

Ritual Aspects. The seminar suggested

Extracts and adaptation of a paper by Fabio Ramirez

Duga is the term for the “Word” of tobacco and coca, meaning the body of beliefs that incorporates the ritual use of plants, on a daily basis, into the systems of healing, education, spirituality and maintenance of the ecological balance by certain indigenous groups of the Colombian Amazon who refer to themselves as the “*people of the center*”, that is, of the center of the world: the Witotos, Boras, Andoques, among others.

According to the cosmology of these indigenous group, there is no “good” or “bad” in life. Instead they use the terms “cool” or “hot”. Disease, violence, anxiety, etc. are “hot”. “Cool” applies to well-being, peace, tranquility, etc. In life there are several goals to attain: to enter into contact with “good thought”, the kind of thought which is good for me, humanity and the world; to discover the origin of troubles and find solutions for them, at a personal, social, environmental and cosmic level; to heal all levels of existence; and finally to make the *Word* “real” in terms of facts.

Plants such as tobacco, in its form as a paste called *ambil* create an equilibrium between body and soul (emotions), so that the participant can find out how what he says “resonates” in his body as comfort, discomfort, contraction, easiness, etc. This becomes obvious during the ceremony under the enhanced awareness brought by the use of tobacco and coca leaves. This is the opposite of what happens during our normal daily activity; we are relatively “absent” from ourselves, in the sense that we are unaware of our whole functioning in terms of interrelations between cognitive, motor, sensory and emotional responses. In this way a comprehensive ethics arises in which my well-being is supported by my clarity of thought, the way it is reflected in my body and the extent to which my behavior positively influences the society around me and the universe. This offers the possibility of healing the individual, the body, the emotions, the “soul”, society and the world in a single act, through the use of our main Western tool: *the Word*, though its cultural connotations are completely different. *Naikino* is the term for the **word-body** that works both “vertically”, as it interprets experience in terms of the origin myths, and “horizontally”, by means of analogies... for example.

The Word, *naikino*, is our essence. As Westerners, we would say plants *sensitize* us to this essence and enable us to experience it, but for the indigenous wise men there is no distinction between plants, qualities and personalities. *Ambil* (tobacco) is simultaneously *woman*, *the word*, *communication*, *the eye that sees* and *the ear that hears*.

But this does not refer to the sharpening of normal senses. It has, instead, to do with the ability to see “beyond”, hear “beyond” and talk “beyond” the world of appearances. If we only consider the superficial layer of reality, we will always make mistakes. This kind of “sight” enables us to feel the subtle energy field of people, their emotions and motivations, and that is exactly the ground on which the ritual conversation takes place. The person who directs the ritual tunes into a subliminal current of information, which is impressed on his mind while origin myths are told and questions about personal and interpersonal matters are discussed.

There has never been any evidence of addiction among *Duga* practitioners, as a matter of fact it is non-existent among those who make a traditional use of that and other plants substances like

Ayahuasca (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and Yopo (*Anadanantera peregrina*).

The reason is that such plants are used in ritualized ways, and besides they are not forbidden, because they are part of a universal environment and are governed by specific rules.

In fact, this moment is reminiscent of religious confession, psychodrama and psychoanalysis and it has a strong therapeutic value. Suddenly things begin to be perceived in a different dimension.

We can easily describe every single person in the so called Western world., to a greater or lesser extent, as an addict. To come back to the umbrella technosphere is very much the product of this all-encompassing tendency towards addiction. Wisdom doesn't play any role in our society, which denies us opportunities to carry out such a quest. Furthermore, to a large extent our society encourages addictive behavior, in the form of the use of alcohol, cigarettes and palliative pharmacological products and its emphasis on consumerism, fashion, technology, etc.

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A list of possible participants:

Cayetano Torres. Arhuaco wisdom keeper (Colombia), Juan Yaiguaje, Taita, Medicine man from Putumayo (Colombia), Isaias Mavisoy, Taita Medicine man from Putumayo (Colombia), Claudia Yasmin, Medicine woman, non tribal. (Colombia), Oscar Román, Huitoto tribe wisdom keeper (*Enokakuyodo*, "he who renders something from nothingness", in Huitoto)