

Drug Policy - 2007

Seeing that keeping the body healthy and whole is the way of God, therefore a person must distance himself from things that destroy the body, and accustom himself to things which heal the body. (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah).

Drug abuse is therefore forbidden, but we are advised to learn to heal the body, not to punish it for things that already destroy it. Drug treatment is in keeping with Maimonides' injunction, while incarceration for personal use of harmful substances could be considered additional bodily punishment. (Religious Action Center, Substance Abuse and Jewish Values)

ISSUE

Redefining the United States and Canadian drug policy from a criminal justice paradigm to one that recognizes drug use or abuse as a medical and social problem.

BACKGROUND

For over a century, policy makers and legislators in the United States have framed drug use and abuse as crimes. This paradigm selectively classifies some addictive and potentially dangerous substances, such as alcohol and tobacco as legal and regulated but others as illegal and unregulated. This has resulted in profitable black markets, overburdened prisons, sentencing discrimination, and expensive but unsuccessful programs designed to discourage drug use through punitive measures. The burden of punitive measures further harms the user's or abuser's family, especially children. Present laws prevent research on the therapeutic and palliative properties of many substances and their use for the relief of pain and suffering.

This simple but significant reframing of the problem impacts many of the social justice issues that WRJ has already addressed in previous resolutions, including those adopted in 1989, 1997, and 1999, such as the correlation between substance abuse and violence against women and child abuse, the need to shift local and federal funds spent on the war on drugs to health care and preventative and rehabilitative services, and the use of banned substances for the relief of pain and suffering. Although Canadian drug policy has shown movement towards viewing drug use as a public health concern and treating it as a medical problem, the current federal administration takes the more punitive approach seen in the United States, according to Common Sense for Drug Policy (<http://www.csdp.org/news/canada.htm>).

RESOLUTION

Whereas the overall situation regarding the use and abuse of drugs in the United States and the crime and misery that accompanies them have continued to deteriorate for several decades,

and

Whereas the United States drug policy has focused on prosecuting drug users and suppliers rather than reducing demand through treatment, education, and counseling, and

Whereas drug enforcement agencies in their zeal to pursue a criminal approach have suppressed medical uses for the relief of pain and suffering.

Therefore, Women of Reform Judaism urges United States sisterhoods to:

For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit www.wrj.org/social-justice-home

1. Educate their members to recognize drug use and abuse as medical and social problems and as such to advocate that they should be addressed with medical and social solutions and
2. Communicate to their congressional delegations their support for a commission empowered by Congress to review the drug laws of the United States with the charge to:
 1. Examine and encourage the government budgetary provisions necessary to extend research, out-patient, and in-patient drug rehabilitation, and mental health programs and
 2. Explore all avenues, including treatment, education, and counseling, that will eventually reduce the demand for illegal drugs and the abuse of legal drugs.

Moreover, Women of Reform Judaism urges Canadian sisterhoods to encourage their national government to strengthen the implementation of policies that address drug use and abuse as public health concerns and to move away from the punitive, enforcement approach.