



Spiritual Discernment: A Journey Towards Initiation in the Santo Daime Tradition.

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Spiritual Discernment:
A Journey Towards Initiation in the Santo Daime Tradition.

A Senior Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Divinity,
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Glossary:

Daime – the religion of Santo Daime

daime – an entheogenic substance, consumed in liquid form, that enables Daime rituals

Trabalhos – spiritual ritual

Madrinha - Godmother

Padrinho - Godfather

Rainha – lit. Queen

Salão – the hexagonal stage where Daime rituals happen

Farda – Daime clothes

Fardados – those who are initiated in the Daime tradition

Concentração – ritual of meditation, lit. concentration

Finados – deceased

Feitio – the ritual where the Santo Daime is made, a ceremony with great spiritual symbolism

Casa de feitio – place where the daime is prepared

Casarão – big house, where Padrinho Sebastião used to live

Estrela – lit. star

Missa – lit. mass

Bailado – to dance; from *baile* (in the doctrine's jargon), a line dance with steps to the right and left in the rhythms of march, waltz and mazurka.

Hinário – a book of hymns; a set of hymns can belong to one person or, in some cases, be a diverse collection

I**All Saint's Day**

I offer my heart to you,
My love of spiritual awakening, connection of stars,
I plunge into your eyes fetching a smile of butterflies,
Offering white lotuses and candid red cloth to our communion.

The wheel still spins, as the wind still blows,
the sun shines like never before,
Aimless and without envying a pretense future coronation,
I tear my soul apart and grieve.

I will search for meaning, in my soul and in the wild world.
I wander for unknown trails, and meet unexpected folks,
Who will guide me towards hell,
through the seven kingdoms that precede heaven.

And before I reach paradise,
I will know the boundaries of the invisible world,
So as I can choose the place where I want to be.
Between hell and heaven,
no candid soul is saved by chance.

November 15th, 2009 – Stories of Origin

I am laying down on Jade's couch after our Ancient History II class. We are classmates in the second period of the Bachelor in History course at the State University of Santa Catarina in Florianopolis, Brazil. We became close friends quickly when classes started in January of 2009. Jade has beautiful honey colored eyes, golden maroon hair, and a sweet smile. While I come from a small town in the country side of Santa Catarina, she comes from the metropolis of Rio de Janeiro. When I left home for college at the end of last year, I was looking for independence and freedom. She appeared as the embodiment of my yearnings.

I grew up in the small town of Rio do Sul. My parents moved there when I was three years old, leaving Concordia, the town where I was born, nestled even further into the country-side of the Santa Catarina state. I grew up feeling disconnected from both of these towns, which, until lately, I considered the epitome of oppression. I grew up increasingly awkward to the racist environment and at my first chance, when I was 18 years old, I moved to Florianopolis and set out to build my life based on the values of justice, freedom, and curiosity. Of all the social and cultural spheres around me, I despised institutional religion as the most antithetical to these values.

I remember when I was nine years old, my parents used to take my two younger sisters and me to mass every Sunday. There was one day they made me wear a formal shirt with a bow tie, shoes, and pants. I felt awkward and shy in the outfit. During the 40-minute drive to the cathedral, I looked out the window, and while contemplating the native trees, I thought, "I wish I was playing games in my brand new Windows 95 instead of wearing this stupid bow tie to go to this boring mass".

We were late. The mass had already started 15 minutes earlier. I entered the main hall of the cathedral holding my sister's hand. I felt small in the immensity of that church with its vaults,

stained glass windows, and chandeliers. The priest stopped the sermon to watch us walking down the church and, in silence, everyone turned back. I felt as if everyone was judging my bow tie. Their gaze remained with me throughout the mass, and I felt a profound shame. While sitting down in the wooden benches, listening to the priest preaching about family and values and hearing the monotonous hymns, I could not stop thinking about how much I hated the church. At the time I had no idea about spirituality beyond Christianity, and the antipathy I felt for the church consumed my spirit.

When I moved to Florianópolis, I was determined to become an atheist in response to my revulsion against the Catholic church. It did not take long, however, for me to start discovering the complexity and beautiful diversity of the spiritual world. My spiritual journey started in my first term at college when I met Jade, that mesmerizing woman who helped give color to my relationship with Christianity. She introduced me to the Santo Daime, the liquid manifestation of Christ.

“You know, Gabriel”, she said, bringing me back from my digression to her couch, “we have been deepening our friendship during this year, and your need for exploration and freedom fascinates me. I would like to tell you more about the religion I belong to. I was born and raised in the Santo Daime.” My eyes shined. I felt an inexplicable attraction, as if those words had shed light to a muddy water and awakened a dormant lotus flower. “I consecrate ayahuasca in a Catholic religious context,” she completed.

I looked at her eyes, a bit uncertain about the emotions I was experiencing. Frowning and raising my eyebrows, I slowly asked,

“Ayahuasca, what is this?”

“It is the gold in form of liquid - an entheogenic tea that can reveal the best and worst aspects of your soul. It helps you experience your internal God, a source for self-knowledge. The name ayahuasca comes from the *quechua* language, from the old Inca Empire of Bolivia and Peru, and means ‘wine of the soul’ or ‘vine of spirits’.” To produce the tea, we cook the leaves from an Amazonian leaf called *chacrona* (feminine element) together with the vine *jagube* (masculine element).”

“You are twisting my head. Ayahuasca seems to be a fascinating substance. Tell me more about the Santo Daime. How come this tradition brings such a magical substance like ayahuasca to the most uninteresting religion, Catholicism?”

“I understand and respect your resentment of Christianity, but there are multiple ways to approach the teachings of Jesus. I understand that one of the sources of your frustration is the moralistic aspect of the priest’s sermons. In the Santo Daime things are a bit different. We do not have a priest. The source of knowledge comes from the hymns we spend hours singing. The ritual consists of singing and dancing and there is a festive aspect while we are under the effects of the plant travelling over the boundaries of consciousness. Indeed, my friend, our tradition is highly Catholic, but we use those religious symbols and codes as a way to transliterate the plant’s message to the general population. That means, ayahuasca comes from the Amazon forest, it is a sacred plant that indigenous populations have been using for millennia. The Santo Daime is a tradition that is trying to respectfully bring the use of this plant to Brazilian urban communities, which are massively Christian. Through Christian symbols and codes, the founders of the Daime created a way to reach the non-indigenous communities midway, adapting the older traditions to a contemporary religious language. Besides, these codes are not taken literally. For example, when the hymns are talking about Jesus, they are actually referring to the *jagube*, and when they mention

Virgin Mary, they are referring to *chacrona*. Water, *jagube*, and *chacrona* are the holy trinity, or the three elements that constitute the *daime*. In our tradition, we replace the name ayahuasca for *daime*, which is the union of the liquid with the hymns. We believe the founder of our religion, Master Raimundo Irineu Serra, is an descendant of Juramidam, a spiritual vortex from the Christic family. Therefore, for us, our Master is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Santo Daime, Jesus has already returned and brought the doctrine we follow. We believe the Santo Daime is the post-apocalyptic source for the regeneration of the earth.”

“This is really something else. Tell me more about the founders of the Daime?”

“Raimundo Irineu Serra,” said Jade walking to her shrine on the corner of the room and handing me two pictures - one of Master Irineu and one of Padrinho Sebastião Mota de Melo - and the *Cruzeiro hinário* by the Master. “This black tall man is the Master, who created the Daime in the beginning of the 20th century in the Acre state of Brazil, close to Rio Branco. Once, after drinking ayahuasca, the Master had a vision of the Virgin Mary sitting on the half-moon. She sent him to the middle of the forest for multiple days on a diet of ayahuasca and unsalted manioc and she revealed the Daime doctrine to him. Over the years, the Master received more than a hundred and thirty hymns, which compose this *Cruzeiro hinário*. He became renowned in Rio Branco, and his home, the *Alto Santo*, still hosts his mausoleum. After his death in the 1970s, his former wife Peregrina became the head of the tradition. However, his death marked the beginning of the segmentation of the Daime. The lineage I follow is from the Padrinho Sebastião Mota de Melo, the man in the second picture with a long beard. He was one of the most prominent disciples of the Master and the protagonist of one of the biggest controversies in the Santo Daime. Before the Master passed away, he said ‘the doctrine is complete, do not change anything.’ However, Padrinho Sebastião’s charisma set him in the spotlight in the process of transference of power and

he eventually established his own mission separated from the *Alto Santo* community. He created the *Colônia 5,000* community, the first one in the Padrinho's lineage. He expanded the number of *trabalhos*, created a socialist-inspired communal system of production and sharing of resources and work, and started to receive hippies and spiritual seekers from all corners of Brazil and the world. The number of communities run on the standards established by *Colônia 5,000* started to expand all around the country. They hosted people who were interested in living close to nature, drinking *daime*, and separating from mainstream society. By the end of the 1970s, Padrinho Sebastião eventually built the *Céu do Mapiá* community, located at the heart of the Amazon forest, which has become the Mecca or Vatican of the *Santo Daime* tradition. My mother met Padrinho Sebastião at *Colônia 5,000* and spent years helping him to build the *Céu do Mapiá* community. When I was born, she held me on her arms and gave me a few drops of *daime*. My first experience in this life was to drink *daime* from my mother. Padrinho Sebastião passed away in the 1980s and his son, Padrinho Alfredo, is nowadays the head of the most prominent lineage of the Santo Daime, and president of the ICEFLU, which is the non-profit organization setting the guidelines for *daime* consumption around the world. Most of the Santo Daime churches around the world, especially in the USA, are connected to the ICEFLU lineage.”

“Fascinating. How does the ritual happen?”

“There are multiple kinds of rituals” she answered, “but the most common are *bailados*, which are rituals that last for twelve to fifteen hours on Christian holidays, where we drink *daime*, chant hymns, and dance. We dance two steps to each side, continuously. Here, let me sing the Master's hymn number 124 to you.” She opened the *hinário* booklet and sang.

124 – Eu Tomo Essa Bebida (I Take This Drink)

1. I take this drink

Which has an incredible Power

It shows all of us

Here in this Truth

2. I went up, I went up, I went up

I went up with happiness

When I arrived in the Heights

I met with the Virgin Mary

3. I went up, I went up, I went up

I went up with love

I met the Eternal Father

And Jesus Christ the Redeemer

4. I went up, I went up, I went up

Following my teachings

Hail my Eternal Father

And hail to all the Divine Being.

“The first stanza tells that the power of the drink is to unravel a kind of hidden truth. This truth involves the feeling of union with God, an ultimate connection with nature, and non-duality

with the universe. The second stanza brings the perspective that the effect of the drink lifts the person to the heights. When the medicine starts to take effect, one enters a realm of modified consciousness with uncharted potential of exploration. There is also a process of material and psychological healing happening as the plant acts in our organs, cleaning the matter and spirit. There in the heights, one receives the teachings of the plant - Virgin Mary (*chacrona*) and Jesus Christ (*jagube*).”

“What do I need to do to participate in one of the rituals?”

“In the Daime, we are not allowed to invite anyone. You need to feel a calling from the plant and I will be a means to take you to her. The plant calls you. Now that I’ve told you all of this, you can spend some time introspecting and if you feel a calling, I can take you there. At the Daime we say that a guest is the responsibility of the one who takes them to the ritual. If I take you, you are like my luggage. I need to take care of you. And the ritual is not a place for having fun. We call them *trabalhos* or work because when you go there you will be working on your issues. It is not a moment for relaxing or hanging out, but for serious and dedicated internal work. And if you want to go, you need to follow a strict diet and sexual abstention for three days before and after the *trabalho*. But to know if you truly deserve to participate in a ritual you need to call the plant. Ask her what you are looking for, and she will give it you. You ask, the *Rainha* gives.”.

“Who is the *Rainha*?”

“The *Rainha* is the Queen, the plant, the inherent motherly power of ayahuasca.”

December 10th, 2009 – Drinking Christ

The sun is setting on the horizon while the full moon rises behind the mountains in front of us. Jade and I are driving to the *Céu do Patriarca São José* Community, the Santo Daime church

in Florianópolis, in the middle of an Atlantic Forest natural reserve. The sounds of civilization fade as we penetrate into the forest and soon, the Daime church appears to my eyes - a hexagonal structure with a high ceiling amidst the native trees. Slowly, I approach the entrance of the church, step up the stairs, and, as I enter, I look forward and see a big picture of the Master Irineu, - the same one I saw at Jade's place. My spine shivers. I look around to find the place is filled with a mix of images of the patriarchs of the Daime and Christian saints. In the middle of the *salão*, is a star shaped table with a cross with two horizontal lines. "Our cross is different from the Catholic one," a man said, approaching. "For us, the second line represents the return of Jesus Christ in the form of the Master."

He placed me in one of the rows close to two other *fardados* wearing the men's uniform - a full white suit with a blue tie. Half of the *salão* is for men and the other half for women, organized in rows and columns. The women were each wearing a long plied white dress with colorful strings of cloth going down from their shoulders, a beautiful green lace, and a diadem. Women in the *Daime* represented the *Rainha*.

While I cannot contain my desire to feel the effects of the plant, I also feel aversion to all of the Christian images and references. After praying a whole rosary, I finally take the first dose of *daime*. I come back to my place in the row and start singing. Forty minutes later, I start to feel time become elastic, as if finishing the hymns was taking longer and longer. I am floating and I look down to see my body there dancing while the soul is traveling in the other world. I feel sacred and divine. I can see a group of angel medics approaching, placing my ethereal body in a surgical bed and placing their hands on me, sharing a beautiful light that heals me from impurities. I come back to my senses and take another dose of *daime*. I continue with the *bailado* and feel like the most beautiful rose flower dancing in the garden. Multiple hours later, the sun starts to rise outside,

and I feel a sense of rebirth. I approached the Daime with the intention of challenging my resistance to Christianity and leave this ritual understanding that there is much more nuance in the spiritual world than I ever imagined.

After the first ritual in the Daime, I felt a spiritual contradiction between my continuous aversion to Christianity, a result of my upbringing in a moralistic spiritual community, and the curiosity to keep unraveling the mysterious states of being that the Daime was presenting to me. I spent the following four years going to *trabalhos* in that same Daime church, always learning more, but at the same time unable to completely overcome my wounds with Christianity. During those years, I was exploring and learning about multiple other religious traditions and faiths. I was increasingly curious about the spiritual world, but did not feel the need to accept any specific faith or tradition. Leaving Christianity a few years earlier was an act of emancipation, and I identified as a multi-religious person rather than striving to belong to one single tradition. At the time, the Daime was no more than one element in this vast spectrum of spiritual exploration.

By the end of 2013, however, a series of events with Leonard, my partner at the time, would pull the Daime to the main stage of my life and introduce me to another level of the admirable power of the plant. Until then, spirituality was an element of curiosity among the various topics of interest in my life. After Leonard, spirituality became the core of my being. After breaking my life into pieces and removing the veil of maya his way, there was no more room for approaching the Santo Daime casually, and I started a painful process of discernment towards spiritual initiation in the Santo Daime tradition.

October 16th, 2013 – Act of Love

I met Leonard at a college gathering in April 2013. He is a little shorter than me, with brown hair and eyes, and a nocturnal outlook. He had an owl tattoo on his back, and used to make the point of incorporating that bird's mystical air into his personality. He studied philosophy at the local public university and our study backgrounds allowed for endless conversations about the meaning of life and the laws of the universe. I started to feel something similar to love for him in September, four months after we met. It was the first time in my life that I was feeling butterflies in my stomach, but I was unsure how to express it. I wanted to feel safe enough to tell him, so I waited. I told him about *Santo Daime* in July and, similar to Jade, I told him to take his time to introspect and discern if ayahuasca was for him. In the meantime, I completed my BA in History in August 2013 and began preparing to take a gap year to travel around Latin America to explore spiritual traditions of Bolivia and Peru.

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Last week Leonard told me he was ready to go to the *Daime*, and yesterday I took him to a *trabalho de concentração*. This kind of *trabalho* lasts for 4 hours and we spend most of the time sitting and meditating. During the *trabalho* I felt a mix of emotions. It was the first time I was introducing someone to *Santo Daime*. After so many years participating in the tradition, I was now feeling confident enough to introduce someone else to the *Daime* world. I was feeling the same kind of excitement I experienced four years earlier when I stepped onto that *salão* for my first *trabalho*.

When the *trabalho* finished, I gave Leonard a tight hug. I looked deep into his eyes, took a breath, and said “I love you”. He smiled back and with a soft voice replied, “I love you too.” We

stayed in the comfort of that hug for a long time. My heart was filled with joy and I began dreaming about our growth together from that moment onwards.

November 1st, 2013 – The Revelation

It is 8AM and Leonard is vehemently knocking at my door. Still a bit drowsy, I yell, “I am coming!” I change clothes, wash my face, and open the door. “Welcome back from the All Saint’s Day *trabalho*,” I hug him. He enters my house, gives me a dear kiss, walks to my room, and lays down on the bed. After twelve hours dancing and singing he was finally allowed to relax. I lay down on top of him, bring my face to his, and look deep inside his eyes. He smiles. We share that short moment of peaceful love, probably the last one we ever had.

"Leonard, I am sorry I could not go with you to this *trabalho*. Why did you insist on going back to the Daime so soon after your last *trabalho* two weeks ago? It usually takes me at least one month to process a *daime* experience so I was not feeling prepared to go again with you."

"Gabriel, I went to this ritual without you because there was something calling me there. I actually fell in love with someone else during this *trabalho*. I don't know if I should be telling you this."

"What do you mean?"

"There was a guy beside me during the *trabalho*, his name is Edan. I was impressed at how similar he is to my cousin who died when I was a kid. I saw him two weeks ago when we went for the first time together and I was so touched that I had to go back and see him again. This cousin and I were childhood boyfriends, but he died and I miss him terribly. This boy I met at the *trabalho* looks just like him."

“So you saw him for the first time the same day you said you love me?” I was shocked and tried to rationalize the situation. “You know, when you take ayahuasca it is normal for your energy to expand and to feel unique things for other people who are close by.” But that explanation faded on the shining of his eyes. I could see that he was mesmerized by meeting someone who looked like his first childhood love at the *trabalho* to honor the deceased. What could I do about that spiritual revelation?

After he left my home that day I kept trying to figure things out: “I took him to my spiritual home, and he met someone else? Does he even know how big of an issue it is to bring someone to a Daime *trabalho*? Is he aware of how generous I was to take him inside my spiritual home, and he falls in love with someone else?” My heart was falling into pieces.

November 7th, 2013 – Hate’n Love

ring, ring, ring....

“hello, Leonard, where are you?”

“Gabriel, I could not resist, it has been one week since I met Edan in the trabalho, I need to talk to him”

“Where are you?”

“I am going to the Daime community by myself now.”

“Are you serious? Why are you doing this?”

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My heart is racing. I am enraged and groundless. I can see my love draining through my fingers and I do not have the means to hold onto it anymore. Love shifts into hate - *Why? Why? Why? Why?* Why was he choosing to move on with someone else right at the point when we disclosed

that we love each other? I love him so much, and now my love remains without a recipient. I sulk to my room and collapse into the bed crying, falling into darkness.

The sun sets and the evening appears on the horizon. I call him again ... no answer. I ramble around the house for another hour, throwing my heart in agony. "This is my fault. I should have never taken him to the Daime. Never!" But now there was no coming back. He was my luggage. It was my mess and I was responsible for taking care of him regardless of the consequences. But at the same time, my heart was exploding, bleeding, yelling "I LOVE YOU, CAN'T YOU SEE?"

I call him again.

"Leonard, where are you?"

"Sorry, Gabriel, I am going back home now. Can you meet me at my place?"

"Yes."

Leonard was my neighbor, I walked to his front door and sat there for more than forty minutes. When he arrived we went to his room and laid down on the bed.

"What is going on?"

"Gabriel, I spoke with Edan. I told him what happened and we kissed."

"YOU WHAT?"

I started to cry, more, more, desperately. I was feeling the bitter taste of treason, and the trust in my spiritual house eroding like a sand castle.

While I cry I ask, "What do you want?"

"I want....to be happy."

And I cry more and more. At that moment, I rose from his bed and walked to the front door. "I need to leave" I say, feeling a rampant anxiety crisis coming on. He holds on my arm - "Please stay." I violently pull my arm away and disgustedly reply, "I cannot stay here with you

anymore, I cannot see your face right now.” My eyes are on fire and I stare him with a penetrating look, feeling a strange urge to punch his face. My whole spiritual structure, together with my emotional stability, was falling apart.

“Gabriel, please stay here. I need you. I am also confused”.

“No, Leonard. You should have thought better before asking for my support”.

“Please stay.” He knelt and brought his hands together as if he was praying. “Please stay, Gabriel. I am afraid of what will happen if you do not stay. Please, I beg you. Stay here with me.”

“NO, I WILL NOT STAY HERE.”

I turned around and left.

I ran to my house and spent the rest of the night crying.

December 15th, 2012 – The Giant’s Shadow

Leonard and I are walking towards the *Daime* community. Do we understand the contradictions of the situation we are about to live? The path was pitch black as we walked in silence up to the mountain where the *Daime* church is located. I hear cracks in the woods and steps approaching in the distance. “Leonard, is that you?” says Edan’s delicate voice. I see him coming from distance, a penetrating aura. As Edan comes in our direction, I hug him tightly. It was a hug of despair, as if somehow he would be my last resort to bring Leonard back to me. Maybe, I was hoping, Edan would tell Leonard that they could not stay together. Or, maybe, I was the one who should let them live their journey. But I was unable to let Leonard go. Edan was a bit surprised by my approach to him. I guess he expected me to punch him in the face, as he was stealing my boyfriend. For some reason, however, anger was not my prevailing feeling. I was more challenged

by the grief for the newborn love that Leonard was rejecting. We hear the bell from the church signaling the beginning of the *trabalho de cura* - healing ritual - and slowly move to the front gate.

There are not many people at the *trabalho* today, just the three of us in the row for young men. We take the *daime* dose and take position. I am feeling a sense of complete surrender to the *daime*. Please take me, please show me the meaning, please let me understand. Why, Master? Why did you decide this way? I took Leonard to the *Daime* wishing that we would grow together inside the tradition. Why did you bring Edan to our lives? As the effect of the *daime* started to take over, I looked around to all those pictures of the *Daime* patriarchs and Christian saints, I felt the meaning of suffering in their eyes, as well as an immeasurable compassion shining towards me. That light started to grow and tears came to my eyes. Leonard was on my right side and Edan on my left. I start to feel their spirits merging with mine, shining with a healing green light.

Although my ego wanted to hate the both of them, the Holy Spirit came down from the skies and shone in front of my eyes, echoing, “Trust us, there are important lessons behind this. Leonard needs you. Take care of him, but let be him free to live his story. He needs it”. As I come back to my senses, I see Leonard and Edan still at my sides and I feel an immeasurable love for both of them. Then, I felt my spirit growing and glowing and as I was *bailando*. I looked behind me and saw the image of Master Irineu in my shadow. I felt powerful. My shadow was holding Master’s stick and wearing his hat. I hear the Master’s voice speaking in my ear: “You are ready, my son. You are ready to belong to my realm. I will send you on a journey to the roots of the *Daime*, to my home. After that, I will send you to the spiritual house where you belong. Trust me, my son. I will never leave you.”

When the *trabalho* finished and we came back to common reality, I hugged both of them and we spent a few hours chatting. I got to know Edan. Even if I had those miraculous experiences

of connection and understanding, coming back to earth also meant reconnecting with my insecurities and ego. Although I now understood my responsibility to care for Leonard, the anxiety and rage for losing my love returned in this realm too. I felt shame for wanting to meet Edan and going to that *trabalho* with the two of them. Interestingly, during that specific ritual I also witnessed a revelation and received the calling for initiation in the Daime. I felt the need to belong to that tradition for the first time and an urge to accept the Master as my guide. But I knew that would not happen in the Florianópolis church, had been tainted with the pain of my story with Leonard. I went back home and started to pack for my solo backpacking trip across Latin America. I would leave a few days later with Master Irineu's words echoing in my head, "I will send you on a journey to the roots of the *Daime*, to my home. After that, I will send you to the spiritual house where you belong. Trust me, my son. I will never leave you."

II

In the Wizard's World: Skywalker vs. The Warrior

I leave home heading to the world.

I free myself from my bonds and surrender to destiny.

The breeze on my face inspires me to look for the unexpected
with the anxiety of someone experiencing the freedom to live.

I say goodbye to a love sealed with painful tears,
realizing that the bitterness of not having the one I love by my side
does not necessarily mean to stop loving him.

My body begins this journey, but my heart remains broken in my beloved's hands.

I need a cup of tea and stars to help me understand everything I am going through.

Unpredictable trip, full of Andean depth.

If I could, I would bring the spring season close by and lie in its colors,
quilted in its warm comfort, that would help me to have you in my dreams.

I fell into a pit of no return,

where I live exiled from the people I love

in an airless plunge inwards.

Some parts of me are dying,

I am purifying myself with the permission of my heart and my mind.

I am spinning, twirling and falling on a blue surface,

majestically opening wings to fly.

Flying.

Gliding across the sky, delirious among the stars.

I'm flying until there is no more air, as much as I can bear,

and in a momentary faint I am falling down, eyes closed,

feeling the air running through my whole body.

I dive, the sea contains me, brings me peace and rest.

April 1st – La Paz, Bolivia –

The world turns fast, as slow as a change in condition. During the last three months I had moments of great happiness, meeting friends that I will take with me for life- especially in Argentina and Chile- and moments of pain through my inner labyrinths. In La Paz, I found a community of travelers at the hostel where I am staying – *El Carretero*. Many of them are street artists: jugglers, musicians, magicians, artisans, etc. I am learning handicrafts and selling them on the streets.

I see the Warrior as he is walking down the stairs of the hostel. He approaches me with two books about meditation. I look at his brown eyes and skin, his skinny stature, his skullcap, and invited him to sit.

“These books are cool. Can I borrow one?”

“Of course. And, if you want, I can teach you about shamanic knowledge.”

“That sounds interesting. I am from Brazil and I am looking to know more about the secrets of Andean spirituality. I belong to a tradition called Santo Daime but I had some frustrations with

my original spiritual home and am now looking for other manifestations of the medicine plants. Would you like to teach me what you know?"

"Of course." The Warrior and I spent almost two weeks hanging out, bonding like two spiritual brothers. While he was clearly a powerful spiritual medium, capable of channeling divine knowledge, I also noticed that he was not the most disciplined. He was quick to let his dark emotions take over, shout at others, start arguments, and burn bridges with friends.

Eventually, the Warrior gave me a new name, based on my Mayan Kim. I was therefore to be called the Skywalker, or, to be more precise, the *Red Cosmic Skywalker*. "My name, Warrior, comes from the Mayan Kim, which is the esoteric system in Andean Latin America. There are over 300 kins, which are connected with your birth day. Your Mayan Kim is the Red Cosmic Skywalker. Mine is the Yellow Resonant Warrior. The red Skywalkers, number 13 of the Mayan Kim, are leaders of the masses. They usher in new ideas and perspectives. The Skywalker is an explorer, someone who seeks paths to follow and realities to discover. You are someone who is searching for your truth and wants to understand the meaning of life, correct?" I nodded. He continued, "I am the warrior, the one who seeks justice in every situation, who is not afraid to fight life's battles and come to the aid of those who need help." The next day he handed me a written note:

Red Cosmic Skywalker

I Endure in order to Explore

Transcending Wakefulness

I seal the Output of Space

With the Cosmic tone of Presence

I am guided by the power of Navigation.

I am guided by the power of navigation, I repeat to myself.

My curiosity about navigation is the fuel of my existence. I identify with sailors who seek out new territory through perilous journeys across the open sea. My goal is to conquer this quest of discovery, this search for expansion, as a driving force for survival guided by the an openness to spiritual mystery and wonder in every living being and in every manifestation of reality and the intention to embrace reality as a whole as Divine Manifestation.

My journey- my *navigation*- is not just through the spiritual sites and natural reserves in my home country of Brazil or the rest of Latin America, but of the vast inner world within me. While my feet walk the Divine Manifestations of the world, I travel through my mind and soul. I travel my own story. And in both explorations, I live with the aim of observing and understanding the phenomenon of reality and seeing the Manifestation of Creation in everything and everyone.

April 20th, 2013 – La Paz, Bolivia –

I spent the past few days with the Warrior and other travelers like Pedro, Nico, and Claudio. We are forming a strong bond. The Warrior suggested that we all go on an adventure together - a hike in the Inca trail *Camino Del Choro*. Today we went to buy groceries for the five days away from civilization. Of the ten men going, I am the only non-Hispanic. In La Paz there is a place called “the Witches' Market.” The Andean people live in close connection with their pantheon of gods and practice many rituals, including animal sacrifices and the use of medicinal plants. At the Witches' Market, I met a lady who sold me a bottle of ayahuasca from the Bolivian Amazon. I slid the bottle in my backpack for the walk on the El Choro path.

Day 1 - We are driving towards the footsteps of the Mount Illimani. It is dawn. I step out of the car at the gate of El Choro National Park and approach, greeted by a massive concrete cross painted blue and white, perched on the edge of a cliff. I look around us and discover that we are in the cleavage between two mountains. I look up toward the cross to see the blue sky showing through the heavy fog around us. Gradually, I could sense we were nearing the top of Illimani. We gathered near the cross to organize our backpacks.

The Warrior came to me, placed his arms around my shoulders, pointed to the cross, and said, "Skywalker, this is where I performed my first exorcism. It was a Bolivian woman. My master asked me to bring her here and take the spirit out of her." I looked at him, smiled in response, and continued packing. "Maybe someday I will teach you how to exorcise." For a second I felt a weight, a dense energy. I saw pretense in his eyes. Who brags about performing exorcism? I felt like he was trying to intimidate me with his power. My instincts said he was feeding his ego from the energies of pain and confusion from that exorcism. He liked to exorcise. He liked the power it gave him. It turns out, that was only the foreword for that trip. His façade would continue to crack, exposing his true face.

On the first day, the Warrior tried to spend time with all the members of the group. He said that he was doing spiritual work with all of us and our journey would be revealed. That night while we were sitting by the fire cooking rice and potatoes, he finally sat next to me. We spent a few moments watching the fire and feeling the embers warm our bodies. He came closer and said, "I understand the pain you are feeling in your heart." I looked at him in amazement and replied, "I haven't told anyone about how I'm feeling emotionally. How do you know?" He answered, "I spent the whole month with you. I can see in your eyes that someone broke your heart." I nodded. He continued, "You need to strengthen your heart. You have great spiritual power, but in order to

develop it you cannot allow your heart to carry so much pain. If you continue like this, you will lose your glow and we cannot allow that to happen. I am here to help you take one step ahead in your spiritual journey.”

Day 2 - I was the first to wake up. I went to the edge of the river, sat down, and connected with that pain I was feeling. My stomach was screaming with anxiety. I placed my hands in the water and released that energy. We walked for about six hours that day until we reached the next destination; a campsite with *stunning* views.

After setting up the tents, I notice that the Warrior is crouching on top of a rock with his eyes closed, making symbols with his hands, and uttering some prayer. He has a necklace in his hands, pointing towards the sun. He gets up and approaches me. “Let us go to the river.” We started down the Inca trail and because of its constant descent (starting at 5,000 meters and finishing at 1,200 meters), there were many waterfalls along the way as the river followed us down. The part of the river where we were camping was stunning, with a drop between many rocks to infuriate the violently sliding waters. I sit on the rock close to the Warrior, and inviting me to a moment of intimate connection he says “Today, I will give you a shamanic lesson. You know you have the ability to summon the power of all the elements, don't you?” I said, "Not exactly." He placed my hands palm down, towards the water and said, “From the left hand, you receive the energy. From the right, you offer the energy. One goes in and the other goes out”.

I close my eyes and feel nothing for a few minutes. But then, I start to feel a tingling in my hands. At first it was subtle, but gradually grew stronger. My hands start to boil and my head spins. I feel as if my body is moving in circles. It stops suddenly as the Warrior touches the top of my head with both of his hands. His gesture gives me strength to power through the experience and

feel the energy of the water almost penetrating my hands. At the same time, I also feel a sense of invasion for being touched on my crown chakra in a moment of spiritual openness. The top of the head holds the most powerful opening for spiritual connection and when it is activated, there is a possibility of getting in touch with the spiritual world. By touching the top of my head without consent during a spiritual experience, he took license to manipulate my energy as he wished, as if he wanted to take full personal advantage of the spiritual experience he created. This experience further developed the already growing suspicions I had about his intentions with the group. My approach to him was an uninterrupted process of push and pull. While he offered me the opportunity to be a spiritual student, it was looking like he was not a very worthy teacher.

Despite this feeling, I allowed him to finish the prayer he recited while touching the top of my head. My hands, which one minute earlier were burning in water's energy, were now back to their normal state. He gave me a crystal and said, "Take this crystal, visualize everything you want to leave behind with it, and bury it in the earth so you will feel more at peace." When he left, I knelt to the ground, dug a small hole, and held the crystal in my hands. I prayed: *Lord of Creation, allow this crystal to carry the pain I am holding for Leonard and allow me to follow my way.*

Day 3 - We spent the whole day walking. When we finally set up the camp, we were exhausted but most of the group was happy. "Claudio, are we going to make a fire and cook rice with vegetables?" I asked. Claudio, a guy from Chile who was always happy, replied, "Of course, my brother. Why don't you start building the fire while I play guitar and sing for us?" As he began to sing, other members of the group approached. with drums and other instruments. We all sang and danced while I made the fire.

Pedro and the Warrior were somewhere else, we assumed doing shamanic initiations. Night was coming and, along with the heat of the fire and the Andean music, I looked up and saw some fireflies in the *yunga* (a forest formation in the mountains). Gradually, what seemed like a few fireflies suddenly looked like dozens, then hundreds, then *thousands* of fireflies flashing at once across the entire length of the mountain in front of us. It was mesmerizing. In a pause between songs, the Warrior and Pedro arrived and I announced, “My friends, I have a bottle of ayahuasca that I got at the Witches’ Market. If you want, we can take it tomorrow.”

Day 4 - We are around ten travelers taking ayahuasca today. For them, ayahuasca is *Pachamama*, the goddess of the earth. For me, it is the *Rainha*. I am giving one dose to each person. The Warrior is last. He takes the bottle from my hand with three doses left. “As a shaman, I will keep the bottle and take the remaining two doses later.” I wanted to ask him to give me back the bottle because the ayahuasca belonged to me, but he would not let me talk. He was becoming increasingly hostile towards me that day.

I wear my backpack and watch the river violently descending the mountains as everyone gets ready. The small stream at the beginning of the hike had become the furious Jucumarini River. The Warrior takes the lead and we start to climb a cliff along the path. I am carrying a *djembe*, a small Bolivian drum. On the way up, as I’m starting to feel the effects of the plant, I play the drum consistently – *tum, tum, tum* – every 3 steps a beat. The sound of the drum echoes through the forest and mixes with the songs of birds. Upon reaching the top, I could see a range of mountains that crossed the horizon. I step close to the cliff and close my eyes, I feel my soul detaching from my body, rising to the sky. Ayahuasca taking over.

We continue walking for another four hours until we reach a small village, where we stop for the day. The Warrior is now comes towards me, takes another dose of ayahuasca, places the bottle in front of me, and leaves. I look at the bottle and, still resentful of having given him the last three doses, furiously drink the rest of the liquid and throw the bottle into the trash. After about twenty minutes, he asks, "Has anyone seen my bottle?" I say, "I took the last dose and threw it away." He glares at me in disbelief.

As I turn around and sit with the rest of the group, Pedro and the Warrior go elsewhere. I was going to feel the effects of that additional dose. I close my eyes and my body transfigures. I am a serpent was ascending into the heavens, rising, rising, and opening robust layers of feathers around my head.

I get up and feel a strong connection with the spirit world. I go to an isolated place, kneel down, and start to pray. An energy starts to take over my body and I begin to squirm and vomit. I feel pain in my body and soul, as if I was opening my chest and taking my heart out of my body. I lay down on the grass and look up, in completely surrender, unable to move, completely helpless and alone. A flash of self-consciousness trespasses my mind. *Maybe you are going too far, Gabriel. It is time to reevaluate the boundaries you want to explore.* Coming back to my senses, I realize that I need help. I spent at least thirty minutes laying down on the ground depleted, finished, and utterly estranged from the existence of my body.

I slowly manage to wake up and return to the group sitting around the fire. I wish my mother was here to hold me. I am still under the strong effect of the plant and not really in control of my being. I need emotional support. "Skywalker, you think I don't know what you're doing?" The Warrior wants to confront me because I drank the ayahuasca. "What do you mean?" I reply. "I just saw you over there in that corner summoning the demon. You keep talking about Santo

Daime, and now you have given us this medicine. Your religion can only be diabolical and you want to take us all to hell.” I slowly lift my head and look deep into his eyes. “I understand now, dear Warrior, that spiritual connection is about responsibility and not about having fun with the plant medicine. We need to be careful and honor the plant. I can see deep into your eyes how you crave to be in the sweet effect of the plant as a way of coping with the challenges of your life in the conventional world. You extrapolated the meaning of the plant, which is to help us to have a better life. You want to spend all the time under the effect of the medicine. I can see now. You are not a shaman. You are addicted to the plant.”

As I say this, I feel the expanded power of the medicine. I can now feel heaven and hell interconnecting. I no longer feel the earth under my feet. I feel them touching another dimension - a karmic dimension where this discussion has happened before and where I was reliving a previous moment in the present then expanded into the future in a fractal of interconnecting experiences. A memory of tomorrow manifesting endlessly through the spectrum of time.

Then, I incorporate the cosmic energy of the Skywalker into my vision of the spiritual composition of the Warrior. He has armor and sword and I have my windy cosmic features of energy transformation. My eyes were emitting the red light of the Skywalker's energy and from his mouth, came a waterfall of the Warrior's yellow energy. They crisscrossed and spiraled vertically into the cosmos. His harsh words felt like swords cutting my flesh and wounding my heart. I held so much trust and brotherly love for that person, but now we are archenemies.

In a lapse of consciousness, I regurgitate and vomit at the Warrior's feet. Also under the influence of ayahuasca, he gets up and start screaming, “You are bringing my mother's spirit back to torment me!” Coming to my senses, I feel a huge swell of regret for having trusted that person

to instruct me spiritually and for believing he would be able to guide a spiritual ritual with ayahuasca.

I never spoke to the warrior again, but he stayed with me for a long time. The Warrior took a place alongside Leonard in the process of understanding and discerning the power of the plant to create both love and pain. Now my journey was no longer just about understanding the spiritual meaning of the betrayal within the *Santo Daime*, but also about processing and understanding the subjective meanings of a second traumatic experience with ayahuasca and the Warrior. In both situations, I was looking for companionship in the spiritual world and was instead left heartbroken and alone.

The next day I woke up and knew I could not remain in the presence of the Warrior. I had to go. I came out of the tent and Fabian was also up and with his bag packed. He said, "I heard your discussion yesterday and I don't think any real shaman would act the way he did so I'm leaving." We went together. At that point, there were only eleven kilometers to go back to civilization. We spent the whole day walking and by the late afternoon, we were in Coroico. From there, we traveled back to La Paz laying on the trailer of a transport truck.

III

The Scream of the Amazon

Stone heart hurts,
Reality decimates the soul with a candid slap,
While regretting what should have been beautiful.

He hovers over my life, my feelings,
my dreams, and yearnings for greatness.

He lives in me, in the idea of being.

Platonically watching over my tears,
I crave Him and enforce forgetting.

Arid fields separate us
Despite the flowery vision of your embrace.

A metamorphosis hug never repeats

Waiting for you under the snow,

I confess you are the One.

The universe takes and brings it back.

You went away, will I be back?

June 6th, 2013 – Rio Branco, Brazil –

I finally reached the pinnacle of this trip, the Acre state. I've arrived at the Amazon Rainforest, the mausoleum of nature and the powerful source of life. My heart has yearned to be here since I left home in January. I arrived at Brasiliana, in the frontier between Peru and Brazil, a few days ago. My mind and heart can only think about exploring ayahuasca. It is my time to experience the roots of the Santo Daime through its most historical sources of knowledge. I am finally back in my country with a thick beard, long hair, and a backpack filled with three flutes, a drum, six pounds of rocks that I found along the way, several books, and some dirty clothes. I am wearing at least 10 necklaces and 5 bracelets on each wrist, all of which I made on my trip. The long journey within Latin America changed me and got me in touch with the most primal, self-grown, untamed version of my being. On that first night back to Brazil, I slept in the main square of the town. My level of freedom and disregard for established convention has reached its peak right now.

Yesterday, I hitchhiked from Brasiliana to Rio Branco, the capital city of the Acre state and a hotspot for ayahuasca. Between spiritual traditions like Santo Daime, Barquinha, Uniao do Vegetal, and indigenous rituals, people from all around the world come to Rio Branco to explore the medicine. There were ayahuasca centers everywhere and, after leaving my luggage in the room and eating, I started my exploration. I found out that the house I was staying at was remarkably close to the Centro Espirita Shining Light, the a *Barquinha* center where I began my quest. My objective was to experience ayahuasca in a variety of contexts, but I especially wanted how to reach *Colônia 5,000*, the first Santo Daime community established by Padrinho Sebastião . I hesitate to arrive there unannounced and want to find someone who can introduce me to the community. I had high hopes about visiting *Colônia 5,000*. Probably due to the influence of the

books and anecdotes I heard from the old generation of the *Daime*, I dreamed about this wonderful community where everyone lived together in harmony and peace.

Reaching the front door of the Shining Light center, I approached a man who was doing construction work, “Hello, my friend. Can you tell me if there will be any rituals in this center soon?” He looked at me a bit surprised and replied,

“Who are you?”

“My name is Gabriel. I am here in Rio Branco exploring the roots of the ayahuasca movement. This is a Barquinha center, right? Can you briefly tell me about Barquinha?”

“Look, I did not intend to stop to work to talk to you, but I will grant you this explanation because tomorrow is the 80th birthday of my sister Madrinha Emerald, the leader of this center. Frei Daniel was the founder of the Barquinha religion. He was a disciple of Master Irineu who, during a *Daime* ritual in the 1940s, received a spiritual message requesting that he start a new religion called *Barquinha*. Master Irineu gave him permission to open a spiritual center and use *Santo Daime* to conduct rituals. Madrinha Emerald met Frei Daniel a few decades later, and eventually became the head of the Shining Light center here. Now if you want, please come tomorrow. You are invited to participate in the Barquinha ritual, drink daime, meet Madrinha Emerald, and enjoy the festivities.”

I walked back to my room feeling satisfied that I already arranged exciting plans for the following day. There are other five families living in the house where I rent a room, each one occupying one room. We are all sharing one bathroom without running water. There is a big tank beside the house with the water supply. Wild nature is all around, with trees and plants growing through the windows inside the house.

I reach into my backpack, open my pouch, and stare to the razor blades. It was time to look presentable, not to anyone who will be there tomorrow, but to the *Rainha*. I will be in the presence of Her strength. I stare at the mirror and initiate the movements of shaving, reflecting on all the adventures and self-growth I had experienced during the past months in Latin America. I feel grateful. As my face changes and the beard goes away, I feel the connection and devotion to the plant. I understand there is a stark difference between the personal, internal experiences I have with the *Rainha*, and those I have in relation to others. As I shave the other side of my face, a drop of blood falls from my jaw to the sink. I see the Warrior's face in that drop of blood and feel the continuous rage he created in my heart. I close my eyes and see his Warrior archetype yelling at me while my Skywalker archetype slashes his armor with the power of discernment. As I shave the mustache, I understand that the plant manipulates the illusion of reality, and presents challenges to me that are a reflection of my learning in this earth. I feel more and more connected with the *Rainha*, and as I finish shaving, I bow down to the unborn Mother, the primordial knowledge, my source of connection with the mystery. Nothing in the external sphere will change the internal connection I have developed with Her. She lives in me. I raise my head again, stare at the mirror, and look deep inside my eyes.

June 7th, 2013 – Rio Branco

With the utmost reverence and devotion, I arrive at the Shining Light church. The ritual was beautiful and I especially loved hearing the hymns of Barquinha, which they call psalms. After the completion of three hours of *trabalho*, Madrinha Emerald closes the ritual and invites everyone to join her in a feast and spiritual music. I stepped out of the church and moved closer to the big

cross with two horizontal lines that stood in front of the complex. I remained there for some time, contemplating my journey and the path I have traveled to reach that point.

A woman is approaching me. She is tall with curly hair and looks to be in her forty's. "You're not from around here, are you?"

"No. I got here two days ago."

"Are you *fardado* of Santo Daime?"

"No, I attend the Daime church in Florianopolis. I am on my journey of understanding. What is your name?" I asked

"I'm Cora. I'm from Rio de Janeiro and I live in the *Colonia 5,000*. I came here today to look for people interested in working in the *feitio* of Daime at the 5,000. There is plenty of work and we give food and a room. Are you interested?"

I felt a shiver in my back, a sensation of connection. My eyes glowed. I was joyous. In my mind, visiting those communities meant to belong to the tradition. I was sure it was my spiritual destiny to go there with Cora and I trusted her right away.

"That would be amazing. I would love to join you. I can be there two days from now. It will be a great opportunity for me to be in the same place Padrinho Sebastião developed the Daime community and to learn about the process of preparing the Daime from scratch."

"Amazing," she replied. "So it will be helpful if I explain to you a bit about the community's internal dynamics. The Padrinho, or caretaker, of 5,000 is Jean. Lino, Jean's brother, does not accept his leadership in the community and took half of the land for himself. Lino keeps the old hippie tradition alive in the community. Jean became more industrious and keeps the *feitio* of the Daime running all year long to supply Daime churches outside of Brazil. He is getting rich by selling Daime in the United States and Europe. I spent a few weeks with Lino, but I am now

with Padrinho Jean, who asked me to take care of Padrinho Sebastião's house, prepare food, and recruit volunteers like you to come and work on the *feitio*."

"This is fascinating, Cora. Thank you for the explanation. Please write down the coordinates of the community and I will be there the day after tomorrow. For now, let us eat and dance with Madrinha Emerald." I spent another hour there before moving back to my room. That night I fell asleep wondering about all the adventures and knowledge I would gather from my upcoming experiences at *Colônia 5,000*. I was feeling so lucky and grateful.

June 10th – Colônia 5,000 - The Blood Baptism

I arrived at the 5,000 yesterday morning. I took a bus in the main station in Rio Branco, got off in front of a dirt road by the highway outside the city, and started walking following Cora's instructions. After around three miles, I reached the entrance of *Colônia 5,000*. Slowly walking in, I looked to my left to see the Greek Orthodox Christian architecture of the iconic Santo Daime church. In front of the church was the big house where Padrinho Sebastião lived during the 1980s. I stopped for a few minutes and stared at the church, asking for permission of Padrinho Sebastião to enter his realm. I felt the blessings of the *Rainha*, so fortunate to arrive there. A group of eight to ten children came running up to me, grabbing my hands, screaming, jumping, and smiling.

"Why did you take so long?" shouted Cora from the front door of the *casarão*, the main house. I smiled at her and walked through the front door. I saw a large living room, three bedrooms, and the entrance to the kitchen. Upon entering the kitchen, I went down five steps to where the table, the sink, and stove were.

"This is the house where Padrinho Sebastião came to live when he separated from *Alto Santo* in 1971. It was here that much of Padrinho Sebastião's doctrine was developed and where

he wrote his *hinário* “O Justiceiro” (The Avenger). We will sing this entire *hinário* tomorrow at Saint Anthony's *trabalho* in the main church starting at 7pm.”

"That's great, I'll be able to do a *bailado* here."

“Yes, you arrived at the right time. You need to purify yourself between today and tomorrow and prepare for the *daime*. Now leave your things here and let's go to the *casa de feitio*. You will start working right away.”

The *feitio* house was in the middle of the forest. When I got there, I saw two men transferring ayahuasca from a huge pot to a barrel already almost full of *daime*. I looked at that golden-colored liquid running down the pot full to the brim with the leaves and vines. The *daime* poured and I felt as if it was filling me. As if just by being there, I was under the effects. I tasted the *Rainha* in my mouth, smelled her in my nostrils. The sounds of the forest washed over me. I was engulfed in the middle of the Amazon Rainforest and I felt like an integral part of the environment. I approached the liquid and they warned me, “Be careful, it's hot.” They transferred the liquid to a hundred gallon barrel and took it into a room where they had at least ten other barrels full of *daime*.

"Hello, I am Caio. I take care of the *feitio*. Did you come to work?" I nodded and he said, “You can sit here in this chair and shave the *jagube* if that is good for you.” I sat in front of a massive mountain of *jagube* vines and started to scrape. After some time, Caio announced the end of the *feitio* for that day and we went back to the *casarão*. We sat on the porch. One of the men working there was Elias. He was a tall black man with a long beard, imposing, and with a strong personality. “I was serving time in a prison in São Paulo and then I came to Acre to seek a cure through Santo Daime,” he told me.

“You are useless,” shouted Cora. “You have been here for three weeks pretending to help with the *feitio*, but all you care about is eating and drinking *daime*.”

“And you are here for a different reason?” he countered.

“I run this house.”

“You ran away from Lino's house because you created trouble there, and now you are here creating more trouble.”

I was confused by my encounter of a spat during my first hours of arrival in the community where I thought I would only have wonderful experiences.

“Alright, you two, let's sing a little,” said Caio as he started to play the drum and sing Santo Daime hymns.

I started to feel the presence of a forest spirit, my hands started to shake, I closed my eyes, and I experienced that energy taking over me. My breath started to swell, and I prayed for Jesus' protection. Gradually, I returned to normal and when I opened my eyes, I noticed that other people also seemed to be in a trance. Sometime later, in the kitchen, I told Cora, “I think I incorporated a spirit when I was outside.” She looked at me firmly and said, “Here, everyone is incorporated all the time.” She took me to the balcony. “This place is the meeting between heaven and hell. Here, you will lose your sense of reality because this is a *magical* place. You will see birds turning into monkeys and jaguars turning into hares.” I did not know what to say or think. I was not sure if she was trying to deceive me or living in a fantasy herself.

Caio and Elias approached us on the balcony. “Here, I got a bottle of *daime* for us to drink today,” said Elias, showing a glass bottle full of the dark brown liquid.

“We are already going to drink *daime* tomorrow. Why do you want to drink it today?” said Cora.

“There is no right time to drink *daime*,” he replied. I could see an exaggerated excitement in his eyes. The Warrior’s face came to my mind, and his obsession for being under the effect of the plant. Elias spent a few minutes insisting that we take the medicine right there. Caio and Cora eventually accepted, and while the sun was setting, they decided to go gather logs for a bonfire, which is an essential part of the ritual.

I was alone with Elias, and as Cora and Caio walking away, he told me, “Let’s go to the front of the church.” Everything was dark and I could see a candle burning in front of the huge concrete cross at the entrance to the church. My heart was racing with fear and curiosity at the same time. I summoned courage. We stopped at the left side of the church and he looked around, suspicious, and laughed.

“Let us open the *trabalho* and drink this *daime* now.” I was confused. Are we not waiting for the others to start? Why the hurry? I know it was not right to drink *daime* outside of official rituals, but I was also filled with the excitement of being at that historic place, protected by the presence of Padrinho Sebastião. I thought this would be my chance to finally understand the deeper spiritual meaning of the journey I had been on since January. This was my chunk of history in this memorable place. I was at one of the oldest Daime communities, touching the roots of my tradition, and I was sure that is where I would certainly find answers. Filled with the certainty of divine protection, I accepted his idea.

Elias placed his hand on my shoulder and began to pray an Our Father and Hail Mary three times, then said, “The work has begun.” He took a dose of *daime* and gave one to me. It was pitch black all around with only the deep sounds of the forest and the noise of me drinking the *daime*.

A few seconds later, I see Cora and Caio coming from the *casarão*. “You are crazy, Elias. How do you have the courage to open a Daime *trabalho* without permission from any *fardado* and

offer *daime* to Gabriel?” said Cora, taking me by the arm and putting me on my knees in front of the church entrance. “Lord, my God, forgive this soul that seeks answers for its innocence.” She prayed, and Caio began to sing a hymn to close the Daime's work. Elias turned and ran away while Cora told me, “Now you have taken the *daime* and you are going to have to face the effects.” She took me inside the house and we laid on the bed that once belonged to Padrinho Sebastião. It was still completely dark, no lights on. I heard Caio in the next room singing Daime hymns slowly and after about twenty minutes the effect started to take hold.

Maybe I should have been terrified, but in reality I felt a deep curiosity about what would happen next. My existence was the setting for that experience, and there was no good or bad duality involved. I was certainly in a risky situation, among people I did not know, and under the effects of *daime* that I should have not taken. But now I was there, over the other side of the rainbow, experiencing the *daime* in the place where I always wanted to be. There was a hidden feeling of satisfaction and pleasure in the situation. The power had arrived.

I felt snakes crawling down the walls. I felt Padrinho Sebastião's presence rising through my spine. It was overwhelming. I started to emanate sounds and prayers in indigenous languages and felt nauseous. I wanted to throw up so Cora took me out of the house. After vomiting, I started jumping and shaking and I felt like I was turning into a jaguar. Cora seemed a bit clueless and said, “Come, let us go to Padrinho Lino. He will know how to deal with you.”

We walked for around ten minutes. I was losing contact with the material realm and my spirit wanted to detach from the body and travel the universe. I just wanted to lay down and let the process happen but I kept walking alongside Cora. I saw Padrinho Lino from a distance, sitting in front of his house around a group of ten people, playing guitar, and singing Daime hymns. He was

a short, thin man with a long beard, and he looked like an elf. Cora took a chair and sat me next to him.

“Padrinho, this is Gabriel. Elias gave him *daime*, and now he is like this. He did some internal cleaning back there and I brought him to you.”

“You and this Elias have been here in the community for a month, making a fuss. You fought with him here, and when you went to Jean's house, he went after you. This will end in tragedy,” he told her.

He looked at me and asked, “Have you ever taken a hapé?” I said no. “Hapé is a mixture of tobacco and powdered medicinal herbs that is blown through the nostrils. It can help you to go through the effect of the *daime* more smoothly.” When he blew the snuff into my nostrils, I felt as if I had been punched in the head. My body felt heavy, my reflexes were blurring, and I lost all consciousness of what was happening. My body felt to the ground, and I started screaming, “STOP, STOP. I DON'T WANT IT ANYMORE!” As I yelled, I slammed my hands on the floor. The music stopped and everyone looked at me. Lino came to me with incense sticks and slapped the soles of my feet.

“That is enough! I surrender! Leave me alone!” I cried.

“You are being possessed by a demon, my son. We need to take care of you,” said Lino. He uttered an exorcism prayer.

“STOOOOOP, STOOOOOP!” I cried even louder. “I can't take it anymore! Take me with you! I surrender!” My body was trembling from head to toe. I was in crisis. I could see the face of the Warrior in front of me, as if he was finally enacting the exorcism he told me about before.

After coming back to my senses, Lino explained that tapping the sole of the foot is a good strategy when someone is being possessed by a demon. “It seems that someone has opened your

spiritual dimension way more than you are able to stand. You need to take care of yourself. Otherwise, you will go mad.”

When everyone went to sleep I lay down on the dirt floor and kept my eyes open until morning. I was both startled and fascinated by what had just happened. Not much time had passed before it was 7 am and I arose to go to the *feitio* house, where everyone was already awake and starting the work. I was disoriented. I crossed the world of living and dead the previous night, transmuting into animals and facing an exorcism. I was the one becoming nature, merging with the forest, and tasting ineffable realms of becoming, while Caio, Elias, and the others were starting to work as if nothing had happened. I wondered if this was usual.

Feitio is considered a formal *trabalho* and for that, it is advised that participants take at least one dose of *daime*. Caio served himself and offered a dose to Elias, who eagerly took it. When he offered some to me, I hesitated. I was still coming down from the effects of last night’s dose and I was not sure I could handle more. But I did because, again, that was the purpose of the trip. I sat down and started to scrap the vines, seeing them filling up a huge pot containing the holy trinity: water, *jagube*, and *chacrona*. Caio, the chief of *feitio*, closely supervised the process would periodically press the concoction with a long stick to check the cooking progress and the strength of the fire. He kept silent as, according to the tradition, he was receiving the instructions from the Juramidam spirits. There was a logic of spiritual intuition that allowed the perfect development of the process.

A few hours later, Padrinho Jean arrived. He was a short man with a long, dry, white hair. His smile scared me. He had multiple golden rings and necklaces.

“I see there is someone new today. Who are you?”

“Good morning, I am Gabriel and I am coming from the Daime community in Florianópolis. I am not *fardado*. I came here to learn about the roots of the Daime and I want to be initiated.”

“No worries. I can initiate you whenever you want. You just need to buy your *farda* and *estrela* then we can do it easily during an upcoming *trabalho* in the church.”

His casual tone bothered me. He treated initiation as a mere formality, while I was crossing Latin American for my process of discernment. He was born in the tradition, while I was coming to it as an adult. I had to build the meaning and belonging. He was the leader of one of the communities I admired the most.

Regardless of the challenging experiences I had there thus far, nothing would dismantle the connection I had with Master Irineu and the tradition. I was completely surrendered to the Master’s wishes and was certain that anything or anyone that appeared to me was there for a reason. “Can you explain the meaning of *fardamento* for you?” I asked.

“Being a *fardado* means that you accept the Master as your life guide and Padrinho Sebastião as your spiritual partner. Master Irineu is the creator, Padrinho Sebastião is the enabler. The Daime is a medicine. It cures all kinds of diseases. A *trabalho* is divided between *fardados* and visitors. *Fardados* accept the Daime as their main spiritual medicine, while visitors come to the ritual looking for healing. *Fardados* take care of the visitors by holding the ritual. Also, every Daime *trabalho* is devoted to universal healing of planet. The most essential objective of a Daime *trabalho* is to contribute to planetary healing, in all aspects, in connection with the natural forces. We shine our universal light to all those who are in need. Therefore, a *fardado* is someone committed to the regeneration of the earth according to the teachings of Master Irineu, which are explained out in his *hinário*.”

“This is interesting. Did you ever meet Padrinho Sebastião?”

“Yes, he was my uncle. I was born here in the *Colônia 5.000*. This is my home,” he said, smiling and shining his golden teeth.

“This is beautiful. I need to reflect on this conversation before making any decisions,” I told him while my vision started to blur and my mind seemed to be jumping out of my material form. I thought, *let me behave like I can perfectly deal with the effects of the plant, as everyone else here seems to be doing.*

“Alright but now, as a welcome gesture, I will give you a dose of *daime*.”

My eyes widened. *Another one?* I thought to myself. Though I had already reached my limits during the mere fifteen hours I was at the *5,000*, it would be a huge disrespect to deny *daime* from the hands of a Daime authority. There was not much of a choice here. I bowed down while he was filling up the small glass with the slimy liquid. I swallowed it, grateful for his meaningful explanation that helped me to have a better understanding of the meaning of belonging to Santo Daime.

It was still morning and I had already taken two additional doses of *daime*, apart from the one I took the previous night, without sleeping. I spent hours scraping the vine, seeing in it the truth of my existence. I remembered the last *trabalho* I participated in Florianópolis, when I heard the Master saying he would send me to a journey to the roots of his realm, the day I experienced the full potential of the *daime*. A few hours later, as the afternoon came, a single divine force was commanding my body. I was going deeper in the corners of existence. My condition in that moment mixed the worlds of the living, the dead, and of dreams.

I returned to the *casarão* in the late afternoon to change my clothes and get ready for the *trabalho* of *Santo Antônio*. On top of everything that happened during the past day, there was still

a full *trabalho* ahead of me. The full moon was rising in the sky as I put on my white shirt and arranged my hair for the ritual. I ate some cookies, knowing that if I ate more, I might escape the frequency of the continuous effect of the *daime* that I had consumed since the previous night. In that moment, I was fully alert, senses extremely heightened, and feeling divine like never before. I felt myself emanating a light of love and peace. I felt sacred.

I walked to the church entrance thirty minutes before 7:00 pm when the *trabalho* was to begin. Cora ran to me,

“I need your help. I am in danger.”

I put my hand on my chest and said, “Pray for God's protection.”

“Padrinho Sebastião is inside me. That's why I needed to send Elias out of this community. This place is not for him.” She looked into my eyes and turned, heading towards the *casarão*.

I closed my eyes and prayed. A few minutes later, a scream came from the kitchen, followed by a desperate voice yelling, “Help! Help!” I ran to the kitchen and saw Cora thrown to the floor with her blood running from her nose. On top of the stairs, at the opposite exit, was Elias. He looked down at me with an imposing air, spat on the floor, and left, slamming the door.

“He hit me! He hit me!” she screamed.

“We need to call the police!” I yelled back.

“NO!” she shouted even louder. “We need to get to the *trabalho* that is starting shortly.” I was disgusted. How could she think of taking *daime* in that condition? I realized that she would disregard everything and everyone to drink *daime*. It seemed that such easy access created a level of dependence, especially for those who are not *fardados* and do not have a signed spiritual commitment to Daime. Such an access to the substance facilitates dependence and abuse, leaving people like Cora to violate even her own dignity in order to feel the effects of the plant.

That was the last teaching I received from Master Irineu at *Colônia 5,000*. I learned that the Daime religious structure is the blessing that organizes and regulates the consumption of the plant, and that one should feel satisfied with the amount they take within the ritual. There, from the deepest roots of the Daime tradition, I learned about limits.

And that place, where hell and heaven manifest together, clouds come closer to magma and crush those who venture to live under the influence of the medicine daily. That situation was a reality check for me, and taught me that less is sometimes better than more with *daime*. After twenty-four hours under the influence of the plant, I had enough. I could not go further. It was humiliating to see at Cora, thrown on the floor, screaming with pain, and probably with a broken nose, focusing only on cleaning herself to get ready to drink *daime*.

I closed my eyes and felt like there were thousands of dark spirits flying over *Colônia 5,000*. I could not stay there any longer. I would not be complicit in that situation of aggression. After helping stop Cora's bleeding, I went to my room, grabbed my backpack, and left. I walked away from the community still heavily under the influence of the daime, crying, and alone under the moonlight. I sat on the corner of the road and cried desperately. I laid down in the corner of the dirt road and was able to sleep for the first time since I arrived at *Colônia 5,000*.

“Hello? Hello? Are you okay?” Someone was gently touching my head. Disoriented, I opened my eyes and saw the beautiful face of a lady with long, blond hair, close to me. I was overwhelmed with an immeasurable sensation of connection and care.

“*Rainha*, is that you?” I asked, still in between dream and reality. Was that lady the manifestation of Virgin Mary? I started to cry in devotion and desolation, still laying down as she held me.

“My dear, I am coming back from the Daime church at the 5,000. I was there when that man attacked the lady, and saw you running to help her. I also saw you leaving the place with your bag and walking down the road. Similarly to you, I did not feel comfortable staying there and decided to leave. I was worried about you and kept an eye open for you across the street until I found you here.”

“*Rainha*, is that you?”

“I know the situation you went through was damaging, my dear. The *Alto Santo* community, where Master Irineu’s tomb is located, is not far from here. I would like to take you there.”

I got in the car and kept silent for most of the time, still crying. The heaviness of what I went through in that community was weighting on me more and more. What happened at *Colônia 5.000* was clearly traumatic. I was in a state of consciousness that I have never been in before. I felt I was at the edge of my ability to exist coherently. I felt myself losing the thread of reality, as if I was going crazy.

There it was - the tomb of my guide, my teacher, my master, Master Raimundo Irineu Serra. She told me, “I brough you here. Now go and meet Master Irineu. He is waiting for you.” Tears came to my eyes while I stepped barefoot into the complex of his mausoleum. I was in a state of complete surrender. Here I am, my master, at your home, with you, for you, after experiencing the wonders of the tradition you created. I am yours. I stepped on the hexagonal structure where his tomb was located. My whole body shivered, and I kneeled in front of his grave. As I prayed, I felt my Master’s presence, placing his hands on my shoulders and hugging me. I heard him saying, “My son, you came to me and fulfilled the mission I gave you. Now, you have proved your worth and learned that my creation is not for entertainment. You are here with me,

and I will always be with you.” I opened my eyes, looked to the ceiling, and saw a shining glow falling down over my head and the illuminating the whole structure with a shower of golden energy. I touched my head on my Master’s tomb for a few minutes, and felt an immense peace and transference of knowledge. That subjective knowledge filled my soul. My discernment process was complete. I was ready to go under Master’s umbrella and accept the Daime as my life path.

June 12th – Rio Branco

I am now back in my room at Rio Branco’s city center. Sitting close to the window, I look outside and see the entrance of the Shining Light church, where that whole story started a few days earlier. Coming back to my private space has been painful. I feel like all my energy is drained. I need to recover from the effects of my tenuous experience at *Colônia 5,000* and *Alto Santo*. I now feel the need to rest. I feel a continuous frustration with the fact that *Colônia 5,000* was not the healthy spiritual community I imagined. I was expecting the same environment from the 1980s, which has unfortunately, changed drastically over the decades. But, I will not stop my search here. Master Irineu has been escorting me through this journey, and I believe he will send me to the place where I belong. The spiritual house where I will receive my *farda* and *estrela* will arrive soon. But for now, I will spend a few days on my own here, trying to regain a grasp on the present.

June 18th, 2013 - Acre

ring, ring, ring.....

“Hello? Who is there?”

“Jade, this is Gabriel. I am calling from a public phone in Rio Branco.”

“Gabriel, how dare you spend four months without letting us know anything about you?! I almost thought you were gone for good.”

“You have no idea, Jade. I almost did not make it multiple times. I have had deeply disturbing experiences here in Rio Branco. I need help.”

“Haven’t I told you to stay away from those Daime communities in the Acre state? You are not *fardado* and you should not be there. People will not respect you as an insider and will take advantage of your vulnerability. You were certainly an easy target. Are you okay? Did anyone hurt you?”

“No, but I witnessed a situation with physical aggression under the effects of *daime* and have been struggling to let it go. I feel like I have an open wound in my spiritual field.”

“Oh my god, Gabriel, I told you multiple times to be careful with abuse within the Daime. It is so common to meet people who have lost track of the limits of the plant, especially in a place like Acre. You are still a beginner, and there, they have been using Daime since they were born, just like me. They have a lifelong connection with the plant that you do not have. You exposed yourself too much by going there, and we now need to help you recover. I am now in the Matutu community, in Minas Gerais, where I was born and raised. I took you to the Daime for the first time four years ago, but I am still responsible for whatever happens with you inside the Daime realm. You will always be my luggage inside the Daime. Therefore, I invite you to come here and spend as much time as you want.”

“Jade, what is this community? I am afraid Matutu will be similar to *Colônia 5,000* and I will suffer more.”

“On the contrary, my friend. Matutu is a hidden jewel, a blessing on earth. Come here and stay with me. Let me guide you now.

IV

Kneeling Before the Cross

In a quick sigh, I return to the shore.

Save me from drowning, or we will never be the same.

A breath by the sea.

Shipwrecked life going down the drain.

The ghost ship of my being comes back to life,

in a wave of the rose-decked magic wand.

Goodbye, goodbye, I'm leaving now.

Life stands still, and we all go to heaven.

Goodbye, I reach the paradise,

hoping that on this side,

I can survive with a heart capable of sighing,

and live on that non-existent cave.

Sighing, moaning, and then smiling,

I expect from life the joy of its brilliance.

Blue glow that moistens the eyes

with the softness of sighs discharged with tones of gray.

June 20th, 2013 – Matutu – Minas Gerais

It is dark outside. I have arrived at Jade's place in Matutu after a long journey coming from Acre. It has been two days travelling by bus from Rio Branco to São Paulo, and then to Caxambu, in Minas Gerais, where I took a local auto to Aiuruoca, a small village where 3.000 people live surrounded by the Mantiqueira mountain range. The *Bico do Papagaio* Peak is visible all around the multiple farms and valleys in the region. I arrived at Aiuruoca around 6pm, depleted after such a long trip, one that has lasted for six months around Latin America. I am now going for refuge and rest. The motivation is no longer for exploration but for internal organization and healing. Jade was waiting for me in her white *fusca*, an old Volkswagen model, the best for the dirt roads of the Matutu community. We drove for around forty minutes under the moonlight. The Milky Way was shining, showering us with the cosmic strength of the stars. Even though it was night, I was still able to feel the stillness of the place. I dropped my backpack in Jade's room in the attic of her mother's place. I kept staring the Milky Way and feeling a deep sensation of support and grace. There is an unbearable sense of security beside Jade right now. She is my ever smiling fortress. Outside, I can only hear the grasshoppers getting ready to sleep, and the fireflies making their way to the nest. I lay my head on Jade's lap, and she runs her hand through my long hair, caressing the overthinking head that went through so much during the past few months of self-exploration. I fall asleep in that position, covering myself with the protection of my preceptor and soul sister.

June 21st – Matutu –

Jade is bringing me a cup of coffee and biscuits in bed. There is so much in my mind, so much to process, so many feelings happening at once. Going to Acre was a courageous and reckless act that taught me so much about the Daime, but took so much of my energy and compass. With

that confusion clouding my mind, I rise from bed and walk outside. Slowly, I open the door, feeling the fresh breeze touching my body and the sun light penetrating my soul. I feel a sudden vertigo and my face flashes white. I take the first step outside and reach paradise. My eyes get wet as I sigh that first morning breath in the pristine nature of the Matutu valley. From where I'm standing, I can see multiple cascades along the mountain range, birds singing, a few wild animals running, horses, plantations, and multiple houses scattered sparsely around the valley.

“It is so important to me that you are here,” says Jade approaching. “I grew up in this place. All my childhood friends are here and I want to introduce you to them. My mother moved to this place in the beginning of the 1990s, when Gregory, the Padrinho of this community, was distributing lands to a group of Daime followers who wanted to move here. The Daime is commonly organized in communities that, one way or another, reflect the first vision of Padrinho Sebastião at *Colônia 5,000*, when that was still a safe place for travelers like you.” She looked at me with a reprisal look. “The story of this valley dates back to the time pre-colonization, when Brazil was untouched by Europeans. Matutu is an indigenous name that means ‘water head’, because of the abundant fresh water running through this place. Over time, multiple owners had these lands, until they came in the hands of Gregory. My mother says that Gregory used to be a proactive member of the Daime community who effortlessly gathered people around him. He never wanted to create a Daime community or be the leader of a church. Even so, it is said that he went to the feet of Padrinho Sebastião and asked what should he do about all those followers coming to his land in the Matutu valley and asking him to guide them in *trabalhos*. Padrinho Sebastião ordered him to divide his land in small colonies, the same way he did at the 5,000, and gift them to all those who wanted to be there. They would build houses their houses and grow their food together. The Matutu Daime community kept working in this way for multiple years, until

recently, when we started to see undeniable influences of capitalism, especially with the establishment of a small market by the feet of the mountain. The first generation of Gregory's followers are now getting old and their children, like me, are starting to bring a new aspect of openness to the community, bringing people like you to know the work we do here. I want you to meet Gregory. You have gone through a lot during the past few months and I think you will benefit from a conversation with him. You are lucky. Today is Sunday and the whole community meets for a short Daime ritual called *missa*, where we chant around twenty hymns. The community has been getting together every Sunday for more than twenty years, using it is an opportunity to meet and share news. Come, let us now spend the day exploring the valley."

A little before 6 pm, we moved with her *fusca* to the top of a mountain range in the valley where the Daime church was located. The sun was setting beautifully on the horizon and as we viewed it, we could see multiple other mountain ranges and a massive stone wall behind the church. There was nature all around and a fresh breeze of virgin nature. I was feeling a deep serenity, calmness, and effortless connection with my experience. I stepped inside the Daime church, a simple structure made of wood and brick, yet energetically powerful. Around fifty people were there for the *missa*, and most of them wanted to check on me and introduce themselves. I felt a shower of gratitude and love. I was feeling more and more confident to open up and feel at ease. When Gregory arrived, everyone went to their places and kept quiet. He was a tall, muscular old man with grey hair, a similarly colored beard, and a penetrating look. I noticed that he had control over his environment just by being present. It seemed everyone wanted to respect his leadership. "Let us start the ritual for today," he uttered, and we started to sing beautifully for around fifty minutes.

Upon the completion of the *missa*, it was already dark outside, and Jade came to give me a hug. She was definitely amazed that I was sharing space with her in her birthplace. She held my hand and brought me closer to Gregory, who was speaking with someone else. After a few minutes, he turned to me, and I felt an immense respect. “Gregory, this is my friend Gabriel. I introduced him to the Daime in 2009, and now he came to visit me here”. He looked at me from top to bottom, and seemed to ponder for a few seconds, as if he was processing if I was worthy to participate in his realm. Then, he gave me a dear hug. “Welcome Gabriel. We are happy to have you here”. Tears came to my eyes. I felt the long-searched-for feeling of belonging to a spiritual house and I remembered the Master telling me that he would send me to my designated spiritual home after the journey through the roots of the tradition. I bowed down in respect to him and said, “Dear Gregory, thank you for welcoming me to your spiritual home. I reach this house depleted and full of scars after a long journey of discernment, and I am looking for answers from someone like you, who is advanced in their spiritual journey. I have gone through much more than I was prepared for during the past few months, and I need mentorship.”

He looked deep into my eyes “You’ve reached home, my son.”

June 25, 2015 – Matutu – My Master is my Guide

A year after the exorcism, I got dressed in Daime *farda* for my official initiation in the tradition. I spent that whole year after meeting Gregory in Matutu. Before officially moving to Matutu, I went back to Florianópolis, saw my family, and got my mother’s blessings to follow my path in the Daime tradition. I also saw Leonard, who was living his life happy and single, participating in Daime rituals and also preparing for his *fardamento*. After everything, we both

found our way through the Daime and will be eternally connected by the struggles we went through. I keep loving him.

... ..

The Daime *trabalhos* in Matutu have always been divine, but that night was special. I was dressing with the brand new white suit and pants, and carrying the six pointed *estrela* with an eagle in the middle, the symbol of a *fardado*. The ritual of passage, or initiation, consisted of the Padrinho attaching the star to the neophyte's clothes and giving them his blessings. That day, there were two hundred very well-tuned people singing the hymns with much love and dedication. It was as if we were singing in the heavens. I was feeling complete, confident, brave. I felt like a lion ready to be crowned. And as the work continued, I felt the effects of the Santo Daime take over me and bring me understanding and peace. I was no longer a beginner, I already knew both the healing and destructive potential of ayahuasca. I knew it was a tool that should be used with caution, and I was grateful for that understanding. When the 65th hymn arrived, Gregory called me to the middle of the hall. I approached him with a smile on my face and gave him a hug. Then everyone began to sing in an angelic choir.

I will sing

I will sing, I will sing

On my knees on a cross

I will praise the Lord God

It was the one who gave me this light

This light is from the Forest

That no one knew

Who came to give me

It was the Ever Virgin Mary

When She gave it to me

I engraved it in my heart

To replant Holy Doctrines

And teach my brothers

I have now received

This prize of value

From Saint Joseph and the Virgin Mother

Of Jesus Christ the Redeemer

I have faith to win

And to gain with my teachings

Because God is sovereign

And He is the one who determines us.

Every word of that hymn entered my ears and penetrated my being like a balm that healed all my wounds. That hymn explained what I had gone through until then in the search for my spiritual home. It had been a long journey to get there, a painful journey of confusion and pain. It's

like I've been on a relentless search for light in a dark, rainy forest all that time. Now, I was at home. That hymn represented all the devotion and love for Daime, and the desire to use the plant in the search for knowledge in a safe, coherent, and respectful way with myself and with others.

Tears of happiness streamed down my face as I listened to that choir singing to me, for my moment. While singing, "I now received this prize of value," Gregory attached the *estrela* on my chest. That was the beginning of a new life, and as I came down the umbrella of Master Irineu, I felt an unique sense of belonging. Now I was a member of that Juramidam family. And as the intention of using Santo Daime was being stated, "I have faith to win and to gain with my teachings," I committed to the path.

When the hymn ended, everyone remained silent. In a glimpse of consciousness, external reality shattered and I saw the image of Master Irineu in front of me. Clouds and a skylike sphere surrounded him, and there was a golden path leading me to his presence. I walked up those stairs and approached that divine being, who was smiling to me. I then took my heart out of my chest and offered it to him in an act of complete surrender to the spiritual world. "I am yours. Whatever you want, I'll do. Wherever you take me, I'll go." Master Irineu replied, "Congratulations, my son. You have made me proud. You walked through the path I laid out for you, and understood the hidden meanings of my truth. I will always be with you, guiding and blessing your path. You have always had an honest motivation to understand the spiritual realm, and I will guide you to so many more experiences of growth and expansion. From now on, you will start a new journey."