with your undeveloped consciousness, because it produces erroneous effects by combining

one's personal self with impersonal realities. In our contemporary age, there is a real necessity to evolve our consciousness out of our own free inner activity which, in turn, gives rise to being able to perceive useful insights for humanity's progress. As Steiner and others expressed in various ways, human beings have to consciously do for themselves what the plant does unconsciously: they have to grow themselves up. Anything that does this growing up for us into these realms, in time, weakens us.

**AM:** Could you briefly characterize what the path of development looks like, that comes out of anthroposophy? What is needed in our modern age, from the perspective of anthroposophical inner development?

**LR:** What's needed is a meditative life that develops a strengthening of self—a meditative life that cultivates the strength required to develop the faculties to experience other planes of consciousness, in freedom. We need to develop our capacities and evolve ourselves, in support of world evolution. What we get from marijuana takes us back to an earlier point in the evolution of humanity's consciousness. That's also why Steiner avoided inner practices that utilize the body; they are practices that access a world of the past through the body that is built with the wisdom of spiritual forces of the past. In Steiner's words, "[t]he spiritual can no longer reveal itself to human beings in all kinds of subconscious and unconscious processes. The time has come for human beings to receive the light of the spirit through a free inner deed."<sup>1</sup> We need to find a way towards living, present spiritual realities, and this is not where we are led when we take substances that alter consciousness. They lead us away from true progression, which can only be accessed through inner capacities that we develop for ourselves.

**AM:** Not surprisingly, I think that this "growing ourselves up," and being able to give through our strengthened individualized will, is also what our farms and communities need. It makes me wonder how much wine and Cannabis are "doing something for us" in the food and farming movement, and how it would be if we, instead, focused on working harder to create, deepen, and manifest new forms of community engagement and education, to help people develop a love of and interest in vegetables, fruits, grains, and more.

**LR:** It's quite a picture, really. It's often quite difficult for farms to get by, so it's understandable that growing marijuana as a profitable side crop seems reasonable. But, there it is again, doing something for us that we can't quite do for ourselves. It's really hard to create and grow consciousness around something like new community

forms if you have your back-up marijuana plot, because then you don't have to worry as much about whether or not the community is on board. The role of the farm is central to healthy community life and to helping to grow new forms of community, so it's important that we work to foster deeper relationships between individuals in community. This not only reveals to us where we need to keep growing, but is a necessity to renew our cultural life. In Rudolf Steiner's words, "[a]s this epoch progresses people will find it more and more difficult to achieve appropriate relationships with one another, for this attainment of appropriate relationships now entails the application of inner development, inner activity."<sup>2</sup> The work of true inner development, although it is not an easy path, is what is being called for in humanity's evolution.

*Lisa Romero will offer a one-day inner work workshop especially for the biodynamic agriculture community in the spring of 2018 in New York. Please contact [innerworkpathusa@gmail.com](mailto:innerworkpathusa@gmail.com) for details.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Steiner, "How to Listen to the Spirit," in *The Meaning of Life and other Lectures on Fundamental Issues* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Steiner, "How Can the Destitution of Soul in Modern Times Be Overcome?" (lecture, Zurich, Switzerland, October 10, 1916). Accessed March 19, 2017. <http://wn.rsarchive.org/GA/GA0168/19161010p01.html>.

**Lisa Romero**, the author of four books on inner development published by SteinerBooks, is a complementary health practitioner and an adult educator whose primary focus is on teaching inner development and anthroposophical meditation. Through



the Inner Work Path ([www.innerworkpath.com](http://www.innerworkpath.com)) Lisa offers lectures, workshops, and retreats for personal and professional development in communities and schools worldwide. Previously, Lisa has worked at an anthroposophical addiction clinic and has served as the lecturer on Health and Nutrition at Rudolf Steiner College in Sydney, Australia.

**Anthony Mecca** began farming twelve years ago, in search of a place to wonder, explore, and serve. In farming, he found hot sun, hard physical work, and community to be potent medicine. Anthony began Great Song Farm ([www.greatsongfarm.com](http://www.greatsongfarm.com)) in the Hudson Valley of New York in 2010, where he continues to live and work. There, he found his kin and began deepening his work with biodynamic farming,



anthroposophy, inner work, and community life. Fostering direct and meaningful relationships between nature, agriculture, and community is central to his work. Anthony also coordinates the farmer training program, the North American Biodynamic Apprenticeship Program (NABDAP), at the Biodynamic Association ([www.biodynamics.com/nabdap](http://www.biodynamics.com/nabdap)).



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