

Chuck Ream, the gospel of cannabis, driving while high, and legalizing it in Michigan

Chuck Ream takes his cannabis religiously. In fact he's evangelistic about it.

"When you get out past your own ego, the teaching plants carry the message of right and wrong just like the Bible," says Ream. "That teaching from the magical plants could be the impetus to save our civilization, to move beyond absolute materialism. It's the only real religion."

It's that kind of zeal that led to Ream receiving the High Times Lester Grinspoon Lifetime Achievement Award at the recent Michigan Medical Marijuana Cannabis Cup. It's a great honor, but Ream has bigger ambitions.

"I would like to change the course of civilization and save the planet from ecological destruction," he says.

That may seem a little far-fetched to some, but a few years ago algae blooms rendering the water in Lake Erie toxic probably sounded pretty improbable. That's a lot of water out there, and it's pretty much human carelessness about the environment that caused it. In the long run, it may take nothing less than religious fervor to keep the rest of the Great Lakes — the largest repository of fresh water in the world — from a similar fate.

"Now I'm afraid we need to have a knowledge of good and evil," Ream says. "We're about to destroy our goose that laid our golden egg. ... My religion and the religion of millions of Americans and people around the world is absolutely illegal. The oldest religion by far is absolutely illegal. If you do want the forbidden fruit, you don't have religious freedom; if you want to get the true messages of nature in your religion, then that's illegal. We all really know these things in our hearts."

Ream has been preaching the gospel of cannabis for a long time, and a quick search on YouTube will reveal plenty more of his thinking.

There are a lot of cannabis activists who have similar spiritual views, although they seldom come out when activists are busy trying to deal with politics and changing laws. Some consider cannabis a sacrament.

Rev. Steven B. Thompson, director of Benzie County NORML, always includes a note referring to the biblical tree of life in his emails. And indeed in the Book of Exodus (30:23) there is a recipe for the preparation of sacred oil for anointing that includes kannabosm, which many believe is cannabis.

But Ream's lifetime achievement award has to do with more worldly things. High Times says, "Chuck is a tireless advocate for cannabis, exhibiting more energy and enthusiasm for the cause than activists a third his age."

While Ream will cop to using marijuana for the past 47 years, he times the beginning of his public activism to 2004, when he campaigned for the Ann Arbor medical marijuana initiative — which won with 75 percent of the vote. When he did that, he left his position as a Scio Township trustee, which he was elected to five times, four as a Republican and one as a Democrat.

"I was never really a Republican, but that's what I had to claim in order to get elected," he says. "They call that a RINO — Republican in name only."

Ream was active in the Ypsilanti and Kalamazoo initiatives to decriminalize possession of small amounts of marijuana for adults and was a cofounder of the Safer Michigan Coalition to support these and other local

initiatives. Ream is also a regular speaker at the annual Ann Arbor Hash Bash.

Ream also taught kindergarten in the area for 33 years. He says that he researched marijuana for 20 years before becoming a public activist.

"All the time I was reading, preparing myself for a life when I would be an activist after I was done [working]," he said in his award acceptance speech. He went on to say, "I'm proud to accept this honor in the name of all the great activists here in Michigan who fight for the holy and the useful plant. ...

"Why do I work so hard on this? Well, I love ganja. ... The second reason that I work on this so hard every single day is I love my country so much. When we fight against the drug prohibition, we fight for the soul of our country, and we fight for the civil rights issue of our time. We can start by making it clear that Americans have a constitutional right to natural plants. We will continue to liberate their potential as they continue to heal and liberate us."

This one's for you, Chuck.

Off to a Great Start

The political season is upon us, and the pro-cannabis crowd can count two victories already. Voters in Oak Park and Hazel Park said yes to marijuana legalization on Aug. 6. That makes three cities in Oakland County telling law enforcement to back off. Oakland County distinguished itself as the badass anti-marijuana location when facilities such as Clinical Relief in Ferndale and Everybody's Café in Waterford, as well as the private homes of several individuals associated with them, were raided in 2010, and Big Daddy's in Oak Park was raided in 2011.

Ferndale voters chose legalization in 2012, and a few weeks ago the City Council approved a dispensary to locate there. Now there are two more legalized cities in the county, with a few more on tap for November elections. So far, every time we get to vote, marijuana wins.

One of the interesting things about these victories is that there is little if any money put into campaigns once the petitions are in. People apparently see the futility of prohibition, and they're ready for a new approach. Get ready for a marijuana landslide across the state this fall.

Proof is in the Pudding

The prohibitionists always claim there will be a long list of dire consequences for lax marijuana laws. But consider that Ann Arbor decriminalized pot in 1973, and it hasn't gone to hell in a handbag. In fact, it's one of the best communities in the state when it comes to things like crime and unemployment. Actually, one of the biggest substance-abuse problems in Ann Arbor is drunken college kids.

Now we're getting reports in from Colorado, the first state to implement legal, recreational marijuana. Predictions of a rash of drugged-driving problems have proved wrong. Last week, the Washington Post reported that highway fatalities are near a historic low in Colorado since marijuana was legalized.

By the way, the results of a study recently published by the National Bureau of Economic Research show that legalizing medical marijuana has not led to an increase in adolescent use. You can double down on that. A different study published this spring in the Journal of Adolescent Health came to this conclusion: "This study did not find increases in adolescent marijuana use related to legalization of medical marijuana. ... This suggests that concerns about 'sending the wrong message' may have been overblown."

Save that one for your pain-in-the-butt brother-in-law at the holiday dinner table.