

Differentiating the use of Shamanistic-herbs from “spiritual practices”: Ayahuasca-type herbs that end the hallucination of “self”

How many times have we heard the old adage that you can't jump to the top of the mountain without going through the trials of the road on the way up there? This is often cited as the justification for taking the “spiritual path” and the trials and tribulations that some call “a long road” towards the perceived victory of “spiritual enlightenment”. However the path, the master and the spiritual quest are always about “the seeker”, the one who in fact doesn't really exist. Hence anything that might be called “spiritual” is an expression of separating off of something, or a braking of something away from any other aspect of life. Everything is “spiritual” or nothing is, both mean the same. The so-called “spiritual practice” or anything practiced with intention are both expressions that reinforce the sense of “myself”, usually in a pious or one-upmanship process. This is commonplace in the world today.

In a recent meeting, Tony Parsons very clearly pointed out that the nature of the so-called “spiritual quest” and the seeking process are always about someone saying “I know the way” and then, of other people following them. Or it can be the taking on of some sort of “personal practice”; a situation where you yourself become “your own master” or as Johnny Cash might put it “your own personal Jesus!”, which also always reinforces the status quo, it must do because after all “you” are very strongly involved. The point is that whether it's “you” and “yourself” having a conversation or “you” and the “master/guru” who are having a conversation, it's always about duality, similar to a snake eating its tail, it's always about trying to find the end of “me”. This process can either occur via “my-self” or via a teacher who, by the mere fact that they label themselves as such (or hide from labeling intentionally, hence revealing themselves), means they create a hierarchical ideology and thereby are also battling with a huge “me”. This is called the blind leading the blind and it happens in every walk of life, from student and master in the traditional practices of Japan to the manager and subordinates at the local branch of Tesco's. There is no difference whatsoever, no matter how eloquently the master makes out that there is, or whether you believe it, this is all smoke and mirrors.

There is no possibility of being able to see anything different in the human world, or outside of human-terms, because 99.9% of the humans on the planet, excluding the infants, really are out to lunch with “myself” and are therefore essentially immune to any possibility of opening up to the reality that this “me” or that “self” is really the key blockage. So, still within the seeking process, what else is there?

Outside of “spiritual practice” and the ideologies that go along with it, there are herbal substances that have been used probably from the dawn of time for this very issue. If we look at the nature of global herbalism there are two categories into which we can put herbs. The first is herbs that somehow have a tonic or strengthening effect on the human, these herbs are akin to foods and will be used alongside them or as tonic supplements. The second group are those herbs used for catharsis which have an action that draws out toxicity (heat) from the body in some way. Looking at the cathartic herbs there are those which help the body's natural elimination processes, such as encouraging sweating or encouraging bowel movement, or even vomiting if it's necessary. Taken in large amounts these are all poisons as they drain the body. However also within this category are herbs that do not eliminate via the conventional

means but primarily affect the function of the head, brain and senses. In fact they are a kind of discharge via the senses, an up-and-out effect more than anything else. This particular category of cathartics is very different from all the other herbs and as such will often be associated with highly mystical powers and have been called “spiritual”. This is not to say the others are not, but the special nature of this group of herbs make them the key herbs of the Shaman and have always been the main tenet of focus within tribal peoples worldwide. While eliminatory catharsis via the bowels and the sweat and via vomiting are outlets that are clearly understood as they are so physically expressive, sensory and mental-emotional issues are the corner-stone of all *suffering/ dis-ease* and as such these are the root for physical formation of illness. Thus these special herbs are often viewed with great reverence as they are the foundation of all the other herbal cathartics and as the “self” is the key basis of all dis-ease or sufferance so relief from this is foundational to curative health.

There is a seeming congruence between health and the end of “self” because one begets the other. Instinctual health is fundamentally about the letting go of “self” which happens completely naturally without method or direction from any human intention or intervention. There are layers of things that medicine can affect but inevitably medicine is usually dealing with the outer symptoms of “self”, or dis-ease. However the core contraction of “being separate” or “suffering” is the foundation of “self” which still remains even when the majority of pain or discomfort has cleared up. This “self” can dislodge in treatment of the issues and discomforts of the body or at any time when it is ripe to do so, but whenever it is focused on or turns into a “spiritual practice” or an intended process this will, in the end, exacerbate the problem because it supports the concept that “I” am able to “fix” something. The greater the focus, the higher the contraction, the more there is a natural letting go, the more open and less contracted the energy state. The “self” fluxes like this, it is literally a “self-protection”.

Shamanism, which is the root of global medicine, has two broad-brush layers to its expression. The first/outer layer comprises herbs and practices which deal with what we might call pain or discomfort of the body system, due to naturally occurring situations such as accident, injury and environmental climatic conditions (overall this can be called “cold”). As expressed above, these medicines have two groups: that which deals with tonifying and strengthening the body which will also include food medicine, and secondly those practices and herbs that help the eliminatory functions of the body in the form of cathartics (heat). As a general rule the tonifying (warming) functions are more herbal-food-based and the more cathartic functions are more about treatment of the exterior of the body which involves massage expressions such as acupuncture (cooling) etc.

The inner boundary/layer is associated with a few specific herbs that affect the site of “sufferance” and so are about the nature of dis-ease. Whereas other medicines and techniques are about simply aiding pain and providing relief from dis-comfort through strengthening or clearing the body, this category of the inner layer is about sufferance, or dis-ease. The outer layer deals with the outer-manifestations of the process suffering, the outer strands/ web of “self” but as was profoundly understood by the ancient peoples, the root of suffering can’t be focused on by an application or a technique. If you are hit by a falling log or sustain an insect bite, then this outer layer medicine can help alleviate the pain problem, but the suffering which is about “me”

owning the pain, is because of the involvement of the “self”. Basically the outer medicine is like a band-aid for suffering, it can help the body to heal and it can cool and calm the surface of suffering but it rarely hits the very root. Essentially the only thing that can break the rhythm of the “self” is that which is totally natural and has no intention, generally this means *anything except for other humans*. While in ancient times a natural-human was a possibility, it is very unlikely to be found in the local therapist or doctor’s office today. The natural-human is something that occurs when “self” drops out, it is possible that change to others may occur through being around such an expression. However, interaction with such a person is a direct insult to the “self” and as such will be very difficult, as evidenced during the various exchanges that occur at a Tony Parsons meeting (see <http://www.theopensecret.com>). With the exception of these rare interactions, everything else that can initiate realization is nature itself. However, society has historically avoided or fought against nature and therefore the “self” reigns supreme.

The outer layer of Shamanism isn’t directly focused on the suffering itself, it is indirect and it can be that through it the root or “self” is also alleviated but often this was obviously not enough of a connection. The inner layer is the foundation method by which suffering is tackled or at least softened, through the taking of the Ayahuasca-type herbs which are directly focused on this, which is the inner layer.

The Ayahuasca-type herb category is very, very different from any of the other herbs, methods and techniques of therapeutics. The nature of the herb is very much focused on the human-brain, affecting the head and brain most strongly, and as a result the herb has an energy that is upwards and outwards in its effect. While it is a catharsis of the senses, this is very different as it hits the root of the problem of suffering which is prevalent in most people with or without physical pain or environmental injury. Physical pain can and often does occur with suffering but suffering of “me” can simply be there without very much in the way of physical symptomology. This is simply the human-condition and the sense of separation of the “me” from the world.

The plant has no intention, nothing to teach. Although many people believe many stories about it, these are really part of male-dominated-Shamanism that has disrupted the entirely neutral expression of nature. Actually the drug affects the human mind and exaggerates everything in it, in particular all that’s held as resistance to nature, which essentially is the “I”. So it actually unblocks the process, it is considered as a wrestling of the “self” and the natural expression of the plant. Of course the plant always “wins” or breaks through to the larger reality of nature in the process of the taking of Ayahuasca, but as there is a letting go of the resistance, so there is an unblocking of the process which keeps the 1% of the human that is locally focused in the neo-cortex of the brain seemingly separate from the other 99% of the human, although the effect is of the whole body contraction. At this deep root-level this effect changes the whole.

Most interestingly, the nature of this connection to a plant is something that can only be *facilitated* by the Shaman (who originally were likely to be women rather than men), whatever their beliefs and interpretations about what’s going on. Originally there would have been little or no intervention of the Shaman or requirement for ritualization, simply a natural connection of people taking the herb without hierarchy or intention, it would likely have been taken just because a person was deeply

suffering, and this “possession” need to be cathartically removed or opened out and therefore instinctively these herbs were used.

In a way one could say that the Ayahuasca-type drugs are the antidote for the “fruit of the tree of knowledge”. It is actually the “self” which is the hallucination and all that Ayahuasca does is to exaggerate this to the point of collapse, rendering it a clear, even visual and auditory experience, and while going through it there is a realization of the “self’s” total illusionary nature and allowance of its dying away. These plants are associated with death, not only because many of them are poisonous but because there is a death of “me” that occurs in taking them, something alters.

The key point is that there is no *trying* involved here, which clearly differentiates it from spiritual practice, even those which are “doing-non-doing” and other such ridiculous notions. No-one is trying to get anywhere and even if they are the plant doesn't care, it just goes naturally to where its nature takes it in the body, the “me” is seen clearly and then it gradually passes away. The brilliance of it is that it has no agenda, no Shaman or guru or teacher attached to it. The interpretations of “what happened” are all added on by the “self” after the event as it tries to come back in, after the herb having been taken. The point is that it effects change. Practising something always involves a “me” and as such always involves a process of engagement with something. With the Ayahuasca-type drugs the engagement is intrinsic, there is no “me” who “chooses” or resists or does anything, there is a total succumbing.

In some ancient pre-systemized medicine of the ancient world there are expressions such as Dao-yin (the origin of yoga/Qigong) which all of which involve spontaneous expressive movements that are “unachievable” and are about a cathartic process of release in the body. Today these are expressed in the form of Katsugen-undo as illustrated by the little known work of Haruchika Noguchi. There are other forms of spontaneous movement arts and dance which also have a taste of this kind of process, where there is a free-flow effect where there can be no master, only the natural flow of energy that is experienced.

While this may seem like a de-bunking of teachers and hierarchy for no good reason actually when it comes to the nature of reality there is no-one who can teach you the way, because if there is a belief in a “way” this will always get in the way! So this actually worse than a de-bunking of teachers, it's saying that teachers are *part of the dis-ease*, whether part of tribal culture or not. The point is that our natural connection to these herbs is something which cannot be taught or learned about, only experienced.

“The art of medicine consists in amusing the patient while nature effects the cure”
- Voltaire

Nature constitutes the cure, so the practitioner or shaman or whoever is merely a participant in the process. Fundamentally it is at the point of contact, of being-with and connection that healing occurs, not because anything is being “done”, or as a result of any ideology or intention of the healer. The healer is not the healer, nature is,

therefore those who are involved are all on the same plain, all at one with what's going on. This is why often the majority of the most ancient of healers were women, who are less likely to attempt to direct a situation or need to make disciples out of people, rather there is just authentic connection/sharing.

Many indigenous communities form what might be called a herb-centered society with herbs like Ayahuasca at their core. This is a key and vitally important point for those who are in the process of considering the changing face of human interaction and acknowledge an instinctive draw to “re-tribalization”. It is clear that the patriarchal society is something dreamed up in the relatively short term in human evolutionary history. As the eminent archeologist Marija Gimbutas (<http://www.marijagimbutas.com/>) points out, societies of BC10000-5000 in Europe were likely to be predominantly matri-focal, meaning female/ yin focused, rather than dominated by the male expression “patriarchal”. This concept is key throughout all the ancient understanding in tribal peoples and also in fundamental texts like the Tao Te Ching, the foundation of Taoist understanding in China. The point is that “lead” or “rule” at the central expression of the society/ tribe in these ancient times were clearly yin-female and as such naturally anarchic, i.e without leadership other than the natural expression of what life expresses *through the yin-female*, she doesn't direct from a “me” or “self/ ego”. The yin-female was the expression of the root of life and so was acknowledged as such and given the prime-central place in the tribal structure. However it is clear that as time moved on, the “self” dominated the picture and partially within the masculine. There was a change over that took place where the female was removed from her central place and male domination began. This is similar to an auto-immune disease occurring to the “body of humanity”.

However when Ayahuasca and similar herbs are themselves are the centre of tribal communities then these take the place of the yin-female. The female or the yin acts like a vessel, life comes through it and as such it is empty of “me”. The women of ancient tribes were probably considered to be *less* dis-ease ridden than the males simply because the nature of the yin has less of the physiological energy to form “self” in the same way it does with men. As such the yin-female was seen as the mother and the healer. When roles switched however it was clear that dis-ease had meant that males dominated, but the Ayahuasca-type herbs are purely natural, they know no sex or ideology they are simply the expression of nature, so when the herb is at the centre of a community, it actually forms the connection to the female or yin again. The herb takes you “back home” so to speak, but to the womb of the yin-female, it prevents the warped ideas predominantly of the male-mindset ideas getting too wild and separatism and allows the women infected by this also, to come back to the heart and more, the feet. Herb rooted societies like this have stood the test of time due to this ingenious connection, which still exist in Peru and a few other places in the world are actually very nature-based and so naturally matri-focal. Even if the nature of the Shamans are most male now, still there is a realization that the Shaman can only guide a person towards the herb but when the herb takes hold it is “her” that “I” is engaged with. The Shamans are in a sense gate-keepers of a connection the true nature of yin. The herb roots a person again, drawing them back to reality and clearing illusion. This is not a “teaching” or training” it is simply nature expressing authenticity through the body of the human, it is a catharsis of stuff that is no longer needed. In a world dominated by the masculine expression these herbs are a possible re-route to a sense of connection to the natural matri-focal society of our origin, and s

connection to nature in the same breath. Of course this also completely destroys any notion of what is meant by separation between people in any societal format including monogamy and the nuclear family and simply produced natural tribal peoples. These drugs are anarchic to the status quo and they break down the nature of what is “normal” to humans, as such they form a very different worldview. While the drugs are not expressed in this book, Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jethá’s brilliant “[Sex at dawn](#)” is about the nature of natural human sexuality, it is clear that tribal communities are our natural state and matri-focal is their basis. This is simply what works and what allows humans to let go of the sense of separation naturally. Ayahuasca and similar drugs allow for a dropping away of the layers of “me” to allow these things to occur naturally. As such they hold a vital place in human life processes, they begin to lift the veil.

There is good reason why these relatively few, but highly prized herbs are clearly vitally important to humankind as distinct from others in the rest of the global herbal pharmacopeia. It is a long time since we inhabited the Eden of our origin, but in this ancient forest heritage there are vines that could counteract the hallucination of the “self” and allow us to glimpse Eden again. At the right moment it may be worth investigating the non-denominational, non-hierarchical, non-intentional natural effect of these herbs, not as a “spiritual practice” which already holds the ideology of separating body from spirit and mind from body, but for the simple freedom they may afford through a non-ideological opening or softening/ripening process of the “me” as it naturally passes away and becomes irrelevant in the context of life. The nature of the herb is to deflate the colonial (head) mentality of the “me” and reconnect to the indigenous roots (feet) of that which is the human-animal who has an instinct, like a dog who goes out to eat grass when its stomach aches, to use the herbs that crack open the head-based sense of contraction which is felt throughout the body, which is the everyday angst of being “myself”.

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