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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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2014

Abstract

Ethnopharmacology and Stress Relief:

The Spiritual Experience of Practitioners in the Santo Daime Church

by

Justin Panneck

MA, American InterContinental University, 2006

BA, University of Colorado, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for The Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Health Psychology

Walden University

March 2014

## Abstract

The inability to effectively cope with stress brings about numerous physical and psychological disorders. Alternative methods of coping with stress are important to examine, but there is a lack of awareness and acceptance of non-Western spiritual practices within the general public and mainstream scientific domains. Due to limited research on the ritual use of ayahuasca as part of the means to cope and thrive in daily life, conventional assumptions about its status as an illegal substance negatively alters its interpretation as an effective therapeutic aid. This phenomenological study was an investigation of the spiritual experience of participants of the Santo Daime Church, a syncretic religious group that uses ayahuasca as their sacrament. The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of spiritual guidance to enhance coping strategies and reduce stress. The theoretical lens of holism, which holds that individuals are best understood as a function of their social, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual contexts, informed this study. From the population of approximately 60 local church members, 14 individuals volunteered to participate in semi structured interviews. The resulting transcripts were analyzed using the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to uncover themes within and across cases. Overall, 6 themes and 53 subthemes were identified. The 6 primary themes included: The Trial, Ecstatic Spiritual Communion, Supernatural Contact, Rapture, Macroscopic Kinship, and Enhanced Coping. The results of this study may impact conventional assumptions regarding the potential of mind-altering substances as effective therapeutic aids. Positive social change may result when health professionals consider expanded alternatives for therapeutic tools to help clients cope effectively with stress.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research project to my two daughters, Calista and Zuma, whom have both served as sources of inspiration for my tireless and ceaseless work. They are amazing, gifted children and I hope to serve as a source of inspiration for them, as they certainly have done so for me. I hope to encourage their own exploration of the great mysteries that lie outside and within the human psyche, and also galvanize them to question the very foundations of science, culture, and religion so that they may come to their own conclusions. I hope to encourage them to be pioneers, or to strive to make the world a better place, if not through their own profession, then through their passion and vigor for life.

I would also like to dedicate this study to the spiritual leaders of the Santo Daime church, of which there are too many to name, for providing spiritual direction and a safe forum for spiritual development. Although I should again mention Mestre Irineu for his commitment to his vision in that forest nearly a century ago, and for bringing a sacred plant medicine into the depth of an organized spiritual tradition. I would also like to dedicate this study to spirit of ayahuasca itself, for helping unleash my creative and spiritual potential, and for aiding me in gaining valuable insights into my own issues, the mysteries, and the inner-workings of the human mind.

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For this new-fangled brevity and qualitative analytical skill set, I am also extremely grateful and in fact lucky to have had the lovely and talented Dr. Susan Marcus, my 2<sup>nd</sup> committee member. I am indebted to her genuine advocacy on my behalf, her knowledge of and interest in alternative healing modalities and qualitative research paradigms, her immense intelligence and charm, and her hard work in helping me to restructure and modify an immense amount of data into something of ample value. I owe her in a very big way for her tireless contributions and extensive support on this research project.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Stress and the ability to cope with stress is a normal feature of life in modern Western culture. When indigenous groups from other continents settle in the U.S., they often institute their spiritual and social practices in their new home as tools for dealing with the Western world (Antonovsky, 1987). It is possible that these practices may look, to the uninformed eye, strange and possibly even dangerous. The Santo Daime Church is a unique example of one such spiritual community. Their practice is a blend of many traditions, and includes a sacramental ritual involving the use of *ayahuasca*, a tea containing several psychoactive compounds (Labate & Feeney, 2012). This substance induces a liminal (i.e., threshold) state that allows for self-exploration, the examination of identity and purpose, and perceived control (Lewis, 2008). The intent of the ritual is to gain self-knowledge and insight that will guide the practitioner to better manage the stresses of daily life (Santos, Landeira-Fernandez, Strassman, Motta, & Cruz, 2007).

This spiritual practice was the subject of many court battles, including a case brought before the Supreme Court in 2008. In 2009, the Court ruled in favor of the Santo Daime Church (Labate & Feeney, 2012). This practice is ongoing today.

Because stress is an integral component of the modernized West, exploration of alternative methods of coping and healing are important to examine. I will therefore explore the spiritual experiences of Santo Daime Church members who have participated in church services using *ayahuasca*.

## Background

There is inadequate research exploring the experience of the combination of religious and/or spiritual practice with the use of ethnopharmacological agents—like ayahuasca—as a therapeutic tool for coping with stress (Winkelman, 2005). There are a number of therapeutic interventions and stress-management programs available to develop effective coping mechanisms. This includes cognitive and behavioral interventions to teach adaptive coping strategies like relaxation exercises, goal setting, assertiveness training, conflict management, and/or cognitive restructuring (Antonovsky, 1996). The goal of these techniques is to reduce the affective distress (like anxiety or depression) and increase healthy, adaptive behaviors.

Religion and spirituality can act to buffer the consequences of stress, and encourage practitioners to explore their own issues and develop personal mechanisms for perceived control and personal strength-building (Shannon, 1998). Many researchers have examined how religion and spirituality mediate stressful life events (Deacon & Cashman, 2009; Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988; Gartner, 1996; Gartner, Larson, & Allen, 1991; George et al., 2000; Goodloe & Arreola, 1992; Hill & Butter, 1995; Koenig & Larson, 1998; Moreira-Almeida, Lotufo, & Koenig, 2006; Nairn & Merluzzi, 2003; Ventis, 1995). There is significant need for further research into the actual mechanisms by which ethnopharmacologically-induced experiences and spiritual guidance provide effective stress management and coping skills for the adult population (Trichter, Klimo, & Krippner, 2009).

There is an existing gap in the literature addressing the core benefits of the use of ethnopharmacological agents combined with religious or spiritual guidance as a tool for

coping with stress and stress-related disorders such as anxiety. The literature does not elaborate on liminality, or liminal states (a key component to the shamanic healing process), as a tool for developing stress-related coping skills. Liminality helps to explain how radical shifts in identity and world-view are possible, and can be defined as a neurological, psychological, or metaphysical subjective state, whether unconscious or conscious, existing on the threshold of or between two distinct existential planes (Lewis, 2008). Liminality is a term coined from 20th century anthropology by Turner of the University of Chicago, where *limen* in Latin translates to threshold, and may be applied to certain states experienced by individuals as they pass over the threshold from one stage of life to another (Palmer, 1980). Palmer described that during the liminal stage, or the between stage, one's status becomes ambiguous; one is "neither here nor there," (p. 5) and is "betwixt and between all fixed points of classification (p.5)," and therefore the rules and form of both his earlier state and his state-to-be are suspended. Palmer further noted that it is from

the standpoint of this marginal zone that the great artists, writers, and social critics have been able to look past the social forms in order to see society from the outside and to bring in a message from beyond it. (p. 6)

In the last decade, interest in stress research has witnessed a great deal of expansion, especially in human biology, anthropology, and fairly newer branches of psychology and medicine, such as health psychology and behavioral medicine. These newer branches of psychology primarily involve the evaluation of adaptive cultural, biological, and psychological responses to stressors in everyday living (Ice & James, 2006). These authors reported that many stress-related field studies have assessed the

stress of modernization where cultural and biological responses of populations undergo rapid industrialization/Westernization, or responses to individuals facing novel environments in Western societies. Sobel (1995) asserted that stress has definitely become a public health concern in both its psychological and physical effects. Many persons are able to cope with smaller stressors, and some even feel more productive when faced with greater pressure (Folkman, 1984). However, it may present a problem when stress becomes overwhelming and produces suffering due to the adversity of elevated anxiety, depression, substance abuse, somatic complaints, and/or poor sleeping and eating habits (Friedman, Sobel, Myers, Caudill, & Benson, 1995).

A review of the existing literature indicated that entheogens and spiritual guidance may provide effective stress management and coping skills for the adult population (Trichter et al., 2009). That said the existing literature does not address the core benefits of the use of ethnopharmacological agents combined with religious or spiritual guidance as a tool for coping with daily and life stressors.

### **Problem Statement**

Stress-related mental and health problems are a prevalent dimension of modern Western life. While conventional approaches to intervention (pharmaceutical, psychological, and physical) are plentiful, the results are mixed at best (Barbosa, Cazorla, Giglio, & Strassman, 2009; Dobkin de Rios, Grob, & Baker, 2002; Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1986; Grob, 2006). With the growing interest in alternative practices (Baer, 2003; Berk, 2007; Brannon & Feist, 2007; Colley & Diment, 2001; Durrant, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lloyd, Tsang, & Deane, 2009; Marsella, 1998; Seligman, 2002), there is a need for research on nontraditional or non-Western psychological approaches, which

can stand alone or be integrated with traditional models of psychotherapy. Progress has been made regarding the incorporation of meditation, body-based therapies, and other non-traditional practices (Austin, 1998; Chu & Kao, 2005; Friedman, Myers, & Benson, 1998; Gillani & Smith, 2001; Kabat-Zinn, 1985; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, Burney, & Sellers, 1987). Yet, the study of ethnopharmacological approaches is limited, and stigmatized and viewed with fear (Aginam, 2007; Doering-Silveira et al., 2005; Grof & Grof, 1989; Shannon, 2002). The research problem addressed in this study is to reveal the importance of examining the spiritual and psychological effects of an alternative spiritual community in the U.S. that incorporates ethnopharmacological substances as part of their ritualistic spiritual practices.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to explore the lived spiritual experience of individuals in the Santo Daime community, and to better understand how their use of ayahuasca in ceremony enhances their well-being and ability to cope with daily and life stressors. Psychologically healthy adult members of the Santo Daime community who have experienced stress-related symptoms of normal daily life were interviewed, to provide rich, thick descriptions of their altered states of consciousness and their daily life experiences. Using the theoretical framework of holism (Colley & Diment, 2001; Honderich, 1995), I also explored perceptions of stress and coping in order to describe how this non-traditional approach was integrated into individuals' daily lives.

### **Nature of the Study**

A qualitative approach was used for this study. The phenomenological tradition was used to examine the experience of spiritual guidance and ethnopharmacology to enhance coping strategies and reduce stress in participants who are members of the Santo Daime Church. Moustakas (1994) defined the phenomenological approach as a meticulous examination of experience to acquire rich and detailed descriptions as a foundation for a structural analysis that reflects the very essence of the experience. The focus is on the intentional relationship between the person and the meanings of the things they are experiencing, as well as the meaning of the ayahuasca experience as it relates to the daily lives of the participants.

From the population of adult Santo Daime Church members, approximately 12 to 15 individuals were purposefully selected for this study. Participants were male and female members of the Santo Daime Church. Selected participants had attended a minimum of 10 sessions and had been a member for at least 1 year, since it is typical that newcomers need a healthy accumulation of sessions to assimilate such a new and unique breadth of psychological experience into their existing schemas (Barbosa et al., 2009). This criterion ensured a more in-depth description of experience and nuance in terms of psychological well-being, personal growth, and/or any improvement in stress-related mood disorders. Those who have attended for at least 1 year have had more time to adjust their coping styles and may have experienced a greater range of stressful experiences for which the church sessions may have aided in their coping mechanism adjustments (Barbosa et al., 2009).

The participants in this study represented a purposeful intensity sample recruited through e-mail contact. This type of sample is appropriate, as described by Patton (2002), when subjects are selected because of special characteristic and where there are information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely. I recruited all volunteers, ages 18 and older, willing to participate in this study, provided they met the minimum length or number of church sessions attended. Those involved in the study received no compensation for their participation. On average, the total amount of time spent on the qualitative assessments was about 45 minutes. Participants were also informed that they may be recontacted later, for additional information and/or member checking.

### **Phenomenon of Interest**

The phenomenon of interest is the spiritual experience of the Santo Daime Church service, which involves spiritual practice and consumption of the ethnopharmacological sacrament, ayahuasca. In-depth, qualitative interviews were employed to prompt the participants to explore the meanings of their spiritual experience in general, and with references to the experience of personal control and well-being. Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), I triangulated the data among participants to develop a holistic representation using nuanced and idiosyncratic data from interviews. Concepts that have roots in Western psychological modalities (e.g., anxiety, personal control, and coping) were explored.

### **Research Questions**

Using a phenomenological approach, I posed the primary research question: What is the experience of spiritual guidance and ethnopharmacology to enhance coping

strategies and reduce stress in members of the Santo Daime Church? Western psychology researchers suggested stress buffering and perceived control are key phenomena in understanding the influences and mechanisms of coping and quality of life. The current research included the following subquestions:

SQ1: What are the life events that create stress-related symptoms?

SQ2: What are the meaningful coping strategies used by church members?

SQ3: How are the church rituals integrated into daily coping and quality of life?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Holism is a philosophical concept that views the whole as greater than the sum of its parts (Colley & Diment, 2001; Honderich, 1995), where only the entire system can serve as the lens by which to view the parts of a system (Strauch, 2003). The primary tenet of holism is that the individual is *sine qua non*, integrated, or unreduced from their surrounding environment, as well as others in the environment (Heidegger, 1962; Parse, 1998). It is fundamentally unproductive to analyze individuals and their experiences beyond the world in which they live, or to examine the body without the mind, and vice versa, given that they are interdependent. The standard treatment for physiological and mental pathology still follows the medical model, which views health from a reductionist model; although the medical model is moving toward a paradigmatic shift toward a more holistic approach. As the health care industry begins to assimilate alternative approaches to disease pathology treatment and maintenance, it can be expected that a revival and integration of ancient paradigms, such as shamanic, spiritual, and ethnopharmacological tools of healing will be seen.



The concept of holism provides a basic philosophical tenet for understanding the lived experience of persons who participate in these shamanic rituals. By discussing a theoretical construct that more directly aligns with the phenomenological experience of nontraditional interventions, greater clarity can be brought forth in hypothesizing frameworks for assessing, analyzing, and understanding the data.

The combination of ethnopharmacological agents like ayahuasca and shamanic-spiritual guidance creates a situation whereby participants gain a deep sense of connection to their environment, culture, and community. That is, personal identity is transformed to that of existing as part of the whole rather than as an autonomous unit within their environment (Frank, 1973). The use of holism in exploring the lived experience of a Santo Daimé participant provided me with a more focused method for understanding the meaning behind the experiences.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Ayahuasca:* Ayahuasca is an admixture of two plants, *banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*, which combines monoamine oxidase-inhibiting b-carboline alkaloids with N, N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT), a psychedelic agent showing 5-HT<sub>2A</sub> agonist activity (Riba et. al., 2001). People drink ayahuasca in cross-cultural vegetalismo ceremonies for various reasons, including seeking spiritual enlightenment, self-actualization, mystical experiences or treatment of physical or psychological ailments (Winkelman, 2005).

*Coping:* According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is defined as a behavioral and cognitive undertaking in the effort to manage internal and external

demands, and is associated with the perception of stress and appraisal of resources, as well as managing the gap between perceived and actual resources to manage a stressor.

*Entheogens*: Term coined by scholars proposing an alternative to hallucinogen and psychedelic (Ruck, Bigwood, Staples, Ott, & Wasson, 1979). Hallucinogen is a word grounded in 1950s clinical psychiatric paradigms, which made the culturally-loaded a priori assumption that the experiences such substances engendered were necessarily illusory and false. Psychedelic was coined as an alternative to hallucinogen; but this word ultimately came to connote 1960s youth subcultures and associated artistic movements. By contrast, the etymological roots of entheogen convey a sense of spirituality, hence its denotation of a psychoactive substance used to facilitate spiritual experiences (Smith, 2000; Tupper, 2003).

*Holism*: A philosophical concept that views the whole as greater than the sum of its parts (Colley & Diment, 2001; Honderich, 1995), where only the entire system can serve as the lens by which to view the parts of a system (Strauch, 2003). The primary tenet of holism is that the individual is sine qua non, integrated, or unreduced from their surrounding environment, as well as others in the environment (Heidegger, 1962; Parse, 1998).

*Liminality*: A neurological, psychological, or metaphysical subjective state, whether unconscious or conscious, existing on the threshold of or between two distinct existential planes and involving spiritual transformation (Lewis, 2008). Lewis described the liminal state as something that may be induced by ethnopharmacological agents, such as ayahuasca, within small-scale, indigenous or traditional groups, but also applicable to the transitional states in contemporary Western society.

*Santo Daime:* The Santo Daime Church is a syncretic religion founded in the early 1930s just outside of Brazil by Raimundo Irineu Serra, to whom church members refer to as Mestre Irineu. There are a variety of spiritual traditions incorporated in the Santo Daime spiritual doctrine and practice, including Kardecist Spiritism, African animism, Folk Catholicism, and South American shamanism. The practice of the Santo Daime Church involves the consumption of ayahuasca (their sacramental beverage referred to as the Daime by its members) during any of the 2-3 monthly ceremonies, or trabalhos (works), which may endure anywhere from two to twelve hours. After receiving their sacrament, the church members sit or stand in a circle and sing hymns (*hinarios*) in Portuguese. Some ceremonies may involve meditation or dancing, depending on the type of ceremony. The literal translation of the Portuguese word *Dai-me* is “give me,” denoting the church doctrine of “give me strength, give me love, give me hope.” This reflects the church’s promotion of a spiritually healthy lifestyle through “harmony, love, truth and justice,” as well as “strength, humility, fraternity, and purity of heart.” Since its humble beginnings, the Santo Daime Church has since expanded worldwide, including such places as the United States, Japan, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Holland, Austria, and Switzerland.

*Shamanism:* The role of the shaman is to create order from disorder, to invite healing, cleansing, purification, and a realignment of the soul in a world where there is disorder, toxicity and misalignment of living, thinking, feeling, and being (Hyman, 2007). Hyman mentioned that these ancient traditions are easily dismissed as magical, imaginary, delusional, or meaningless collections of superstitious beliefs and behaviors, although it is an integrated system of mind-body medicine to eliminate stress. Hyman

went onto mention that shamanism “provides a cosmology and architecture for healing not only the mind but also the soul, for navigating the confusion, injury, pain, or trauma we encounter as human beings” (p.10).

*Stress:* According to Ice and James (2006), the definition of stress varies among disciplines, and includes (a) social psychology – transaction between the person and the environment, (b) sociology – socially derived stressors which lead to negative affect or distress (psychosocial stress), (c) biomedical, biological psychology and neurology – nonspecific response to stimulus, and (d) human biology/biological anthropology – disruption in homeostasis or allostasis.

*Stress Management:* This includes techniques for appraising stressful events, how to develop skills for coping with stress, and how to put these skills into use in our everyday lives (Santrock, 2004). In terms of stress management programs, Santrock mentioned how some are broad in scope, teaching a various array of techniques to cope with stress, whereas others may teach a specific technique, such as relaxation or assertiveness training.

*Stressors:* According to Elliot and Eisdorfer (1982), there are four types of stressors: acute, time-limited stressors (parachute jumping, etc.), stressor sequences (series of events that occur over a certain period of time), chronic intermittent stressors (sexual difficulties, or other conflict-oriented situations), and chronic stressors (permanent disabilities, chronic stress, etc; pp. 150-151).

*True Presence:* This is an intentional, humanistic approach to promoting receptiveness and compatibility without judgment during the interview process. True

presence requires a strong knowledge base, and reflects the belief that those telling their story know their own mind and their own experience (Parse, 1995; 1998).

### **Assumptions**

Given the holistic underpinnings of this study, it is assumed that any distinct or individual domain of data or knowledge, whether subjective, objective, or intersubjective, is not complete. A complete epistemological construct may be explored only as a model or paradigm to aim toward, and not as an affixed arrangement of knowledge. This fundamental premise rationally accompanies a qualitative approach as an exemplary method in exploring how humans come to understand themselves and the world around them.

One assumption of phenomenological theory is that it is the most productive manner of exploring the voluminous array of realities that exist, and that a collaboration of the participant and researcher must take place in order to gain any epistemological ground (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenological researchers also stress open processes in conducting research rather than fixed methods and procedures, and further recognize the importance of context and social structure (Moustakas, 1994). However, it is important to note that extracted meanings do hold limited generalizability, although one aim of this study was to provide suggestions for further research topics and methodology. I was able to minimize any social restraint between myself and the participants with empathy, true presence, and genuine interest in their perception of the experience of daily and life stressors, as well as in the use of ethnopharmacological agents and the spiritual guidance of the Santo Daime Church sessions.

### **Limitations**

The phenomena under scrutiny did not fit neatly into an empirical, quantitative, reductionist medical model typically implemented in health research in the West. The collection of qualitative data from a phenomenological standpoint—experience as it occurred and remembered by the participants—was an alternative methodological approach. I used a small purposeful sample and the qualitative data gathered was analyzed using IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), a process of systematically examining the content within and across cases to detect instances of shared experience and meaning. The characteristics of the sample chosen from the Santo Daime Church community were not completely representative of adults who seek alternative and/or similar methods of stress management. As such, conclusions of this study were tempered by this limitation.

The spiritual experience and mechanisms of stress and coping in the context of an emotionally- and psychologically-charged consciousness-expanding experience is not easy to measure. The subjectivity of the data leads to difficulties in establishing reliability and validity of approaches and information. The credibility of this study depended in part on the participants' ability to articulate their experience. While no causal relationships can be discovered, useful findings can guide subsequent quantitative studies as well as guide adults to better cope with life and daily stressors as they emerge.

Finally, verifiable qualitative research requires that rich data be channeled through the personal biases of the researcher and the findings could be subject to other interpretations. I conducted member-checking with participants to verify the accuracy of the summarized transcripts and key concepts (Patton, 2002). Further verification was

ensured through axial coding to interrelate categories identified. I posed questions that emerged from the data and then returned to the data and to the participants to validate themes that emerged.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations that identify the boundaries of the study include participants who can read, understand, and speak English. This study limits itself to investigating the experience of members who have participated in a minimum of 10 Santo Daime sessions throughout their life, and who report daily or life stressors, who are over 18 years of age, and who reside in Oregon. Although the I had no formal experience in conducting a study of this nature, my interview experiences included over 5 years of qualitative interviewing of prospective students in a university setting, and 3 years of quality control and needs assessment with employees, as well as interviewing prospective employees as a manager and corporate trainer.

### **Significance of the Study**

The field of health psychology is a branch of psychology devoted to understanding the scientific relations among psychological factors, behavior, and physical and mental health (Taylor, 2003). This fairly new branch of psychology continues to incorporate alternative models of healing, yet many of these techniques have been used for thousands of years in other parts of the world, such as Asia or South America. For example, Qi Gong, Tai Chi and meditation have been documented in Eastern countries, such as Asia, and have experienced a recent 'revival' in the Western countries, as in the United States (Lloyd, Tsang, & Deane, 2009; Chen et al., 2007; Sullivan-Marx, Cuesta, & Ratcliffe, 2008).

In the last decade, some psychologists have travelled to places like South America to observe the healing practices of shamans (Winkelman, 2000). This research includes the assessment of techniques borrowed from ancient cultures in the Amazon, combined with newer models of spirituality, as a method of stress management. As noted above and discussed in the subsequent literature review, the inability to effectively cope with stress brings about numerous physical and psychological disorders (American Psychological Association, 2001). The professional application of theories and findings that emerge from this study may provide health professionals with additional tools for guidance in helping clients cope effectively with stress, such as effective questions in a therapeutic setting for getting at the root of maladjustment to stressors.

An increased awareness of the use of spirituality and ancient medicinal tools as mechanisms of healing and stress management will pave the way for greater social awareness of alternative models of treatment for stress-related psychological disorders, such as anxiety or depression. This enhanced awareness and subsequent integration of non-Western practices may lead to positive social change. It is possible that by including additional refined studies of ancient practices, such as ritual ayahuasca or other plant-medicine consumption combined with spiritual practice, a greater awareness of the mechanisms of coping with daily and life stressors will be brought to public awareness. This will help to fill the existing gap in the literature regarding the benefits of the use of ethnopharmacological agents combined with religious or spiritual guidance as a tool for coping with stress and stress-related psychological disorders.

This has significant social change implications not only because it provides additional effective tools for coping with one of the most prominent causes of mental and



physical health issues in the United States, but also because it places focus on the integration of non-traditional practices and indigenous groups, which in effect should aid in a positive evaluation of multi-cultural integration. Furthermore, providing an individual with practices and tools that warrant a deeper examination of personal issues and mechanisms for self-healing, not only opens up a broader and richer body of knowledge of human psychology and spirituality, but it elevates the individual toward a modality of trust, responsibility, and competence—a mechanism in and of itself that provides an orientation toward personal sustained healing practices.

I plan on utilizing the data from this study and modifying the data to accommodate several types of educational forums—a published book and a variety of subject-related conference presentations, such as the annual MAPS conference, and other related conferences that present research data on the various benefits of entheogens. I also belong to an ayahuasca research group, and plan to submit the data to the group literature archives to contribute to the growing database of knowledge regarding the positive aspects of ayahuasca. The results of the study (without compromising participant confidentiality) will be made available to individual church members who may find this information helpful.

### **Summary and Transition**

Chapter 1 introduced the idea that the root of many psychopathologies lies in one's coping mechanisms to stress, and that the use of spirituality or religion and an ethnopharmacologically-induced experience may pave the way for the self-exploration and the development of personal coping mechanisms for stress, such as perceived control and personal strength-building. A qualitative study is proposed to explore the meaning of

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a spiritual experience to practitioners in the Santo Daime Church. It is hoped that the results of this study will illuminate how these unique experiences create meaning and enhanced coping. Chapter 2 is a literature review on the healing components of shamanism, ayahuasca and spirituality, as well as liminal states, while the remaining chapters will be dedicated to the methodology, results, and analysis, respectively, of the phenomenon related to ayahuasca consumption in a spiritual and ritual context.

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## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of spiritual guidance and ethnopharmacology to enhance coping strategies and reduce stress in members of the Santo Daime Church. The participants interviewed were psychologically healthy adults, who have experienced stress-related symptoms of normal daily life. Experiences of low self-esteem and perceived helplessness of Santo Daime participants were also explored and examined.

Stress is an inevitable part of daily existence as humans. Whether experienced as a result of trauma or as chronic stress from various daily living conditions, such stress may lead to physiological and psychological illnesses such as heart disease, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other anxiety-related disorders (McKeever & Huff, 2003). Anxiety disorders constitute the most common psychiatric problem in the United States, with the exception of substance abuse disorders (Beidel, Turner, & Alfano, 2003). Since the beginning of psychodiagnosis, the tradition has always emphasized symptomatology and dysfunction, or simply something that has gone awry with one's life, whereby each diagnosis represents a negative syndrome comprising a cluster of symptoms associated with clinically significant impairment or duress (Lopez, et al., 2006). Thus, the problem is two-fold: (a) Individuals have increasing levels of stress and anxiety but are either not aware that they are stressed, or not aware of any adverse physiological and psychological symptoms; (b) if they are aware of stress and/or symptoms, they may not be aware of the alternative and nontraditional therapeutic interventions available, which presents itself as a broader social issue. These

interventions are available and have been for thousands of years. They include ecopsychological, entheogenic, and shamanic technologies, which will be discussed in the following section on theories and conceptual frameworks related to the area of inquiry.

### **Organization of the Literature Review**

In the review of literature, I addressed the following topics: (a) ayahuasca and spirituality: this includes cultures who use ayahuasca for healing and spiritual purposes as well as studies of the effects of ayahuasca alone and in combination with spiritual practices, such as the Santo Daime Church; (b) shamanism: a survey of the nature and process of shamanism is important to this study because the Santo Daime Church utilizes elements of shamanism in its ceremonies by using indigenous plants to stimulate healing, and the dealing of personal issues head on (a long-term coping strategy); (c) a risk assessment of ayahuasca, including transitory psychosis, a general description of hallucinogenic effects, addiction potential, and spiritual emergencies; (d) benefits of spiritual and ethnopharmacological approaches, including liminal states (this concept is included because ayahuasca stimulates the liminal state process leading to spiritual states and self-healing). A discussion of psychotherapeutic integration will explore combining traditional Western approaches with the ayahuasca ceremony; (e) alternative approaches to stress management, including social support and religion; (f) conceptual frameworks, including mindfulness and stress management as well as holism; and (g) literature review of methodology, including alternative qualitative paradigms.

The literature was located through the Walden online library using the following search engines/databases: Academic Search Complete, ERIC, General Science

Collection, Health & Medical Complete, Health and Psychosocial Instruments, Health Sciences, PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, PsycCRITIQUES, PsycEXTRA, PsychiatryOnline, Psychology: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, PsycINFO, Science Direct. The search terms used included: *ayahuasca*, *mental health*, *spirituality* and *psychotherapy*, *spirituality* and *psychology*, *stress*, *shamanism*, *self-healing*, and *Santo Daime*.

### **Shamanism**

According to some scholars, shamanism will be an important, if not necessary role, for the future of the healing sciences. For Hyman (2007) contended “the role of the shaman is to create order from disorder, to invite healing, cleansing, purification, and a realignment of the soul in a world where there is disorder, toxicity and misalignment of living, thinking, feeling, and being,” (p. 10) which are universal, transcultural, and prereligious traditions. The field of health psychology is contributing to the field of general psychology and behavioral medicine by introducing a number of alternative approaches, specifically a paradigm shift toward the holistic mind/body model of the human condition, which could also be categorized as the emergence of a revival of ancient beliefs and healing technologies.

In line with that is the nature of shamanism, which can be seen as an integrative system of mind-body medicine. There are many modern, alternative methods that have adopted the mind-body medicinal model, such as yoga, relaxation techniques, meditation, massage and biofeedback, which can all be effective for temporary relief of stress (Brannon & Feist, 2007). However, these techniques do not address the root causes of suffering and stress that altered states of consciousness via shamanism and

ethnopharmacological agents do, since the latter purport to navigate the confusion, pain, injury, or trauma humans encounter (Hyman, 2007). Plant medicines are often not enough to provide healing by themselves, but it is the traditional role of the shaman to act as a guide, much like the Santo Daime Church uses spirituality and shamanic practices, to create and reintroduce purpose, meaning, and a sense of self.

Modern therapy and stress management may benefit from additional approaches, especially those that have been used for thousands of years, such as shamanistic models. When dealing with stress, science must look beyond the individual's ability to deal with stress and to the root causes and other contributors to modern chronic diseases, such as culture, industrialization, or technology (Aginam, 2007). For example, the shaman would view disease as a result of disconnection from a sense of place in the world; a loss of control and meaning as individuals sit in front of the television, disconnected from communities; or as individuals eat foods disconnected from its origins and unidentifiable from its natural state; or even as families and friends communicate apart from each other through email and text messaging—all a representation of our loss of a sense of culture, control, and meaning (Hyman, 2007). In dealing with health and disease, it is the shaman who provides a sense of place and control through mind-body realignment, creating harmony in our relationship to the outside world.

It is important to look deeper into the methodology of shamanic practices as they reveal techniques that are used in the fields of psychology and psychiatry in the modern age; and some components are even at the heart of traditional Western religious beliefs and other healing practices, including hypnosis. Hypnotizability is defined as an inherited trait that creates specific physiological and psychophysiological responses that gives

focused attention with lowered peripheral awareness and a focused thought process with biological, behavioral, and mental changes as the result (McClenon, 2001). McClenon discussed how it is the association of hypnotizability and anomalous experiences, with ritual constituting a hypnotic induction, which produces placebo effects with physiological consequences.

Hypnosis serves as an arrangement of altered states of consciousness (ASC), representing the brain's fluctuation toward "cholinergic neurotransmitter systems that produce dreamlike mentation interrupting the normal cycles of neurotransmitters, and producing parasympathetic dominant states and synchronized brain wave conditions" (McClenon, 2001, p. 37). The author discussed that anthropological data reveal that ritual healing practices demonstrate their effectiveness, especially in regards to psychosomatic ailments, psychiatric disorders, chronic pain, hysterical conditions, and interpersonal problems, which further illustrate the roles of hypnotic and placebo responses in spiritual and other shamanic healing models.

In regards to mindfulness, my current study supports the importance of individuals processing their own dissociations and emotions during the healing sessions. There is clinical evidence revealing the role of hypnotic and placebo responses that are a consequence of the patient's own response in evoking healing processes via emotions and psychoneuroimmunological responses, also known as the "shamanic syndrome," which facilitates the development of creative strategies in individuals (McClenon, 2001).

It is also important to look at other techniques employed by shamans, such as drumming or other rhythmic stimulations, which make up an important component of the healing sessions of the Santo Daime Church. In his article on changing western views of

shamanism and altered states of consciousness, Jilek (2005) discussed how changes in consciousness in motivated candidates facilitate somatopsychic effects in shamanic cultures, either through spirit quests or other special techniques like drumming or song (often referred to as icaros in the Amazon regions of South America). The author mentioned how it is this rhythmic acoustic stimulation, which in a specific frequency, intensity, and duration, forces a direct dissociating effect on the mental faculties. The Santo Daime Church uses icaros, or the singing of hymns, to invoke the spiritual and healing essence of the group and the consumption of ayahuasca, which produces auditory and visual images that further enhances the healing process through direct somatic effects.

### **Shamanism and Therapy**

It is important to review research and effective interventions of shamanism and ethnopharmacology for mental disorders, such as substance abuse. For example, the Takiwasi Center for drug addict rehabilitation and research on traditional medicines has put to the test for the last 18 years the indigenous ethnopharmacological resources of the Peruvian Amazon (Mabit, Giove, & Vega, 1996). Mabit, et al. reveal that Takiwasi integrates the ancestral practices of folk healers and shamans with modern psychological models, from Jungian to transpersonal psychology, which includes the perspectives of current social models, and treats patients world-wide with a variety of substance abuse issues.

The key component of therapy at Takiwasi focuses on the initiation of ASC, and as Mabit et al. (1996) mentioned, while the initiation of this unique perception takes place with psychotropic substances in a potentially destructive, dependent, addictive and



disorganized manner in Western societies, these traditional Amazonian cultures have a controlled and systematic model of techniques for exploring these levels of reality and perception. Takiwasi uses traditional medicine for the treatment of modern addictions, where consciousness-altering substances are used carefully with expert guidance and work on the physical, psychological and spiritual levels of action, much like the services of the Santo Daime Church.

The mechanism of action taking place within this healing paradigm of juxtaposing spirituality and ethnopharmacology includes self-initiation, counter-initiation, self-challenge, intrinsic reorganization, and integration. Mabit et al. (1996) reported that the addict seeks a self-initiation that eventually moves him or her toward self-destruction, therefore formulating a type of counter-initiation; then the shamanistic model challenges and proposes a true initiation that enables an individual to integrate their own inner reality, which inevitably results in an intrinsic reorganization. These authors discussed how the shamanistic model offers the patient the opportunity to reach deep levels of meaning in their life by exploring a vision, and it is in this acknowledgement of a sacred dimension that serves as a condition for the therapeutic and efficient cure of their addiction.

Ayahuasca used in these healing interventions has the ability to bring to the surface forgotten traumas, repressed memories, and negative behavioral patterns. These psychological elements are then verbalized during the interviews with trained therapists, who in turn use modern psychological techniques, such as group dynamics and dream analysis (Mabit et al., 1996). What is more, the effects of the psychotropic substances turn the patient into their own healer; thus, the therapist becomes the guide and

companion and does not need to expend additional resources and energy toward persuasion regarding the various issues of the patient. Mabit et al. (1996) revealed how the patients essentially become masters of their own healing process, which primarily gives them the responsibility for their own success or failure of treatment.

There are many Westerners not accustomed to this modality of healing that may see the obvious paradox here—using psychotropic substances to treat drug addicts. That is, using drugs to treat drugs. This model, however, gives the patient a completely new perspective and produces a rather intense curative healing effect, triggering a cathartic crisis (Mabit et al., 1996). These authors discussed that

By not denying the potential value of the search for modification of their states of consciousness a positive shock is produced in the patient and permits acceptance of a different focus: there is no more irresponsible and dangerous “play flying,” but control of the experiences of exploring the unconscious, of this *other-world*, to make them productive, constructive, and a source of enrichment. (p. 275)

Moreover, these authors asserted how the sessions allow the patient to let go of negative ideas, pejorative feelings like hate or rage, and bad self-images, and help to realign perspective by reintegrating and assimilating the peak experience the patient had during their addictive phase.

Psychotherapy is an intentional endeavor to adjust an individual’s experiences, behaviors, and attitudes that they and their social groups view as dysfunctional, whether involving an inhibition of interpersonal relationships, restraint of competence, or some mechanism that prevents an individual from manifesting their capabilities and/or talents (Krippner, 2002). Shamanic healing practices, much like other forms of psychotherapy,

attempt to alter dysfunctional experience, behaviors, and attitudes via a formulated series of communication between a socially sanctioned practitioner, such as a shaman, and a distressed client (Krippner, 2000).

The Santo Daime Church services contain elements of shamanic technologies, such as the use of ethnopharmacological agents, symbolism, chants, spirit manifestations, and other shamanic healing practices. Mayer (2008) discussed how the shaman, by using ASC, has the ability to alleviate or disengage the composition of experiences that are otherwise obscured by ideas and concepts during every day or normal states of consciousness, thus discovering new and fresh methods, solutions, and perspectives. These experiences encountered during induced ASC can fundamentally convert the perception of reality and consequently create problem-solving functions, resulting in the development of new ways of looking at the world (Mayer, 2008). This can be particularly effective for modern psychologists when conventional methods do not serve them well.

In the West, there is growing interest in Ancient Eastern modes of healing, such as ayurveda, as well as the ancient techniques used by shamans. The practitioners in the West who use shamanistic methods are often called neoshamans, and it is this Western neoshamanism movement, using such designations as *spiritual teacher* or *healer*, that can be seen as a part of the fields of personal growth, complementary medicine, and self-empowerment, which attempt to integrate archaic shamanic knowledge into the established Western health care system, therefore establishing itself as part of complementary medicine and therapy (Mayer, 2008).

Because of the increasing malcontent with Western orthodox therapy, the reintroduction of the shamanic model of healing has increased the search for

complementary and or alternative methods based on a more holistic viewpoint of humans (Mayer, 2008). This author went on to mention that just as ecopsychology or humanistic psychology places more focus on balance and human potential, with the shamanic model, there is a deeper understanding of the connectedness of things, and thus the shaman can unravel the structures of meaning in our world of conscious experience, which may otherwise seem chaotic or incoherent. This could be particularly useful for someone experiencing stress in their lives. If traditional therapy, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, is not effective, components of shamanism could be introduced to help add meaning to an individual's suffering, aiding in the further development of effective tools for coping with stress.

The exploration of alternative therapies outside of the West should also include alternative therapies in the West, such as those psychological healing processes used by Eriksonian counseling, which is similar to that of Native American tools for dealing with psychological distress. Both of these types of therapy rely on a relatively authoritative healer/therapist who utilizes symbolic methods and rituals, such as hypnotic trance, to facilitate receptivity to change in the client (Thomason, 2009). The trance state may have therapeutic value in the sense that it reduces psychological suffering (McClenon, 2001). In terms of the mechanisms of action, the client is more likely to suspend rational thought in the trance state, and is usually more open to the suggestions of the counselor, such as the therapeutic reframing of the issue at hand (Waterfield, 2002).

Trance states, which are induced by the consumption of ayahuasca, may serve as an important component in easing the resistance to change. The nature of the Santo Daime Church sessions creates a situation whereby the participants experience more

discomfort the more they resist change, whereas acceptance of change or facing problems head on creates a mental state that produces greater comfort (Barbosa, Giglio, & Dalgarrondo, 2005). What this means is that due to the psychedelic properties of ayahuasca, many individuals have a tendency to reflect on past experiences, repressed traumas, negative experiences, and/or bad habits, which are then forced upward into the participant's current focus (Barbosa, et al., 2009). As many researchers have reported (Barbosa, et al., 2005; Lewis, 2008; Tupper, 2009), individuals under the influence of ayahuasca tend to have a positive experience following their session if they faced their emotional or psychological issues squarely, rather than maintaining their existing strategy of running away from their issues.

The ayahuasca component of the Santo Daime Church sessions tends to accelerate a situation where one must quickly develop effective coping strategies, whereas the spiritual, fellowship, and guidance component of the Church provides social and spiritual support for one's journey to self-healing. Squarely facing one's troubles or issues is very much in alignment with the confrontive coping styles of accepting responsibility, planful problem solving, positive reappraisal, distancing, self-controlling, and seeking social support, as seen in the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WOCQ) (Folkman & Lazarus, 1998).

Much like the Santo Daime Church services, the use of ASC, whether through trance or ethnopharmacology, is one element that some methods of Native American healing and Erickson's psychotherapeutic approach have in common. Based on a review of a voluminous array of instances of Native American healing ceremonies, some researchers (Hultkrantz, 1992; Sandner, 1991) have hypothesized that ritual healing is

occasionally facilitated by clients going into trance. The Native American healer will typically create a sacred space by executing ceremonies in very particular ways, which may utilize chanting, drumming, smudging with smoke, singing, and other components that characterize the healing encounters in such a distinguished event (Kalweit, 1992). Rituals, ceremonies, and rhythmic sonic stimulation may produce a hypnotic effect to the patient (Schumaker, 1995).

The trance state itself is not necessarily healing, yet since it does quiet the mind and body, it may have benefits similar to relaxation or meditation (Thomason, 2009). This is in alignment with one key aspect of the Santo Daime rituals, whereby the participant is engaged in the singing and listening of rhythmic hymns, or hinarios. One key element to note is that what is involved in the ritual or how it works is irrelevant (Mehl-Madrona, 1997). It is the client's faith in the power of the healer and of the healing ritual that is sufficient in reducing suffering (McClenon, 2001), as well as the voluntary participation of a tribal healing ceremony that facilitates the openness of the client toward psychological change (Hultkrantz, 1992).

Thomason (2009) discussed that "ceremonial healing rituals can help a client reduce their psychological distress, give them a sense of belonging to the group, and restore a sense of balance and harmony" (p. 355). The various modes of symbolic healing (including counseling, psychotherapy, hypnosis, and tribal healing ceremonies) are all geared toward reducing psychological distress and demoralization rather than healing a physical illness (Frank & Frank, 1991).

Tribal healers use traditional symbols and stories during their healing ceremonies, which are allegedly shared by the client. Ericksonian counselors however cannot always

operate under the assumption that the clients share the counselor's symbols and stories about health, illness, and healing (Thomason, 2009). Thomason went onto to discuss how one of Erickson's contributions to the counseling process was his attention to the imperative for the counselor to acknowledge, accept and enter the client's belief system as opposed to prescribing a theoretical belief system outside of the client's experience. This idea is related to the concept of *true presence*, defined previously and which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The central idea here as Thomason (2009) asserted, is that the healing ritual gives credibility to the client and fits within the parameters of the client's belief system—it is the client's beliefs about the healing process, as opposed to the counselor's belief system. This has important implications for the healing ceremonies of the Santo Daime Church, which believes that the church members are responsible for their own salvation and healing, rather than through some conduit or authority, such as a priest, preacher, or in the case of psychological counseling, the clinician. Like both leaders in the Santo Daime Church and traditional counselors, they serve as guides and facilitators to the healing process. This should consequently serve as an effective model for new paradigms within the field of psychological counseling, leading to additional tools for effective healing and stress-reduction.

### **The Role of Shamanism as a Cultural, Spiritual Practice**

Even nearly forty years ago, it could be observed that the number of people with neurotic and psychotic symptoms was on the steady rise, which, according to Frank (2003), reflected the dissolution of societal values and consternation of moral standards, in addition to the increasing proportion of the affluent and educated who have the

inclination and freedom to brood about such issues. The same phenomenon can be observed in today's world as we experience an overall increase in industrialization, population, and ecological degradation. The field of environmental psychology (ecopsychology) asserts that we must match individuals to environments in which they can flourish, since nourishing environments can make an important contribution to the development of positive mental and behavioral health, especially in a rapidly changing world threatened by overpopulation, the breakdown of traditional social structures, and environmental degradation (MacDowell & Schroll, 2009).

Although a discussion of ecopsychology and the eroding human connection to nature as a culprit to increasing psychopathologies in the West is beyond the scope of this study, its very emergence as a branch of psychology should orient us to at least examine both the reasons for its emergence and the varying angles and degrees by which the social sciences are trying to get at the root of our society's changing mental health problems. Whether it is that other traditional approaches are unsuccessful or it is a response to social and environmental trends that contribute to our mental health, these are among some of the questions scholars and the layperson alike should be asking.

One particular viewpoint of the modern Western approach to counseling comes from Frank (1973), who wrote extensively on this subject. In fact, given Frank's breadth and depth of experience and research in his book, much of the remaining content of this sub-section, as well as the following two sub-sections, will contain a high proportion of his contributions related to this work. From this work, he asserted that "the patient's suffering and disability are related to an inappropriate or distorted view of himself, faulty communications with others, sometimes even his views about the meaning of existence;



[and] because the resulting disturbances in personal functioning involve the person's social behavior, the attitudes and values of his society determine which manifestations of personal distress it classifies as mental illness" (p.7). Frank went on to discuss that in the contemporary West, namely the United States, individuals who show signs of distress from the normal functions of life are typically labeled as mentally ill and thus eligible for treatment. What is ironic, as Frank asserted, is that mental health education, the aim of which is to instruct individuals on how to more effectively cope with life stressors, has instead elevated the demand for psychotherapeutic intervention; and when individuals are called to the attention of symptomology as indicators of neurosis, mental health education may elicit unwarranted anxieties. Frank summed it up by claiming psychotherapy is the only form of treatment that appears, to some degree, to create the illness it treats.

It can be seen thus far that there are a host of issues to examine related to trying to improve therapeutic intervention in coping with stress, e.g., confusion in morals, societal values, self-distortion, epistemological distortions, faulty communication, overzealous labeling, and the very institution of therapy itself, which in itself may warrant an entire study. Another issue to be examined is the act of labeling patients as mentally ill, which, according to Frank (1973), relieves, for example, the alcoholic or drug addict of responsibility for his or her plight. Labeling the individual ill and placing them into a mental institution may be more humane and certainly more helpful than incarcerating them, yet it may also elevate their pathological dependency and further reduce their incentive to assume any responsibility for their treatment.

One of the benefits of examining alternative approaches from, say, Eastern value systems, is that it necessitates an examination of our own values, namely those in the

Western World. For example, Frank (1973) discussed how in Western psychotherapy, the underlying value system emphasizes interaction between self and outer world, whereas in Eastern value systems, we see that awareness is really an end in itself. This essentially means that the Western value system equates action with worthiness, meaning for example, that psychotherapy must involve some form of goal-directed task where the measure of its success is whether the patient has been productive, rather than if therapy was an enriching experience in and of itself (Frank, 1973).

This observation relates to this study in that it is important to consider the importance of the phenomenology of experience just as it occurs. Many individuals who have profound spiritual experiences, which is often expedited by the consumption of hallucinogenic substances, especially if accompanied by a spiritual institution or mode of guidance, cannot necessarily explain the mechanisms by which they seem to have been positively transformed, just that an enriching and profound experience has occurred. It could be that the outcome of this study will not be so much the suggestion of changes in traditional approaches, or even just the addition of approaches, but a deeper understanding of the epistemological grounds and assumptions by which we operate and think here in the West, which has major implications for therapeutic intervention.

### **Assumptive Models**

The cultural tradition and social group in which we live and by which we communicate has a deep impact on how we think, relate, adapt and perceive. In the context of mental illness, or perhaps even physical illness, our assumptive models, or perceptions of the illness itself and its root cause, may in itself be the underlying issue with which to examine illness. Frank (1973) believed that it is important to view illnesses

as “non-adapted” states, with adaptation failures being driven by an imbalance between the environmental stressor and the individual’s susceptibility to it; and the sum total of all individual assumptions are appropriately referred to as one’s “assumptive world,” the internal consistency of which humans devote considerable energy to maintain. Frank further posits that the emotional states of individuals have both a direct impact on their ability to modify their behavior and perceptions as well as the determination of the status of their well-being. That is, the cause to which we attribute an event largely determines our behavior and feelings toward it.

Our assumptive world is also shaped by reference groups, which has its own values and assumptions within the values of the larger society. Frank (1973) mentioned how societies have built-in conflicts, or sources of stress, which generate disharmonies in the assumptive models held by its members, in addition to institutionalized methods of dealing with the very stress it creates. However, as Frank discussed, too frequently in the West, no readily available institutionalized manner exists to deal with conflict created by discrepancies in the societal assumptive models. Frank uses the examples of how Americans are sometimes taught to be aggressive, albeit considerate and affable; or how the mass media tends to glorify violence, although it is condemned in daily encounters and relationships. That is, American society perpetuates conflicting social values yet does not provide institutional resolve, which further creates guilt and confusion. It is possible that these conflicting models, which creates disharmony, could have some role in psychopathologies, such as anxiety, depression, and/or substance abuse. Again, it is all in the manner by which an individual deals with daily and life stressors, and examining the core values and assumptive models perpetuated by one’s interior belief systems and

exterior culture may certainly help to disentangle some of the complexes responsible for mental illness.

Powerful ethnopharmacological substances, along with peaceful, alternative spiritual institutions, and not to mention, the appropriate experienced guidance, often provide these cultural-assumptive revelations and paradigmatic shifts in consciousness. Although a sudden and powerful shift in cultural paradigms and assumptive models may itself bring about some initial stress, the process of spiritual and psychological growth is never without its detractors. The important component here is to operate a shift in behavior and ideals about the world within a community that is supportive and understanding, and that can provide guidance in that context.

### **Uncovering Trauma and Negative Experience**

Another important consideration in dealing with mental illness involves repression of negative or traumatic experiences. Frank (1973) made the argument that “banishing an experience from consciousness prevents the erroneous conclusions that were initially drawn from it from being modified by subsequent experiences, in part because the patient cannot link them to the original one; and as repressed emotions or thoughts reduce both a person’s adaptive capacity and his sense of security, [then they] must expend some effort to keep them out of awareness, thus decreasing energy available for meeting current stresses” (p.39). The repression of these thoughts or emotions may then ‘burst forth’ into consciousness attached to blatantly inappropriate objects or at inappropriate times (e.g., psychological defense mechanisms such as projection, regression, reaction formation, etc.). In the case of ayahuasca-induced altered states of

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consciousness, individuals are often directly presented with these repressed thoughts and emotions as ayahuasca tends to release them into conscious awareness, consequently

### **Healer-Patient Relationship and Shamanism**

Physicians world-wide are outnumbered by the numerous individuals employed in the healing arts, and those practitioners who are of the non-medical healing status, such as shamans or even practitioners engaged in alternative healing in the West, view illness as a disorder of the totality of the individual, involving not only one's body but one's self-image and relationships to their group (Frank, 1973). Frank went onto mention how these healers focus on strengthening or stimulating the natural healing abilities of the patient; they also maintain a rather intense relationship with the patient, and while scientific medicine may pay lip service to the patient-doctor relationship, it in fact mostly ignores it. In addition to viewing the totality of the patient, Frank expressed how illnesses are typically viewed by shamans and other non-traditional healers as "symbolic expressions of internal conflicts or of disturbed relationships to others, or both" (p.50).

The healing potential of the shaman, who does not use modern medical technology, forces many of us to examine the mechanisms of action in terms of efficacy of healing potential. In the examination of the healing potential and energy of shamanic methodology, it is revealed that the patient maintains an expectation of assistance based on their perception of the shaman's possession of special healing powers, in large part due to the shaman's ability to communicate with the spirit world (Frank, 1973). The enhanced emotional intensity of the shaman's ritual, as well as the image of the shaman as a powerful ally in the patient's struggle with malign forces that have created illness, says Frank, increases the overall therapeutic power of the relationship.

The healing rituals of The Santo Daime Church resemble this relationship in several ways. First, as part of the service, the church members consume a very powerful and hallucinogenic concoction, ayahuasca, which they believe contains a ‘living being,’ referred to as *Juramidam*. The belief of the church is that this ‘living being’ connects the members with the ‘divine realm’ and further cleanses them of their old patterns, or on a more spiritual and shamanic level, malign forces or spirits. Often times, church members will face many of the negative patterns in their lives—things they have identified as causing physical illnesses (chronic pain, fatigue, etc.) and/or mental illness (e.g., anxiety, depression, substance abuse, etc.). The support of the experienced church members, or *fardados*, and leaders provides a helpful opportunity for guidance, helping church members to interpret the meaning of their experience.

The central goal in this support is to help church members to be at peace with themselves and the variety of social groups with which they are involved. Furthermore, members may set appointments with the church leaders, whether they experience a crisis, or have spiritual or personal growth questions, or in some cases, confessions. The confession of suppressed negative patterns or habits has a manner of aiding that individual in moving forward as if a personal ‘weight’ has been released.

This confessional aspect of the shamanic healing ritual is succinctly summarized in the following statement:

Naming something is the first step toward controlling it. The confession may have many implications. It helps the patient to make sense of his condition, counteracts his consciousness of sin, brings him into closer relationship with his group,

impresses him with the shaman's powers, and improves the relationship of all concerned with the spirit world. (Frank, 1973, p.65)

It is the expectation of the healing aspect of this confessional aspect (or shedding negative habits or patterns), the social support of the church members and leaders (who also play a shamanic role in the healing works), the profound psychological effects of the ayahuasca, as well as the actual ceremonies themselves, that serve as combined healing tools. Frank (1973) supported this by his notion of the intensification of the emotional state via chanting, rhythmic music, and dancing, which has a rather strong esthetic appeal. The Santo Daime Church members decorate with costumes, crosses, and candles and sing inspired hymns in Portuguese. These elements have meaning symbolically, as Frank mentioned, and are not only esthetically inspirational and soothing but represent concrete reinforcements of the conceptual arrangement that the ritual attempts to impose on the patient's undeveloped sufferings. Furthermore, the Santo Daime Church reinforces group solidarity by maintaining what they call the "current of healing," stimulated and maintained by each individual member's positive thoughts toward healing on a psychological level, and the synchronized dancing and singing on the physical level.

The Santo Daime Church contains elements of primitive healing or shamanism, which involve a deep relationship between group, patient, healer, and the supernatural world. These crucial elements elevate the expectation of the individual's cure, and further aid in harmonizing inner conflicts, stimulating reintegration with the group and spirit world. This provides a conceptual framework to aid in the healing process, stirring the emotional state of the individual. Frank (1973) believes that this total process "combats one's demoralization and strengthens one's sense of self-worth" (p.66).

### **Neurophenomenological Approach to Shamanism**

Although this study has so far explored a variety of methods and schools of thought (e.g., philosophical, psychological, and sociological constructs) in the examination of shamanism, ethnopharmacology, and spirituality, it is important to cover most, if not all bases, as contingent upon the parameters and focus of the study.

Examining the chemistry of the body itself may help in an understanding of some of the physiological foundations of the transformative experiences of ayahuasca consumption, or both the evolutionary functions of shamanic healing and the neurochemical effects of its employment. A neurophenomenological paradigm is one such approach that will give the reader another viewpoint from which to see the bigger picture of the effects of spirituality and ethnopharmacology on how individuals cope with stress and forge ahead on the path toward self-healing. A neurophenomenological approach identifies the four major modes of consciousness: dreaming, deep sleep, waking, and integrative aspects.

Winkelman (2010) reported that shamanistic practices initiate a parasympathetic-dominant state with frontal cortex synchronization by extremely coherent slow-wave discharges (namely theta waves), which originate in the limbic system (paleomammalian brain) and produce a synthesis of information processing between the frontal cortical hemispheres and the limbic system and lower brain structures; thus the reasons for these conditions being labeled as integrative modes of consciousness (IMC). These innate integrative capacities of the brain, argued Winkelman, are one root of shamanism's adaptive potentials.



Personal and social functioning is enhanced when ritually stimulated alterations of consciousness integrate emotional, behavioral, and cognitive capacities, where the practices of shamanism reflect adjustments to a biological potential known as IMC, which may be achieved in a number of ways: deprivation or sensory overload, manipulation of autonomic nervous system balance, extreme focus of attention, or pushing one's psychological faculties beyond their limits (Winkelman, 2010). Interestingly, as Winkelman purported, pathological and dissociative states may destabilize consciousness in a manner by which allows the expression of integrative potentials or ASC.

ASC may be seen as a method by which to develop awareness of the illusory world, providing a more objective perception of external reality, which is an adaptive advantage that can be stimulated by meditation and other traditions, such as dream states, or shamanic flights (Winkelman, 2010). There are cultural differences that institutionally value explorations of these ASC, such as *dream cultures*, *shamanic cultures*, and *polyphasic void cultures* (Laughlin, McManus, & d'Aquili, 1992).

The desire to achieve ASC is an innate and biologically-driven human need with adaptive advantages, which is manifested by homeostatic nervous system dynamics (Siegel, 1990; Sullivan, Hagen, & Hammerstein, 2008; Winkelman, 2002 a&b). The parasympathetic-dominant, coherent high-voltage theta state IMC, which creates interhemispheric synchronization and entrainment of networks and circuits, further synthesizes emotion, thought, and behavior (Winkelman, 2010). Winkelman related mystical and shamanistic experiences, which are seen cross-culturally in possession states, visions, or other ASC and spiritual experiences, as demonstrations of symbolic

systems based in consciousness and primary biological functions and structures that test and model modes of reality.

Another primary component of shamanic healing involves what is known as “medicine’s symbolic reality” (Kleinman, 1980). That is, the relationship between patient and healer in “religious healing” involves a symbolic manipulation of physiological levels, which involves associative links among the biological and mental systems via attachments, associations, and affects (Winkelman, 2010). Winkelman further extended this argument by suggesting the following summary about the importance of applying a neurophenomenological approach:

Our perception of the physical world is a transcendent reality and our knowledge and experience of it is through mediating constructs that include the physical properties of our bodies and the mental and symbolic systems of our brains (represents epistemic levels). We ordinarily experience our models, not the environment itself; our perceptions are generally limited to our culturally cognized environments, which are necessarily incomplete and contain systematic biases and errors. Neither the biological sciences nor the spiritual disciplines alone provide a complete explanation or representation of reality. A neurophenomenological approach integrates these perspectives. (Winkelman, 2010, p. 10-11)

The psychiatric and psychological concepts of id, ego, self, personality, obsession, motivation, complexes, and other psychodynamic functions, give rise to the cognitive projections of the many aspects of the spirit worlds, which play a crucial role in corresponding to social relations and the environment, as well as the individual’s

concepts of self (Winkelman, 2010). Whatever these spirits are ontologically and in actuality, they are real from an experiential standpoint, and involve direct impressions of the quintessential cognitive structures exhibiting knowledge of self, others, and nature (Winkelman, 2004a). The ritual manipulations of the phenomenological and symbolic systems of the spirit world allows the shaman to transform the “patient” emotionally, which reduces egoic structures causing unconscious material to rise to the surface, guided by integrative physiological mechanisms combined with cultural expectations (Winkelman, 2010).

The healing component of shamanism incorporates psychological, social, emotional, and physical aspects by utilizing symbols that converge these levels and affect physiological qualities of an individual (Winkelman, 2010). Furthermore, Winkelman made the point that the ritual communion with the spirit world includes pre-symbolic and symbolic processes that recalibrates the association between the world and self to engender catharsis, integration, and psychological balance. This is similar to the three phases of ritual experience (separation, liminal phase, and reaggregation) suggested by Victor Turner (1967), which helps to articulate the transformation of experience provided by the Santo Daimé Church services and assesses for the reduction of stress-related symptoms. The beliefs concerning the spirit world are the result of a natural and intuitive perception, and further mirrors their root cause in our natural cognitive processes, aspects of our ancient brain that afford information for consciousness (Winkelman, 2010).

Levels of consciousness reveal “zones of convergence” or information integration of the various evolutionary levels of the brain, where tension subsists between our affectional tendencies and our self-preservation drives, as our self-interest conflicts with

our commitment to others (Winkelman, 2010). Winkelman addressed that shamanistic technologies address this conflict via processes that provide a balance to our other-interested and self-interested drives, as well as our empathetic and egocentric drives. Winkelman further discussed how the healing methods of shamanism are also mainly concerned with the management of social relations, sense of self, and emotions, employing ritual for the therapeutic interventions in the mechanisms of the paleomammalian brain. It is here, Winkelman described, where the correlation of intrinsic drives and social influences comprises the web of a vast array of health issues—behavioral disorders, obsessions and compulsions, chronic anxiety and fears, excessive emotionality or desires, conflicts, repression, dissociations, etc. It is in this sense of social cohesion or community that certain shamanic-like spiritual institutions, such as the Santo Daime Church, provide through the combined use of ayahuasca and cohesive practices, for example, collective song and dance.

A sense of self and personal well-being is very much linked to a sense of *communitas*, a sense of social identity whereby empathic relations to other individuals provide the basis for a sense of security and self (Winkelman, 2010). Shamanic rituals, said Winkelman, engross intrinsic social signaling structures that stimulate—socially, physically, and mentally—a sense of community, as well as a general increase in cooperation. Winkelman further mentioned that the paleomammalian brain initiates and utilizes facial expressions, gestures, actions, and vocalizations that provide data regarding others' internal states and motives, generating a collective awareness, which lay at the heart of consciousness.

## **Ayahuasca and Spirituality**

A review of literature indicates that spirituality, shamanistic technologies, and entheogenic medicines when used in combination with structured guidance, accelerate the psychological therapeutic healing process (Kjellgren, Eriksson & Norlander, 2009; Privette, Quackenbos & Bundrick, 1994; Trichter, et al., 2009; Winkelman, 2005). It is thus important to examine the research on spirituality and entheogens as healing mechanisms separately and together, such as with the União do Vegetal (UDV), the Barquina Spiritual Organization, and the Santo Daime Church. From the existing research, there is good reason to consider probable uses of entheogens in psychotherapy (Trichter, et al., 2009). Trichter and colleagues discussed that it is rather clear that these substances are not ultimate cure-alls, suggesting instead that given proper guidance and application, as well as effort on the part of the user, they demonstrate significant promise in relieving suffering. These authors also asserted that an important benefit of including an entheogen into a psychotherapeutic treatment is that by accessing and processing conscious and unconscious elements from a distinct angle (i.e., the perspective offered by the substance), radical and effective solutions may take place for the individual. The authors further discussed that though qualitative research implies that the substance serves as a guide in itself, it is invaluable to have an experienced guide present when the individual processes their own perspectives of the session.

The Chilean psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo (1979) has used ayahuasca in short-term analytic psychotherapy. According to Trichter, et al. (2009), his research revealed one out of three psychoneurotic patients showed positive changes, such as positive mood and behavioral changes, reduced depressive symptoms, etc., within as little as one

ayahuasca session that would otherwise be expected only after five or more years of intensive psychotherapy.

In terms of entheogenic interventions, individuals consume ayahuasca in cross-cultural *vegetalismo* ceremonies for a variety of reasons, including the attainment of spiritual insight or enlightenment, self-actualization, mystical experiences or treatment of physical or psychological ailments (Winkelman, 2005). As was briefly mentioned before, ayahuasca is used as a legal psychoactive sacrament in Brazil within the religious organizations of Santo Daime, União do Vegetal (UDV), and Barquinha (Luna, 2003; MacRae, 1998; Grob, et al., 1996), and the use of ayahuasca within these churches has been examined by other researchers, such as Grob (1994), Doering-Silveira, et al. (2005), and Santos (2007). These researchers have used psychiatric and neurophysiological evaluations, as well as personality tests of the members using ayahuasca, and indicated high functional status and no negative effects among these users.

Another interesting finding is that significantly less use of alcohol was revealed among young people affiliated with the ayahuasca-using churches (Doering-Silveira, et al., 2005). In this particular study, adolescents ( $n = 41$ ) from a Brazilian ayahuasca sect were compared with adolescents ( $n = 43$ ) who never drank ayahuasca. Throughout the prior year, ayahuasca adolescents used less alcohol (46.31%) than the comparison group (74.4%), whereas recent use of alcohol was also more frequent among the latter group (65.1%) than among ayahuasca drinkers (32.5%) (Doering-Silveira et. al., 2005). Since ayahuasca contains a natural monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI), it is important to note, as Doering-Silveira and colleagues discussed, that large amounts of alcohol taken with MAOIs may cause side effects like angina (chest pain) or headaches.

A more comprehensive case-control study was conducted to evaluate the effects of ayahuasca among adolescent users in UDV regarding neurocognitive function, psychiatric symptomatology, and drug use (Doering-Silveira, et al., 2005). This study found a lower incidence of some psychiatric symptoms and alcohol use among ayahuasca-using adolescents compared to in the control group. Although long-term effects were not addressed, the authors of this study found no evidence of deleterious effects of ayahuasca on adolescents who participated in these ayahuasca rituals with their families.

Other research has revealed ayahuasca-using groups in South America had ceased the use of illicit drugs, such as barbiturates, sedatives, cocaine and amphetamines, despite a history of a significantly higher prior use than control groups (Fabregas, et al., 2010). Ayahuasca has also been shown to have therapeutic benefits on alcoholics and other abusers of chemical substances (McKenna, 2004; Grob et al., 1996). An increasing number of researchers have identified that “by acquiring a greater familiarity with how shamanism and shamanic practices work we can only stand to benefit enormously from millennia of knowledge and praxis in the use of imagery...to evoke desired psychological, physiological and spiritual responses” (Overton, 1997, p. 17).

The use of ayahuasca has also been revealed to stimulate a greater affinity toward positive self-evaluation. For example, participants in one study with ayahuasca (Kjellgren, et al., 2009), described a great diversity of positive changes in life; a greater self-awareness and a sense of being more present in oneself; with negative psychological patterns linked to fear and abuse lowered or even eliminated. There were reports of the subjects becoming more loving, and having learned to love themselves, others, and life to

a greater degree. These authors also reported that several healing effects have been described as direct cures for both physical and psychological diagnoses of illness, in addition to enhanced levels of creativity; new interests related to nature; and improved cognitive abilities like enhanced ability to survey complex problems. In general, under the effect of ayahuasca, individuals report having greater insight and are given to new ideas than they typically are, and it further appears that the intoxication helps individuals to be more involved with deeper psychological analyses and with philosophical ruminations (Shannon, 1998).

Growing evidence of benefits from the administration of psychedelics within a structured setting reinforces the suggestion that the religious use of ayahuasca itself influenced positive mental changes (Winkelman, 2007); and either administration of hallucinogens in a clinical research setting or in a naturalistic religious setting may result in some psychological benefit (Griffiths, Richards, McCann, Jesse, 2006; Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1986). In addition, regular ayahuasca users (more than nine sessions during the evaluation period) scored significantly higher in both emotional role and social functioning domains of SF-36 than did the irregular users (nine or fewer sessions) (Barbosa, et al., 2005). A six-month data analysis on Santo Daime members from these authors confirmed and extended their findings that the motivations of the Daime sample to participate in ayahuasca rituals included a search for “healing” and “equilibrium,” as this group demonstrated positive mood and behavioral changes two weeks following their first ayahuasca experience.

In regards to the Santo Daime church, social support and encouragement of healthy behavior have been described as a strong contributor to mental health promotion



due to the fact that it provides a sense of belonging to a fellowship that aids in dealing with painful emotions. This further discourages unhealthy behavior, like drug abuse and attitudes correlated with stress, such as aggression and anger, which are further enhanced by hyper-suggestibility resulting from ayahuasca use, a typical characteristic of the psychedelic experience (Moreira-Almeida, et al., 2006).

Additionally, the ability of psychedelics to enhance the psychotherapeutic process could very well play a role in participants' working through difficult personal issues (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1986), and the spiritual experiences brought on by psychedelics may elicit a variety of personally and socially beneficial consequences (Griffiths, et al., 2006; Pahnke, 1966). Barbosa, et al. (2005) suggested that the religious use of ayahuasca "acts at a number of focal points, exerting a constellation of psychological, social, spiritual, and pharmacological factors" (p.197). In interviews with 150 informants, Shannon (2010) reported that the ayahuasca experience prompted users to reflect a great deal on the phenomena of life, nature and human consciousness.

It has been reported that the ayahuasca-using members of the UDV church in their study were:

More reflective, confident, gregarious and optimistic compared to the control group, which had never used ayahuasca and was age-, gender-, education-, and socio-economically matched; however, with respect to our research objectives, the most interesting findings were those that showed that before membership in the religion, 11 of the participants were diagnosed as having previously been afflicted with alcohol abuse disorders, two with major depressive disorders, four with drug abuse (cocaine and amphetamines), eleven with tobacco addiction, and

three with phobic anxiety disorders [and] all of these psychiatric diagnoses remitted following entry into the religion. (Grob, et al., 1996, p. 88)

Psychiatric diagnostic assessments revealed that even though a significant portion of the long-term ayahuasca users had alcohol, anxiety, or depressive disorders prior to initiation in the UDV, all disorders had remitted without recurrence following admittance into the UDV (Grob, et al., 1996). In addition to chronic substance abuse issues, the authors discovered that participants were also empathic in the degree to which they had experienced radical transformations of their attitudes toward others, behavior, and general outlook on life. Grob and colleagues revealed that they were also able to eliminate their chronic anger, aggression, alienation, and resentment, as well as maintain greater self-control, personal fulfillment, and responsibility to family and community through their involvement in the ayahuasca ceremonies with the UDV. Prior biochemical analyses of ayahuasca preparations have indicated significant monoamine oxidase inhibitor action (McKenna, Callaway, & Grob, 1998), which could be related to these clinical findings, indicating that long-term use of ayahuasca itself may have a direct positive and therapeutic effect on psychological and functional attributes of individuals.

Regarding the Santo Daime Church rules and regulations, any participant who currently takes SSRIs are prohibited from attending any services where ayahuasca is consumed at least two months prior to any ceremony. All participants who join the church are screened during a face-to-face interview to determine their usage of medication, as well as any other medications or foods that may contain MAO inhibitors. Pamphlets are given to members educating them on the potential dangers of adverse drug interactions and counter-indications.

The beneficial effects of a strong social network and the religious affiliation through these ayahuasca-using churches, such as the UDV and The Santo Daime Church, should not be minimized with respect to the aforementioned study or any related research. It is the compounded positive effects of ayahuasca and the positive spiritual and social influence of the Santo Daime Church that serve as the focus of the current study. Negative effects of ayahuasca consumption are discussed in the following section on risk assessment.

### **Risk Assessment of Ayahuasca**

Any consideration of ayahuasca as an adjunct for therapeutic intervention should always include an assessment of risk, given that it is a very powerful hallucinogen. Even though nearly all of the literature describing ayahuasca use (whether an observation of ceremonial practices or an experimental situation involving control groups and placebos) is positive, there will always exist the potential for adverse consequences with hallucinogens. These range far and wide, but may include negative emotional reactions, improper social support and understanding of an individual's new perceptions, drug and/or food contraindications, and/or pre-existing conditions that exacerbate transient psychotic episodes. This section will thus explore the literature regarding the risks involved in ayahuasca use for participants.

### **Adverse Psychological Reactions**

Virtually all sources of data reveal that experiences with ayahuasca or DMT (the primary active ingredient in ayahuasca) has a substantial degree of non-predictability in regards to both positive and aversive aspects, depending on certain variables, like the participant's intention and setting, or dosage, etc., (Gable, 2007). The variety of reactions

during ceremonies involving ayahuasca has ranged from profound calmness to anguished cries for forgiveness (Lovetree, 1993). Occasionally, the effects of ayahuasca may even temporarily resemble a psychotic episode. In fact, certain perceptual characteristics of the ayahuasca experience overlap those of schizophrenia, and a few researchers have reported that blood or urinary levels of DMT are above normal in schizophrenic individuals (Checkley, Murray, Oon, Rodnight, & Birley, 1980; Lipinski, Mandel, Ahn, Vanden Heuvel, & Walker, 1974).

Other studies have produced conflicting results and alternative conclusions (Forsstrom, Tuominen, & Kakkainen, 2001; Gillin, Kaplan, Stillman, & Wyatt, 1976). Jacob & Presti (2005) proposed that “increased DMT, acting at the G-protein-coupled trace amine receptor, might actually serve in schizophrenics as a homeostatic response to calm or suppress psychotic activity, rather than exacerbate it” (p. 935). Currently, the notion that endogenous DMT in schizophrenia is correlated biochemically to ayahuasca-induced states of consciousness remains a speculative hypothesis (Gable, 2007).

The hallucinogenic effect of ayahuasca and other tryptamine derivatives may cause severe adverse psychological reactions, especially when administered outside established ceremonial practices (de Rios, 2005). For example, two cases of unsupervised use of 5-methoxy-N,N-diisopropyltryptamine (5-MeO-DIPT, ‘foxy’) have been reported in which an unknown amount of 5-MeO-DIPT caused sensory hallucinations requiring several hours of hospitalization (Meatherall & Sharma, 2003; Wilson, McGeorge, Smolinske, & Meatherall, 2005). Transitory psychotic episodes have also been known to occur with high doses of psilocybin (Hyde, Glancy, Omerod, Hall, & Taylor, 1978) and LSD (Klock, Boerner, & Becker, 1975). However, it is important to note that LSD,

psilocybin and 5-MeO-DIPT are orally active and more potent than DMT; therefore the comparison of these three substances with DMT is problematic (Gable, 2007).

Over a period of 5 years, the medical studies division of the *União do Vegetal* (UDV) documented between 13 and 24 cases where ayahuasca may have been implicated in a psychotic incident, which occurred from an estimated total of 25,000 servings of ayahuasca (Joint Appendix, 2002, p. 701). Although the frequency of psychosis or schizophrenia among U.S. adults varies by way of applied diagnostic criteria, the typical accepted estimate is approximately 1.3% (Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). This reported UDV rate of psychotic episodes under 1% suggests “that the use of ayahuasca is not a triggering event for sustained psychosis [and] many or most of the UDV psychotic episodes were transient in nature and resolved spontaneously” (Joint Appendix, 2002, p. 623).

### **Ayahuasca and Addiction**

The potential physiological dependence ayahuasca and DMT remains to be convincingly documented (Gable, 2007). Hallucinogenic substances with similar chemical structures to DMT are rarely used in a compulsive manner that would meet the dependence criteria of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* version IV (DSM-IV) (Morgenstern, Langenbucher, & Labouvie, 1994). Gable (2007) reported no studies during his literature review of the assessment of ritual use of oral DMT and harmala alkaloids that revealed the termination of DMT resulting in an abstinence syndrome. However, in regard to drug tolerance, a few nonhuman animal studies were conducted that revealed varying degrees of tolerance to behavioral and physiological responses over a period of 3 or 4 weeks (Cole & Pieper, 1973; Gillin, Cannon, Magyar, Schwartz, &

Wyatt, 1973; Kovacic & Domino, 1976). Little or no tolerance to autonomic or emotional effects was reported in one study, where human volunteers were administered DMT four times at 30-minute intervals (Strassman, Qualls, & Berg, 1994), and in another study where DMT was administered twice daily for 5 days (Gillin, et al., 1976).

Mabit, Giove and Vega (1996) reported that there is no way to become addicted to *ayahuasca* via the traditional way of ingestion, which includes liquid consumption. Mabit and colleagues went onto mention that they have never found a single individual that can recall an addiction, and as researchers, they report months of interruption between sessions without a modicum of withdrawal symptoms. It has been constantly verified without exception with all patients and healers.

Gable (2007) asserted that “the relative lack of abuse potential of ayahuasca in social settings seems very plausible [given that] the unpredictable occurrence of frightening images and thoughts, plus predictable nausea and diarrhea, makes it a very unlikely candidate for a ‘club drug’” (p. 30). Furthermore, the discipline of toxicology alone presents its own aversion—especially regarding spiritual concepts like ‘ineffability’, ‘transcendence’, and ‘grace’, which typically appear in descriptions of ayahuasca sessions by psychologically and physically healthy individuals (Roberts, 2001). In fact, many reported ayahuasca experiences are similar to descriptions of *satori* in Zen Buddhism, *samadhi* in Hinduism, or *beatific vision* in Christianity, which exist outside the pathology-oriented realm of toxicology (Gable, 2007).

### **Spiritual Emergencies**

Religious and spiritual experiences may occasionally be so profound that one may be unable to cope and subsequently develop distressing psychological symptoms as a result (Lewis, 2008). In fact, a fairly new diagnostic category, Religious or Spiritual Problems (Code V62.89), is included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) to address psychological symptoms associated with religious or spiritual issues (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Stanislov and Christina Grof (1989), who coined the term “spiritual emergencies,” defined them as “crises when the process of growth and change becomes chaotic and overwhelming; individuals experiencing such episodes may feel that their sense of identity is breaking down, that their old values no longer hold true, and that the very ground beneath their personal realities is radically shifting; in many cases, new realms of mystical and spiritual experience enter their lives suddenly....” (p.35).

Spiritual emergencies provide a different association between transformational crisis and psychiatric disorders, and it is important to consider in the context of analyzing participants in services that use ayahuasca, such as the Santo Daime Church, that any subsequent distress may be directly related to the religious or spiritual experience (Lewis, 2008). In the Western model, psychological symptoms may be treated as “attacks” on the healthy mind, yet the psychological distress associated with spiritual emergencies, may provide an opportunity for deep healing and transformation (Lewis, 2008). Grof and Grof (1989) argued that it is essential that those individuals who deal with spiritual emergencies distance themselves from the concept of disease and acknowledge the healing nature of their crisis, especially since many Western clinicians are not

experienced in treating patients outside of the disease model. Therefore, it is important to further examine the use of shamanic and ethnopharmacological tools in coping with stress on all levels, including religious and spiritual, so that we can better understand not only specific mechanisms of action in what patients deem crucial to their psychological well-being, but also to provide additional therapeutic tools in dealing with patients from diverse cultures.

Lewis (2008) described this psychological distress associated with spiritual emergencies as an opportunity for deep healing and transformation. Lewis went on to say that ayahuasca can often be a catalyst for a shamanistic initiatory crisis, but many Western clinicians are not accustomed to treating their patients outside of a disease model and are thus not trained properly to work with patients coping with spiritual emergencies. Lewis asserted that in the West, mental illness is always considered negative and undesirable, but cases of spiritual emergencies or spiritual crises, in particular, should be considered an opportunity for healing, learning, and personal growth.

### **Benefits of Spiritual and Ethnopharmacological Approaches**

The question then remains: If Western psychology is not prepared to deal with patients who undergo spiritual transformation as a result of these aforementioned experiences, then wherein lies the benefit? The answer, of course, lies in continued research in this area to provide additional tools for training Western clinicians. Lewis (2008) discussed that although not all psychiatrists view distressing psychological symptoms as an “opportunity” to restore health and balance, or to manifest one’s full potential, whereby symptoms are a clarion call for growth, there are a handful that do view these as opportunities. Of course, this philosophy does not accurately reflect



principles of general psychiatry, since as medical doctors, most psychiatrists maintain a “responsibility to diagnosis their patients with an illness that has a name, a course of treatment, and a DSM code to bill for insurance” (Lewis, 2008, p. 120).

Many people now wish to have their spiritual beliefs and values integrated into counseling settings (Privette, et al., 1994), and there is substantial and expanding interest in inspecting the impact of spirituality on the social, psychological, and somatic dimensions of life (Trichter, et al., 2009). For example, from the noteworthy research done to reveal the effects of religious and spiritual behaviors on psychological and physical health as well as relational well-being, it seems that greater levels of spirituality are correlated to lower risk for disease, fewer psychiatric and medical issues, and higher levels of psychosocial functioning (George, et al., 2000; Ellison & Levin, 1998; Gartner, 1996; Ventis, 1995). One researcher (Sperry, 2001) found that persons with greater levels of religious and spiritual commitment, as measured in their attitude and beliefs towards the Divine and their spiritual actions or behaviors, tend to report greater levels of life satisfaction and well-being on psychological indices, e.g., lower anxiety, in such areas as lowered fear of death, rumination and neurotic guilt; and lower rates of depression, substance abuse and dependence, and lowered suicidal tendencies.

Existential psychologists have highlighted that spiritual discord and distress are at the root of much of the clinical pathologies we see today, and even if a more temperate causal relationship is in fact the case, clinical psychology and psychiatry cannot afford to disregard what has been referred to as the spiritual dimension of the human experience (Trichter, et al., 2009). The authors went onto mention that if existentialists are accurate in their evaluation that the loss of a spiritual perspective creates a multitude of

psychological issues, then the restoration of a spiritual perspective is an apparent and comprehensive treatment methodology, something of which Carl Jung frequently discussed. It was Maslow in the early 1960s who said that "the human being needs a framework of values, a philosophy of life, a religion or religion surrogate to live by and understand by in about the same sense he needs sunlight, calcium and love" (Elkins, et al., 1988, p. 206).

### **Liminal States**

As previously discussed, liminality is typically examined after the ritual states in shamanic healing that involve spiritual transformation induced by ethno-pharmacological agents such as ayahuasca, within indigenous or shamanic groups (Lewis, 2008).

"Liminality" is a term coined from twentieth century anthropology by Victor Turner (1967) of the University of Chicago, where *limen* in Latin translates to 'threshold,' and may be applied to certain states experienced by individuals as they pass over the threshold from one stage of life to another (Palmer, 1980). Palmer described that during the liminal stage, or the 'between stage,' one's status becomes ambiguous; one is "neither here nor there," and is "betwixt and between all fixed points of classification (p.5)," and therefore the rules and form of both his earlier state and his state-to-be are suspended. Palmer further noted that it is from "the standpoint of this marginal zone that the great artists, writers, and social critics have been able to look past the social forms in order to see society from the outside and to bring in a message from beyond it" (p. 6).

Religious and spiritual experiences produced by ethnopharmacological agents like ayahuasca may bring forth such profundity that one may not be able to immediately develop the appropriate language to completely understand their experience (Lewis,

2008), hence the importance of providing additional tools and training for Western psychologists to interpret these liminal experiences for effective therapeutic goals. As mentioned previously, Grof and Grof (1989) viewed this process of significant growth and change where one may feel that their sense of identity is becoming altered, or that their prior values no longer stand the same ground, as these new realms of spiritual and mystical experience suddenly appear.

It is important to note that in the Santo Daime Church sessions, for any type of adverse psychological, spiritual, or physiological effect of the ayahuasca experience that occurs, there are trained and seasoned ‘guardians’ who serve to help participants process their experiences both on an individual counseling basis and through the general doctrine of the church, which upholds values of strength, transformation, and compassion. The primary role of the guardian is to help the participant channel their ‘visions’ through the conduit of the church’s doctrine and spiritual enlightenment. If a participant experiences consequences that are beyond the capacity of the guardian to respond, there are specific protocols to be followed, including the transport to a local hospital. There is always a standby available that is not under the influence of ayahuasca, in addition to several members who are medical nurses, including a medical doctor. However, there is no history of this occurrence at this particular location or any reported incidences in the United States that this researcher is aware of.

As Winkelman (2001) and Mabit (2007) discussed, there is a good deal of promising research in exploring the therapeutic effects of ethnopharmacological intervention, namely ayahuasca, on drug addicts. As Lewis (2008) claimed, individuals who have these experiences with ayahuasca, even if transient distress arises, may also

experience personal growth and positive transformation. Of course, in shamanic contexts or healing centers, like the Takiwasi Healing Center in Peru, therapists are trained in utilizing these experiences to the benefit of the patient.

### **Psychotherapeutic Integration**

The combination of Western psychotherapeutic models with ayahuasca rituals could create a healthy Western psychospiritual healing practice (Trichter, 2010). For example, the Takiwasi Healing Center in Tarapoto, Peru combines ayahuasca with psychotherapy, which has been treating patients suffering from severe drug addiction for the past 25 years (Mabit, 2007). Through this assimilation, the psychological health of participants could be assured so that psychotherapy sessions could explore various spiritual issues (e.g., spiritual crisis, liminality, etc.) and investigate certain psychological elements that arise, such as shame or guilt, which may appear during transference-countertransference issues within the ayahuasca ritual context (Trichter, 2010). By itself, as Trichter discussed, the ayahuasca ceremony has the potential of creating significant and meaningful spiritual and mystical states of being, although, combined with psychotherapy, certain qualities of these states may further reinforce the essential goals that have been revealed to be effective in the Western psychotherapeutic modalities.

Another benefit of integrating ayahuasca and psychotherapy rituals is that it would allow experienced and licensed mental health professionals, asserted Trichter (2010), “to help screen and prepare potential crisis intervention, and work with emerging traumas and post-ceremony integration, [which] can be done with an experienced licensed mental health professional [by] preparing the client with the potential of

emotionally challenging material that may come up during the ceremonies” (p. 138).

Additionally, the therapist may work with the client in preparing an intention as a focal point for the client’s psychospiritual needs at the time of the ceremony, which may provide some guidance and direction of the experience toward the attainment of insights into appropriate areas that may challenge the client’s current issue or development (Trichter, 2010).

The greatest benefit will occur from an ayahuasca ceremony if the client has participated in therapy for some time (Trichter, 2010). Trichter went onto mention that one of the potential primary advantages of integrating an ayahuasca ritual with psychotherapy would be that the previous therapeutic involvement could be transported into the ayahuasca ritual for further examination and the experiences could be further investigated. Trichter also discussed the preparation the client could undergo for the ayahuasca ritual by setting the intention to explore themes that have surfaced during therapy sessions and further investigate any resistance identified in the consultation room during or after the ceremony.

As previously mentioned, each Santo Daime Church session includes guardians that serve as guides for participants who may exhibit instability, agitation, or feel overwhelmed while under the influence of ayahuasca. The guardians are also available for debriefing after the session is complete to discuss any concerns, questions, or simply to explore themes and meanings of the session. Trichter (2010) revealed the importance of having well-trained clinicians trained in crisis intervention during ayahuasca rituals, and that these clinicians could also be trained in empathic listening, relaxation techniques, or just simply being present to mitigate some of the stressors that occur

during these crises. As discussed in the section on shamanism, the shaman that uses ayahuasca has a number of tools available to assist the participants who struggle, such as the use of songs or *icaros*, which the Santo Daime Church uses in their sessions (*hinarios*). Given the spiritual context often seen with ayahuasca, a clinician trained in the integration of psychotherapy and spirituality could be particularly useful in such a context.

In examining the possibility of integrating spiritual and shamanic approaches with Western and/or contemporary psychotherapeutic frameworks, we must begin by looking at the connection or relationship of the client with his or her therapist, since a good therapeutic relationship necessitates the client's experience of genuine relatedness to others and the development of a more firm sense of self. The sense of interconnectedness that participants feel with a session involving ayahuasca could be supplemented with psychotherapeutic techniques to create complementary benefits (Shanon 2002; Trichter, 2006). Trichter (2010) made the point that "although the sense of connection sometimes felt during experiences with ayahuasca can have healing benefits for participants, there is often no ongoing concrete relationship that is deliberately occurring during the group rituals, [which] causes questions of the sustainable impact of these feelings on the contemporary Western psyche" (p. 140). By including connectedness within the therapeutic alliance and the ayahuasca ritual, they could be further examined and integrated.

It is clear thus far that the experience with ayahuasca can bring about fear and anxiety as the participant may often be faced with suppressed traumas, negative habits that have been avoided or suppressed, or any other number of spiritually-related crises.

To more effectively deal with this issue, the integration of ceremony-based ayahuasca consumption into a framework of ongoing psychotherapy could create a greater sense of safety for the client when participating in these ayahuasca rituals, which would allow the participant to more fully explore a situation that often brings up fear or anxiety and to share their experiences with the therapist following the ceremony (Trichter, 2010).

Trichter also discussed how this client-therapist rapport could present an opportunity for the therapist to frame perception and/or interpretations with less restriction while the ceremony experience is more emotionally and temporally grounded within the client. Again, this provides an opportunity for the therapist to examine and interpret the insights and emotional/psychological experiences brought about by the ayahuasca ceremony, which could then be integrated into continuing therapy.

### **Alternative Approaches to Stress Management**

One of the roles of a health psychologist is to develop and/or teach a variety of techniques to individuals so that they can more effectively cope with stress, especially since many individuals experience difficulty in managing their own stress (Auberbach & Gramling, 1998; Penedo, et al., 2004). Stress management techniques teach individuals how to appraise stressful events, the development of coping skills, and how to utilize these skills in their everyday lives (Santrock, 2004). The main purpose in including a brief discussion on alternative approaches to stress management is that often the Santo Daime Church sessions promote a variety of these approaches in a number of ways.

First, the Church itself promotes healthy living, whether through vegetarianism, moderate alcohol consumption, community and social networking, or meditation. It is typical for a member to have already engaged in these alternative and healthy lifestyles,

although the consumption of ayahuasca tends to ‘cleanse’ one’s mind and body and orient one toward a healthier lifestyle. This is particularly true of mediation, since the array of unbounded experiences or suppressed issues a participant faces under the influence of ayahuasca not only demands greater attention toward mental control as a coping mechanism for the situation at hand, but also aids in the continued enlightenment that the ayahuasca affords. It is also the social support and doctrine of the Santo Daime Church that promotes these alternative, healthy practices so that the participants gain the greatest benefit from the services.

Meditation involves the practice and system of thought that includes certain exercises to help individuals attain bodily and/or mental control and well-being, or in some cases, enlightenment (Gillani & Smith, 2001; Tassi & Muzet, 2001). The strategies involve either cleansing the mind for new experiences or enhancing concentration (Santrock, 2004). Research has indicated that meditation practice activates neural structures linked to control and attention of the autonomic nervous system (Lazar, et al., 2000); and as a physiological state, it reveals qualities of both wakefulness and sleep, yet distinct from either one (Friedman, et al., 1998). The effects of meditation have been found to lower oxygen consumption, slow heart rate, increase blood flow to the forehead and arms, and produce rhythmic and regular EEG patterns that reflect alpha wave activity (Wallace & Benson, 1972). Other research has indicated that meditation creates positive physiological activity and that it is even superior to relaxation techniques in helping to alleviate anxiety (Eppley, Abrams, & Shear, 1989). Additionally, healthful living, which involves evaluating and changing behaviors that interfere with good health and establishing healthy habits, like proper nutrition and exercise, aids in avoiding the



ameliorating effects of stress on the mind and body (DiMatteo & Martin, 2002).

Therefore, a meditation practice coupled with the Santo Daime Church sessions may create an opportunity for the development of positive mental and physical health practices, such as mindfulness, which serves as a strategy for coping with daily and life stressors.

### **Social Support**

In Western and other industrialized and modernized countries, we live in noisy, polluted, crowded, and achievement-oriented environments, which can make us feel isolated and overwhelmed (Santrock, 2004). This means that social support systems, such as friends, family members, church groups or other organizations, are vitally important for buffering stress (Mann, 2003; Muhonen & Turkelson, 2003). Social support is feedback or information from others that one is cared for and loved, valued and consequential, and included as part of a network of mutual obligation and communication (Santrock, 2004).

Research has consistently revealed that social support helps individuals cope more effectively with stress (Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2003; Apker & Ray, 2003; Taylor, 2001). One particular study revealed that depressed individuals had fewer, less supportive relationships with friends, co-workers, and family than those who were not depressed (Billings, Cronkite, & Moos, 1983). In another study, the predictors of cancer, suicide, and psychopathology were correlated with distance from one's parents and a negative attitude toward one's family (Thomas, 1983). Individuals who participate in more diverse social networks, such as social and religious groups, show greater longevity than those

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with fewer types of social ties (Berkman & Syme, 1979; Vogt, Mullooly, Ernst, Pople, & Hollis, 1992).

Research in the field of psychology has also revealed that individuals who receive social support, especially from significant others, typically have fewer psychological issues than those who do not receive support (Lepore, 1994; Vaux, 1988). Indigenous communities are a great area of research since social support is a central component of shamanic intervention (Krippner, 2002).

Membership in the Santo Daime Church also provides a supportive social network. Given that the Church itself and the ceremonies are so unique, it attracts such a rich diversity of individuals with a variety of different backgrounds. It is the uniqueness of the group and the ceremonies that provides fertile ground for discussion and relationship-building. Furthermore, many of the members tend to be healers in some capacity, e.g., nurses, doctors, massage therapists, shamanic practitioners, etc. This provides a healthy social support network for those who may need help or guidance in dealing with life stressors and continued personal growth.

As mentioned previously, social support and encouragement of healthy behavior have been described as a strong contributor to mental health promotion due to the fact that it provides a sense of belonging to a fellowship that aids in dealing with painful emotions, which further discourages unhealthy behavior, like drug abuse and attitudes correlated with stress, such as aggression and anger. The social atmosphere of the Santo Daime Church is one of integrity, strong moral character, compassion, and love. It is this healthy social network, combined with the consumption of ayahuasca, which tends to

build strong moral character and dissolve unhealthy habits due to the hyper-suggestibility characteristic of the psychedelic experience (Moreira-Almeida, et al., 2006).

## **Religion**

Individuals in the religious mainstream typically experience a positive or neutral correlation between religion and physical health (Paloutzian, 2000). Research has indicated religious commitment and/or participation in aiding the moderation of blood pressure and hypertension (Levin & Vanderpool, 1989), as well as greater longevity (Gartner, et al., 1991; Hill & Pargament, 2003; McCullough, Hoyt, Larson, Koenig, & Thoresen, 2000).

There could be a variety of reasons why religion may help individuals cope more effectively with stress. Some religious organizations provide health-related services, or it could be that religious individuals tend to maintain healthier lifestyles. In looking at the variety of dimensions of religion that may help individuals cope with stress, it has been observed that religious thoughts may play a role in maintaining hope and stimulating motivation for recovery (Nairn & Merluzzi, 2003). One recent study revealed that some AIDS patients who had greater longevity used religion as a coping mechanism (Ironson, et al., 2001). Furthermore, the correlation between good health and religion could be that these organizations provide social connections, and it has been revealed that socially connected individuals tend to have fewer health issues (Hill & Butler, 1995). These social connections encouraged by religious participation can help to reduce anxiety and depression (Koenig & Larson, 1998).

Many individuals join religious institutions because it is simply part of their heritage or culture; or it could be that they have felt a ‘calling’ to be healed and need to

'kick' old habits. Whatever the reason for deciding to become religious, that is, if an individual is not 'born' into a religious congregation, the operative term can be boiled down to spiritual well-being. As mentioned previously, spiritual well-being may be considered an important component to coping with stress-related disorders such as anxiety, since spirituality and religion serve as a method for helping individuals to stay grounded. A complete analysis of the many types of religions and their relative merit in providing stress-relief is beyond the scope of this study. The three phases of ritual experience (separation, liminal phase, and reaggregation) (Turner, 1967) were used to examine the transformation of religious experience in reducing stress-related symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, or substance abuse.

The Santo Daime Church provides an essential foundation for use of the ritual experience as a method for effectively coping with stress: 1). Ayahuasca serves as a powerful tool for the separation phase, allowing an individual to temporarily separate from traditional modes of thinking and examine their conscious experiences from new perspectives; 2). Both the ayahuasca experience and the church session aid in initiating the liminal phase. As mentioned previously, ayahuasca consumption accelerates liminality and spiritual awareness (Lewis, 2008); 3). Following each ceremony of the Santo Daime Church, the leaders and guardians make themselves available for debriefing. The church ceremonies are powerful events for participants on a variety of levels, and engaging in conversations with those who have had a great deal of experience with liminality and the ritual experience, aids the participant in securing reaggregation or 'closure.' This study examined spirituality in the context of the Santo Daime Church

services and further examined the relationship among these phases and more defined components of stress-coping tools.

### **Summary and Transition**

In summary, the life of a modern day human is not without stress, which could be caused by trauma as well as the accumulation of daily stressors. Traumatic and chronic stress brings about a variety of symptoms, including anxiety, depression, or physical symptoms such as fatigue and heart disease. In the last decade, the rise of alternative and non-Western healing practices, such as shamanism and ethnopharmacology, has piqued an interest in those individuals dissatisfied with traditional therapies. This chapter summarized the literature related to ayahuasca and spirituality, namely the Santo Daime Church; the nature and benefits of traditional shamanism and as it relates to the Santo Daime Church; a risk assessment of ayahuasca, including spiritual emergencies and effects of hallucinogens; benefits of ethnopharmacological and spiritual approaches, including psychotherapeutic integration; additional alternative approaches to stress-relief, including religion and social support; conceptual frameworks, such as holism; and a review of alternative qualitative methodologies.

Chapter 3 presents the research design and approach, including the research questions; a justification for using a phenomenological approach; role of the researcher; setting and sample; the recruitment, consenting, and debriefing process; the data analysis plan; instrumentation; conflict of interest; issues of trustworthiness; and protection of participants.



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## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research was to describe the methods for recruiting participants, conducting the study, and analyzing data. In addition, the context of the research—the Santo Daime Church—is described, as well as the role of the researcher. Issues of procedural trustworthiness are discussed, followed by a detailed presentation of the ethical procedures used for the safety and well-being of the participants.

### **Research Design and Approach**

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was used to investigate the spiritual experience of the Santo Daime Church participants. The intent was to explore and understand how this transformative experience affected the daily lives and coping of Church participants. Moustakas (1994) defined the phenomenological approach as a meticulous examination of experience to acquire rich and detailed descriptions as a foundation for a structural analysis that reflects the very essence of the experience. Thus, the focus is on the intentional relationship between the person, the experience, and the meaning of the experience (Smith & Osborn, 2007). For the current research, this focus was on the meaning of the spiritual experience induced by the ayahuasca ritual as it relates to the participants' daily lives.

The research was guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a variant of hermeneutics. Moustakas (1994) explained hermeneutic science as an approach that “involves the art of reading a text so that the intention and meaning behind appearances are fully understood” (p. 9). That is, a hermeneutic analysis is necessary to derive a correct understanding of a text. The interrelationship of the direct conscious

description of experience and the dynamics that account for the experience gives the researcher a primary meaning and unity that provides an understanding of the essence of the experience. Smith and Osborne (2009) described this as “a two-stage interpretation process, or a double hermeneutic, [whereby] the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world”. (p. 53)

### **Alternative Qualitative Approaches**

There are other approaches that serve the examination of conscious experience well (e.g., heuristic phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory), although the phenomenological approach appeared to be the best fit given the nature of this study.

#### **Heuristics**

Heuristic research involves a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis (Moustakas, 1994), the main characteristic being that the researcher shares the lived experience and is in fact a coresearcher in the study. Moustakas further explained this approach as the self of the researcher being present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with greater and greater depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. This process of discovery leads researchers to new meanings regarding human phenomena, yet also to realizations relevant to their own lives and experiences (Moustakas, 1994).



## **Ethnography**

Ethnography is the study of culture and involves a great deal of fieldwork. It may be conducted in a variety of social settings that allow for direct observations of the activities of the group under examination, as well as interactions and communication with the individuals and formal or informal interviewing opportunities (Moustakas, 1994).

This type of study can be conducted with sociological, psychological, and anthropological frameworks. Ethnographic inquiry is typically employed by sociologists and anthropologists who seek to describe a culture. For example, many of the studies on ayahuasca, which are conducted by anthropological scientists, seek to describe the cultural context in which the ayahuasca is consumed, mostly in South America. This particular study does not involve direct observation of the process of the church session, nor is the sole purpose to describe the culture in which the church session takes place.

## **Grounded Theory**

The goal of grounded theory is to gain phenomenological knowledge of how individuals delineate their existence for which this understanding is then analyzed through an inductive approach to examine constellations, which precede theoretical constructs (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) inferred in the data collection (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss (1987) defined grounded theory as a detailed grounding of the research inquiry by meticulous analysis of the data, involving the study of transcribed interviews by each sentence, examination of field notes, coding of phrases used, comparisons of the categories, and the ultimate construction of a theory. Since the intent of the current study was not to develop a theory or explanatory model, this approach was not selected.

### **Research Questions**

Using a phenomenological approach, the research posed the primary research question: What is the experience of spiritual guidance and ethnopharmacology to enhance coping strategies and reduce stress in Santo Daime Church members?

The literature suggests that stress buffering and perceived control are key phenomena in understanding the influences and mechanisms of coping and quality of life. Therefore, the current research includes the following sub-questions:

SQ1: What are the life events that create stress-related symptoms?

SQ2: What are the meaningful coping strategies used by church members?

SQ3: How are the church rituals integrated into daily coping and quality of life?

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role in this current research was to gather and interpret data from members of the Santo Daime church who had been involved in the church rituals for at least a year, or who had attended at least 10 sessions. This role included interviewing participants who had accepted an invitation to participate in a study that would contribute to a growing body of knowledge related to examining the spiritual and ritual use of ethnopharmacological use as an alternative means of coping with daily and life stressors. Upon completion of the qualitative interviews, my role then included analysis of the data for emerging patterns and relationships to the existing literature related to the various effects of individual, spiritual, and ritualized use of ayahuasca and shamanism.

### **Researcher Bias**

Using the strategies of qualitative research, including bracketing as well as open and honest descriptions, researcher biases were minimized in several ways. Selection bias

was minimized, as the announcement was communicated via email from a church listserv. Those who were interested in participating responded to myself via e-mail. Once contact was made, I sent the participant the study details and informed consent. All of the informed consent documents were collected prior to the interview being conducted. This aided in minimizing my influence on the selection process.

Bias during the data collection and analysis process was minimized using the phenomenological technique of bracketing. I made several journal entries during and following the interview process to bracket, or describe objective expressions and illuminate recognition of bias. Bracketing gives a researcher the possibility of abating pre-judgment or bias of the collected data (Creswell, 1998). In the IPA, this process occurs before and after the interview and during the analysis process to distinguish the researcher's experiences and the literature's interpretation as separate from what comes from the participant.

Bias, in the form of social desirability (i.e., saying what the interviewee thinks the interviewer wants to hear) is another risk factor (Nancarrow & Brace, 2000). To minimize this type of bias, I clearly described the purpose and general content of the questions; explained the importance of open and honest descriptions of experiences, whether negative, positive, or neutral; and asked interview questions that were not leading.

My qualifications in skillfully conducting the interviews included over 5 years of qualitative interviewing of prospective students in a university setting, and 3 years of quality control and needs assessment with employees, as well as interviewing prospective employees as a manager and corporate trainer.

The aim of the qualitative interview is to gain a phenomenological assessment of the experience of the participants. I am educated on techniques of qualitative interviewing and the concepts of true presence. The participants were cued to communicate the experience of the Santo Daime Church service and the acquisition and synthesis of this new knowledge into their daily life routines and practices throughout their history with the church. That is, through the qualitative questioning process, the accumulated experience of the church service will be explored, as well as how the participant views the experience in relationship to stress and coping in his or her daily life.

### **Conflict of Interest**

Currently, my connection to the Santo Daime Church could be categorized as participant/observer, given his intermittent participation in church sessions approximately once every three months or so. Although I am an official member of the church, I have attended church services intermittently for over 3years. I did not participate in church services or other events during the course of the study, separated his role as researcher/church participant, and his participation was not used in any way to entice participation. It is my belief that the accumulated interaction among church members served as the establishment of rapport, which created greater levels of openness with the research participants. Development of rapport and trust facilitated understanding and the co-construction of meaning between myself and the research participants. My role as a member also solidified a deeper understanding of the various processes and the core belief system with which the church currently operates, which provided him with a more solid framework for understanding the experience of various phenomena of the

participants. Furthermore, the use of true presence during the interview process promoted compatibility and receptiveness without judgment related to my church affiliation and/or accumulated experience. As mentioned previously, I minimized any social restraint between himself and the participants with empathy, true presence, and genuine interest in their perception of the experience of daily and life stressors, as well as in the use of ethnopharmacological agents and the spiritual guidance of the Santo Daime Church sessions.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is the term used in qualitative research to describe what the researcher has done to produce research that accurately represents the data and is meaningful to the reader. According to Patton (2002) there are four dimensions of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of these is discussed below.

**Credibility.** This is the extent to which the research findings represent an accurate interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2005). A researcher must have adequate familiarity with the research context, and insight into the phenomena so that the data can be properly coded, organized, and developed into themes.

Prolonged contact is typically used in field studies, such as in anthropological studies, to gain a greater understanding of a social setting, phenomenon of interest, or culture. In phenomenological or ethnological studies, adequate time should be spent observing varying components of a setting, communicating with and establishing rapport with members of the culture or event. Regarding the Santo Daime Church, I did not observe the church session as a requirement of the study; prolonged contact has been

established during the various sessions attended within a 5 year time frame. This prolonged contact has essentially served as the development of rapport and trust, further facilitating the understanding of meaning between myself and the participants in this study.

I also employed member checking (summarizing and reviewing participant responses with the participant) so that the participants could critically analyze the findings and provide any additional comments. Several participants confirmed that the summaries accurately reflected their experiences, feelings, and viewpoints, and further clarified several points regarding the main themes that emerged from the study. Given that the participants confirmed the completeness and accuracy of their statements, this lends some credibility to the study. Although these member checks are not free of fault, they do serve to decrease the occurrence of erroneous data, as well as the incorrect interpretation of data. The overall goal of this process was to provide findings that were original and authentic.

**Transferability.** This is the degree to which the findings of this inquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project. The intended audience whom will find the study results meaningful, will consist of health, psychology, and medical professionals and researchers, cultural anthropologists, religious scholars, and laypersons researching alternatives to healing as well as developing and maintaining positive coping strategies to daily and life stressors and/or stress-related psychological disorders.

**Dependability.** This is an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. I utilized the IPA method as a framework for rigorous data collection and analysis, primarily by triangulating the data

from research participants. That is, the content from the qualitative questions were systematically examined within and across cases to reveal potential shared meaning and experience. The small sample size of 14 participants allowed for a more detailed interpretative account of cases and to help reveal themes, including their lived spiritual experience.

**Confirmability.** This is a measure of how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data collected. To keep biases at a minimum, I utilized the process of bracketing by recording entries into a journal during and following the interview process, which included a description of objective expressions and any recognition of bias. More specifically, this aided in classifying the experiences of myself and the interpretation of the literature as distinct from that of the participant. I directly related the interview questions to the primary research questions and sub-questions by relating the findings to the literature to note any parallels and differences. Themes were clustered and each interview was utilized using the same process.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Prior to beginning data collection several steps were taken to make sure that the participants were treated ethically and safely and that the data was kept confidential and secure.

### **Protection of Participants**

First, the study was approved by the University Human Subjects Committee and the Institutional Review Board of Walden University (Approval#: 01-24-13-0056213) before data collection was initiated. Participant recruitment took place in the form of an invitation email sent by the current church leader. Interested persons contacted me via

email, which ensured that the participation was voluntary. Once I verbally reviewed the purpose and procedures of the study at the time of the interview, each participant received an informed consent letter (Appendix A). I received the signed letters prior to beginning the interview.

All participants were interviewed no sooner than 48 hours from the most recent church ritual. In the event of any evidence of negative psychological symptoms presented by the participant, the participants were informed that the interview would not proceed and the participant would be immediately referred to the Multnomah County Department of Community & Family Services Crisis Line at 503-988-4888. It should be noted that is highly unlikely given that the active ingredient in ayahuasca (DMT) is completely broken down by MAO inhibitors within 6 to 8 hours after initial ingestion, whereas the actual effects decline from their peak plasma levels within 2 hours (McKenna et al., 1998). No participants presented any negative psychological symptoms during the interview sessions.

An-depth, semistructured interview was conducted and recorded with a digital recording device. The participants were advised to explore the lived experience of stress, the obstacles or challenges presented, the spiritual experience of the church session, and the meaning of the experience as it relates to their current functioning and coping with daily life. I informed each participant that he planned to follow up with a member checking process to verify the accuracy of the summarized transcript, and to review any confusing elements that would need further clarification.



## **Confidentiality and Storage of Data**

Confidentiality was secured with the designation of pseudonyms. I collaborated with each research participant to either select a unique name or a name from a list that I provided. All transcripts, tapes, questionnaires, demographic data, interview and questionnaire results are secured in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office at my residence and accessible only to me. Signed informed consent letters are secured in a file separate from other data. All records will be destroyed 5 years following completion of the study.

Data analyses were carried out using the pseudonyms. Results were presented in such a way to minimize the unique identification of anyone individual. As indicated early, participants were notified with an opportunity to review transcript summaries and findings for accuracy as well as to approve their use in the presentation of the results.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

**Context.** The Santo Daime Church sessions take place in Oregon at a rented space, which is typically at alternating locations, depending on the expected capacity. However, the interviews took place at the most convenient location of the participant's choosing.

The church sessions are highly orchestrated, meaning that men are either seated or standing on one side of the room, and women on the other, in a circular format. The leaders and musicians (this often involves a guitarist, drummer, keyboardist, and accordion player) are seated at a star-shaped table (salão) in the center of the circle. Each session begins with several repetitions of Catholic prayers (Our Father and Hail Mary),

which are first read in English then Portuguese. Following the prayers, church members line up on each side (separate male and female lines) to receive their ayahuasca serving or sacrament (Daime). Following the reception of the sacrament, members find their seats and begin a procession of singing Portuguese hymns (hinarios).

There are several types of church services, all of which involve the singing of hinarios—concentração (a concentration session that involves a 1 hour meditation); cura (a healing session that involves permission of any official members (fardados) to heal others in a shamanic style; shamanic channeling of spirits typical of Kardecist Spiritism; the opening up of hospitals whereby any participant may seek energetic healing from fardados who have channeled healing spirits); and white works—a waltz-style dancing work involving formal dress (men wear white suits; women wear dresses with green sashes and tiaras). Church members involved in a white work will often dance while singing hymns for anywhere between 6 to 12 hours, depending on the nature of the session, for example, a festival celebration, etc.

The church space itself is decorated with crosses, banners, framed pictures of Santo Daime spiritual leaders, roses and flowers, and small statues of African, South American, and Catholic deities and/or avatars. The atmosphere is one of celebration, community, healing, and love (many of the hinarios make frequent reference to ‘the heart’). Following a session, participants are often in a celebratory mood for having maintained tremendous stamina and energy during a ceremony involving the experiences of a potent ethnopharmacological brew, all the while maintaining rhythm and synchronicity during the singing of hinarios in a non-native tongue (for most members).

The emotional elevation of experiencing the sacrament in a highly charged spiritual atmosphere fosters a tremendous resonance of community and healing.

**Population.** This particular church group includes about 60 adult members. All church members do not show up regularly. Typically, there are 20 to 30 members that show up for each session, although this depends on the type of ceremony. For example, a festival ceremony (2 to 3 times per year on average), including guests from the central church in Brazil, can draw upwards of 100 or more members (those willing to travel from out-of-state locations, such as California, Washington, Canada, etc.). The group tends to be composed of the same core members who regularly attend, with the occasional new guest. The ethnic composition of the group tends to be Caucasian, with only 1 Black participant, 3 to 4 Brazilian members, and 1 Asian.

**Sampling strategy.** A purposive intensity sampling strategy was used. The intent was to select approximately 12 to 15 adult members (18 years or older) of the Santo Daime Church. The use of intensity sampling is to purposefully select individuals who have been immersed in the church's activities for at least one year of church session activity and/or 10 sessions. This timeframe for church activity participation ensures that enough sessions will have been accumulated to provide sufficient description of experience. Although each session may be considered a profound experience, in some cases, it may take up to an entire year for an individual to synthesize their experience into their current life schemas (Barbosa, et al., 2009).

Based on the cooperation and ability of the participants to articulate their experience, it was originally projected that data from at least 10 usable interviews would constitute the final sample, although the final sample consisted of 14 usable interviews.

While phenomenological research has been done with as few as one case, the typical sample size for an IPA study ranges from 8 to 12 individuals that are homogenous with respect to the phenomenon of interest (Smith & Osborn, 2007). That is, as Smith and Osborn further assert, “a distinctive feature of IPA is its commitment to a detailed interpretative account of the cases included and many researchers are recognizing that this can only realistically be done on a very small sample – thus in simple terms one is sacrificing breadth for depth.” (p.56).

### **Instrumentation**

Instrumentation was composed of two parts: basic demographic information and the semi-structured qualitative interview.

**Demographics.** Demographic information was limited to gender, racial/ethnic composition, marital status, and church attendance (tenure, number of sessions).

**Interview guide.** A semi-structured interview was used to guide the participants through the data collection process. The choice of a semi-structured interview guide was made so that I could maintain consistency across the individuals, but have the freedom to re-order the questions, and expand questions depending on the unique requirements of each case (Smith, et al., 2009). The questions were developed from several textbooks on IPA, and utilize open-ended questions that guide the participant in sharing the relevant experiences (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007).

1. Tell me about how you came to the Santo Daime Church?
2. How would you describe your life at the time you first came to the church?

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(Probe: were there any significant stressors or challenges in your life at the time?)

3. What did you expect this Church experience to be like?
4. Tell me about your most profound or most powerful church session.  
(Probe: What made it so powerful?)
5. What did you take away from this experience?  
(Probe: What did the experience mean to you?)
6. What has changed for you since you've been participating in these church rituals?
7. What do you see as the connection between your church experiences and your experience of daily life?  
(Probe: What is different for you now, compared with before you came to this church?)
8. What is your experience of coping with life challenges now?  
(Probe: How is coping different for you now, compared with before you came to this church?)
9. Is there anything else you would like to share with me so that I can better understand your experience and what it means to you?

### **Recruitment and Data Collection Procedures**

#### **Recruitment**

Church members initially learned of the study from an email announcement (see Appendix D) sent to all members on a church listserv maintained by myself over my four years of church participation. The invitation letter for the study was sent to the current

church leader in Oregon who subsequently forwarded the invitation letter to church members on my behalf. Instructions were provided for contacting me for those who were interested in participating. This approach provided access to participants at any of the church locations in Oregon by identifying participants who have been members for at least one year, or who have attended a minimum of 10 sessions as a member. Once a participant expressed interest by emailing me, a letter (Appendix B) was provided detailing the purpose of the study, as well as the consent form, and a request to meet with them at a location of their choosing. Participants did have the option of emailing me the informed consent, although all consent forms were received in person prior to conducting the interview.

As an alternative means of recruitment, participants were encouraged to forward the invitation letter on to any other members they felt would be interested in the study. However, this approach was never utilized as I received ample responses for the target participant population. In the end, there were 17 participants who met the eligibility criteria and were willing to participate.

Of the 17 participants who emailed their interest in participation, 14 of them responded with a positive confirmation of meeting location, date, and time for an adjusted response rate of 82%. All participants were contacted via email by myself and subsequently interviewed at the indicated dates and times. There were no changes or revisions to the Church organization, services and participation at the time of the study that may have influenced participants or their experience, or influenced interpretation of the study results.

## **Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted in person and were recorded with a digital audio recorder. Video recording was not conducted. The interviews took place at the participant's choosing, which included their private residence, with the exception of one interview, which took place at a local café. Privacy and confidentiality were assured. Only myself and the participant were present during the interview process.

Before the start of the interview, I reviewed the signed informed consent and initiated the collection of demographic data. Following the interview, participants were debriefed. I provided a brief oral summary of the nature of the study and the intent of analysis, which is to explore and compare emerging themes with the answers from other participants. I confirmed confidentiality of data and anonymity and provided contact information should questions about the study arise.

I obtained permission to re-contact them if clarification was needed. The participants briefly reviewed a summary of the conversation to ensure accuracy. I offered to send a summary of the results, with my contact information in the event they would find it necessary to follow-up on the study.

Upon completion of the study, a summary of the results will be published and circulated via a church member email listerv. The article will discuss the results of the study, the study's goal of expanding literature in health psychology, and a contact number for any questions pertaining to the nature of the study.

## **Analysis Plan**

The data analysis for a phenomenological study follows from the work of Smith et al. (2009) and Smith and Osborn (2007) using these steps or stages:

1. Create and read the transcript
2. Identify and code themes in the first case
3. Connecting and clustering the themes
4. Continuing the analysis with other cases
5. Creating a master table of themes
6. Create a narrative description with particular attention to the fidelity of the original data.

The intent is to find commonalities within and across cases that can be labeled as “themes” as a way to discover the lived experience of the participants.

After completing the process of bracketing, self-reflection and familiarization with the transcripts, I began by identifying themes (descriptive elements) to capture the unique and experiential concepts associated with each question for each participant, beginning with the first case. Then, the themes were grouped into clusters. Each interview case was subjected to the same process, and then a “master list” of themes were created. These themes are presented and discussed in the Results section of Chapter 4.

I maintained an “audit trail” of the analysis process, staying true to the original transcript. I also utilized the step of “abandoning epoche” (the suspending of judgment) to incorporate his lens in order to summarize the findings and relate them to the literature and the social significance of the study.

### **Summary**

In summary, this qualitative, phenomenological study investigates the spiritual experience of the Santo Daime Church participants in order to explore and understand how this transformative experience affects the daily lives and coping of Church



participants. This approach has been deemed the most appropriate fit to examine detailed descriptions of the meaning of the participants' spiritual experience induced by the church rituals. The research was conducted in the phenomenological tradition, and guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), so that I could gain a greater understanding of the essence of the experience. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used to maintain consistency across participants, which allowed the flexibility to re-order and expand questions depending on the unique requirements of each case.

Although I was led to the study of the Santo Daime rituals as a tool for coping with stress from personal circumstances, I worked to minimize bias in several ways. This included email communication for research inquiries; the use of bracketing during the data collection and analysis process; true presence; member checking, and the elimination of leading questions. The data collection and analysis processes were conducted with rigor so as to enhance credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Prior to initiating data collection, several steps were taken to ensure the safe and ethical treatment of the participants. This included approval by the University Human Subjects Committee and Institutional Review Board of Walden University; the review and signing of a consent form by each participant; and phone numbers of health professionals for any participant who may have felt anxiety or any other related psychological episodes that may have emerged during the interview process. Confidentiality was secured with the designation of pseudonyms.

Out of the approximately 60 adult church members, a purposive intensity sample of 12 to 15 adults was used. Participants used for the study have been immersed in the church's activities for at least one year of church session activity and/or 10 sessions to

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ensure a more solid synthesization of experience into existing life schemas. Analysis of the data involved several stages, including but not limited to connecting and clustering of the themes, self-reflection, and familiarization, the intent of which is to reveal common themes in the lived experience of the participants. Finally, I summarized the findings as relevant to the literature and the social significance of the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

The use of ayahuasca in the Santo Daime church creates liminal states that allow for self-exploration, the examination of identity and purpose, and perceived control—insights that may guide the practitioner to better manage their variety of daily and life stressors (Santos, Landeira-Fernandez, Strassman, Motta, & Cruz, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of spiritual guidance to enhance coping strategies and reduce stress among members of the Santo Daime. Using a phenomenological approach, the research posed the primary research question: What is the experience of spiritual guidance and ethnopharmacology to enhance coping strategies and reduce stress in Santo Daime Church members?

The literature suggests that stress buffering, learned helplessness and perceived control are key phenomena in understanding how individuals influence coping and quality of life. Therefore, the current research examines the following sub-questions:

SQ1: What are the life events that create stress-related symptoms?

SQ2: What are the meaningful coping strategies used by church members?

SQ3: How are the church rituals integrated into daily coping and quality of life?

Chapter 4 presents the participant recruitment, data collection and analysis procedures. Six qualitative themes and 53 subthemes emerged and are illustrated using participant testimonials. The resulting themes are summarized to address the research sub-questions. Issues of data quality and integrity are discussed.

## Participant Demographics

Fourteen individuals were interviewed (6 men and 8 women), providing detailed information regarding their experience with the Santo Daime church rituals. A brief description of each participant follows.

Participant Number 1, Adrienne, is a 63-year-old Caucasian who is a MSW mental health counselor with her own private practice. She has two grown children of unknown age. Originally from California, she moved to Kansas and had a successful practice as a counselor working with individuals with eating disorders, teenage gang members, and using such approaches as dream work, art therapy, and Jungian analysis. Adrienne felt there was no real sense of community where she lived, and felt it was time for her to have some new discoveries, so she went with her intuition and moved to Oregon. She felt she was on a “very strong, intuitive track.” She began attending services nearly 3 years ago, and has been a Daimista<sup>1</sup> for a little over 2 years, which took her approximately 9 months.

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<sup>1</sup> In the interest of efficiency, I have chosen to use the term Daimista, as opposed to fardado/fardada, when referring to either official male or female members of the Santo Daime Church. A Daimista is one of the common titles given to male or female members of the church. It is usually interchangeable with the term “fardado,” which refers to an official male church member, and “fardada,” which is an official female church member. Typically, both terms (Daimista and fardada/fardado) are equally popular in the Daime community, although this may vary according to regional or personal preference, or context. In Portuguese, *fardamento* translates to “uniform,” where fardado refers to the male’s uniform and fardada, the female uniform, both of which differ in appearance. When a spiritual work is announced, the church will sometimes indicate the dress code by using the designations “blue farda” for concentrations, curas, etc., or “white farda” for more formal dancing works, such as festivals, New Years, Mother’s Day works, etc. Thus, the main distinction is that fardado and fardada are gender and uniform specific, where Daimista refers to anyone who has become initiated into the church. Initiation involves “taking one’s star,” whereby an individual has decided to become a member and accept the Santo Daime as their main spiritual path. Both men and women will wear the official uniform to their initiation work, yet for women, the star is already embroidered on the shirt, although they receive a blessing from the padrinho (head of the church) in front of the entire congregation; whereas the men receive a brass star pendant (which closely resembles a sheriff’s badge) attached to the chest region of their uniform.

Participant Number 2, Sunshine, is a 60 year old Caucasian female who is a self-employed drama school instructor and life coach, and worked in special education for 20 years. She is married with no children. She grew up on the east coast and described her parents as accepting and loving, yet stern and close-minded, which is what motivated her to seek a more liberal and spiritually supportive community. She was looking for a shamanistic practice, and although she was not specifically looking for an experience related to the Santo Daime practice, she was seeking a mentor for a new spiritual paradigm or practice. Sunshine came to the church in April of 2009 and became a Daimista in just under a year (March, 2010).

Participant Number 3, Sterling, is a late-30s to early-40s Caucasian male computer and software engineer. He is a divorced single father of a 3 year old girl. Sterling was going through a very challenging time prior to and during his initial indoctrination into the church. He was in the middle of a financial meltdown, which ended in bankruptcy. He was having marriage problems, living in an isolated community with his wife and child, and was sleep-deprived due to his daughter's sleeping problems. Sterling has been in church attendance for over 3 years, coming to the church his first time in November of 2009. It took him about 10 months to become a Daimista.

Participant Number 4, Iris, is a mid-to-late 30s Caucasian divorced female acupuncturist with one 9 year old daughter who currently lives with her. She had lived in an ashram and had a spiritual guru at a yoga-based spiritual retreat center, but felt like she needed additional spiritual aid with some emotional and relationship issues, as she felt as though she was treading water with her meditative yoga practice. Her then-husband had been diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder, and later she was diagnosed with

conarccissism personality disorder. She went through a very challenging divorce and custody battle, which happened before and throughout attending church services. Iris began attending church services in March of 2008. She attended for 1 year, and then stopped attending for a year due to the marital and custody issues. She became a Daimista as soon as she came back, which was in March of 2010.

Participant Number 5, Santo Luz, is a mid- to late-30s Caucasian male. He works as a renovator/contractor for various renovation projects. He had traveled around a great deal before settling in Portland, and was very interested in studying sacred plants. He had traveled to Peru and drank ayahuasca with a shaman for about 6 months prior to coming to the church. Santo Luz has been a Daimista for nearly 4 years. His first church session was March 14, 2009. He knew the very night of his first session that he wanted to become a Daimista, for which he became approximately one month later.

Participant Number 6, Musashi, is a 37 year old Brazilian married male with two children—one 10 year old from a previous marriage and living in Rio de Janeiro, and an 18 month old boy from his current marriage. He is currently a full-time student working to earn his MBA from a local university. His connection to the Santo Daime runs much deeper than most members, as the church is originally from Brazil where he grew up, and having attended services for over 20 years and having been a Daimista for 16 years—longer than all of the churches in Oregon and Washington have even been around. Musashi was a high school student on a spiritual yoga and meditation path, but felt he needed something to “intensify and purify” his spiritual practice and experience. His social environment was impinging on his spiritual development, as he began smoking

marijuana and drinking heavily. His peers began using cocaine, which is right around the time he sought the services of the Santo Daime.

Participant Number 7, Walda, is a 26 year old single Jewish Israeli female medical student. She is currently attending an Eastern naturopathic medical school. Before she came to the church, Walda and her family had just moved to California from Israel when she was a 16 year old high school student. She was very isolated and disconnected from American culture and did not have any friends. She was very unhappy and thus resorted to chronic marijuana use to help numb her feelings of disconnection and unhappiness. Walda has attended church services for a total of about 10 years, yet it took her 9 years to become a Daimista. She began attending Daime rituals through an unorthodox shamanic practitioner. The services were related to the Daime only through the practice of the hymns and the doctrine, whereas the structure and the uniforms were absent. She attended for 6 years with this alternative Daime branch, then moved to Portland and began attending the local church. She became a Daimista 3 years later.

Participant Number 8, Kathy, is a late-20s to early-30s Caucasian married female and works as a licensed massage therapist. She has two kids of ages 20 months and 3 years. Prior to her attending services, Kathy was going through a very difficult relationship of 5 years, which resulted in a lot of emotional and psychological pain, as well as several abortions. She had been praying for a man to help her on her own spiritual path. Two days later, she met Jagube at a spiritual retreat center, who then introduced her to the Santo Daime. She has had 4 years of service, starting in February of 2009, and it took her approximately 9 months to become a Daimista (October, 2009).

Participant Number 9, Jagube, is a Caucasian male and husband of Kathy (participant #8), and also works a licensed massage therapist. He was also struggling in a very difficult relationship, had a tremendous amount of heartbreak, as well as a very strong addiction to marijuana. He too was praying for a woman to help support his spiritual path with the Daime, when he met Kathy at the retreat center where he was praying. May of 2013 will mark his 7 year anniversary with Santo Daime. It took him approximately 6 months to become a Daimista.

Participant Number 10, Samantha, is an early- to mid-30s Brazilian female housewife, currently married to Musashi (participant #5). She only has the one child they share together (20 months). Samantha was living in Rio de Janeiro when she met Musashi, although she did not attend any church services while there. She had no significant stressor or religious background, although she did have a yoga practice and some intermittent experience with the Umbanda religion. She moved from Rio to Portland with Musashi in early 2009 and attended her first church session 1 year later, where it then took her 1 year to become a Daimista. Therefore, she has a combined total of approximately 3 years of church service, and 2 years as a Daimista.

Participant Number 11, Juniper, is a mid-40s married Caucasian with one 3 year old boy and a newborn. He is the owner of a 'folk-medicine' business that cultivates wild herbs and plants, turning them into a variety of herbal remedies. He also owns a school of "forest medicine" that teaches individuals how to cultivate wild plants and herbs for medicinal purposes in addition to developing spiritual relationships to various plants and plant medicines. His idea for the school and business came from a vision he had during a church service. Prior to the church, Juniper described that he had a pretty good spiritual



practice, but was seeking “spiritual completion and wholeness.” He began attending the church over 5 years ago. It took him approximately 7 months to become a Daimista.

Participant Number 12, Cedar, is a 60s married Native American female who is married to a Daimista in the church. She has no children. Cedar could be described as an ‘entheogenic scholar’ and does research on many plant medicines, including ayahuasca, peyote, iboga, and others. She is a member of several entheogenic research groups. She is very experienced and educated on ethnopharmacology, having received her Master’s degree in anthropology regarding indigenous Peruvian permaculture. She had drunk ayahuasca for 9 years in South America before coming to the Santo Daime, and had done extensive research on ayahuasca as well as the Santo Daime church, having read one of only a few books published on the church itself, *Forest of Visions*. She has been in the church for 3.5 years, and a Daimista for 2.5 years. She is a current Daime musician and performs in most of the church services.

Participant Number 13, Angel, is a 59 year old single Caucasian female working in the infant and toddler division at a Jewish community school. She is retired from doing work as a medical technician and researcher in a bio-medical lab, having done research related to DNA. She was born in Africa to Baptist missionary parents and spent most of her childhood years there. She was never comfortable with the religious setting and context, and so ended up leaving the church in her late teens and started a spiritual yogic path, but she felt it was incomplete and needed “wholeness.” Angel has been with the Santo Daime church for 7 years and has been a Daimista for 6 years.

Participant Number 14, Wichar, is a late-20s to mid-30s Caucasian single male with no children who works as a licensed massage therapist. Prior to the church, he was

in massage school and herbalism school, as well as on a spiritual path seeking ‘wholeness.’ Wichar has been a Daimista for 1.5 years, starting with the church since June of 2009, and taking him 2 years to become a Daimista.

The average length of church participation for 12 of the 14 participants was just over 4 years, whereas one participant from Brazil, Musashi, had 21 years of service, and another one, Walda, had 10 years of service. On average, it took 13 of the participants 11 months to become a Daimista, whereas it took one participant, Walda, 9 years. The aforementioned participants, Musashi and Walda, were excluded from the group average as their inclusion in the data would have skewed the group averages for length of service and length of time taken to achieve membership.

#### **Data Collection Setting and Storage**

Out of all participants, 12 were interviewed face-to-face, as discussed in Chapter 3, whereas the other two were interviewed via a video Skype session, where both participant and researcher could see each other. The Skype sessions were conducted due to the long distance between myself and the participants, both of which live over 300 miles from my current residence. For the 12 face-to-face interviews, consent forms were reviewed and signed at the beginning of each interview. For the two Skype sessions, the consent forms were also reviewed at the beginning of each interview, then signed and sent to my address via United States Postal Service to his place of residence. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder, filed, and saved in a secure database on my private computer. Each interview was transcribed by myself and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. All identifying information was removed from the transcripts prior to verification procedures. All recordings will be erased upon completion of this

study, and all paperwork will be destroyed through a professional shredding service five years after completion of this study.

### **Data Analysis**

All interviews were recorded and transcribed onto a word processing document. Once they were transcribed, they were transferred to another word processing document and organized by chronological sequence, then analyzed through a multistep process. Prior to analysis, a pre-coding process was conducted during transcription by putting key words in bold font. The first step in data analysis included reading each complete transcript to obtain a basic impression of what the data were presenting. The second step involved highlighting statements made by the participants that had specific relevance to the experience of improvements in overall coping skills related to stressors; improvements in mental, physical, and/or emotional health; transformational or pivotal experiences and outcomes; descriptors related to the process of liminality and spirituality correlated to the experience of ayahuasca and the spiritual guidance of the church services; and finally, any significant descriptors or themes that emerged among all participants. Distinguishing accounts pertinent to the experience were then identified and readjusted into descriptive articulations using common everyday language relevant to the thoughts, emotions, and feelings expressive of their experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 252). While sorting through the data for common experiences, exploratory comments and questions were recorded in a separate word processing document for later interpretation and theoretical considerations.

The above process led to the development of specific themes relevant to the experience of coping with life stressors as well as the liminality and spiritual experience

of the participants. Based on these specific themes, individual descriptions were formed by listing the general themes for each participant at the end of his transcript. Individual descriptions of the experience were then consolidated by theme similarity to form an overall group description (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Upon a more in-depth exploration of the data, several discrepant cases were identified. Individual and group descriptions, as well as discrepant cases, are provided later in this chapter.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Following the completion, transcription, and analysis of the interviews, the process of verification followed. The data for this study were verified by highlighting researcher bias, member checking, and rich, thick description as suggested by Creswell (1998, pp. 201-203). The rich, thick description has been demonstrated by using direct quotes from the transcribed interviews to provide support for the statements listed in the overall group description, which follows in the next section. The process of conducting member checks was completed following the analysis and verification of the transcripts. Member checking is a process of verifying the accuracy of the findings with each of the participants involved in the study. I generated member checking questions based on the overall group description of the experience and can be found in Appendix D.

Member checking in this study occurred 14 days following the last interview and included sending each of the participants interviewed an email attachment with key excerpts of their verbatim answers in addition to a list of group themes, where they were asked to verify their statements for accuracy and/or expand on their answers or the group description of the experience. All members concurred with the overall group description of the experience after reviewing the themes listed. There were several reiterations and

clarifications regarding the concepts of balanço<sup>2</sup> and mirações<sup>3</sup>, including reaffirming statements made about integrating these concepts into their own lives for enhanced coping skills for daily and life stressors. Overall, there were no disagreements with the group description of their experience. The verbatim email responses from the interviews are provided in Appendix E.

Transferability (the degree to which the findings of this inquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project) was addressed in several ways. For example, consistency of the use of church language throughout the testimonials with the addition of helpful translations articulated through follow-up questions and member-checking provided in-depth insight into the nature of the phenomena under scrutiny. Additionally, the articulation of the church rituals and the use of quotations throughout this study, further provide examples of transferability.

Based on my own experience and the informal conversations with various members of the church throughout the last 5 years, I had some expectations of the

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<sup>2</sup> Balanço is often described in the Santo Daime church as the strong trembling and shaking that precedes purification. As will be discussed in further detail later, this often occurs during a specific stage of the spiritual work, and as stage within the individual's own spiritual growth. There is some overlap between the church's own concept of balanço and the shaking, and often jerky movements and bizarre bodily contortions usually seen during healing works (curas) that are associated with mediumship practice (individuals are only allowed to practice mediumship during curas). These same ecstatic movements may also be similar to kriyas, which may be odd movements, actions, or vocalizations as a result of "clearing" the chakras as seen in Kundalini yoga practices.

<sup>3</sup> Marcelo Mercante (2006), who conducted his dissertation research on the Barquinha church, an off-shoot of the Santo Daime religion, describes the miração, or mirações (plural of miração) as "spontaneous visual imagery experienced by the members of Santo Daime and the Barquinha, [which] are transcendental moments for the participants and are accessed in the rituals promoted by the Brazilian Ayahuasca religions. A miração may involve other perceptual modalities, such as sounds, tastes, or odors. However, even when an experienced miração is not limited to its visionary aspect, the visual elements are most often its most intense aspect. The miração is, in general, a very emotional experience, and the most anticipated one; it is the moment when people receive the teachings of spiritual beings, a source of knowledge and of self-transformation. The miração is the highest moment in the ecstatic experience. It has a powerful introspective aspect and sometimes bears with it the power of a revelation, occupying a vital place in rituals. It is the transcendence medium par excellence" (p. 31).

processes similar to the three phases of ritual experience outlined by Turner (1967), for example, balanço, releasing blockages, mirações, Christ consciousness, and the long-term relief of various psychological symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, and/or substance abuse. Several members had discussed their personal stories with me outside of the context of the study and without any knowledge of the study. Therefore, I was expecting to find that other participants experienced similar processes and results, and was thus cognizant of this expectation prior to and during the interviews. A faithful effort was thus made prior to each interview to augment the awareness that the experience heard and transcribed was of clear, sound, and authentic participant ownership. It was my role as the researcher to pay close attention to their experience objectively and refrain from delineating questions that may have led the participant to reciprocate in a manner consistent with the experience of this researcher. This approach was utilized during each step of the data analysis process as well.

### **Preparation for Presentation**

The findings below are presented by specifying the term used to label the experience, which originated from data analysis, and are followed by what these findings meant for participants in this study. This is then followed by analysis of the research sub-questions concerning the experience of spiritual guidance and ethnopharmacology to enhance coping strategies and reduce stress in Santo Daime Church members. Finally, discrepant cases are discussed.

It is important to note that the findings below were clustered into separate tracts. First, they were organized in a hierarchical fashion from highest to lowest frequency then sorted by relationship to the three phases of ritual experience as described by Turner

(1967), with special attention to the concept of liminality, which was described in detail in Chapter 1. The overriding themes below are discussed in accordance with Turner's three phases of ritual experience, which is considered useful for understanding major events in the narrative and the effect those events have on the individual constructing the narrative. Rather than discuss the results by order of frequency, themes are presented by order of the three phases of ritual experience, where the number of descriptors are provided within each main theme and subtheme to demonstrate their frequency. Tables are provided to further illustrate thematic frequency. Although there were originally 80 individual themes identified, those discussed were chosen based on their overriding characteristic. That is, themes were chosen that appeared to pervade all aspects of a participant's experience. Upon further analysis of the data, many of the theme clusters were found to be related to pivotal themes, thus the related themes were aggregated and labeled as subthemes.

The top six themes are discussed through an analytic immersion within all cases and within each case to gain a sense of the lived experience of the phenomenon with identification of significant statements. This is followed by a comparison of significant statements within and across all cases to identify categories of statements common to all participants and the identification of corresponding themes. A relationship to the basic framework of the three phases of ritual experience—separation, liminal phase, and reaggregation (Turner, 1967)—was used to examine the transformation of religious experience in reducing stress-related symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, or /substance abuse/addiction.

The method of determining frequency of occurrence for the themes consisted of identifying separate passages, or statements, as theme descriptors. The method by which frequencies are identified includes separate passages either from each of the questions from a participant, or separate discussions or statements within one particular question, as many participants provided different instances, or recalled separate profound experiences. These separate passages are labeled as “descriptors” in the identification of their frequencies and are indicated as a numerical value in parentheses adjacent to the identified theme.

## **Results**

### **Overview of Primary Themes and Sub-Themes**

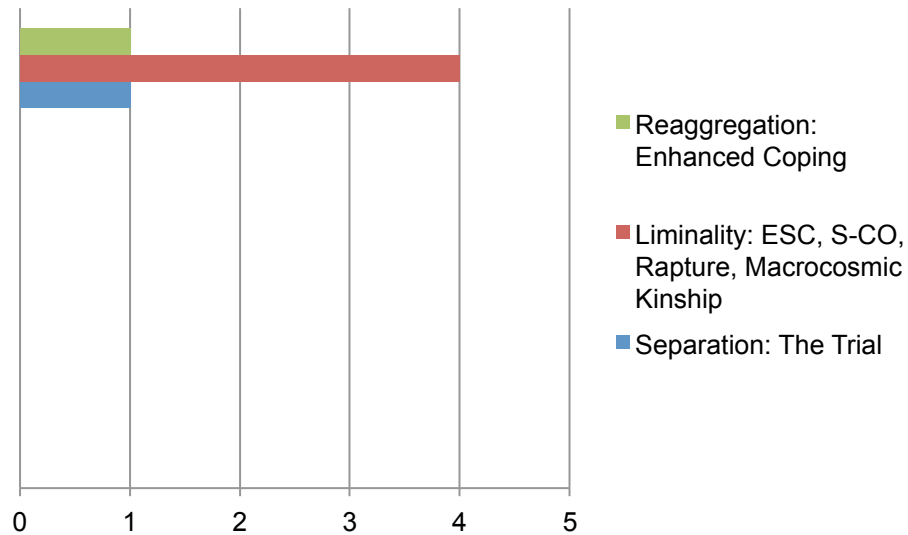
Six themes and 53 sub-themes were identified. The six primary themes are: The Trial, Ecstatic Spiritual Communion, Supernatural Contact, Rapture, Macroscopic Kinship, and Enhanced Coping (Improvement, Personal Development and Skills). For each theme, the subthemes are organized as follows:

1. The Trial: Balanço; Aparelho; Disembodiment; Deconstruction and Uprooting, Blockage Release, Purging, and Nakedness and Vulnerability.
2. Ecstatic Spiritual Communion (ESC): Christ Consciousness, Jesus Christ, Mary/Divine Mother, Divine Light, Awakenings of Consciousness/Spiritual Illumination, Spiritual Transformation, Spiritual Messages, and Divine Connection.
3. Supernatural Contact (S-Co): Contact with Benevolent Beings, Contact with Malevolent Spirits, Contact with Mystical Beings, and Contact with Spiritual Guides/Teachers.



4. Rapture: Heart-Opening, Heart-space, Heart-Centering, Love, and Community Love.
5. Macrocosmic Kinship: Nature Connection, Plant-Spirit Communion, and Christ-Gaian Paradigm.
6. Enhanced Coping: Expedited Healing, Expedited Spiritual Awareness, Relationship Improvement, Family Dynamics Improvement, Interpersonal Skills Improvement, Spiritual Faith and Support, Conflict Resolution, Enhanced Perception of Needs, Clarity, Detachment, Openness, Self-Affirmation, Firmeza (strength and firmness), Perseverance, Stability and Calmness, Psychological Self-Improvement, Direction/Purpose, Compassion, Patience and Tolerance, and Coping with the following issues: addiction, chronic pain, trauma, cultural anxiety, physical ailments, anxiety, and depression.

The themes and sub-themes can be further organized into the framework of the three phases of ritual experience—separation, liminal phase, and reaggregation (Turner, 1967). This is visually presented in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* The 3 phases of ritual experience with corresponding main themes. The above figure represents the presence of main themes for each stage of the ritual, as indicated by numbers 0-5 on the X axis (as listed alongside each phase). Note that

**The Trial.** The initial stage of the Daime journey marks a very important initiation and process—what I have come to label, *The Trial*, which could be described as a “transformative struggle.” This was the 2<sup>nd</sup> most frequent theme and consisted of a total of 9 sub-themes, which include *Balanço* (4), *Aparelho*/Bodily Sensations, (9), Disembodiment (3), Deconstruction and Uprooting (20), Blockage Release (7), Purging (5), and Nakedness and Vulnerability (3), with a total of 51 descriptors. Table 1 below presents within-case frequencies of The Trial sub-themes.

Table 1

*The 7 Subthemes and Stages of the Trial*

	<i>Balanço</i>	Aparelh o	OBE*	D-Con**	Clearing Blockages†	Purge‡	Naked§
Adrienne		3		5	2		
Sunshine		1		1		1	1
Sterling			1				
Iris			1	1	2		
Santo Luz							
Musashi		1	1				1
Walda				1			
Kathy	2						1
Jagube		2		2			
Samantha					2	1	
Juniper	1			2	1	2	
Cedar				2			
Angel	1			2		1	
Wichar		2		4			
Total	4	9	3	20	7	5	3

\*OBE = Disembodiment

\*\*D-Con = Deconstruction

†Blockages = Clearing Blockages

‡Purge = Physical or Psychic Purging

§Naked = Nakedness & Vulnerability

*Note.* The first column, *Balanço*, referred to descriptions of actual shaking and may have included emerging mediumship work. No participant mentioned this term during the actual interview. I chose this spiritual description since the process or practice surrounding this phenomenon almost always involves some form of purification process. This is distinct from “aparelho,” which involves bodily sensations (e.g., heaviness, euphoric sensations, or other perceived bodily disturbances or sensations), and may often set the stage for perceived abduction by supernatural entities, or communion with divine entities.

The Trial as a descriptive theme was used because of the characteristic way in which ayahuasca brings one through a series of self-examinations (metaphor of a court trial involving examination, cross-examination, sentencing, etc.), whereby one may painfully process hidden traumas, negative behaviors and thoughts, etc., and consequently cleanse oneself to become “rehabilitated.” In the Santo Daime tradition, this

is often referred to as *balanço* and *passagem*, yet these terms refer to specific processes within the Trial, where *balanço* was considered as a sub-theme.

*Passagem* can be described as the special moment within the spiritual work, when each person needs to overcome quickly what is being crystallized to attain spiritual and psychological transformation (Polari De Alverga, 1999). Polari further asserts that depending on the resistance to the surrender asked by the Daime, the *passagem* is made with some effort and suffering. This term was described in one of the first books written on the Santo Daime, *The Forest of Visions* by Padrinho (Godfather) Alex Polari de Alverga, a disciple of the late Padrinho Sebastião Mota de Melo, the direct disciple of Mestre Irineu, the original founder of the Santo Daime Church.

*Passagem* was not directly identified in the overall group experience, as it is a little more of a complex occurrence and many Daimistas are unfamiliar with this term, yet most knew about *balanço*, and furthermore, it is easier to identify given the frequency with which many participants shake or tremble as an effect of ayahuasca consumption. However, in the Santo Daime, this is not discussed simply as “an effect of the medicine” but rather a spiritual transformation whereby one is being cleansed of impurities so that they may more wholesomely “receive the spirit” within their *aparelho*.

**Ecstatic Spiritual Communion (ESC).** The Trial in the Daime works is often a process that may eventually lead up to what is known in the Daime community as the *miração*, which was the most frequent theme and relates to the main ritual concept discussed in Chapter 2—liminality (Turner, 1967)—for which I have labeled “Ecstatic Spiritual Communion” (ESC). There were a total of 66 descriptors of this theme, which consists of 9 subthemes: Christ Consciousness (10), Jesus Christ (6), Mary/Divine

Mother (5), Divine Light (13), Awakenings of Consciousness/Spiritual Illumination (5), Spiritual Transformation (7), Spiritual Messages (3), and Divine Connection (7).

Although some of these sub-themes may appear to correlate or blend together, e.g., “spiritual transformation” and “spiritual illumination,” there are distinctions that exist (e.g., one must become illuminated before becoming transformed). Further, this relates to the importance of presenting the data as described by the participants to avoid bias in data interpretation. Table 2 below presents within-case frequencies of ESC subthemes.

Table 2

*The 8 sub-themes & stages of ESC*

	C- Con*	Jesus Christ	Divine Mother	Divine Light	Illumin ation	Transf orm <sup>†</sup>	Spiritual Messages	Divine- Con <sup>‡</sup>
Adrie ne	1							
Sunsh ine				3	1			
Sterli ng					3		1	
Iris					1			
Santo Luz	1		1	1	1			
Musa shi		1						1
Wald a	2	1	1		1			1
Kathy Jagub e	1	1	1	1				1
Sama ntha				2	2	1		
Junip er	1	1	1	2	2	1		1
Cedar	1							1

Angel Wich ar	3	2	1	2	1	2	2	2
Total	10	6	5	13	15	7	3	7

\*C-Con = Christ Consciousness

†Transform = Spiritual Transformation

‡Divine-Con = Divine Connection

It is important to note here that ESC (ecstatic spiritual communion) bears some resemblance to the *miração*, one of the most anticipated events in the Daime ritual. This was the most frequent theme, yet the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the Daime ritual as evident from the group experience. “Divine light” and “illumination” are distinct in that the former is an actual perceived focal illumination, whereas the latter is a psychological and spiritual illumination, as in enlightenment. Table 2 is distinct from Table 1, in that these particular sub-stages do not always occur in the order from left to right as seen above, as there may be some overlap and switching of order. For example, spiritual messages may come first, whereas divine light may come last. The sub-themes, “transformation” and “divine connection” comes close to capturing the overall experience of the adjacent sub-themes, although a significant number of participants described them as distinct phenomena.

**Supernatural Contact (S-Co).** “Supernatural Contact” (S-Co) was the third most frequent theme, and although there may be some overlap regarding contact with other beings during ESC, it is most frequently associated with contact of a more divine or religious nature. I made the decision to separate this theme because it occurs outside of ESC, either before, such as during the Trial, or during an individual’s mediumship practice, or anytime during a church session. There were a total of 30 descriptors, with the following sub-themes: Contact with Benevolent Beings (16), Contact with

Malevolent Spirits (3), Contact with Mystical Beings (Orixas, Caboclos, etc.) (2), and Contact with Spiritual Guides/Teachers. Table 3 below presents within-case frequencies of S-Co sub-themes.

An Orisha (spelling variations include Orisa or Orixá) is described as a deity or spirit reflecting one of the many expressions of God in the Yoruba spiritual tradition. The spiritual lineage is part of many religious practices around the world, although within the Santo Daime, Orixas are often spirit guides adopted from beliefs and practices of both the Candomblé and the Umbanda, the latter of which is a Brazilian syncretic religion with elements of Spiritism, Catholicism, and indigenous lore. This is very similar to the Santo Daime church itself, which blends African deities, Catholicism, Christianity, and Spiritism. Members who see Orixas believe them to be their spirit guides, and many Daimistas who practice mediumship may often “work” with these guides for continued spiritual development.

The term *caboclo* is also employed as an alternate term for the Orishas of the Candomblé religion, or the Umbanda as described previously in the second footnote. The caboclo is also an Orisha. As mentioned before, alternate spelling variations include Orisa or Orixá, where the latter spelling is typically used in the Santo Daime church.

Table 3

*The 5 sub-themes of Supernatural Contact (S-Co)*

	Benevolent Beings	Malevolent Beings	Mystical Beings (Orixas)	Spirit Guides	<i>Mediums</i>
Adrienne					
Sunshine	1				•
Sterling	2				
Iris	1				
Santo					
Luz	2	2	1	1	•
Musashi	1				
Walda					
Kathy	3			1	•
Jagube	1	1		2	
Samantha			1		
Juniper	2			2	•
Cedar				1	
Angel	2			3	•
Wichar	1		1		
Total	16	3	3	10	5 Mediums

The sub-themes listed above do not occur in any particular sequence and may also occur during any of the 2 main phases of the Daime ritual (i.e., Trial or ESC), and especially occurs during mediumship practice. There were 5 mediums in the group who described contact with either benevolent or malevolent beings, or both. Malevolent beings had a tendency to occur during either mediumship work or during the Trial while



processing negative behaviors or coping strategies (e.g., addiction). Some mystical beings may also serve as spirit guides, as in the case of Santo Luz (above).

It must be noted that there were a total of five participants who described mediumship as part of a routine practice within the Daime sessions, which may involve contact with either malevolent or benevolent beings. Their mediumship was only described during certain healing works (curas or mesa brancas), when mediumship is allowed for their own purposes or the purpose of healing others in the Daime “hospitals,” which a designated area within the ceremonial space and outside of the main circle used for healing purposes. These mediums became aware of their abilities through a rigorous process that initially involved contact with many beings. Again, this is distinct from ESC, or even what Daimistas describe as the *miração*, although there may be some overlap between the *mirações* and mediumship work, as the latter may be an aspect of the former. This will be discussed in greater detail in this section.

**Rapture.** Rapture was the fourth most frequent theme with a total of 23 descriptors and includes the following subthemes: Heart-Opening (8), Heart-space (2), Heart-Centering (2), Love (9), and Community Love (2). This is more relevant to the third ritual phase, reaggregation, and tends to be a type of “resolution” or psychological balance of one’s Trial through the spiritual work of the church sessions. Examples may include the sensation of one’s heart opening after a difficult work, or feeling reconnected to the heart, as a type of spiritual and psychological affirmation, or feeling more love towards family, friends, or community. Table 4 below presents within-case frequencies of Rapture sub-themes.

Table 4

*The 5 sub-themes of Rapture*

	Heart-Opening	Heart-Space	Heart-Centering	Love	Community Love
Adrienne Sunshine		1		1	
Sterling	2			1	
Iris		1	1		
Santo Luz				2	
Musashi					
Walda					
Kathy					2
Jagube				3	
Samantha	1			1	
Juniper	2				
Cedar					
Angel	3		1	1	
Wichar					
Total	8	2	2	9	2

As seen from the above data, the foundation of rapture involves some aspect of the heart—opening, space, and centering. Rapture is also an all-encompassing phenomenon, which involves love for self, community, and nature/environment. The latter object of rapture was not included in this data set as it emerged as its own theme with related sub-themes. All the sub-themes are very closely related and overlap to some degree, as several of the above sub-themes may have been included within one testimonial or descriptor. The theme of rapture and the related sub-themes are very closely tied to the data from Table 2, specifically Jesus Christ and Christ Consciousness. These sub-themes within ESC set the stage for rapture.

**Macrocosmic Kinship.** The fourth most frequent theme with 23 descriptors was “Macrocosmic Kinship,” where participants described either a heightened sensitivity to nature or their surrounding environment, or a greater overall connection to nature in what was occasionally referred to as “plant-spirit communion” or “transfiguration.” The sub-themes included: Nature Connection (14), Plant-Spirit Communion (7), and Christ-Gaian Paradigm (2). Table 5 below presents within-case frequencies of Macrocosmic Kinship sub-themes.

Table 5

*The 3 sub-themes of Macrocosmic Kinship*

	Greater Connection	Plant-Spirit Communion	Christ-Gaian Paradigm
Adrienne	3		
Sunshine	1	1	
Sterling			
Iris	1		
Santo Luz	1	1	
Musashi			
Walda	2	1	
Kathy			
Jagube		1	
Samantha			
Juniper	3	1	1
Cedar	1	1	1
Angel			
Wichar	2	1	
Total	14	7	2

Regarding the above data, Macrocosmic Kinship involves a predominant connection to nature, a heightened appreciation and/or sensitivity to nature, or even a “rapture” toward nature, and is related to a form of Christ Consciousness, which is the basis behind the sub-theme above, “Christ-Gaian Paradigm.” Along with “rapture,” this theme also occurs during the 3<sup>rd</sup> experiential stage of the Daime ritual. There may appear to be overlap between “greater connection” and “plant-spirit communion,” although prima facie, the former refers to a greater appreciation for nature, or even “all things natural,” whereas the latter involves a spiritual component, such as interacting with plant spirits.

**Enhanced Coping.** Central to the dominant theme of this study includes the process of the church sessions enabling more effective coping mechanisms for stressors, which is related to the final ritual phase of reaggregation, and beyond into one’s daily living routines. There were 13 descriptors from 12 of the 14 participants describing significant relief from daily and life stressors. However, all of the participants described themes related to enhanced levels of overall emotional, physical, and psychological functioning, which to varying degrees may be incorporated into more effective coping mechanisms for dealing with daily and life stressors. For example, many participants reported greater life functioning and better relationships through their enhanced spiritual awareness, which ultimately contributes to overall levels of positive coping mechanisms for a variety of stressors.

Overall, 26 sub-themes were developed within the main theme of Enhanced Coping and fall into three main categories: improvement, personal development, and skills. These are organized as follows:

**Improvement:** Relationship Improvement (5), Family Dynamics Improvement (2), Interpersonal Skills Improvement (5), Conflict Resolution (5), Enhanced Perception of Needs (2), Clarity (3), Detachment (3), Direction/Purpose (1), Self-Affirmation (12), Psychological Self-Improvement (11);

**Personal Development:** *Firmeza* (strength and firmness) (9), Perseverance (1), Stability and Calmness (5), Compassion (8), Patience and Tolerance (1); and

**Skills:** Expedited Healing (i.e., getting much quicker relief than traditional therapeutic methods for a variety of issues) (6), Expedited Spiritual Awareness (8), Spiritual Faith and Support (2), Openness (2), and Coping with the following issues: addiction (4), chronic pain (1), trauma (2), cultural anxiety (3), physical ailments (3), anxiety (2), and depression (2). Tables 6 - 9 below present within-case frequencies of coping sub-theme.

Table 6

*Sub-themes 1-6 (of 26) of Enhanced Coping*

	<i>Stress-Coping<sup>a</sup></i>	↑ Heal <sup>*</sup>	↑ Spirit <sup>**</sup>	Relation- ships	Family	IP <sup>†</sup>	F & S <sup>‡</sup>
Adrienne	1			1		1	1
Sunshine	1		3	1			
Sterling	1		1				
Iris	1	2	2			1	
Santo							
Luz				1			1
Musashi	1						
Walda	1					2	
Kathy	1			1	1		
Jagube	2	3	1	1	1	1	
Samantha							
Juniper	1						
Cedar	1	1	1				
Angel	1						
Wichar	1						
Total	13	6	8	5	2	5	2

\* ↑ Heal = Expedited Healing

\*\* ↑ Spirit = Expedited Spirituality

† IP = Interpersonal Relationships

‡ F & S = Faith & Support

<sup>a</sup>The term “supra-theme,” which could also be called a “sub-aggregate” theme, refers not to the aggregate, “coping with stressors,” which contains 26 sub-themes, but rather to testimony where something closely resembling or exactly matching the phrase “coping with stressors,” “coping with stress,” or “coping with life challenges” was used, most often as a response to question #9 in the interview guide, “What is your life like now coping with life challenges?” However, many of the sub-themes were also included in this question. As explained in this chapter, further examination revealed many sub-themes directly related to coping with daily and life stressors/challenges.

Table 7

*Sub-themes 7-11 (of 26) of Enhanced Coping*

	Conflict Resolution	Perception of Needs	Clarity	Detach	Openness
Adrienne Sunshine			1		
Sterling Iris		2		1	
Santo Luz Musashi	2				
Walda Kathy Jagube	1				
Samantha Juniper			1		1 1
Cedar Angel	1 1				
Wichar				1	
Total	5	2	3	3	2

*Note.* All sub-themes listed above represent characteristics or skills that have been improved upon, e.g., “greater clarity,” or “improved conflict resolution,” etc. All items list above also have a particular motif and are all mostly inter-related and inter-dependent.

Table 8

*Sub-themes 12-19 (of 26) of Enhanced Coping*

	Self-Affirm <sup>*</sup>	Firmeza	Persv <sup>*</sup>	S & C <sup>†</sup>	ψ Self-↑ <sup>‡</sup>	Direction	Compassion	P & T <sup>§</sup>
Adrienne Sunshine		1			1			
Sterling	1			1	2	1		
Iris Santo					1			
Luz		2			1		3	
Musashi		2		3	1			
Walda		1					2	
Kathy	3							
Jagube	1		1		2		1	1
Samantha	2				2			
Juniper	3	1					1	
Cedar		1			1			
Angel	2			1			1	
Wichar		1						
Total	12	9	1	5	11	1	8	1

\* Self-Affirm = Self-Affirmation

\*\* Persv = Perseverance

† S &amp; C = Stability &amp; Calmness

‡ ψ Self- ↑ = Psychological Self-Improvement

§ P &amp; T = Patience &amp; Tolerance

*Note.* As opposed to the last 5 to 6 tables, this motif, as observed from the overall group experience, has a tendency to occur in relatively consistent sequence (from left to right as listed above), with some overlap and/or co-occurrence. For example, if a participant attains self-affirmation, they may gain strength (firmeza) to persevere, or gain firmeza and perseverance simultaneously. This may then engender peace of mind, or stability and calmness as a trait that is carried over into daily life. For some, this may consequently create direction in life, overall compassion, and patience and tolerance. Note that calmness, patience, and tolerance may overlap with openness, detachment, and clarity (Table 6b). Thus, this motif almost always begins with self-affirmation, followed by firmeza and perseverance, whereas the latter sub-themes may occur in different order or simultaneously.



Table 9

*Sub-themes 20-26 (of 26) of Enhanced Coping*

	Addictio n	Chronic Pain	Trauma	Cultural Anxiety	Physical Ailment	Anxiety	Depression
Adrienne Sunshine Sterling					1		
Iris Santo Luz Musashi Walda				1			
Kathy Jagube	3	1		1	2		
Samantha Juniper			1			1	
Cedar Angel						1	2
Wichar	1						
Total	4	1	2	3	3	2	2

*Note.* All sub-themes listed above represent coping with physical, emotional, or psychological conditions; negative behavioral patterns; or repressed negative events.

A more detailed discussion of the identified themes in order of sequence and the ritual phases of experience as related to these themes can be found in Appendix E. This section addresses how the identified themes and ritual experiences meaningfully address the three research sub-questions, and inform the primary inquiry of coping and stress relief in participants of the Santo Daime church.

**SQ#1: What are the life events that create stress-related symptoms?**

The data in this study reveal a number of life events that created stress-related symptoms in the lives of the participants. Some of these are consistent with what the

professional literature and clinical practice (Antonovsky, 1987; Apker & Ray, 2003; Cohen, Tyrrell, & Smith, 1993) would recognize as stressful life events. Others identified event/experiences that connote more intrapersonal discontent or crisis; the need to find life direction; and/or a sense of being “grounded”. Some participants reported that a combination of several life events co-existed to create stress-related symptoms.

**Spiritual/Religious Discontent.** This refers to individuals who experienced relative discontent with their prior spiritual path and created daily and life stress. For example, Kathy described how she “fell in” with the Mormons for 3 years in her teen years, even though her family was nonreligious.

It was a super-big struggle to my family....they hated it, and my mom was always fighting with me and I just wanted to belong and have a relationship with God and I wanted to be spiritual and I wanted a community.

Iris admitted a lack of resolve through her yoga-based spiritual practice: I had a spiritual practice, but I felt like I needed something to blast through some deep stuff and I felt like I could have probably spent the rest of my life there, but I felt like I was treading water. I felt like I had these deep, inner issues that I wasn't able to get to.

**Substance Abuse.** At least four participants described a form of unhealthy lifestyle and/or substance abuse: “I was trying to quit smoking, drinking, and felt I needed a divergent path from potential substance and cocaine abuse” (Musashi).

Walda described her “cultural isolation” as an impetus for chronic marijuana use: “I was smoking a lot of weed...everyday...to kind of numb myself. Yeah, I was pretty unhappy.” Jagube also described an addiction to marijuana:

I was working with a psycho-spiritual sort of addiction to marijuana, and that tied in with a perception that I couldn't really hold down a relationship with a woman because of my habitual use of marijuana. So, that was hard. That's actually really significant, because I wanted a good relationship and I didn't feel like I could hold it down.

During a discussion of his life prior to the Daime services, Wichar acknowledged an unhealthy lifestyle pattern:

I was drinking a lot at that time in my life. I was struggling with smoking cigarettes, partying...just unhealthy habits. Being lazy, eating poorly, being distracted. I was having a hard time with my schoolwork. I just didn't know how to be a successful person and just going through a lot of escapism, which I think has kind of been a big thing throughout my life, whether that was through drugs and alcohol, or through fantasy novels and videos games. Ya know, it's kind of been a consistent theme in my life—someone that didn't fit in well.

**Relationship Issues.** There were four participants that described relationship issues as the cause of daily and life stressors. Sunshine acknowledged, "I was on the verge of divorcing my husband. So, I went into my first work with a tremendous amount of stress and the unknown, and all that."

The other case (Kathy) involved the termination of a difficult long-term relationship:

The relationship had been ending for over a year...painful, drawn-out, separating stuff. I had been sad...I had multiple abortions and just had negative experiences

with this person. When I moved here, I was 21, then spent the whole time with this relationship and it was just really difficult.

**Cultural/Community Discontent.** At least 4 participants expressed some level of stress related to a group or community:

There is so much opposition and so much misunderstanding, that people don't understand each other...being with a group that drops out of that egocentric culture, that "thinking" culture...I really wanted to get out of the sea of red thinking, if that makes sense—that black-and-white thinking, very towney, very, very money-oriented, extremely Republican—I didn't fit. I needed to be more with my people. There wasn't any sense of real community.

Angel also expressed discontent with a community setting: I had lived in a community situation for 14 years and it had become not healthy for me. I was kind of stuck in it.”

**Lack of Direction/Grounding.** Three participants revealed challenges related to a general lack of life direction and/or grounding. Santo Luz described himself as something resembling a “fool archetype”:

At the time before I went to the church, I couldn't seem to stay put. I was moving all the time. Then, my challenges were I couldn't really ground anything because I wasn't there long enough. It was challenging because sometimes I didn't always have a place to call home. I would be like, 'okay, where am I gonna sleep tonight, ya know?

When asked about his life prior to the Daime, Wichar explained:

I was doing massage school and I was in another herbal medicine program. I was doing my apprenticeship and I was really trying to confront some of the issues inside of myself. Ya know, I felt confident in who I was, but in a lot of ways I didn't and I knew I had a lot of things that I had to face about myself that I had trouble confronting and I couldn't. Just a lot of confusion.....some difficulty navigating in the world.

Juniper described his life path as "...pretty unclear. I was still struggling with what I was supposed to do and who I was, but I was on that track, so it wasn't like I was completely lost."

**Other stressful life experiences.** A few participants mentioned life experiences not commonly reported by others. Nevertheless, the event/experience was identified as a life stressor.

- Relocation. Walda mentioned having moved with her family from Israel to the United States and this creating the stress of cultural isolation.
- Chronic pain. Jagube discussed his on-going chronic pain ("about 20 years") as a constant source of stress.
- Unconscious Sexual Abuse. Two participants that described stress-related symptoms related to "unconscious" sexual abuse that occurred early in their lives, and they did not become aware of the abuse until they had attended Daime services:

It was clear that I had some experience of abuse in my life, maybe sexual abuse, even though I didn't have any proof of that, any image or anything.

Then my mother, after when I was already in my 30s, she mentioned that

she had an experience when she was pregnant—when I was inside her belly. I thought that was interesting. When you are in the womb, you can get some information about things like that. (Samantha)

### **SQ#2: What are the Meaningful Coping Strategies Used by Church Members?**

The response to this question emerges from participants' responding to what their lives were like coping with current life challenges. As the results suggest, "coping" is experienced as something more complex and profound than the modification or adaption of a particular coping strategy. This question is directly addressed in the themes that emerged in the third phase of the transformative experience, identified as "Enhanced Coping" (see Figure 1). "Enhanced Coping" refers to development in several areas of the participants' lives related to stress, including but not limited to expedited spiritual healing and fulfillment, relief from addiction and unhealthy behavioral tendencies, coping with symptoms related to trauma, improvement in relationship dynamics, improved coping with anxiety symptoms and forms of unhappiness, and increased direction and "grounding." The meaning of "enhanced coping" can be summarized in terms of three sub-theme dimensions: Improvement, Personal Development, and Skills.

**Improvement.** Several participants described improvements in interpersonal relationships and family dynamics. Examples included: seeing "the best in people"; becoming "more loving towards family"; or rekindling a connection based on a common interest and averting potential divorce. Others became more effective at handling conflict in personal and family situations by being able to "reel back to the teachings" from the Daime rituals, and calling "upon that presence" based on their "Divine connection."

There were consistent reports of improvement in the ability to detach from trivialities and

negative self-talk, along with a greater connection to a life-goal or “mission” that adds meaning, clarity, direction, and simplicity in life. These themes also appeared to be connected to an increase in self-awareness, or a self-affirmation. The connection to the liminal experience allowed a willingness for self-examination and removal of psychological restraints so that “each person to wake up to who they are and their true gifts and help them to manifest those true gifts.” (Juniper).

**Personal development.** This sub-theme is a complement to the sub-theme of improvement in the recognition of how individuals have grown psychologically and spiritually as a result of their participation. The physical, psychological, and spiritual intensity and rigor of the church rituals provided a type of commensurability to everyday living stressors. As church members migrate so deeply inward during the ritual, they gain strength and perseverance to maintain their duties as church members while under the influence of hallucinogens, which effectively lowers their sensitivity toward what become trivial or “petty” stressors: “... it really illuminates the significance of day-to-day life and the meaning of how we carry ourselves in the world, and how we conduct ourselves in day-to-day interactions and conversations” (Wichar). Most participants link their personal development (e.g., being more relaxed; the experience of greater insight about relationships) directly to church experiences. For example, the literal “shaking of tension” out of the body was experienced by Juniper as making it “easier for me to connect and be open with people, and loving and compassionate.”

**Skills.** Overall, the shift in thoughts and feelings about stressors was accompanied by what appeared to be a galvanized temper to conquer life and all that it brings: “there’s nothing that I cannot do or overcome. I am ready to respond within the world when

things that are presented to me” (Sunshine). Additionally, there was evidence of a new skill set—the continual striving for personal and spiritual development and evolution—that allows these individuals to more effectively grapple with life challenges while maintaining purpose and contentment. The indoctrination process and the effects of the ayahuasca provide a “blueprint” of inner skills that can be employed in daily life. “I’m getting indoctrinated by my own choice and [I] surrender into the force of what this medicine and this spiritual path offers. It gives me internal skills to deal with stress...on a much faster and on a more profound level” (Juniper).

### **SQ#3: How are the Church Rituals Integrated into Daily Coping and Quality of Life?**

This sub-question was included as a vehicle to explore how the ritual experiences are seen in everyday life. The themes that best approach this question come from the thematic perspective of the final reaggregation ritual theme related to enhanced coping, integration was represented by a number of sub-themes. Only three of these themes will be discussed here, as they are chosen for their level of perceived importance in the overall enhancement of daily coping and quality of life, in addition to the particularly expressive and detailed testimonials to which they are linked. These themes include an enhanced level of clarity as it pertains to one’s sense of self and purpose; an increase in firmness, or what could be referred to as a “grounding effect;” and finally, elevated levels of overall compassion.

This notion of integration gets at how the participants viewed their participation in the Santo Daime as a "cause" in the changes in themselves and in their daily lives. (i.e., how/if they see the association). These questions were used:



(7) What do you see as the connection between your church experiences and your experience of daily life? (Probe: What is different for you now, compared with before you came to this church?); and

(8).What is your experience of coping with life challenges now? (Probe: How is coping different for you now, compared with before you came to this church?).

Interestingly, all participants felt they had answered question (8) in question (7).

Only Sunshine felt she needed to elaborate further.

Just as research question #1 focused on the participants' lives prior to their initiation with the Santo Daime services, and research question #2 revealed specific enhanced coping mechanisms, this final question puts the focus on how integrating these spiritual experiences have affected the quality of their lives. For example, irrespective of coping mechanisms, that is, whether or not someone may cope better or worse than his or her peers, a deeper understanding of their self and the realization of their connection and importance in the world ultimately will engender a more positive quality of daily living, as seen in this study. Therefore, through the transformative nature of the church rituals, participants in this study appeared to have not simply changed what they do, but rather who they are, i.e., their "beingness."

**Enhanced clarity.** A common reflection on this question was an enhanced clarity of some greater sense of identity, with the addition of positive personal characteristics.

Integrating can mean anything from just being a kinder person, to loving yourself more, to just remembering who you are. The Daime helps you to see who you are.

The fact that it is always there, that I'm always able do it again. (Kathy)

Everything has changed for me! What information do you wanna talk about? I mean, my spiritual life has awakened, I'm no longer an atheist. I don't know what I am yet, and I don't know if I'll ever define that per say, and I don't know if I really need to define it. It's just a pure joy being in service. I'm just appreciating being in service on a fundamental level. I'm enjoying seeing that as worthy goal. I mean, geez, man, everything's changed (laughs). Uh, I'm happy! (laughs). And, ya know, on a physical plane, everything has changed as well. (Sterling)

**Firmness and grounding.** Other participants revealed what appeared to be an increase in firmness, or “grounding.” This included a transferability of adapted skills from the church rituals, which engendered a greater degree of strength and perseverance in the wake of various life challenges. Thus, in the lives of these participants, challenges became opportunities for the construction of additional positive life qualities or attributes.

Nothing is “icky” anymore. There's nothing that I cannot do or overcome. I am ready to respond within the world when things that are presented to me. I no longer take on other individual's thought forms, or crises. I am able to walk in this world with whatever it's presenting. And...the subtleties continue, the works are always new, when something else creeps up in life, the work is there for me to go to another level. (Sunshine)

It gives me the ability to persevere through long, long days. I mean, some of these works we do are like 9, 10, 12 hours. You've just got to finish it, you've got to go through it. It's like a grueling day with the kids. You've got to maintain composure and realize it's gonna get done and not give up. You've gotta keep

doin' it. It's funny because parenthood is kind of like a never-ending work.

(Jagube)

**Elevated compassion.** This study also revealed enhanced levels of compassion, which translated to more effective relationships to others and family, including greater overall patience, love, and tolerance. It appeared that the church rituals “primed” participants to become influenced and guided by their “heart space,” which allowed for a more compassionate, respectful, and less judgmental view of the world.

I would say it's taught me how to love. It's taught me how to really love my family more, and my children, and it's helped me become a profoundly better father...much more patient, much more loving, much more tolerant. (Jagube)

I feel like Santo Daime as a medicine and as a ceremony has taught me what it really means to love. And to live in my heart more, like really have compassion and respect for everybody. Ya know, I look around at people in the world who are really struggling and really destitute, and I have far less judgment for them. To me it's like I have more compassion for those people because I'm lucky I'm not one of them because it's really easy to slip into homelessness, or like a really nasty heroine or meth addiction, or something like that. (Kathy)

Overall, participants in this study revealed various levels of integration of the church rituals into more positive daily coping and a greater overall quality of life. There were a number of personal and spiritual developments observed in the group experience, which emerged out of the initial phases of the church rituals—separation and liminality—ultimately creating a psychological balance or reaggregation. Participants entered a realm

far beyond the typical modality of daily life experience, precipitating deeper levels of meaning and understanding of significant and daily stressors, the core of their own being, and their relationship to others, their immediate environment, and the world in which they live. Therefore, the integration of these liminal experiences have become integrated with an overall enhanced quality of life.

### **Discrepant Findings**

Analysis of the data also revealed some participants to experience some aspects of the church sessions differently. For example, earlier it was highlighted that when a participant goes through the Trial, eventually they gain strength, or firmeza, which allows them to more effectively deal with those very things that caused the emotional and psychological struggle in the first place, such as trauma, negative behavioral patterns, etc. It was evident that several participants, as a result of facing their issues squarely within the church sessions, were better able to cope with daily and life stressors, including reducing tension, addictive tendencies, or having better relationships. However, Wichar's interview reflected a discrepant experience in the need to depart from the church for integration; "...the work was unsettling and it took me a while to get back to my grounded self." Additionally, his partner of eight months had broken up with him, which was the opposite effect of what some participants described as a 'relationship-mender.' Later, Wichar reconnected with his partner, and he viewed that as "a sign" that things "have shifted," and further that he "needed to come to terms with some things" in his life so that he could continue in "a well-grounded, integrated way."

Jagube, when asked how he now copes with life challenges, stated, "...what the Daime offers me is a way to cope with pain with the fear with the grief...", although he

has “not been able to develop the coping very much because a lot of it has come from the last couple of years,” further adding that he has not “been able to drink with the Daime as much because I have children, and they demand most of my time and energy.” He further revealed, “the double edged sword is like all this awareness and level of willing to go into these challenging emotional states....at the same time I don’t know if there’s healing available for that. I don’t know if there’s physical healing available, but at this point the pain seems to get worse.”

In the results section, a discussion on ESC revealed another discrepant finding related to the “non-visionary status” of two participants, Angel and Musashi. This phenomenon was largely unexpected given the visual profile that ayahuasca consumption maintains as one of its hallmark features (Strassman, 2001; Strassman, 2008; Shanon, 2010; Luke et al., 2011). Musashi had revealed that he had never received or incorporated beings, even after drinking large doses of sacrament, and that it perhaps had something to do with his beliefs or skepticism. Rather, he disclosed that the singing of the hymns were his “mediumistic practice.”

Angel also reported a nonvisionary experience: “I don’t get visions, ya know, these Pablo-Magritte-type visions— ayahuasca or Daime, I never get ‘em. But I get these flashes.... and sometimes I get these short, simple messages...” She admitted to thinking she was “doing something wrong” and asked “...the Daime” point blank what was going on, and her answer was that, "your visions are your thoughts and your feelings."

#### **Additional Theme: Healing Potential of Daime Hymns**

There was one additional theme that arose from this study, and although not as frequent as the aforementioned main themes, this was considered in order to gain a more

complete understanding the ayahuasca experience and the spiritual guidance of the church. The main themes also have a clear relationship to the three ritual phases of shamanic experience. This additional theme is a relevant, supportive dimension of the overall healing process.

The main component of the Daime sessions includes the singing of hinos, or hymns. The entire collection of hymns are often referred to as hinarios. Many of these hymns reiterate the doctrine of the Daime, and may include honoring the saints, the religious icons, such as Jesus and Mary, or the many virtues revered by the Daimistas—strength, love, compassion, gratitude, hope, and justice, for example. There were 11 descriptors of what could be described as the healing potential of the Daime hymns, where participants describe overwhelming and powerful spiritual uplift from singing or listening to the hymns—or on occasion being “one with the hymns.”

So, when I heard the Lord’s prayer during the rosary (initial part of every Daime ceremony), I was like, ‘what is this?’ Then I remember looking at the Portuguese hymns and the words thinking, ‘I am not gonna learn these hymns, but I kept reading them, and I had such a powerful work that first time, and that changed everything. Just one work! (Santo Luz)

Musashi described how the affirmations contained within the hymns, such as the “call for firmness, stability, love and joy and fraternity” and the “exercise of singing and praying in the context of ayahuasca” had helped him to cope better with stressors. Two other participants discussed their opinions regarding the importance of the hymns:

Actually I think what happened is Musashi showed me some hymns and it just—BING!—awakened me inside, ya know? Finally, I could understand the meaning

of the words, and the messages were so beautiful, and I felt I really needed that....a mantra...every day in my life. It was then when I realized I wanted to go.  
(Samantha)

In a very practical way, the hymns itself are so uplifting, you know, the message is so positive. It's like going to sit and saying your mantra, ya know 'Om Nimah Shivaya' or like a rosary, or whatever, or some people go on walks. It's more and more like a tool of self-improvement....a very positive message to illuminate your thoughts and open your heart and affirm yourself. (Samantha)

The hymns are truly a spiritual centerpiece of the Daime ritual and an element that transforms those who sing them; "There's one good line from the Daime hymns that can sum things up: *"I'm here in this battle. I'm suffering but I'm happy."* (Kathy). In fact, many Daimistas believe that these hymns take on a life of their own, that they are taken in and consequently transformed by their message. It must be mentioned that the hymns are actually "received" in a spiritual process. That is, practitioners in the Santo Daime believe that these hymns somehow exist "pre-formed" in the spirit world and those that "tune in" may receive them, as if it were being broadcast through a "spiritual radio." Thus, every hymn sung in the Daime was "received" by a practitioner in the church; a majority of them from the church leaders, or padrinhos. Mestre Irineu, the founder of the Santo Daime, received hundreds of them, many of them sung during works, especially the first part of a concentration. Juniper elaborated on his own personal meanings of the hymns:

The hymns....each one has its own like spiritual....there's a being, ya know...a spirit in each one and as it comes through and as you learn to sing them, or as I've learned to sing them I should say, it heals me. I can embody them. And learning from the words is one thing but there's more for me in the energetic experience of being a channel of a song.

Occasionally, a Daimista may receive a hymn to honor the service and dedication of another Daimista within the church, as if they were “tipping their hat” for that individual's overall spiritual contribution toward the church sessions and the community, whether it be their enthusiasm, consistency in service, leadership, or even the hymns they have developed for the group. In a hymn that was received for her by another Daimista, Angel recalled, “Ya know, somebody received a hymn for me and I read it every night, and in it says something about remembering that time with Him, and this is my mission now, here on this earth, and I'm here now for that.”

### **Summary**

This chapter was a description of how overall coping mechanisms for daily and life stressors of members of the Santo Daime church are influenced by their experiences with ayahuasca and spiritual guidance through the church rituals. To reiterate, the primary themes were categorized according to the three phases of ritual experience—separation, liminality, and reaggregation. One primary theme, the Trial, was observed to occur during the ritual phase of separation, which involves an experience of self-examination, intense bodily sensations, disembodiment, deconstruction, and the clearing of blockages. The most prominent ritual phase appeared to be liminality, which included Ecstatic Spiritual Communion (ESC), Supernatural Contact (S-Co), Macrocosmic



Kinship, and Rapture. This included a variety of sub-themes, including but not limited to a connection to divine entities, the experience of spiritual illumination and transformation, contact with mystical beings, an overall increase in love and compassion for self, others and community, and an enhanced connection to nature.

The ritual phase of reaggregation included the theme of enhanced coping, which encompasses many subthemes related to coping with stressors. For example, some of these include expedited healing and spiritual development; enhanced interpersonal and family relationship dynamics; an increase in faith, clarity, openness, strength and perseverance; as well as greater coping mechanisms for anxiety, depression, trauma, and addiction.

Participants reported life events that created stress-related symptoms, such as spiritual/ religious discontent, substance abuse, or other unhealthy lifestyle patterns, relationship issues, cultural/community discontent, lack of direction/grounding, as well as relocation, chronic pain, and unconscious sexual abuse. As a result, participants developed enhanced coping in terms of three sub-theme categories: Improvement, Personal Development, and Skills.

As a result of these enhanced coping mechanisms, participants reported an elevation in the overall quality of life as they gained a deeper understanding of themselves and their connection to the world, ultimately altering their identities in a more positive direction. That is, these participants were able to integrate their participation in these liminal experiences within the church to engender an overall enhanced quality of life. For example, the data revealed an enhanced clarity of a more pronounced impression of identity, with an extension of positive personal attributes; increased firmness and

grounding, including a higher caliber of strength and perseverance amid life obstacles; and elevated compassion, which appeared to precipitate more productive interpersonal and family relationships, as well as greater tolerance, love, patience, and respect as it pertains to the participants' overall world view, or *weltanschauung*.

The data also revealed several discrepancies regarding the experiences of several participants. This included the need for a temporary separation from the church services and the dissolution of a relationship, which conflicts with other data revealing the continuation of church services and strengthening of relationships. Another participant revealed a lack of the development of more effective coping mechanisms and an uncertainty of physical healing through the Daime services for this pain, which had become worse. Two other participants reported “nonvisionary” states, where one of the participants acknowledged a focused involvement in singing the hymns, whereas another admitted receiving “flashes” or “short, simple messages.”

There was also an additional theme that emerged from this study—the healing potential of the Daime hymns. It was reported that within the hymns sung at each church ritual contains specific themes, including strength, love, compassion, gratitude, hope, justice, firmness, and stability. Participants in this study revealed that singing hymns with such themes in the context of an emotionally- and spiritually-charged atmosphere while also under the influence of ayahuasca, aided them in the development of more effective coping mechanisms for daily and life stressors and enhanced their overall quality of life. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings, implications for social change, recommendations, and conclusions.

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## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Anxiety, depression, and addiction are common consequences of unproductive coping mechanisms to daily and life stressors. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of individuals in the Santo Daime community, and to better understand how their use of ayahuasca in a spiritual ceremony enhances their well-being and ability to cope with daily life stressors.

The results suggest that the exploration of stressors and coping extend beyond one's immediate and familiar environment (e.g., family, work environment, neighborhood, etc.) toward the more sociocultural aspects of life, for example, cultural conflict, industrialization, the isolating effects of technology, the ostensibly inescapable occurrences of random and frequent global violence, or damage to the planet's ecosystem. As a way to better cope with daily stressors, sociocultural and existential concerns and discontent for traditional Western cultural and religious paradigms, participants sought the services of non-traditional spiritual rituals through the Santo Daime church. These rituals ultimately aided the participants in reducing their accumulated stress and positively transformed the essence of their personal and spiritual lives.

The Santo Daime church is one of many avenues of exploration for alternative healing modalities using ethnopharmacological substances like ayahuasca in a shamanic or organized religious context (Tupper, 2009). These nontraditional modes of healing have been used in indigenous cultures to uncover wholeness and seek answers to some of life's most important questions. So the results of this study offer an opportunity to study

this traditional healing process with individuals who are seeking to live more spiritually in the modern world.

### **Summary of Findings**

The data from this study revealed that most participants who sought the services of the Santo Daime church were either going through significant life challenges or seeking more complete and effective dispensation from religious, psychological, spiritual, or metaphysical modalities. When individuals are faced with a variety of stressors, yet lack a sense of life-meaning, self-control, or connection to their culture or environment, coping with stress can become much more difficult, leading to additional physical and mental health-related issues. The participants in this study, all of whom had averaged over 4 years of experience attending church services on a fairly regular basis, experienced enhanced coping mechanisms by confronting both apparent and latent stressors in an emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically charged environment. The profound, consciousness-altering effects of ayahuasca consumed in the context of a spiritual framework, heightened further by the celebratory atmosphere, provided participants with the tools for integrating their “life discrepancies,” resulting in an enlightened reappraisal of their relationships to self, others, and environment, as well as local and global culture as a whole.

The context of the Daime rituals were in alignment with Turner’s (1967) 3 phases of shamanic ritual, as participants in this study experienced separation within the Trial; profoundly liminal occurrences within ecstatic spiritual communion (ESC), supernatural contact (S-Co), rapture, macrocosmic kinship; and then reaggregation during the development of enhanced coping styles. It was observed that the ritual phase of liminality

most likely served as the most important component to enhanced coping and overall quality of life, given the higher frequency of sub-themes that existed within that phase.

Participants reported having experienced deep transformation from their own self-examination, a deconstruction and clearing of negative behavioral patterns and mechanisms, and the interaction with a variety of perceived ethereal entities that engendered spiritual guidance, including the highly-anticipated and enlightening modality of Christ Consciousness. The combination of the shamanic plant medicine context with the Christ theme appeared to have provided a profoundly positive marriage leading to expedited healing and spiritual development, including enhanced clarity, compassion, openness, and strength, all of which facilitated more effective coping mechanisms for a variety of stressors and stress-related symptoms. It was evident that enhanced coping fell under three main categories: improvement, personal development, and skills.

Discrepant cases found that the church services may at times be too “robust” to manage initially. One of the 14 participants found that he needed to take time off to integrate his new “findings,” or his new understanding of himself. His partner had also broken up with him, and although it was not revealed why, it can only be speculated that it was related to the changes in personality or behavior brought about by the church. This reveals one potential issue with the accelerated nature of ayahuasca—that it may be a challenge to integrate rapid changes in self-orientation and that some may not always receive the necessary social support beyond the church community.

Another discrepancy involved mediumship work. Several participants revealed additional suffering due to their contact with malevolent spirits, although in all cases,

participants were able to successfully transform their struggles into more effective coping mechanisms and further come to gain more meaning from their own spiritual works. One participant needed assistance in her daily life from another member of the church to integrate her newly-formed mediumship practice. This should serve as a caution for future participants of church services, but also highlights the importance of seeking additional support within the church community. Several participants later came to the realization that they could and should ask for help, both from church community members and perhaps even on a more etheric or divine level, most notably within the ESC process, or during S-Co.

### **Revisiting the Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

In Chapter 2, it was asserted that the shaman views disease as a result of disconnection from one's sense of place" in the world and the disconnection from one's communities, representing a loss of perceived control, meaning, or cultural support (Hyman, 2007). Much like shamanism, the services of the Santo Daime church appear to provide a sense of place and community through mind-body realignment, offering the opportunity to create harmony in its followers' relationships to themselves and their environment.

Purpose, meaning, and sense of self represent the fundamental prerequisites for being able to effectively handle stress (Antonovsky, 1987; 1996). That is, if an individual has a strong sense of self and a purpose in life, it stands to reason that they would have a greater likelihood to honor, protect, and respect their minds and bodies, thus become less yielding to addiction, or remain emotionally stable in the event of a crisis. The use of a nontraditional healing practice that involves a powerful consciousness-expanding

substance like ayahuasca, and within the context of an organized spiritual ritual, allows for an individual to both personally process their emotional and psychological issues, and develop an intimate personal relationship to the Divine. The result is a liminal initiation that enables an individual to integrate their own inner reality, resulting in an intrinsic reorganization, and further reaching deeper levels of meaning in life through the exploration of visions, (including meaningful and symbolic nonvisionary states), not to mention the acknowledgement of a sacred dimension (Mabit et al., 1996).

The Santo Daime services represent a three-fold therapeutic technology in alignment with Turner's (1967) three phases of ritual communion—a separation and reorganization through a transformative struggle, or trial; a liminal psychological and spiritual enrichment through an intimate spiritual communion; and finally a reaggregation, or psychological balancing, through the positive neurochemical effects of the ayahuasca brew, the celebratory spiritual context of the ritual (hinarios, meditation, dance, etc.), and the resulting rapture and enhanced connection to self, others, and environment. This represents a unique and effective approach for preventing a host of negative psychological symptoms as well as the maintenance of optimum and purposeful living.

Prior to this study, the concept of liminality within the ritual phases of shamanism, in addition to the various components of separation and re-organization as it relates to coping mechanisms for daily and life stressors, had not been documented in the literature. This study is the first known of its kind to extrapolate to the extent and manner by which it does, the composite of working components of the spiritual and shamanic

concepts of both the Santo Dame and shamanism, respectively, and consequently develop contemporary terminology to describe the themes and sub-themes therein.

Although this study uses shamanic models as a comparative lens to examine the ritual context of the Santo Daime services, it is important to delineate traditional shamanism from organized ayahuasca religions. In the last decade, and especially within the last five years, ayahuasca consumption alone has seen a significant rise and has consequently witnessed a globalization (Tupper, 2009; Luna, 2011). There are a variety of contexts in which an individual can receive profound healing or spiritual enlightenment, e.g., the ayahuasca religious organizations, such as the Santo Daime, the Barquinha, or the União do Vegetal (UDV), etc. Other modalities, such as ayahuasca shamanism in South America, have become even more popular and pervasive, especially given that they are less exclusive than the organized churches that use ayahuasca, and many shamans are even travelling to the United States and other countries to conduct underground sessions.

Many who travel to South America to seek these ayahuasqeros do so for self-exploration, spiritual growth, curiosity, as well as physical and emotional healing (Kristensen, 1998), although services like that of the Santo Daime, the Barquina, or the UDV provide protection, community, genuineness, and structure, which often the former may lack. These organized ayahuasca religions provide a unique element—a certain aspect that shamanism does not necessarily reach. That is, the structure, organization, use of religious hymns (referred to as icaros in a shamanic context), the doctrine, and especially the social support and network, provide a type of scaffolding and set the stage



for some key phases of spiritual and psychological development, such as ESC, or the *miração*, for example.

I do not advocate that the general population should seek the services of the Santo Daime church, or related organizations. Rather, the intent is to illuminate a unique and powerful phenomenon through the lens of qualitative research. There have since been dozens of studies on the various neurophysiological and neurochemical effects of ayahuasca, as well as psychological, emotional, and spiritual effects, although this study focuses more on the “lived experience” that traditional Western science often overlooks.

The results of this research suggest that the Santo Daime experience aligns with other psycho-enrichment technologies (PETs) that empower and augment the mind and further advance knowledge regarding the human psyche. As Shanon (2010) aptly stated, “the study of Ayahuasca belongs first and foremost to the domain of psychology,” (p. #) and furthermore, “it is a tool to discover new, heretofore unknown territories of the human mind” (p.31). A beginning point for the assessment of this viewpoint, offered by this investigation, is to more clearly understand the processes that practitioners of the Santo Daime church endure that produce the radical shifts in thought, spiritual belief, lifestyle, and general outlook that positively affect their coping mechanisms for stressors.

### **The Relationship of the Themes to Prior Literature**

**The Trial.** It was discovered that all participants progress through a transformational struggle for which I have labeled “the Trial.” Three participants revealed a disembodiment during the Trial, in effect viewing themselves from “outside their bodies,” and 9 participants reported a deconstruction phenomenon as they psychologically “disassembled” themselves resulting in a critical self-analysis. I have

labeled this phenomenon psychoexegesis, which involves Turner's (1967) first ritual phase of separation, and may occasionally overlap with Winkelman's (2010) cathartic stage of spiritual communion.

Especially noted to occur during disembodiment, some participants found that they could view themselves from the outside, as if rising above and gazing down upon their bodies. It has been observed that the DMT component of the ayahuasca brew is largely responsible for OBEs. In Rick Strassman's (2001) experimental studies with DMT, a high frequency of dissociation from the body was reported, in addition to participant's feeling they no longer had a body, or that it had dissolved and they had become pure awareness. Luke and Kittenis (2005) reported in their survey of psychedelic transpersonal experiences that over 65% of the most common DMT reports included an out-of-body experience, as well as dissolution into pure energy.

There appears to be some aspect of this dissociative process that engenders an awareness that reality consists of a fundamental interconnection among all that it beholds. Shanon (2010) reported in his study on the phenomenology of ayahuasca users that one of the most salient themes included an appreciation that all reality is interconnected. In the current study, this was reflected in the themes of Macrocosmic Kinship, ESC, and Rapture, which is substantiated by Shanon's claim that it is "extremely common for ayahuasca drinkers to talk of their discovery of there existing a force that is the ground of all Being and that gives nourishment and sustenance to everything...often characterized as embodying love" (p.164). Roberts (2013) asserted that individuals who experience this state "and put their self-jacket back on afterward often find it the single most meaningful

experience of their lives; [and it is] this beyond-the-person experience [that] is the basis for transpersonal psychology (trans = “beyond,” personal = “default identity”)” (p. 20).

Deconstruction and uprooting also involved a confrontation with inner-fears, traumas, negative behavioral patterns, etc. This is elaborated on in the following statement:

When we allow traumatic memories and other negative things to emerge into consciousness to be fully experienced and closely examined, it loses the disturbing power that it can otherwise exert in our lives, and chronic psychological and even physical problems whose origins were previously unknown can be fully healed. (Grof, 1989, p. 12-13)

These kinds of experiences lend the traveler with a rapid learning process, such as when Roberts (2013) revealed that “in traumatic experiences and mystical experiences pathways seem to be formed almost immediately” (p. 33). This rapid formation of brain circuitry necessitates further research.

Additionally, ayahuasca drinkers often report that they feel as if they were dying (Merkur, 1998; Schmid, 2012). Thus, the mystical sensation of narrowly skirting the jaws of mortality leave one with a rather rejuvenating sensation, as if an appreciation of life has been created from the near loss of it. This may be similar to an individual who is involved in an accident, has a near-death experience (NDE), and then develops a new appreciation and positive outlook on life. Merkur (1998) reported these mystical experiences that provide access to unconscious sources of human potential to be the most effective psychedelic sessions, as they involve a psychomimetic death crisis, followed by

a unitive experience. Prior research involving LSD administered to cancer patients provides a good example of this:

Our experiments have indicated that deep within every human being there are vast usually untapped resources of love, joy, and peace. One aspect of the psychedelic mystical experience is a release of these positive feelings with subsequent decrease in negative feelings of depression, despair, and anxiety. But this shift in mood is not enough to account for our most dramatic finding—loss of the fear of death. In fact, the experience of deeply felt positive mood may be more the result than the cause of this change in attitude toward death. Our data show that these feelings are released most fully when there is complete surrender to the ego-loss experience of positive transcendence, which is often experienced as a moment of death and re-birth. (Pahnke, 1996, p. 175)

Following the initial stages of the Trial, including the experience of psychoexegesis and psychointegration, participants proceed to expunge the negative psychic debris in several ways. First, purging is one of the most prominent characteristics of ayahuasca given its *emetic* and *anthelmintic* (i.e., expulsion of parasitic worms) properties. Purging can result from the cleansing of physical items, such as the accumulation of toxins from a poor diet, or be a type of psychosomatic emesis where stored tensions are released. It is important to note that the emetic effect of the ayahuasca drink has a spiritual aspect as well, since purging reveals that the drinker is being cleansed. In his book, *Singing to the Plants* (2009), Steven Beyer related a phrase sometimes heard among ayahuasca shamans (or *purgueros*): *La purga misma te enseña,*

which translates as, “vomiting itself teaches you.” This purging process is succinctly described in the following passage:

There is an interesting convergence that often happens between physical purging and psychic purging – what seems to be a kind of discharge of negatively toned psychic contents. People who do not have any appreciable physical toxicity in their system may find themselves throwing up and thereby releasing the toxic residues of past emotional entanglements, the guilt and shame loads of traumatic abuse, or the self-limiting, self-defeating thought patterns of addictions, compulsions and other neurotic behaviors. (Metzner, 1999, p. 278f)

Finally, having gone through a rather challenging ordeal, participants may report a nakedness or vulnerability. This is a critical stage of the Trial—an “eclipse” that seems to open the envelope to spiritual influences and communion, and where it is crucial that participants generate strength, firmness, and openness, often leading to sensations of connection, rapture, and spiritual enlightenment. Ego-dissolution may be a common effect of this process as people from all walks of life, even those in positions of power or with conservative religious and cultural beliefs, may find themselves at the mercy of a powerful paradigm shift.

Overall, the initial stage of the Daime ritual represents a “Trial” where one examines their conscience, cleanses their mind and body of psychic and material “toxicity,” and begins the “work,” of spiritual development, opening the door for the profound experiences that change how one copes with daily and life stressors.

**Ecstatic Spiritual Communion (ESC).** Following the Trial, the group experience revealed that participants underwent an ecstatic spiritual communion (ESC).

This was the most frequent theme that emerged from the data. Although the literature reveals that psychedelics alone illicit positive spiritual experiences (Griffiths, et al., 2006; Pahnke, 1966), it is the “ritualized use of these divine plants in a religious context” (Polari, 1999, p.2) that contributes toward the development of spirituality. It was also discussed earlier how a related spiritual phenomena—the *miração*—is one of the most anticipated moments of the church ritual. Although some participants claimed to be “non-visionary,” which is replaced by either intense emotional catharsis or divine messages; for those who do have visions, this can be one of the most intense aspects of the ritual. During ESC, participants often witness the presence of “divine teachers” and gain spiritual teachings, often resulting in spiritual illumination and personal transformation.

ESC is also very similar to many of the concepts described by Stanislov Grof, as mentioned in Chapter 2, especially as it relates to spiritual crisis. Grof (1989) referred to this as episodes of unitive consciousness, where one “experiences dissolution of personal boundaries and has a sense of becoming one with other people, with nature, or with the entire universe; [and] has a very sacred quality and feels like one is merging with creative cosmic energy, or God” (p. 16).

Maslow studied these peak experiences in hundreds of individuals and revealed much disdain for the Western psychiatric view of these states as mental disease, and believed that these experiences, if encouraged, may often lead to optimum life functioning and self-actualization (Grof, 1989).

Interactions with and/or images of Jesus Christ and an awareness of a Christ Consciousness together represented the most frequent sub-theme within ESC, followed by spiritual illumination and witnessing the phenomenon of divine light, respectively.

Shanon (2010) revealed in his studies of ayahuasca users that many drinkers believed it reveals “true and otherwise unattainable knowledge” (p.324). Soibelman (2005) reported in her studies on ayahuasca religions, that “since all cults [*sic*] in Brazil are based on Catholicism, Catholic saints such as Saint John the Baptist, Saint Michael, Saint Joseph and others are commonly seen. Jesus Christ and Mary are regularly seen by ayahuasca drinkers of any cult [*sic*], mainly in the Santo Daime which focuses a lot on these two spiritual beings” (p. 127).

It appears intuitive that such a high frequency of connections to Christ or Mary would occur in a church that holds within its core doctrine the belief of the seed of Christ Consciousness embedded within their sacrament. However, this divine and sometimes mythological connection appears to be a special privilege for those who partake in ayahuasca consumption even outside of the context of a religious setting. Throughout his writings, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1971, 1975) specified that one of the primary reasons for the consumption of ayahuasca in the indigenous context is to gain access to the mythological heritage of their ethnic group, where the young individual being initiated into this plant medicine gains direct access to the knowledge they were beheld by the elders of their social group. Shanon (2010), who conducted his ayahuasca studies on both religious and non-religious contexts of use, reported a significant occurrence of the divine:

Visions [of] the Divine are quite common. The most notable facets of the first cluster are those of creation and sustenance, bounty and vitality, grace, love, and justice. Encounters with the Divine are usually accompanied by various insights

regarding God and his relationships with both nature and humanity. Often the experience of divine presence is associated with the appreciation of the bounty of life and the harmony of the universe. With this appreciation, drinkers often report that ayahuasca makes them recognize that there is a force of energy that governs the world and everything in it. Many identify this force with God. (Shannon, 2010, pp.154 - 155)

In this study, at least 10 participants beheld substantial shifts in religious and/or spiritual thinking, mostly geared towards a new understanding of the teachings of Christ as old paradigms of religion gave way to newer paradigms of direct communion and spiritual transformation. In essence, the group experience revealed an insight that could be translated as the “divine within,” which appeared to be a particularly empowering notion for several participants in this study.

As mentioned in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, stress buffering tools, e.g., church, exercise, good nutrition, etc., and perceived control are key phenomena in understanding why some individuals are able to cope with stress more effectively. The experiences of the Santo Daime church participants suggest access to new coping mechanisms based on expanded consciousness. These individuals came to an awareness that there is much more to life than the daily dramas, obstacles, traumas, etc., and that there is a sort of “grand cosmic realm” for which they are an integral part. This may have profoundly positive effects on spiritual growth, and consequently, dealing with stressors.

In *The Holotropic Mind*, it was reported that:

Deep reverence for life and ecological awareness are among the most frequent consequences of the psychospiritual transformation that accompanies responsible



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work with non-ordinary states of consciousness [and] the same has been true for spiritual emergence of a mystical nature that is based on personal experience.

(Grof & Bennett, 1992, p. 221)

The results of this study also identified a “divine light” phenomenon accompanied by focal perceptions of luminosity. Variations from the data included: “holy, sacred divine light,” “pink, emanating light,” “universal light,” “light beings” or “bright forces,” the “light of the current and the cross,” or even a “sword of light.” This sensation of light seems to have a powerful effect on spiritual transformation and seems to be a pivotal moment when one “breaks through to the other side,” marking an important moment when one may transition through the Trial and into ESC.

It is important to note some general effects of luminosity with eyes open and closed under ayahuasca inebriation. From my own experiences and from the accounts with others in personal conversations, it is evident that when reading the words on the hymn books during service, the letters are often illuminated with an emerald-green, red and/or gold profile. Also reported by myself and other members, when the eyes are closed, and especially when the ayahuasca intoxication is strong, objects radiate with a remarkable luminosity. Occasionally, even with eyes opened, it may appear as if the entire room has been illuminated as if by a rather powerful overhead light.

The sensation of light seems to be an aspect of ayahuasca that is perhaps more weighted toward a neurophysiological explanation, which is outside the orbit of this research. However, as humans, on occasion we have been known to witness phenomena that perhaps may not at all be physically present, such as ghosts, UFOs, or any other number of mysterious phenomena. Is divine light, therefore, an unconscious and

psychologically-based mechanism of embellishment that adds to the overall emotional and spiritual aspect of this experience? Whatever it is, it appears to represent a very interesting phenomenon and parallels the old religious adage, “I saw the light!” which also happens to come at a very appropriate time—when an individual begins to overcome their various struggles. Perhaps future studies could put additional focus on this particular aspect of ayahuasca intoxication within an organized religion.

Under the effects of ayahuasca, many drinkers feel that they gain special privileged access to an ultimate or true cosmic knowledge (Shanon, 2010). Shanon also reported in his ayahuasca studies that his informants “felt that their level of intelligence increased considerably and that they gained ‘comprehension of everything’” (p.64), or that it “bestows upon them special lucidity and mental clarity [and further] renders people more involved with deeper psychological analyses and with philosophical contemplation” (p.161). That is, Shanon believed ayahuasca alone may aid individuals in reflecting on their lives, which may lead them to an elevated psychological understanding of themselves. In fact, it is often discussed in the Daime community that just one session may amount to several years of psychotherapy.

Other studies have revealed other psychedelics in assisting with psychotherapy, such as the use of psilocybin in aiding with emotional insight and lowering psychological defenses (Carhart-Harris, et al., 2012), MDMA and the reduction of PTSD symptomology (Bouso, Doblin, Farre, Alcazar, & Gomez-Jarabo, 2008), and LSD-assisted psychotherapy with terminal cancer patients (Pahnke, Kurland, Goodman, & Richards, 1969).

Two participants in this study reported receiving “spiritual messages.” In a survey conducted with over 80 ayahuasca users (many of them Santo Daime members in Oregon), the following results were revealed:

When asked whether they received any messages or instructions during their recent ayahuasca experience, subjects cited a rich array of positive spiritual advice. Themes included: love yourself more, open your heart to yourself and others, empower yourself, another’s pain is your pain, normal waking consciousness is just one of many realities, love what is. More specifically, one person was told to visit his father more often, while another was instructed to talk to another participant after the ceremony about a fundraising idea. Many subjects felt they had received a large “download” of complex insights and information that was described as far too complex and extensive to describe in a questionnaire. (Harris & Gurel, 2012, p. 211)

Although only two participants in this current study mentioned the words “spiritual messages” or “divine messages,” further examination of the data revealed that most participants during Daime services “received” spiritual or divine messages in some form or another, which could be in the embodiment of an instruction, an answer to a question, a challenge, or even what may have felt like an ‘information download,’ or access to knowledge that otherwise would have not been known or conceived. This also concurs with my own experience in the Daime sessions throughout the years.

What is unique about messages of these types is that sometimes what is being transmitted may not always be directly heard or remembered, but rather felt and integrated into the individual’s life. Identification of the origin of these messages (i.e.,

whether they originate from one's own mind or from another realm) goes beyond this study. Rather, it is the occurrence and subsequent integration of messages that bridges the ritual experience to improved coping with daily and life stressors. I have come to call this phenomenon *psychospiritual bricolage* (PSB), whereby individuals are able to creatively integrate and synthesize rapid sequences of sensory phenomena during ASC into a spiritual and salutogenic healing regimen by “filling in the gaps” of the phenomena observed.

This notion of “filling in the gaps” refers to another concept I have developed—*psychoexegesis*—which means that the individual's cognitive faculties in ASC are formulating the most relevant approximation of an image, scene, or interaction, based upon unique personality characteristics, sources of suffering, culture, interests, or other unique attributes. This is similar to the dream state in which the mind seems to poetically recreate certain life attributes or meaningful events. Through PSB, individuals further integrate the psychoexegetical product into their existing life schema.

As a result of these encounters with Jesus Christ, Mary, the Divine Mother, and other spirits and/or spirit guides; as well as the reception of and encounters with divine light and divine messages, participants appeared to have experienced a deep, ethereal and sacred connection resulting in a spiritual transformation. It is important to note that while “divine connection” was listed as a sub-theme, all of the sub-themes within ESC represent a universal phenomenon of spiritual or divine origin, whether Christ Consciousness, divine light, or spiritual messages. It is this experience that creates a psychological and emotional uplift, which further enhances more effective coping

strategies for daily and life stressors. Padrinho Polari (1999) provides an appropriate assertion regarding this notion of the “true” spiritual self:

I do not know what eminent theologians would think of my considerations, but I think it is time to search for an inner theology—a true science of the spiritual self, alive and pulsating—not an anatomy of dead or fossilized doctrines, but the true root of doctrine, the Divine relic of the heart that produces spiritual deeds. (Polari, 1999, p. 40)

**Supernatural Contact (S-Co).** As previously mentioned, some of the phenomena within S-Co appeared to overlap with that of ESC, or even the Trial, specifically contact with other beings (e.g., spirit guides). However, the main distinction lies in the type of contact, since during ESC, contact appeared to be of a more divine and religious nature, whereas during S-Co contact may involve a richer variety of benevolent and/or malevolent beings. This may occur anytime within a church session and was reported frequently during the Trial, especially for those who practice mediumship. Mediumship practice often involves contact with malevolent spirits, indigenous or mystical spirits (Orixas, caboclos, etc.), and even spirits of deceased Brazilian doctors, which was reported to occur during the healing works (or mesa brancas).

Cott and Rock (2008) asserted that one of the most compelling and common characteristics of the ayahuasca or DMT experience is the encounter with apparently sentient discarnate beings, which are typically referred to as appearing more authentic than anything experienced previously. In his DMT studies, Strassman’s (2001) participants commonly described these as entities, aliens, beings, helpers or guides, and would often appear as something resembling "clowns, reptiles, mantises, bees, spiders,

cacti, and stick figures" (p. 185), as well as imps, elves, dwarves, spirits, angels, gods, or just as some fuzzy presence, the latter four of which were commonly supremely wise, powerful, and loving.

However, Shanon (2002) reported encounters with serpents and large felines, such as black pumas, as more related more to ayahuasca visionary states. Shanon further categorized the types of supernatural beings encountered on ayahuasca: mythological beings; chimeras or hybrids; extraterrestrials; angels and celestial beings; semi-divine beings; and demons, monsters, and beings of death. Another category that could be added, which was evident from several participants, includes beings, spirits, and guides related to plants. Earlier it was noted that one of the core beliefs of the Santo Daime church, is that within their sacrament exists the being of the plant itself, known as *Juramidam*.

Although the categorization of discarnate entities is not the primary focal point of this paper, it is important to examine the group experience of S-Co for its effect on coping with life challenges. Participants who described their emerging mediumship practice reported additional struggle and pain in working with malevolent spirits, although the outcome was a type of spiritual and psychological transformation as well as more fulfilling works in the church ceremonies. Other participants reported entities of an extraterrestrial nature that operated on them, and although this may appear as malevolent in nature, and indeed it may be to some, the experience reported in this study was one of healing, which appeared to have occurred most notably during the Trial when one was undergoing “deconstruction” or “clearing blockages.”

The phenomenon of contact with malevolent spirits appears to be a significant finding, as I believe this may also be a mythological and/or archetypal *amplification*, whereby dealing with sources of stress become radically dramatized, ritualized, spiritualized, and personified so that overcoming these negative forces become, first, identifiable, and secondly, a more glorified and spiritually meaningful triumph. This is an important phenomenon and one that, to the knowledge of this researcher, has not been thoroughly examined in the current literature and thus warrants further study.

**Rapture.** Along with Macrocosmic Kinship, Rapture was the fourth most frequent theme from the group experience. The similarity in frequency to Macrocosmic Kinship may be related largely to the overall heightened sensitivity and connection to an underlying force or unity. In his studies, Shanon (2010) found that under the ayahuasca inebriation, it was typical that individuals will experience such themes as beautification, meaningfulness, enchantment, powerful energy (a force that permeates and sustains all Creation and is the ultimate fountain of health and well-being), and sanctity. These sentiments are likely to induce spiritual and/or religious sentiments, create profound gratitude, as well as a sort of *eroticization*. Although this may include those to whom one is attracted in a sensuous or sexual way, it is in this case a more “environmental” or “cosmic” orientation. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1991) pointed out that in the indigenous Amerindian context of ayahuasca use, the erotic is a pivotal theme. He further revealed how the Tukano Indians of Colombia refer to ayahuasca inebriation as a type of *cosmic coitus* (1971, 1975).

As discussed in Chapter 4, rapture was a permeating theme that appeared to infiltrate the participants’ general mood and orientation toward themselves, their

community, environment, all sentient and organismic entities within that environment, spiritual entities, the global community, and the earth itself as an entity (Lovelock, 1989). There are several probable causes of rapture, including the sacrament itself (ayahuasca), the core beliefs of the Daime community, and the nature of the hinarios that are sung during service, many of them which profess the importance of love. The core church beliefs and hinarios are most often associated with the true gnostic teachings of Christ—to open one’s heart, to center one’s heart, and love thyself and thy neighbors. Additionally, the oft-repeated phrase, *Daime força, Daime amor* (Give me strength, Give me love), represents a hallmark phrase of the practicing Daimista.

It could also be observed that internally, when one is going through the self-examination and deconstruction phases of the Trial, one aligns to a tacit understanding of an ideal, perhaps a pious manner of behavior and thought. This is what the Santo Daime members would call the “Divine self,” which could not occur without genuine love, openness, and firmness. One of Padrinho Sebastião’s (the successor of Mestre Irineu, founder of the Santo Daime Church) hymns gracefully summed up the relationship between love and firmness:

A love without firmness  
Is a fire without warmth  
It is a weak thought  
It is a body without worth. (Polari, 1999, p.41)

**Macrocosmic Kinship.** Originally, this theme was entitled “Connection with Nature,” but upon further emergence of sub-themes, e.g., plant-spirit communion, the Christ-Gaian paradigm, etc., it was determined that the title of “macrocosmic kinship”



better encompassed the nature of the phenomenon. As described earlier, the Santo Daime church maintains the belief that Christ is in effect the Jagube vine itself, which means consumption of this sacramental constituent effectively “plants the seed” of Christ Consciousness within its adepts. Madera (2009) succinctly described this paradigm by asserting, “Daimistas graft Christian theology to an Amazonian botanical sensibility, rephrasing the Christian myth in the process....a radical vision of the incarnating fluidity of the Divine....Christ as plant” (p. 67).

Regarding the Santo Daime doctrine in Brazil, it can be seen that “visionary encounters with Christianity form a radical botanical theology of transubstantiation,” and that “Christ has returned to this world as an ayahuasca power plant, re-incarnated in his Second Coming within the alchemical mix of this Amazonian brew” (Madera, 2009, p. 75).

The data also suggest that the church rituals stimulate and accelerate a greater connection and sensitivity to nature. This is most often referred to as the participants’ external environment and beyond. That is, an individual may gain a greater appreciation and/or heightened sensitivity toward nature during and following the ceremony. The sensation of connectedness and the deep impact of animism that the Daime sessions afford are very much in alignment with the “Gaian Hypothesis” (now often referred to as *deep ecology*). This idea was developed by James Lovelock in the 1970s and eventually theoretically expanded upon by some leading scientists and philosophers, like Rupert Sheldrake, Ken Wilber, Fritjof Capra, David Peat, David Bohm, etc. (Von Stuckrad, 2002).

This notion of a developed ‘Gaian-complex’ has also been verified in other ayahuasca studies, such as Blainey’s (2013) recent anthropological fieldwork, where it became apparent to him that “fardados share with New Agers the belief that ‘the earth is a conscious, living organism’” (Hanegraaff 1998, p.157), and that the Santo Daime could be called an “eco-religion” (Schmidt, 2007) or a “Dark green religion” (Taylor, 2010). Blainey further makes the comparison of the Daimista to a segment of the population known as “Culture Creatives,” where both would come to see “the Earth as a web of life, and humans as just one strand in the web” (Ray & Anderson, 2000, p.167).

Other researchers, such as Greenwood (2005), have asserted that the Santo Daime could be categorized as a “nature spirituality” (p. vii) given that the Daime rituals and their corresponding spiritual beliefs are directed towards the Earth and its biosphere, not unlike *wiccan* and neo-pagan groups found throughout the world. Additionally, this heightened perception of the sanctity of nature was acknowledged in a study by Gearin (2013) with an Australian ayahuasca community, which was “characterized by a strong environmentalist ethos that is often expanded to sacred or religious postulates with references to nature and the earth as ‘the Great Mother Gaia’ *who* must be ‘respected and not polluted and destroyed’ (informant 3)” (p. 8).

**Enhanced Coping.** Every participant in this study revealed enhanced functioning on some level related to more positive coping mechanisms for a variety of life challenges. As a result of successfully overcoming intense trials and communing with divine and/or discarnate entities within a liminal context, participants were able to gain a wide array of positive life changes. Overall, 15 sub-themes emerged and were filtered within an overall

aggregate of enhanced coping. Chapter 4 revealed the essence of enhanced coping as falling under three sub-theme axes: improvement, personal development, and skills.

It was reported in this study that participants experienced improvements in their family dynamics and interpersonal relationships, including greater expressions of love and the rediscovery of common ties with family members, more effective conflict resolution with family and peers, and an enhanced ability to view the greater qualities in others. In several cases, it was observed that participants had incorporated valuable lessons from their participation in Daime rituals, predicated in part by their connection to and interaction with the “Divine realm.” In addition to improvements in social dynamics, through divine participation and the dissolution of psychological restraints, participants were able to develop deep personal meaning in their lives, along with a more transparent, focused, and unmitigated life-purpose.

This is consistent with previous literature reporting on the experience of the Divine. For example, Mabit, et al. (1996) acknowledged how the shamanistic model confronts and advances a genuine initiation that facilitates the integration of the participant’s inner reality, thus culminating an intrinsic reorganization. Just as in shamanism, the Daime ritual provides the participant with an opportunity to attain deeper levels of meaning through the exploration of their visionary states.

The affirmation of this sacred and divine realm during altered states of consciousness (ASC) converts the perception of reality, which allows for the development of creative problem-solving heuristics and novel approaches to viewing the world (Mayer, 2008). The acquisition of personal meaning to both the divine ritual phenomena and to personal life issues and stressors, along with the ease of resistance to

change (egoic structure dissolution), represent key elements to enhanced coping. This is very similar to the “shamanic syndrome” mentioned in Chapter 2 (McClennon, 2001), whereby participants are responsible for their own healing and salvation.

Additionally, the spiritual and psychological intensity of the church sessions, from the standpoint of the ayahuasca intoxication, tends to accelerate a position where participants must promptly establish effective coping strategies by squarely facing their issues. Just as shamanism utilizes ASC, the Daime rituals forge the ability to decouple the architecture of experiences that are otherwise obfuscated by every day impressions and beliefs, therefore unleashing novel arrangements, schemas, and attitudes.

As the church rituals became integrated into the daily coping and quality of life of participants, this allowed them to not only develop new skill sets but appeared to have further awaken and inspire them toward greater spiritual and personal development, having moved toward a more penetrating appreciation for themselves and their position in the “web of life.” That is, the essence of their very “being” appeared to have been positively altered.

Chapter 4 focused on three of the most influential themes related to a heightened quality of life, which includes an enhanced level of clarity regarding self and purpose; elevated firmness or “grounding” where life obstacles were transformed into a recourse for the integration of progressive life virtues; and greater levels of an all-embracing compassion, which ultimately led to a more reverent and enthusiastic view of nature and humanity.

There are many elements of the Daime ritual tantamount to the “shamanic flight,” most notably the separation and liminal phase, where participants entered into such a

unique and non-ordinary realm of experience that the core of their being appeared to have been significantly upgraded. Victor Turner (1967) summed it up succinctly by conceding that “the arcane knowledge of ‘gnosis’ obtained in the liminal period is felt to change that inmost nature of the neophyte, impressing him, as a seal impresses wax, with the characteristics of his new state. It is not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being” (p.102).

This is in alignment with the literature presented in Chapter 2, especially that of the shamanic context and purpose. For example, in the modern day era, especially within industrialized countries, there appears to be a loss of a sense of culture, control, and meaning, which may bring about instability, anxiety, and negative effects on health (Hyman, 2007). In dealing with health and disease, asserted Hyman, it is the shaman who promotes an impression of place and control via mind-body realignment, engendering a harmonious relationship to the external world.

Just as the shaman uses a sort of bombastic display of showmanship, the Daimic rituals intensify the emotional state via chanting, rhythmic music, and dancing, which has a rather strong esthetic appeal (Frank, 1973). It is the rhythmic acoustic stimulation through the singing of hymns, which in a certain intensity, frequency, and duration, impresses a decoupling effect on the mental faculties and aids in this process of re-gaining control and balance (Jilek, 2005). Thus, the separation and liminal phases provide opportunities for “repair work” for internal inconsistencies or imbalances between environmental stressors and the participant’s susceptibility to them. It is the emotional state of the individual, as Frank (1973) posited, that has a direct impact on their ability to

modify their perceptions and behavior as well as the ultimate conclusion of the condition or quality of their well-being.

Other aspects of the Santo Daime Church that contain elements of primitive healing or shamanism, involve an in-depth relationship among the group (healing current), participant, ayahuasca (as the healer/shaman), and the supernatural or divine world. These critical components stir emotions, uphold the expectation of the participant's relief from suffering, and further promote reconciling inner conflicts, encouraging reaggregation with self, others, and environment. Overall, this has the effect of strengthening the participant's sense of self-worth (Frank, 1973).

### **Limitations and Trustworthiness**

#### **Limitations**

The sample was purposefully selected, and as with efforts like this, the results cannot be evaluated for external validity. There were also other characteristics that suggest a sample whose responses are unlikely to be consistent with the general population. For example, 5 participants had sought ayahuasca sessions in a shamanic context, whereas 4 other participants experimented with different entheogens in the interest of alternative modes of healing. Given this data and the notion that several other participants were seeking additional "wholeness" in a spiritual practice, as well as a new spiritual and cultural paradigm, the data in this study may thus reflect the limitation that these participants are not completely representative of most individuals that seek alternative modes of healing.

Most participants (12) had "stumbled upon" the Santo Daime through friends or acquaintances, whereas only 2 participants sought out Daime services based on their

research and experience with ayahuasca. The literature does seem consistent with this finding (Lyn & Rhue, 1988; Grob, McKenna und Callaway 1996; Schmid, 2010)—that there is a unique set of individuals seeking this kind of experience that share some common characteristic. It should also be acknowledged that despite the use of member-checking and follow-up, the limited and cross-sectional nature of the data in this study is dynamic in nature. Therefore, methods to capture this information over longer periods of time should be a goal of future studies.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is the degree to which the research inquiry, analysis and results accurately reflect the phenomena of interest. The four axes of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Patton, 2002). The following paragraphs will discuss how I addressed these elements throughout the study.

**Credibility.** The qualitative data gathered in this study was examined systematically through interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), whereby the meaning of the group experience was subjected to a within and across case analysis. In addition to rich, thick descriptions of the group experience through detailed testimonials, tables were provided to display thematic frequencies that emerged from the church rituals in order to provide a clear and honest representation of the phenomena under observation. This is important given that the experiences of altered states of consciousness are not only difficult to measure, but the subjectivity of the data may present challenges to the establishment of reliability and validity. Therefore, the credibility of this study was contingent upon the objective representation of data through IPA, the articulation of the

participants' experiences through testimonials, as well as probing, follow-up, and verification questions.

In regards to member checking, I posited questions derived from the data and then reexamined the data based on participant responses in order to validate the themes that emerged. Additionally, although no causal relationships were established, these findings may guide subsequent quantitative and/or qualitative studies as well as provide guidance for adults to more effectively cope with daily and life stressors as they arise.

These research findings further represent an accurate interpretation of the data, given that I maintained an adequate familiarity with the context of the research, as well as insight into the phenomena, thus the data was appropriately coded, organized, and developed into subsequent themes and sub-themes. It was mentioned in Chapter 3 that in anthropological studies, it is typical for researchers to maintain prolonged contact to acquire a deeper understanding of the culture, social setting, and/or phenomena of interest, which should also include the establishment of rapport with participating members. Given my 5 years of experience and contact with Santo Daime members, the reinforcement of trust and rapport thus strengthened the interpretation and understanding of the participants' meaning behind the phenomena experienced.

**Transferability.** The results from the inquiry of enhanced coping mechanisms from participation in Daime church services are applicable and transferable beyond the scope of this project. This data may be useful for laypersons, including Daime initiates or seasoned church members who may seek a greater understanding of the overall ritual process, providing a smoother transition from the initial stages toward the integration of successful coping strategies. Professionals in many fields, such as religious studies,



cultural anthropology, medical practitioners and researchers, and psychologists, particularly within health, cognitive, and clinical schools of thought, may find this data useful by gaining additional insight into various psychological mechanisms related to, for example, perceived control, unconscious or repressed traumas, personal strength-building, and other means by which coping strategies are developed and integrated to positively affect quality of life. The group samples' prior experiences may also serve as some general guidelines for other seekers of the Daime services.

**Dependability.** The overall quality of the combined data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes was dependent upon my use of the IPA method discussed in Chapter 3. That is, data from testimonials was triangulated via within and across cases, which revealed frequencies of themes as well as shared meaning and experience among the participants. The interpretation of data from a small sample size of 14 participants permitted greater detail in revealing themes and capturing the essence of the overall lived spiritual experience and quality of life in the group.

**Confirmability.** First, biases were reduced as I utilized bracketing by taking notes during the interview process, and further recording entries into a journal following the interview process, which included any relevant notes related to emphasis or gestures during a participant's testimonials, a description of objective expressions, and any recognition of bias related to similarities between the participant's and researcher's experiences. This had the effect of classifying my own experiences and the interpretation of the literature as distinct from that of the overall group experience.

The primary research questions and sub-questions were directly linked to the data from the interview questions as well as the literature findings, which revealed several

parallels and some discrepancies. For example, the clustered themes were acknowledged to be associated with Turner's 3-phase ritual experience, including the primary concept of liminality, which was an integral phase in the development of more effective coping mechanisms for daily and life stressors. At least 4 participants also experienced some degree of spiritual crisis, although the literature did not account for the additional suffering created by mediumship practice, which revealed itself to be an additional tool for building strength and enhancing the overall experience of the ritual for these participants.

#### **Additional Note on Researcher Bias**

I would like to note that given my 5 years of experience with the Santo Daime services, and as a Daimista, it is this intimate experience and understanding of the core church that enabled me to more clearly comprehend the deeper meanings of the participants' expressions. My breadth of experience has helped me to meaningfully penetrate not only the significance of the many ritual components and characteristics of the Santo Daime, but also the importance of the phenomena experienced by the group. This understanding aided me in formulating an appropriate model of themes and sub-themes germane to the experience of the participants within the context of the church.

My experience also aided me in gaining a better grasp of the literature regarding organized religions that use ayahuasca, as well as the experience of ayahuasca itself. In studies of both manufactured and natural entheogenic substances, researchers became involved with the object of study (McKenna, 1993) to gain insight into what can be externally perceived as nebulous experiences in consciousness. Alexander Shulgin developed MDMA in 1965, then resynthesized it in 1976 after having tried it, whereupon

he was so impressed by the results he encouraged its use in psychotherapeutic settings (Shulgin & Shulgin, 1991). Many of the Brazilian anthropologists who wrote exclusively about ayahuasca (Dobkin de Rios, 1972; Monteiro da Silva, 1983; McRae, 1992; De La Rocque, 1988) are Daimistas, which largely facilitated their access and improved the quality of their data collection (Soibelman, 2005). Dobkin de Rios (1972) stated about her use of ayahuasca prior to fieldwork, that she “felt entirely like an objective observer who was at best only able to record the vaguest outlines of a phenomenon which defies description” (pp. 71-72). Therefore, experience adds depth and understanding to the analysis of chemically-induced ASC phenomena, as well as a framework for potential uses.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The theoretical lens of this study identifies ayahuasca as a technology, specifically as PETs. To put this into perspective for the reader, it may be appropriate to provide an example, if I may be granted some poetic license. Imagine there is a new and effective treatment for anxiety, depression, and addiction that utilizes a ground-breaking new virtual reality (VR) technology. This VR technology consists of a set of goggles placed over the eyes, stimulating the mind by infiltrating the deepest brain centers, further releasing certain “blockages” or other elements impeding the use of optimum potential, of whatever that may consist. There may be some struggle during the processing of negative behavioral patterns, or traumas, although it can be observed that significant and effective development typically requires some initial struggle and discomfort. The therapist then provides guidance and aids in processing the experience so that full integration and synthesis may be achieved.

Ayahuasca consumption and any practitioner that provides guidance for the experience of its consumption, be it a shaman or a religious organization, is not unlike this technologically sophisticated tool. Of course, this begs the question, what are the similarities between an ethnopharmacological substance like ayahuasca and a human-made technological apparatus like a VR application? First, it could be said that ASC is not unlike a “virtual” reality, one in which there exists far more possibilities than is normally accessible in ordinary states of consciousness. Secondly, the creation of a virtual fantasy environment, whether intentionally “indoctrinated” by spiritual, religious, and/or mythological symbols and figures, or a random and emotionally charged psychedelic *mise en scène* of some type, may stimulate the deep emotional and psychological centers of the brain, possibly leading to a sequence similar to that seen by the ritual use of ayahuasca: separation, liminality, and reaggregation.

It is the intent of this study to add to a growing body of literature that is aimed at altering conventional assumptions about what is a “good drug” and what is a “bad drug.” The scientific community ultimately reforms its thinking via research and facts. Case in point, changes to marijuana laws are in large part due to research-based evidence demonstrating its relatively innocuous effects and the lack of success in criminalizing its use. Therefore, it is hoped that this study and additional studies like it will re-orient the manner in which substances like ayahuasca may serve as additional psychotherapeutic and medicinal tools for the global community.

It may be difficult for others to grasp ayahuasca as an effective therapeutic alliance, since the notion that it is organic skews its interpretation as a sophisticated technological tool. Additionally, because it alters the mind, which has rendered it a

controlled and illicit substance, it is then labeled a drug, further creating a culturally-agreed-upon taboo, not to mention the associated lineage of its indigenous users who may at times be deemed uncivilized (e.g., shaman as the Noble Savage). Ayahuasca is then separated from the availability of effective technologies and deemed as an unworthy, alternative therapeutic tool, due to fixed assumptions of valid and usable data outside of the focused engine of traditional Western science. As Shanon (2010) stated, “Any general, comprehensive theory of cognition has to encompass both the ordinary and the non-ordinary facets of the mind. Thus, the new phenomena revealed by ayahuasca have significant ramifications for psychology at large.” (p.38).

McKenna once said, "One man's symbolism is another man's technology" (BG2071, 2011). It is believed by this researcher that a new understanding of the positive effects of ayahuasca, which will continue to be documented by further related studies, should compel scientists to re-pivot their interpretation of its essence, and temporarily, as a sort of Gedankenexperiment, set aside the peripheries it may carry—the culture, the magic, shamanism, a biological entity, etc. (but at the same time not ignoring its complete context, history, and disciplined practitioners), so that the scientific community can avoid the 'pejorative reflex' that is an integral modality of Western science. Additionally, although the mystery and magic surrounded by this technology may not be always fully understood, its profound effects certainly represent an important tool for understanding the mystery of the mind, the spirit, and the very foundation of being.

If there was but one positive social change that came out of this study it would be this illumination, or paradigm shift—that an effective and powerful technology is available for gaining a greater understanding of the inner-workings of the mind as well as

coping skills that can be highlighted for more successful therapeutic alliances and research. Therefore, a paradigm shift in how we deal with human issues and how we interpret the efficacy of other culture's healing technologies would be paramount. This means that our out dated and old-fashioned rules, regulations, and social recipes should to some extent be re-examined to include additional effective solutions for significant human issues.

This could be a paradigm shift that may, in essence, bring therapy to the marketplace—at the community level, and at a more basic, fundamental, and natural level, as we learn to become a culture of self-help. An example of this is seen in the shift of marijuana—its growth as a medicinal resource and source for manufacturing, as old paradigms are challenged and changed. Organizations such as the Multi-disciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) and Students for a Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP) represent funded entities that are using both scientific and social media to change the politic of belief regarding these substances.

Finally, I plan on using the findings from this study in a variety of ways. First, excerpts from the results of this study will be submitted to a number of academic journals, such as the Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology, Anthropology of Consciousness, among others. I also plan on presenting the results at a number of related conferences, such as the annual MAPS conference, Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness (SAC) conference, and various functions held through the ERIE group (Entheogenic Research, Integration, and Education). The data in this study will also be combined with additional theoretical considerations not discussed in this study to compile

a book to be queried for publication. This study will further provide a springboard for future writings, discussions, and studies by myself along with colleagues in the field.

### **Recommendations**

Professionals in the field of psychology, such as LPCs, psychotherapists, health psychologists, cognitive psychologists; psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, and medical doctors; medical and traditional anthropologists; sociologists; scholars and researchers in the social, anthropological, health, religious, and mythological sciences; and counselors in a religious setting or organization should consider the results of this study. For example, psychoactive compounds have been valuable in analyzing the various etiologies of mental pathologies by chemically altered states of behavior (Cole & Katz, 1964), as well as certain modalities of human psychology and behavior (Schachter & Singer, 1962). Although it is not suggested that therapists or other professionals persuade, or dissuade, but rather consider the nature of spiritual crisis and its potential for positive psychological development, which may be brought about by the use of ayahuasca in any setting. That is, practitioners could be educated on the notion that the spiritual crisis represents a “doorway” for positive therapeutic potential, whether ayahuasca is used or not.

The professions listed above may use the data in this study to structure appropriate therapeutic dyads or other tools, such as specific questions oriented toward the root of behavioral and thought patterns. Not everyone who attends the Santo Daime church may find the necessary will or motivation to seek assistance within the group. Offering creative, cognitive-behavioral-spiritually-centered support may prove useful in helping these individuals process unique and profound experiences. This could also prove

to be an effective route for the development of new professions as a branch of psychology to aid individuals with emerging issues relevant to a modern day era. Modern conceptual models of analysis deserve the courtesy of further development and research.

A focus on newcomers and initiates of the Santo Daime in future studies may provide greater insight and understanding of this population and their experience in the church sessions. Studies focusing on the experience of these naïve Daime participants during and after the church sessions will provide an understanding of the unique aspects of the phenomena experienced and how individuals process struggle and further develop effective coping mechanisms. Also, gaining access to both naïve and seasoned participants immediately following a church session will eliminate reflective discussion of the topic and may provide additional insight into this experience.

The scope of this study was limited to 14 men and women who had an average 4 years of experience, although one had 10 years and another over 20 years of experience in the Daime. Expanding the number of participants across all lengths of service and membership status (e.g., guest, fardado, leader, musician, etc.) would be useful in understanding issues related to spiritual communion (i.e., ESC); transformational struggle (the Trial); macrocosmic kinship; rapture; contact with entities (S-Co); the development of effective coping strategies for stress; and overall quality of life. This would also account for additional discrepancies, such as any members with more adverse experiences, or those who left the church or had conflicts with the structure or any other features of the organization. Additionally, future studies should focus on the details surrounding a spiritual crisis, with special attention to soteriological processes and the



specific psychological mechanisms involved in the transformation of struggle into something of great value.

Lastly, participants in this study did not report on the visual distortions, patterns, and symbols caused by the DMT present in the brew. Although the core religious context of the church doctrine appears to reroute focus on elements like spiritual communion and Christ Consciousness, and is germane to the development of successful coping strategies, visionary states may in themselves be psychologically and spiritually rejuvenating and salutogenic, providing a type of mystical participation and symbolic healing modality. Therefore, further studies could incorporate mythological motifs and symbols, perhaps through synthesizing the works of Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung, calling attention to ancient mythological wisdom. This may not only help to stimulate a paradigm shift in epistemological and ontological foundations of knowledge, but also further support and encourage multidisciplinary approaches to research and learning.

### **Conclusion**

The use of ethnopharmacological substances, such as ayahuasca, in both shamanic and organized religious contexts is gaining rapid popularity and witnessing emerging globalization from its origin in the Amazon. It is evident that many are searching for alternative healing modalities; the answers to life; more complete spiritual development; new and alternative perspectives from the traditional Western model of culture; or even new and enriching journeys into a world of mystery. It is suggested that the use of these substances can be utilized in ritualized and spiritual settings, which facilitate and accelerate the healing process in general, or any particular goal that is personal, spiritual, or otherwise. Many have to come to call these substances ‘entheogens,’ which reveals the

potential of these substances to uncover and manifest a spiritual center, or a “divine spark” within. I label these substances “PETs” in an attempt to dispel the taboo nature that these substances carry, so that the scientific community and the government may collaborate to work on a potentially broad-spectrum healing tool for a voluminous array of human issues.

Ayahuasca alone is known to be a significant tool in solving life issues and in coping with a variety of ailments. For most participants who use ayahuasca, such positive changes are typically a sideline of the intended process of changing their self-concepts and conduct of life (Schmid, 2012), which may result from a better quality of life, from a salutogenic point of view (Antonovsky 1987). Nearly all types of ayahuasca rituals have been considered as “healing rituals” by its participants (Winkelman 2005, Schmid et al. 2010). “Healing” is not necessarily limited to the cure of mental and physical diseases but extended to a variety of both psychological and spiritual issues, and in some regards may be seen as both a journey to our “inner worlds” through self-exploration (Schmid, 2012).

As a result of participants in this study developing intimate personal relationships to the Divine, resulting in a “liminal” initiation, this effectively enabled them to integrate their own inner reality. The results of this is similar to what Mabit et al. (1996) described in their assessment of individuals who consume ayahuasca, where participants undergo an intrinsic reorganization of deeper levels of meaning in life through the exploration of mythological motifs, Supreme beings, “visions,” (including meaningful and symbolic ‘non-visionary’ states), as well as the acknowledgement of a sacred dimension.

The results of this study appear to match Turner’s (1967) 3 stages of shamanic ritual phases as well as Winkelman’s (2010) description of the ritual communion with the

spirit world, which involves pre-symbolic and symbolic processes that recalibrate the association between the world and self, creating catharsis, integration, and psychological balance. This represents a unique and effective approach for preventing a variety of negative psychological symptoms as well as the sustainment of purposeful and optimum living.

Until now, no study has focused on, at least to the extent that this study has, the specific mechanisms or stages of spiritual and psychological development, such as the components involved in the Trial, liminal states, divine communion, and coping with daily and life stressors provided by a combination of spiritual guidance and ayahuasca consumption. This study is unique in introducing specific theoretical mechanisms that explain the interpretation and integration of sensory phenomena experienced during organized ayahuasca rituals, and presenting additional tools for the facilitation of spiritual and psychological development.

Substances like ayahuasca, especially in a spiritually-guided container, allow individuals to participate in not only the myths and mysteries that have been discussed for thousands of years, but the facilitation of their own development; and not to mention, the enrichment of life itself as potentially new and insightful knowledge regarding the collective human psyche is revealed. I believe this and future studies like it will provide not only models for assessing the inner-workings of the mind as well as techniques for developing effective coping styles, but also change the way we view the very foundation of knowledge and research.



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## Appendix A: Consent Form

Ethnopharmacology and Stress Relief: The Spiritual Experience of Practitioners in  
the Santo  
Daime

Church

**Walden**

**University**

*CONSENT*

*FORM*

You are invited to take part in a research study of “Ethnopharmacology and Stress Relief: The Experience of Spiritual Practitioners in the Santo Daime Church.” The purpose of the study is to explore your involvement in the Santo Daime church services and inquire about the relationship of this spiritual experience to your daily life and coping. This will include questions about stressors or major negative events, along with any subsequent psychological, emotional, or spiritual effects. This may or may not include anxiety, depression, or substance abuse.

You were chosen for the study because you have participated in the Santo Daime church services at least one year of church session activity and/or 10 sessions.

This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before acting on this invitation to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Justin Panneck, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. Justin became aware of the Santo Daime Church several years ago when conducting research on non-traditional methods of healing and shamanism.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to explore the spiritual experience of the Santo Daime Church participants and the meaning of the experience for daily living and coping with stress.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Give consent to be involved in the study
- Be interviewed on audiotape, in-depth, no sooner than 48 hours after the

termination of the Santo Daime Church session.

- To confirm the completeness and accuracy of the study, the researcher will ask you to review a summary of the interview, to ensure that an accurate representation of the interview has been made. If necessary, a follow-up telephone meeting will be scheduled to correct any inaccuracies.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one in the Church will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the interview. If you feel stressed during the interview you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There may be minimal risks related to being in the study, e.g., increased anxiety in recalling any troubling personal matters during a church session. There are no direct benefits to you for participating, although you may experience some personal meaning for sharing your story. The indirect benefit of your participation is that you are contributing valuable data to help researchers and psychologists better understand the role of spiritual practices like this in everyday life.

In the event you experience any distress during the interview you may terminate your participation at any time. Although unlikely, in the event of an adverse emotional or psychological reaction, you may contact the Multnomah County Department of Community & Family Services Crisis Line at 503-988-4888. You may refuse to answer any questions you consider invasive or stressful and still be involved in the study.

**Compensation:**

Participants who give consent to be part of the study will receive no compensation.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any report of this study that might be published,

the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. Tapes and transcripts will be destroyed five years after completion of this study. Participants will choose pseudonyms and all data will be connected only to this fictional name.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via [REDACTED] and Panneck@hotmail.com. If you want to

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talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **01-24-13-0056213** and it expires on **January 23, 2014.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Written or Electronic\* Signature

Researcher's Written or Electronic\* Signature

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

## Appendix B: Research Study Announcement

### Sample Research Study Email Announcement from Researcher

Justin Panneck  
Walden University  
155 5th Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55401  
[REDACTED]  
[Panneck@hotmail.com](mailto:Panneck@hotmail.com)

01/28/2013

Dear Santo Daime Church members and beloved guests,

This announcement serves as an invitation to take part in a research study entitled “Ethnopharmacology and Stress Relief: The Spiritual Experience of Practitioners in the Santo Daime Church.” Justin Panneck is currently a doctoral student at Walden University and became interested in this topic as a result of his own experience in the church.

Justin is looking for 12-15 participants who are fardados, and have been for at least one year, or who have attended a minimum of 10 sessions as a member. The study will involve a face-to-face, qualitative interview with 10 questions related to your interest and experience with the Santo Daime Church, how you cope with stress, and how your coping skills have changed since you began attending. Interviews are conducted outside of any church session, and no sooner than 48 hours following the closing of a session

If you would like to find out more about how to participate, please email Justin at [panneck@hotmail.com](mailto:panneck@hotmail.com) or contact him by phone at 503-545-8688. If you agree to participate, he will send you a consent form to read and sign, which you can email back or return at your initial meeting. You can expect the interviews to take anywhere from 45 minutes to 1 hour, and you can meet him at a location of your choosing. Although no compensation will be provided for participation, you will be contributing to a study that hopes to shed light on one of the increasing number of unique and alternative methods for dealing with daily and life stressors.

If you find that at this time you are not interested but know of a fardado either at your location or another location who may find interest in this study, you are encouraged to forward this on to those individuals.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Church Leadership  
Santo Daime Church  
c/o Justin Panneck  
[REDACTED]  
[Panneck@hotmail.com](mailto:Panneck@hotmail.com)



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## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

### Interview Guide

1. How long ago did you start attending church services; and how long did it take you to become an official member?
2. Tell me about how you came to the Santo Daime Church? (Probe: Why were you specifically interested in the Santo Daime Church denomination?)
3. How would you describe your life at the time you first came to the church? (Probe: were there any significant stressors or challenges in your life at the time?)
4. What did you expect this Church experience to be like?
5. Tell me about your most profound or most powerful church session. (Probe: What made it so powerful?)
6. What did you take away from this experience? (Probe: What did the experience mean to you?)
7. What has changed for you since you've been participating in these church rituals?
8. What do you see as the connection between your church experiences and your experience of daily life? (Probe: What is different for you now, compared with before you came to this church?)
9. What is your experience of coping with life challenges now? (Probe: How is coping different for you now, compared with before you came to this church?)
10. Is there anything else you would like to share with me so that I can better understand your experience and what it means to you?

Appendix D: Verification Letter

**Sample Verification Letter Protocol**

Justin Panneck  
Walden University  
155 5th Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55401  
[REDACTED]  
[Panneck@hotmail.com](mailto:Panneck@hotmail.com)

02/21/2013

Dear Participant,

I wanted to thank you again for your support in helping me with my current research study. Your contribution provided some useful material for this research in shedding some light on the spiritual practices of practitioners such as yourself in the Santo Daime Church.

As I had mentioned following our interview, as part of the data analysis and results portion of my dissertation, there was a possibility that I would need to contact you to verify your testimonial for accuracy. With that said, I am sending you a summary of your interview and requesting at this time that you to review and verify that your testimonial is reasonably accurate, and if there is anything you want to amplify or change. I know you may be busy, but I would greatly appreciate it if you could reply back to me no later than 7 days from now.

Although I do have a verbatim transcript of our interview, you will notice that I have summarized the transcript and selected usable sections for my study, and further highlighted certain passages. Feel free to correct any errors or expand on some of the highlighted themes from the excerpts.

Thanks so much again for your time and I will keep you posted on further results. Feel free to email me or call me at the number below should you have any further questions about the transcript or the study in general. Have a great week!

Sincerely,

Justin S. Panneck  
Walden University  
[Panneck@hotmail.com](mailto:Panneck@hotmail.com)



Appendix E: Identified Themes  
and the Ritual Phases of Experience

**Identified Themes and the Ritual Phases of Experience**

The Trial involves 9 sub-themes or processes leading up to ESC, or the *miração* as labeled in the Santo Daime tradition, and is related to the ritual phase of separation, or the cathartic phase of Winkelman's ritual communion with the spirit world. Originally, I labeled this theme "transformative struggle" and equated it to the spiritual concept of *balanço*. My own preconception of *balanço* was that it was limited to one specific behavior within the spiritual works—shaking. For example, when discussing his first session, Juniper recalled, "...the first time I went, I had these incredible healing experiences where my body was shaking...." However, *balanço* was a rather complex theme to tease out, as some may describe *it* as an overall transformative struggle involving several of the sub-themes included within the Trial. That is, it was determined that *balanço* should be listed as a sub-category of an overall process that involves "struggle" and eventually "transformation."

*Balanço* can be observed a specific process seen at the beginning of the Trial, and may involve shaking, intense visionary states, or what Timothy Leary described as the "retinal circus" (Leary, Metzner, & Alpert, 1970). Through intense scrutiny of the overall group experience, it was determined that *balanço* may either occur spontaneously without the involvement of other important components, such as self-examination or self-confrontation, purging, etc. Additionally, several participants described an immediate sensation of intense and painful psychological and emotion struggle, which then initiated

a sequence of events, described in this study as sub-themes. Therefore, the sub-theme “balanço” is used to describe the immediate intense struggle experienced by the participants.

It has been observed that the following sub-themes (although not necessarily consistently for everyone who attends the Daime services) tend to occur in a particular sequence: balanço, aparelho/bodily sensations; disembodiment; deconstruction/uprooting; self-confrontation/facing inner-fears and traumas; clearing blockages; purging; and nakedness and vulnerability. Balanço and aparelho may overlap, yet these were teased out as distinctions in overall sensations and affect were described in the group experience. Clearing blockages and purging may also overlap, although some participants were able to clear blockages “psychically” without purging.

**Balanço.** It is the accompaniment of psychological, emotional and spiritual support that provides the necessary tools for assisting an individual in processing a usually profound and life-shifting experience. This is why the overall struggle is transformational and healing. For example, Kathy discussed the following about one of her most profound experiences:

I was just like suffering, and I was having a really hard time, and during that time—well, there’s a space they use with a massage table and they do work on people as doctors—and important guardian type people were working with a person, and I was going through all this and the guardians didn’t know what to do with me (laughs). The guardian I had didn’t even know what was going on until I started screaming so loud that the whole salão could hear me for like 20 minutes. And then I passed out on the floor in the middle of a hymn. At some point I didn’t

have control of my body, and I just struggled. But it was very interesting. The struggle was really beautiful. I feel like I opened up a whole new door of possibility....

When asked what she took away from the experience, Kathy stated, “Ya know, there’s something to be learned about regarding human nature and the human psyche and the experience of the struggle....it’s very beautiful. It helps put our humanity into perspective, I think. It helps us also to see the Divine, which is always a special gift, to feel like you’re aligned to it instead of just the everyday experience of wanting to be or hoping that you are.”

As mentioned earlier, some participants described balanço as involving a wide range of effects, and may occur when working with various levels of “vibration.” When asked to validate her testimonial and elaborate on any of the highlighted key words and themes, Angel responded via email with the following statement on her experience with balanço:

This, to me, is the "physical" effect of what is happening in all the other "bodies". Since we are in human bodies, things manifest on the physical level. These effects can be vertigo, nausea, profuse sweating or intense cold, throwing up, intestinal purging (diarrhea or otherwise), etc. These effects can happen during times of detoxification from emotions, fears, doubts or physical things we've taken into our bodies that are not the healthiest for us. The Daime seems to pull all the "stuff" that we are ready and willing to let go of (on whatever level) to the stomach and intestines in order to release them physically through vomiting or intestinal purging. It's how we physically "let go" of all of it! Another aspect of balanço that

I've experienced is when I'm coming into a new level of vibration with the Daime. For example, I come into a work with my "vibration-of-the-day"... I could be in a high vibration already because "everything is going my way"... or I could be having a bad day and have a lower vibration due to negative thoughts, feelings, etc. OR, I could be graduating to a new level of vibration with the Daime. Either way, my vibration is not "in tune" with the vibration of the Daime. Personally, I will experience intense balanço until I am able to raise my vibration to one that is "in tune" with the Daime. At that point, all my "balanço" effects disappear with a "puff". I may think I'm going to throw up on the spot or have to run to the bathroom or have an accident, and the next moment, I'm perfectly fine! It has all passed. It's actually quite extraordinary.

**Aparelho/Bodily Sensations.** Many participants described strong bodily sensations in their *aparelho*. Ayahuasca tends to bring on a very strong presence of bodily sensations, which can range of tingling, intestinal purging, feeling that body is heavy, or many other sensations. The literal Portuguese translation of *aparelho* is "apparatus," although in the Daime this refers to the vessel, or medium, who receives and manifests the spirit in the mind and body (Polari, 1999). This occurs during both the separation and liminal phase of the Daime ritual, or the cathartic phase of Winkelman's shamanic ritual communion, and most often leads to an "anchoring" or firmness, which is an integral phase of a Daimista's spiritual growth in the Daime. One of the signature phrases in the Daime doctrine is "Daime força, Daime amor," which translates to "give me strength, give me love." The church padrinhos and padrinhas, as well as any seasoned

Daimista, will frequently reiterate the importance of *firmeza*—the inner-strength necessary for personal healing and spiritual growth.

One example of this was from Adrienne, who beheld, “I knew I needed to do more grounding in a bigger and more metaphysical way—I wanted to feel the firmness of that in my body.” This *firmeza* is an integral phase of a Daimista’s spiritual growth in the Daime, yet this does not typically occur until later in the reaggregation, or psychological balance phase. Although this sensation begins as soon as the effects of the ayahuasca are felt, they also may occur throughout the entire work, and may also overlap with several other themes, such as S-Co, mediumship, or ESC.

Describing his experience during his first work, Juniper stated, “. . .the first time I went, I had these incredible healing experiences where my body was shaking and all of these spirits were coming out of me. . . .” Juniper’s description appears to blend *balanço* and *aparelho* sub-themes as he experiences shaking and intense bodily sensations. Others are more specific. For example, in describing his most profound experience, Jagube added, “There were like other spiritual beings that were coming into my body, or my *aparelho*, as they call it, and creating all this grief too. It was very interesting.”

Some individuals may experience much intensity in their *aparelho* when coming into mediumship for the first time, such as when Angel recalls one of her first sessions with ayahuasca with a shaman in Peru. She recalled, “One of the first times I drank ayahuasca, I started feeling something. My body started to feel something—I didn’t understand it. The Westerner who was leading this retreat, who works with a Peruvian ayahuasquero. . . .just said—‘Do it on the inside.’ And I said, ‘Do what on the inside? I’m not doing it!’” In later describing her continued work with spirits in her emerging



mediumship, she recounted, “So, when these beings would start coming...coming into my body and moving my body, I could tell...I knew what it was...a male, a female, a shaman, an animal, a bird, ya know. But I didn’t understand what it was.”

**Disembodiment.** Disembodiment involves the feeling of ‘leaving one’s body’ or being ‘lifted out of and above’ one’s body, similar to individuals who recall out-of-body experiences (OBEs), which may occur during hypnogogic hallucinations prior to sleep or during the dream state, or even during near-death experiences (NDEs). In recounting one of his first experiences, Musashi stated, “I drank the Daime and then I closed my eyes and I said my mantra and...I went so deep...so deep...that I felt I had detached from my body.” Similarly, in recalling his most profound experience of what he described as psycho-emotional healing, Sterling beheld, “I immediately went into another visionary state...and I could see my own body sitting in my chair.” Additionally, Iris discussed her most profound experience with a being when she mentioned, “I had an experience [that] involved an interaction with a being and all the energy with what I associated as me was having a complete overhaul with how it reacted with everything that I sensed as outside of myself.” She further added, “.....So, that was profound. I think the most profound tend to be those of that ilk. They all have this kind of sense of this very fundamental level of having things shifted about how I look at my life and myself and how I connect with other people and my environment.”

Iris wrapped up her discussion of her most powerful experiences by stating, “I did have a number of experiences that were in the same category where I felt as if my whole system was being re-calibrated, like off the planet and all the data in my entire being was being re-calibrated. So that was pretty profound.”

**Deconstruction and Uprooting.** Deconstruction, or “uprooting,” is a process that involves intense self-examination, bringing to the surface the ‘psychic detritus’ one has accumulated, including negative behavioral and thought patterns. The Trial includes a “de-rooting” or “deconstruction” through a self-confrontation of anything from negative behavioral patterns, addictions, unhealthy eating habits or bad nutrition, to abuse traumas or negative self-talk, which eventually leads to the psychic or psychological clearing of blockages, often, although not always, via purging. As observed with psychosomatic disorders, these blockages are “stored” within the body, which may manifest as physical tension, anxiety, depression, and/or substance abuse. Thus, the intensity of this process is often correlated to the degree of “psychic detritus” one has accumulated over the years, which will become more evident as the data is presented.

Some individuals may seek out the church services for the purpose of deconstruction and/or self-examination. For example, Iris explains one of the reasons she first came to the Daime, which involved her overall interest in the use of psychedelics as an “up-rooting” tool. She explained, “I had extensive experience with mushrooms (psilocybin) and a little bit of Salvia Divinorum. Let’s put it this way, I like having my scaffolding taken down. And so I had an active desire to be completely taken apart, and so that’s all I had an idea about and that it would probably work towards that end. I didn’t have a lot of expectations of what that (the Daime) might be. I just knew that it might be challenging, and that I was looking for a deep transformation.” Walda described a similar experience of being “taken apart”:

I was going through a really, really difficult time where I felt like my entire psyche was being deconstructed and everything I was trying to do to cope with

the experience was not working. Like I could kind of see my mind as a very, very tiny spec in the greater mind of the medicine. And I could already anticipate every move that I was trying to make to get away from what I was feeling. So it was very humbling, and it was very scary. It kind of like took me apart.

Self-confrontation or facing one's deepest inner-fears is a signature occurrence *during* the deconstruction process of the Trial. This very process is the cause of many of the sometimes terrifying or shocking experiences that many participants face. When asked to describe his life at the time he first came to the church, Wichar stated, "I felt confident in who I was, but in a lot of ways I didn't and I knew I had a lot of things that I had to face about myself that I had trouble confronting and I couldn't. Just a lot of confusion.....some difficulty navigating in the world. And I felt like really healing medicine could help me....face my own head...so to speak—to have some more guidance with that, because that always felt like my biggest beast." He described past issues with addiction and escapism, an approach that resembles helplessness—a negative coping mechanism for life stressors.

When describing his most powerful experience, Wichar recounted what to many would sound like a most unusual experience, although actually quite common among individuals who take ayahuasca. That is, the sensation of "abduction," or being examined or worked on by other beings:

I felt like I was at a doctor examination and they were looking at all my wounds, all my psychological problems—all inter-correlated. And they actually started looking at some of my deeper things, and they were like, 'Yeah, I don't think he's ready.' And I was like 'I'm ready, I'm ready.' But then as it started to feel really

intense, I started looking into it and then my mind would wander, and then they were like, ‘No, he’s not ready,’ and I was like, ‘No, I’m ready!’ And it was getting really intense and my mind would try to escape again, then again, ‘He’s not ready.’ ‘No, I’m ready, I’m ready to face this stuff!’

Wichar further described in vivid detail his continued struggle with de-rooting and deconstruction, calling on the help of an “ally”:

And what followed next was hours of agony, literally sometimes writhing on the ground. So, I would get back and then go to my seat and then go back and lie down, then go outside and stand by the tree. It was like I was at this deep crossroads and I could see it and feel it so viscerally. I was struggling...for a long time. So, eventually, I’m standing out by this tree. And I’m standing there literally feeling like there are like these black roots growing inside of me and wrapped around...and I knew it’d be painful to rip out....it’d tear some shit out and probably be a lot of healing, but sometimes it’s just what ya gotta do. So, there was just so much pain. And then the spirit of one of these plants—it’s one of my main allies—it’s a plant covered in thorns—a very protective, very fierce guardian spirit, just came in at me and just in one intense movement, it like ripped all this shit out of me and threw it onto the ground and was swallowed by the earth.

When further elaborating on his profound experience, Wichar recalled, “I don’t know if those are some of my most profound experiences compared to some other ones, which were maybe a little more jarring. But, when you’re digging deep and you face something really big and really unexpected, it’s gonna be a little jarring, and it’s

something you've gotta dig up, and it may not always be the most pleasant or the most immediately satisfying journey." He further elaborated, "I felt like I needed to take this space and understand that maybe it's just more about sorting out my headspace and learning how to confront some of the problems in my life. It felt like this stuff was going really deep..."

It may also be the case that an individual will report becoming aware of past sexual abuse, something they may not even have been aware of, the consequences of which include frequent or intermittent tension or emotional pain. Juniper began to recall some sexual abuse trauma during his first couple of church sessions:

My most profound experience has been something that has taken all five years....starting from the second work that I came to. It was something that I had kind of thought....that I was pretty sure I had been sexually abused, [which] just totally rose to the surface and I was like swimming in this sea of trauma. So from the Daime, that was really brought forth for me to work with. And then in those first months of coming really regularly, I would go to that place of trauma and just get completely overwhelmed by it and the Daime showed me, 'Oh, you don't have to actually re-live that every time. It's like this hole. You can choose to go down that—it's your choice, so I learned how to do that. That was the first self-transformation work I had been to and I barely knew anything about the Daime. And in that work, these beings came to me.

Others may be faced with current issues that cause one to project into the future, such as Jagube's account of his chronic pain when discussing his powerful moments in the Daime. He stated, "I was in another work where the grief transformed into fear....fear

of being 40 years old and practically....ya know, I might need surgery, I might be in a wheel chair at some point. It's scary stuff, ya know, especially when I have children that are like 2 and 3 years old, ya know? It's heavy, heavy duty stuff."

Facing your inner-fears is not a pleasant experience, especially when one believes they are on the edge of death, perhaps one of the greatest fears that we as mortal humans face. In fact, a very seasoned leader within the Daime once said, "taking ayahuasca is like preparing for death" (personal conversation, 2011). When asked if there was anything else she would like to share, Cedar, who has been a Daimista for 2.5 years, but 9 years of experience drinking ayahuasca, said, "Ayahuasca really makes you face your fears....your inner fears. People need support in processing what ayahuasca does. What ayahuasca does, especially when people are alone, is it makes people think they're dying, or make them have to deal with their fears of mortality. Some people have an ecstatic experience with this, but some people have a panicky experience with it. It makes people have to look at all their fears and to not be afraid of fear." Cedar further elaborated on the notion that those who decide to take ayahuasca, not to mention those who come back repeatedly, have made a decision to not only face their fears, but to no longer be afraid of fear:

When you drink ayahuasca and take it seriously, you have to make up your mind that you're gonna deal with some fearful things, and the fact that you're willing to do it means you're not afraid of fear. And it's not that people are fearful, it's that they're afraid of being fearful. The decision to take ayahuasca is a decision to not be afraid of fear because you know you're gonna see something fearful. You have

to not be afraid of it. And once you're not afraid of your fear, it's a liberating thing.

Musashi responded with a similar theme when asked to verify data via an email response on his own experience with balanço:

As I mentioned, I have few mirações. But on the balanço part and the shaking, I truly believe it is a very interesting and productive means of firming one's self. The idea that you might 'die' or go through something really difficult, in some way obliges you to revise your actions and consider whether you've made the right choices. Almost as if you rehearsed death over and over....and then the cleansing gives you a chance to actually 'die' and clear your system of whatever is burdening you, be it from this life or past (who knows)....then the lightness and sense of well-being afterwards affirms the hope in a new day where you can recommence a new life. The key in the Daime as an accelerator of consciousness is to actually seize that moment and go back to your day to day life with an invigorated heart and mind to follow the teachings and instructions that you were given, rather than following back on all your old patterns and conditioned behavior. And since we are creatures of habit, we have many Daime works so you can practice many, many times before you actually are faced with 'death' itself...so that is my idea of balanco, learn how to shake and firm yourself now before the 'big' earthquake.

When asked to discuss her initial reasoning for seeking out the church, she revealed, “So, I went down to Peru to drink ayahuasca, and went about twice a year for two years mostly to face my fears.” When asked about what it is like coping with life

challenges now, Angel stated, "...what's so beautiful is that for me, and from my understanding of talking with a lot of other people, is the Daime can show us those parts of ourselves that can't even hardly acknowledge, or want to look at. But it does it in such a, many times, in a gentle way....like it's always hard for me to get feedback because I get pummeled, ya know, 'your this, your this, your that, whatever,' and I would just shrink and go under. But, the Daime showed me those places I need to work on."

**Clearing Blockages.** Adrienne elaborated on two of her most profound experiences, related to the theme of clearing out blockages related to fear. She stated, "The one that brought me into taking my star—that one was like getting a big block out of the way...about being fearful....it was the most embodying of my higher self....the most release...of the fear held in the lower chakras. So, releasing that block of the root chakra that I belong—moving that was so essential. So, one was very profound in removing the fear and one profound in understanding more deeply my core. It was authentic." She further conveyed, "I just really felt like I went through multiple transformations...of letting go...of negative things in my psyche....like the fear, or that I had to go along with certain things, or that I should be killed—whatever you take into that central nervous system. Incredibly healing! Very, very healing."

When asked what she took away from the experience, Adrienne discussed the general make-up of psychological elements that create the very blockages that need to get released, and the mechanisms that individuals use when obscured by the build-up of "psychic detritus," adding to this notion of connecting back to the heart, which will be discussed later:



Shame, guilt, and fear gets so embedded in our psyche, now we have to come back to reality and whatever we have taken in that space, now we have to come back and clear that in the real life. This stuff, like shame and guilt, which leads to fear, has so much interference in our lives. You're punishing me and I'm fearful that I'm not good enough, or something's wrong with me because I have this part, and I also feel that when we're fully in our bodies we realize a sexuality and sensuality that's part of nature—it's so repressed in our culture, then because the sexual part is so repressed, it's other parts that get repressed too. So that shaming of that instinctual part of who we are gets healed, and you know, get it connected back to the heart. So, stronger faith.

**Purging.** This transformative struggle can be very intense for a participant during the ritual. There may be an entire gamut of emotions and actions that take place, similar to Juniper's earlier description of his first session, where he recalled experiencing *balanço* and *aparelho* themes, with the addition of "puking and crying and laughing." It may be that nearly all of the sub-themes occur succinctly in rapid succession, making it difficult to determine the sequence. For example, Sunshine described one of her most powerful experiences:

Very, very intense force from the beginning, and I was reeling and I was dizzy and there was nothing I could manage....and seeing so many people their first time lost, and [here] I was one of them. Everything I had ever done in the Daime had dissolved. I had nothing. I went to the purge bucket and fell (laughs), literally with my head in it. It became this open vat of what seemed like incessant release...of material vomiting. A guardian came over and asked if she could hold

my hair, which was in the bucket. Seemingly, an eternity passed where I'm just this flaccid lump while vomiting as my hair was being held. Then the guardian said, "I think you should stand now." So she supported me in standing. And I'm turned away from the current and the table. Then she said, "I think you should face the cross and the current." I felt like "no way, no way." But I said, "Okay, turn me." So, I turned. And as I saw the light of the current and the cross, centered on the table....It blasted with such intensity and light! And what I felt....a spiritual....I felt absolutely naked! I had been stripped of my physical clothes and everything and completely humiliated and vulnerable. I literally had vomit in my hair and snot dripping down my nose (laughs) and I'm facing the light of God.....(pause)....and my community. And that was an initiation....and everything that has come after that, I was dissolved of my ego to allow for that soul to connect with its source. And that's how I became a fardada.

When she said, "Everything I had ever done in the Daime had dissolved," she was referring to the accumulated strength she had built from all her session within the church. This is a hallmark trait of ayahuasca—that it may on occasion completely shatter any assumptions, beliefs, pre-conceived notions, defenses, or patterns one has built up over the years. This is the essence of "deconstruction." However, it is important to note that one of the intentions within the church doctrine is to build strength, or *firmeza*, as they call it in the Daime—to affirm one's self and stay strong, passionate, and open as an individual within their community. Thus, a church member may build up strength over the course of months or years, and come to a point where they do not have such "shattering" experiences, given that they had successfully cleansed themselves of

impurities, or negative patterns, and moved forward on a broad front with the intent of continued spiritual and psychological development. Firmeza was discussed in detail in the section on “Enhanced Coping” (Chapter 5).

As seen in the aforementioned testimonial, this was a special moment for Sunshine, as this was her initiation into the Santo Daime, when she would receive her star. She went onto say, “It became this open vat of what seemed like incessant relief,” as she went to the purge bucket. This is an important moment during the Trial, when one releases the accumulation of “detritus.” As she described, one of the guardians came over to help her up. The role of the guardian is to assist those who are struggling, whether helping them lie down off to the side of the ceremonial circle, or wrapping them up in warm blankets and providing comfort and coaching during a rather intense trial. Often, however, and so long as the participant is willing and able, the intention of the guardian is to reorient the participant toward the “center” or the salão, which contains the frequently discussed “healing current,” the center of which lies the Daime cross, from which emanates what many describe as “divine light.”

It can be very difficult to stand up and face the center when one is reeling and struggling, but the result, again, is an affirmation, strengthening, and resolve, which is a token trait of the Daimista, for which Sunshine described as providing the prerequisite traits for filling the role of a Daimista. This process is also one of self-discovery, whereby one may analyze their thoughts, defenses, patterns, etc. For example, Sunshine discussed what she took away from the experience:

Anytime you have an experience like that, you’ve reached a level that....is it! I’m enlightened! And then you’re back in your life and then the amount of awareness

and light that you have has to be assimilated...it has to be integrated within the material world. So, it was one amazing experience that I had reached a certain level of no return...to quickly realize there's another layer in this onion. I guess the biggest thing, and this is different for a fardada and a firmada, is that you have committed to the work of the Santo Daime, and that has another whole slew of layers and laws and regulations and you have given up your personal need within the Daime; and that was, I guess, the beginning of my awareness of being in service.

When prompted to discuss her most profound experience, Samantha described a situation that felt like a “channeling,” whereby she goes to an unconscious space. She stated, “So I start to have this mystical experience, where I was kind of channeling things, but I didn't know. But what struck me the most was this unconsciousness space, and that was irritating me because the work of my practice is just to be very conscious, ya know, your mind is here, then wandering over there. ‘No, no, get back here (laughs)...I need focus’.....and I guess that I was channeling something because I was kind of moving—I don't know what I was doing—then after that, I just threw up I think most of the work.”

Occasionally, an individual in the church may be called upon to purge for others, typically during the mesa brancas and curas, or healing works. These individuals are almost always mediums in the church. Angel described this experience when asked to elaborate on her mediumship work. She recalled, “Some of my work may be for some in kind of a clearing house. Because sometimes I would take on stuff for the salão (the star table—the center of the Daime ritual where the leaders and more seasoned members sit—

including the musicians), and me just throwing up for someone, and then afterwards they would say, ‘Oh, thank you so much.’”

**Nakedness and Vulnerability.** Participants in the church during the first round of Daime often experience a “nakedness” or “vulnerability” during the Trial. Of course, this does not necessarily refer to a physical sensation of feeling naked, although some participants may feel physically naked as the physical and psychic world tend to meld, leaving one to feel a sharp drop in all manner of discernment. Rather, the sensation resides in one’s mental processing of events, as if they were being stripped of their belief systems, assumptions, motivations, defense mechanisms, or ego, which may lead to a sort of ego-dissolution. Whatever is being exposed and/or stripped away, one may feel as a vulnerable or insignificant grain within the vast sphere of erratic imagery and overwhelming emotions.

This feeling of vulnerability, combined with facing one’s inner fears or traumas, or of stripping away one’s mechanisms, self-defense, or addictive habits, may often cause one to “release” these negative elements that “cloud” one’s thinking or mental health. This could be in the form of an ecstatic overwhelming joy, sometimes represented as light, or “divine light,” but occasionally, this may cause one to purge. In Sunshine’s earlier description of her most powerful session she exclaimed, “And what I felt like was....um...and this was a spiritual experience that’s been documented by many, many people throughout history....I felt absolutely naked! Ya know, that I had been stripped of my physical clothes and everything and completely humiliated and vulnerable. I literally had vomit in my hair and snot dripping down my nose (laughs). And that’s how I became a fardada.”

Musashi described this nakedness and believed it to be a more authentic religious experience, very much like a new religious paradigm. His statement hints at this notion of “stripping away” the accumulated cultural “layers,” whether it be social status, position, or ego. For example, he beheld, “It felt much more authentic to me than going to church, ya know....because of this sacred beverage....this potent beverage...you become naked. Ya know, there’s no room for pompous masking or pseudo-egos. You could shit your pants and be the President and that wouldn’t matter.”

When describing her life when she first came to the church, Kathy described the vulnerability that most participants encounter, yet something that is supported by the social group bonding of the church itself. She mentioned, “The Daime was kind of perfect, and the community in the Daime was key, and I was like, ‘this is a special place, with special people, and they all really love each other and you do this thing together where they’re all so vulnerable .....so vulnerable, and you’re all friends, and that’s really helpful.”

Overall, the Trial represents an important phase not only in the spiritual development of Daime practitioners, but also in their social, emotional, and psychological development. The church sessions provide a unique opportunity for a type of “auto-therapy” through an intense self-examination. It was observed from the data that participants experience a variety of themes: heightened awareness of bodily sensations; shaking of tensions right out of the body; the unique opportunity to gain an “outside perspective” as one looks down upon one’s self from above; the deconstruction or “taking apart” of one’s self; clearing of blockages, such as habits, traumas, addictions,

etc., and the stripping away of old assumptions and defenses toward the forging of a fresh new perspective and outlook on life.

Although set within the context of a structured church ritual, the Trial is almost entirely dependent upon the holy sacrament—ayahuasca, a very powerful medicine extracted from the Amazon, which sends one through a vivid and profound journey that most certainly leaves an impression on those who take it into their bodies, as observed from the data in this study. As discussed in Chapter 5, the structure of the spiritual component of the church may also influence some aspects of the Trial, which is invariably related the next phase—ESC.

### **Ecstatic Spiritual Communion (ESC)**

The most frequent theme that emerged also relates to one of the main ritual concepts in Chapter 2, liminality, for which I have labeled “Ecstatic Spiritual Communion” (ESC). Originally, the themes that emerged within this phenomenon were labeled what is known in the Daime as the *miração*. In the Daime church, this state that occurs during the spiritual work is often described as an ecstatic visionary state wherein each person becomes a protagonist of his or her shamanic flight (Polari De Alverga, 1999). Padrinho (Godfather) Polari, a revered leader of one of the Santo Daime churches in Brazil, further asserts that the *miração* is “an inner perception combining insight and ecstasy that can be included by the ritualized use of these divine plants in a religious context [and it] contains the model for a new state of being brought forth from an internal reality, revealing an ancient wisdom and foretelling a spiritual consciousness that is indispensable to our very survival on this planet” (1999, p.2).

Mercante (2006) discusses a certain level of merit or privilege to this process, as if one must accumulate the appropriate self-knowledge and spiritual work toward an authentic *miração*. Marcelo relates that individuals may get glimpses of *mirações*, like facial images, sounds, colors, etc., prior to their readiness in receiving such a profound occurrence. For the current study, I have expanded upon the description of the *miração* and added 9 sub-themes as they emerged from the group experience: Christ Consciousness, Jesus Christ, Divine Mother/Mary, Divine Light, Spiritual Illumination, Spiritual Transformation, Spiritual Messages, Divine Connection, and Spirit Guides. Thus, ESC has been chosen as a descriptive label to identify additional spiritual processes and distinctions among various phenomena, such as contact with “otherworldly” beings not of a religious nature, and those of a religious nature (divine communion and Christ consciousness), the latter of which describes spiritual contact during the ESC. This study so far has discussed the results of the spiritual and psychological processes within the Trial that lead up to the ESC phenomenon.

It is important to note that although Mercante (2006) puts emphasis on “spontaneous visual imagery,” some Daime participants have a complete absence of visual imagery, as demonstrated in Angel’s response to a verification question regarding her own experience in working with *mirações*:

Personally, I don't get visual *mirações* - those Technicolor visions that you hear about so much with ayahuasca or Daime. I will occasionally get "flashes" of images... like an imprint on my mind's eye. For many years, I thought I must be "doing something wrong" or not be "good enough" to get visions. I asked the Daime, point-blank one time, why I didn't get visions. The answer I was given



was, "Your visions are your thoughts and your feelings". Certainly, visual *mirações* are incredible and what you mostly hear about. But everyone is different. Some people are more *clairaudient*, more *claircognizant* or more *clairsentient* than clairvoyant. My *mirações* seem to be through messages given to me through my thoughts and feelings. They tend to be pretty simple - I guess because I'm a pretty simple being.

When asked if there was anything he would like to add to help me better understand his overall experience, Musashi also claimed to not be a visual person, as he described, "...I'm not much of a visual person. Many people tell me about their visions and revelations, but I've never seen things. I've felt things and heard things, and maybe that has to do with what chakra is being activated, or whatever. I tend to cry and feel emotions. So, anyway, I've never been that type of person. I mean, I'm not one who usually believes in beings, I've never received any beings, I've never incorporated them, even after drinking large doses, and maybe it has something to do with my skepticism or my tradition, and I was willing to go within that in the Daime, but I've always been one with the hymns....the hymns and the prayer are my practice...that's my mediumistic practice...to sing the hymns." The spiritual influence of the hymns is an integral component of the spiritual and religious ecstasy that occurs during *mirações*.

Cedar responded to a member check email, and expanded on some of the causes for the distinctions between visionary and non-visionary states in the *miração*:

As far as the *miração* and *balanco*, and your interest in the pharmacology of that -- I don't think that Daimistas in general have any sense of the distinct effects of the two plants and exactly how they work together, unless they (like me) have some

independent Ayahuasca experience. Both *B. caapi* and *P. viridis* are visionary, but in very distinct ways and they work together. The *balanco*, on the other hand, is almost entirely the effect of the *B. caapi* (which is much lighter in Daime brews than in traditional Ayahuasca shamanism -- heavy *B. caapi* content creates a "drunken" effect that would make it hard to function in a work) and the blood pressure lowering effect that can make people feel cold.

After being prompted on her experience with *mirações* from a member check email, Angel elaborated on the strengthening of her relationship to Jesus Christ, a particular theme that emerged in the interviews with 6 separate descriptors:

*Mirações* are one of the beautiful ways that the Divine communicates directly to you through the Daime. There is no intermediary. Just you and the Daime...you and God... you and the Divine. You and Christ. I have deepened my own relationship with The Christ through the Daime. After having left the fundamentalist Christian church in my late 20's, the Daime has been a real gift in mending my relationship with Him. I have had many *mirações* - messages and those images in my mind's eye - of and from Christ. His message of Love is being replanted through the Doctrine of the Holy Daime two thousand years after He was here on earth. The Daime gives a direct experience of His teachings.

**Divine Connection.** Another very similar spiritual concept in the Santo Daime, which is in alignment with the aforementioned concept of the "divine within," is the belief in a direct connection to the divine. Padrinho Jonathan Goldman (1999) summarizes the purpose of the ritual:

The purpose of the ritual that takes place around the drinking of the sacrament is to create and hold a space for direct contact between the participant and the Divine. The role of the leaders of the ritual is never to interpret experience, but simply to be the human aspect of the center pole of the spiritual atmosphere. In this the Daime is true to the original teaching of Jesus, who never sought to establish an elite class of priests to intercede between people and the Divine.

Rather he taught that direct experience of God was the birthright of all humans. A great emphasis is put on leaving expression of the individual ego out of the ritual.

(p. xxiv)

Several participants recalled what could be described as a “divine alignment” or “divine connection,” such as Walda’s explanation of her overall life experience since attending services, as she stated, “In general, it’s kind of like I have this place to back to....when I go to a work it’s like reconnecting me to the Divine....”, or in Juniper’s statement that, “Every person has the opportunity to connect in with the center to make your own connection to the divine...” This divine connection may also be described as a connection between the earth and the sky, such as Mushashi’s description on what he took away from his most powerful experience, as he beheld, “.....the Daime really helped me to bring back an anchor and put my feet on the ground and recognize that, yeah, we do have this connection between Earth and the sky, ya know, Heaven and Earth....” When asked if there was anything else he would like to discuss to aid me in helping me better understand his overall experience, Musashi added his thoughts on divine connection:

One thing is that in the Daime, people tend to think, feel, or even believe the things they are receiving is an expression of their messages, or inner guides. And I thoroughly believe that people, or the Daime itself, is a medium between you and yourself or between you and God, or however you want to put it. And the Daime is a vehicle that can, perhaps, bring these things closer to you.

As a result of these divine connections and alignments through their continued spiritual work, participants often feel an overall spiritual transformation and growth. For example, when prompted to summarize her overall experience, Sunshine stated, “I believe the Daime is a spirit. I have become open to work that spirit through the depths of my physical channel.....into the depths of....Gaia.... and the whole world of life forms.” She also claimed to be evolving on both a spiritual level and a personal level, by believing that, “I’m now aware that I have a life within the Santo Daime that is coming closer to my life on the Earth, but I’m evolving on both.”

Several participants also described an increase in overall spiritual faith and support from their divine connections, which may contribute to the overall healing process. For example, when wrapping up her overall experiences in the church, Angel replied, “We’ve got a lot of support from the spirit world. That’s our real home. I mean this is just wearing costumes.” When Santo Luz discussed what had changed in his life since participating in the sessions, he stated, “The thing that I can really, really, really appreciate more than anything is the access I have to an unshakeable faith....” When discussing his answer to the same question, Jagube exclaimed, “Putting faith in the Cross, and the Daime. Having faith in this spiritual lineage that comes through—it’s basically a lineage of Christ. To me it is even broader than that. It is life, it is spiritual life!”

**Jesus Christ and Christ Consciousness.** Christ Consciousness is one of the most significant aspects of ESC (and the *miração*), which includes a deep connection and new understanding of the teachings of Jesus Christ. Although Christ Consciousness was the 2<sup>nd</sup> most frequent sub-theme, when combined with its related counterpart, Jesus Christ (images and encounters of), it represents the most frequent aspect of spiritual experience, followed by “spiritual illumination” and “divine light.” Images of and contact with Jesus Christ is an integral part of the Daimé sessions. Many Daimistas report very powerful and profound experiences when not merely reading about Jesus Christ or Mary, but coming in direct contact with these figures. For example, when she described her most powerful experience of receiving her star (initiation of a Daimista), Walda recounted, “. . .in the ceremony, I had a visit from the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. And it was very powerful for me.”

It is important to note that Christ Consciousness is distinct from Jesus Christ, since with the former, one may feel “as Christ,” and with the latter, one may see or interact with Christ. When the participants describe Christ Consciousness they do not necessarily believe themselves to be Christ, as in delusions of grandeur often seen in schizophrenia, but rather come to see the world as Christ allegedly did, or at least how the world should be seen (e.g., awareness of natural beauty in all of creation; a rapture for others and the environment; a profound love for oneself, etc.).

Many Daimistas speak of Christ Consciousness in their visions, which is in accordance with the doctrine of the church. For example, in describing her most powerful session, Adrienne beheld, “I knew I was carrying the authentic, original Christ Consciousness.” Adding to her most powerful session mentioned just earlier, Walda

revealed, “I had this experience where....and I don’t know how else to explain it except that it was Christ consciousness....where it was literally like I could hear and feel the life that was inherent in all of existence and it was profound....”

Angel appeared to be moved by her new understanding of the teachings of Christ, having been raised as a Baptist missionary kid in Africa, generating a rather strong distaste for the traditional Christian viewpoints. She stated, “I had missionary parents, I went to boarding school, church, praying, devotions, we had everything. I was taught about Jesus and God. But I was afraid of Jesus and God. Everything we did was a sin. And at the boarding school, someone would get mad at us and would say, ya know, sorry for....living. So, everything was a sin. So, when I left the Christian church because I was like if that’s what God was and that’s who Jesus was, it didn’t work for me.” She further adds, “The Daime is kind of like a rocket ship. I was wanting my own connection to the Divine, which I found in the Daime.”

Describing her most powerful experience, Angel added, “....here comes Jesus again. And I wasn’t quite sure about Jesus. So, throughout all my years of drinking Daime, it’s really opened my heart to Jesus—who are you really? Because my experience was really bad. And it was one concentration that he came to me, and I got insight as to who this being that we call Jesus—who he was and what he brings, and it’s not the Christian religion, it’s a consciousness that is for everyone—it’s not a religion—it’s a state of consciousness really. And something after that concentration shifted in me, because my relationship to Jesus the Christ has really deepened and has really taken me to my own inner depths that spiritually I had not gotten to before.” She further went onto say, “I feel more of the higher vibration of the angels and the ascended masters and the

Christ energy.” Angel clearly had a new understanding of her relationship to Jesus Christ, even after claiming to have “no desire to step foot in a church for 20 years.” However, it is important again to consider how this changed her thinking in terms of bringing this new understanding into her daily life. When asked what she took away from this powerful experience, she revealed some insight into her understanding of Christ energy:

Ya know, I don't feel so alone. Because I'm a medium, I work with spirits and other beings and my guides, and just that helps me not being alone. But that presence of not only Jesus who had been the man, who embodied the Christ energy, but feeling that in my heart, and in my aura, and in my life. But that knowingness, that Christ consciousness, it's like getting a better understanding of what he actually came to the planet to do. Ya know, it's not just about a man. It's what he came to show to embody, ya know, this is you—each one of you. So, I think what it's done is that it's empowered me to see that I am that too. So, the little person I think I am—I'm not good enough, or I'm not this, or I'm not that—NO! That spark is in you too, that is you too, that is who you really are! He came to show that I am present, right!? That's me! So, it's given me more confidence, not only in just my own spiritual aspect, but as I take that on into the world. Because I like surrender to the mission that is mine that I signed up for. It's like I'm so grateful—every day I'm like—“wow, I'm here, I'm doing it.” That's what this whole thing was in preparation that I could be who I am today to do this mission and be part of this—to replant the doctrine that Christ came 2000 years ago to bring....

Other Daimistas may not even come to a complete understanding of the true meaning of Jesus Christ. The important thing seems to be its translation to the receiver—what it means to the recipient. In fact, many practitioners of the Santo Daime church maintain their own belief systems, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, or other religious and spiritual practices, but use the church for their own healing or the acceleration of their existent spiritual or healing practice (e.g., yoga, Buddhist meditation, Tai Chi, traditional therapy, etc.). For example, when asked if there was anything he would like to add to help me better understand his experiences and what they mean to him, Juniper added, “...it’s easy for me to translate it into something that makes sense to me. The Virgin Mary is just like the Divine Mother; Christ is like the universal light. And then I said I don’t really care what the outer trappings of it are because I’ve gotten the most incredible healings of my life, ya know, completely transformed my life by working with this medicine.” He also described that when one of his acquaintances asked him how he “deals” with Christianity in the Santo Daime church, knowing that he is not a traditional Christian, he replied, “I’m not like a Christian in the sense that I believe in the Catholic church, but I’m Christian in the sense of aligning myself with the Christ energy.”

Another spiritual concept that is often discussed among Daimistas and the leadership, related to Christ Consciousness, is that Christ and/or God is within, as in “the Kingdom of Heaven is within.” For example, when asked what she took away from her most powerful experience, Kathy stated, “that was probably my 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> work when I discovered that was everything. That I was God and everything was God and that that alignment helped me to understand like Christ and Jesus...what he was trying to teach...” The result of this notion of “God within” is an empowering translation that is



closely related to the ESC subtheme, “divine light,” as well as the “opening of one’s heart,” which is discussed later as part of the “Rapture” theme.

Finally, when discussing their most profound experiences, several participants discussed their own related viewpoint regarding their encounters with Christ and how that changed their understanding of what Christ represents to them:

Putting faith in the Cross, and the Daime. Having faith in this spiritual lineage that comes through—it’s basically a lineage of Christ. To me it is even broader than that. It is life, it is spiritual life! To me that’s what Christ is—it’s like holy, sacred divine light and goodness and love, and having a direct connection to that.... I know I’m taken care of and protected and watched over on a spiritual level.

(Jagube)

I felt like I could see right through them...to their very essence. I just felt like it was this thing.....where....I dunno....I felt like Christ was just in me. And I had never had any relationship to these Catholic figures before, so it was like totally unexpected for me, and I think that kind of enabled me to deepen my relationship to the Santo Daime because I understood why there was such an emphasis on these figures...and it really showed me the meaning. (Walda)

I had an idea of the history of what the Christian and Catholic spirituality meant, but through the years of my Daime practice and my understanding.....I was much more open to receiving and understanding through that practice the teachings of Christ or brotherhood and of fraternity and charity and all those things within that

context. It felt much more authentic to me than going to church, ya know....because of this sacred beverage....this potent beverage. (Musashi)

At the very end there was this part where....there was this Jesus mantra and this was being fed to me while I was laying down. I kind of had my back turned to everybody because I kept feeling like that they were trying to like suck me into this weird cult....and when they were doing this Jesus mantra, the figure of Jesus like totally appeared in front of me....pulled his heart out and....showed it to me. Then I had this understanding that we are all a part of this same heart. A flood of memories came over me....past lives of having known this of course, like we all know from this universal place. Then I was like, ‘Oh, God, how could I have forgotten....again?’ (Juniper)

**Divine Mother.** Many Daimistas report aligning with a divine feminine energy, or “the Great Mother,” which encompasses many aspects of femininity, such as Gaia, Mary, a connection to the “womb of creation,” etc. Often in the Daime and other Amazonian indigenous beliefs, the ground or the earth represents the feminine, whereas the sky represents the masculine, where this essence produces a feeling of comfort and safety. For example, when discussing her most powerful experience, Kathy revealed, “Often I align with the Divine Mother because that feels safe and comforting and...I feel like she has a space around my heart that she can hold. The Mary on the altar can give off that energy too.”

When asked about coping with life challenges after having attended church sessions, Santo Luz beheld, “I have help....on standby. I’m not alone ever, and I’m

always connected to God and I'm always connected to the Divine Mother, and all these other beings. And if I can just align myself to just that, it just hits me...I can feel that. So then even when difficult circumstances or people or stuff arrive, I can call upon that presence." An affirmation of "divinity within," citing among other important divinities than the Divine Mother, he further clarified, "I feel like one thing the Daime has done is it's completely solidified in the cells of my body, but there in my consciousness and in my heart, is a piece of God...to be here right now...the Divine Mother, Jesus....all right here."

**Divine Light.** Liminality was described in detail earlier in this section as the second stage of Turner's ritual phase. However, this particular theme, although occurring typically during the liminal phase, and following the separation stage (the Trial), involves for many the sensation of "light," which tends to be of divine origin. This sub-theme had 13 descriptors and tends to occur during this very critical and important phase of the spiritual growth process.

The manifestation and perception of light can come in many forms and varieties. For example, during his previous discussion of spiritual communion, Musashi talked about the safe passage of his mother and his first contact with spiritual beings. In his description, he mentioned, "So, I was holding her ashes and this mantle of pink light shot up from my left side. As I had my eyes closed, there were angelic vibrations, and spheres were emanating..." It may also come in the form of a metaphor, as in Angel's discussion of when she first came to the church. She acknowledged, "...it was when I committed and became an initiate and got my star and actually joined the church—the sword of light

came down and cut it and like everything, I mean EVERYTHING (*all caps used to demonstrate sudden inflection and increase in volume*) changed about my life!”

Divine light may also be related to how Daimistas conceptualize the Christ spirit, which often occurs during ESC, or the *miração*. For example, when asked if there was anything they would like to add to their overall experience, Jagube replied, “.....that’s what Christ is—it’s like holy, sacred divine light and goodness and love...”, whereas Juniper asserted, “The Virgin Mary is just like the Divine Mother; Christ is like the universal light.” When Kathy recounted her most profound experience involving mediumship, she related, “Giving those beings to the light and the cross and aligning your heart with the cross, which I always envisioned as this kind of....way up....like the light coming through the center and spreading out.”

Cedar, when asked about how she came to the church, relayed, “I’ll tell ya when I first knew I wanted to be a Daimista. It was my first orientation with [the leader], and he said, “All spirits that are willing to work with the light are on the same side.” And this is what I wanted, and my only problem with Christianity was their exclusiveness, and this was a Christianity that welcomed all spirits willing to work with the light and all spirits working for our benefit on the same side.” When Sunshine was asked to recall her most profound Daime experience, she conveyed a very emotional and critical moment in her spiritual development, which occurred right after her Trial, involving an absolute feeling of nakedness and vulnerability, followed by a rather healthy amount of purging.

Others may describe their experience with light as encounters with “light beings,” such as Angel’s account of her initial mediumship work early on in the church, when she stated, “When this first started happening these beings would come and they’d be

POWERFUL (*all caps used to demonstrate sudden inflection and increase in volume*)—very high-vibrational light beings.” Wichar also highlighted a similar encounter when he described his most powerful session, as he mentioned, “I felt really quickly dropping into a deep sacred ceremony and it happened all really fast and I felt the spirits arriving, and really bright forces.”

Light may also involve a source of healing energy, as described by several participants. For example, when Juniper recounted his abuse trauma during one of his most powerful experiences, he went on to say, “and then after that happened—after I cleared it, then I had to start letting the light into that and that was the most painful thing I’ve ever experienced in my life, ya know cause I had been shut down for 40 years, and letting the light come into it.” Angel put it in a simple manner as she explained, “Ya know, we’re showing these parts of ourselves—light is showing these parts of ourselves that are hard to see.” Kathy described the shift in the way she communicates to God, after the transformative struggles she has encountered in her most profound moments, asserting that, “the Daime always reminds me that it’s a direct connection, and it’s through myself. And it’s through the light and through the Daime, but it can be just right through me.”

Light may also be described in the context of the opposite of “dark,” as in evil or malevolent forces. For example, when Kathy related her story about her profound mediumship work, she stated, “. . . .I instantly started to realize what was happening—that I was incorporating this being—but I couldn’t do anything about it, and they ended up giving me a little bit of Daime, and I drank the Daime and the being was gone. . . .it went straight to the light!” Jagube also recounted one of his most powerful experiences, as he

revealed, “I had this experience with the *Ponto Das Almas* altar, which is an altar that’s designed to help these darker, more malevolent spirits and beings release and to help these beings be transformed and healed into the light.” On a side note, the organization of the church was given the name CEFLURIS (Eclectic Center of Universal Flowing Light Raimundo Irineu Serra), which indicates to some degree the importance of “divine light” operating within the core of the church belief system.

**Spiritual Illumination.** During ESC, church members often reported not just the perceptual sensation of light, but also an illumination, as in a shift or awakening of consciousness. This could be a profound insight, a divine or spiritual teaching, or a realization of a professional or personal goal. Although much of what one experiences may be at the edge of language given the sheer profundity of it all, it is not uncommon during the opening of consciousness to gain a greater understanding of how the mind operates, and how it connects to emotions or patterns of behavior. For example, when prompted to share anything that would aid me in better understanding his experience, Jagube added, “When you drink this medicine with the Daime, I don’t think that it necessarily alters you, but it opens you up. It opens up your consciousness. It thins that veil between [these] realms, and an astral or spiritual-based realm, so you can understand much more about your thinking, and about how your thoughts connect to your emotions, and connect to your own spiritual being. In the process of creating this understanding, and so much of it is beyond words, right? It’s just like light bulbs going off. And fireworks!”

It can be very inspiring and uplifting to have an illumination or insight into the inner-workings of the mind. However, this process, as discussed previously, is not

without its detractors. That is, it can be a struggle leading up to illumination, for example, when asked about coping with life challenges now, Jagube asserted, “When you drink Daime and have these profound awakenings of consciousness and understandings of consciousness, it’s kind of like a double-edged sword because there’s a lot of challenge that comes with it.”

The struggle may come from an awareness of one’s own wrongdoing, or a negative event that was repressed, such as an abuse trauma. Samantha had an interesting revelation related to her mother’s alleged abuse trauma while Samantha was in her womb. This illumination aided her in identifying the source of her stress, which led to a sort of relief from the symptoms. Naming something appears to be the first step, or in some cases the only step, toward eliminating it.

Juniper’s own trauma was discussed earlier during the Trial. He had spent many years working on it—healing it and integrating the teachings into his life. Although this may have generated a great deal of anxiety for him, his sudden illumination in a recent work that he discussed as one of his most profound sessions brought closure to this event, as he recalled, “It’s still all unfolding and in the process of the works, like a month ago, I finally saw who it was who abused me, and because all the work that I had done in the Daime and healing the psychic and emotional aspects of it, I was completely fine and I was in this space of forgiveness.” When wrapping up his thoughts on how he has integrated his experiences and teachings from this event, he added, “Being able to shift from your own consciousness and let another consciousness come in, and another one and another one, makes it so you don’t get too stuck in one way of thinking or being, so it

helps you to be more flexible in the world. And then just having an opportunity to learn from these incredible divine beings that heal me.”

**Spiritual Messages.** As previously discussed, ESC tends to involve frequent divine communion, where many participants may interact with other beings, or see images of them manifest. However, some participants, including those who could be classified as “non-visionary,” instead tend to “receive messages” from the “astral plane.” For example, when describing what it is like coping with life challenges now, Angel exclaimed, “I talk—I don’t just pray anymore—I talk! I can call—I talk to Jesus, I talk to my guides. They’re just here. And I don’t see them, and I’m kind of glad I don’t (laughs), but I get messages and I hear them.” When describing her mediumship work after being prompted, Angel provided details into these spiritual messages:

I don’t get visions, ya know, these Pablo-Magritte-type visions—ayahuasca or Daime, I never get ‘em. But I get these flashes. In my consciousness there will be this...flash...of a picture, or a knowingness....or a thought...a message ....and sometimes I get these short, simple messages, maybe because I’m a simple person (laughs). But, ya know how like on a computer screen, you’ll get this quick message? And it said, *‘We are beings from the other side but use your body to bring our energy into physical reality.’* And I was like, ‘Thank You!’ Finally, somebody told me what was going on!

As evident from the data, ESC is clearly a critical stage in the overall personal and spiritual development of participants, leading to much greater levels of enthusiasm and zeal for life in general, not just limited to within the spiritual domain. The church doctrine and structure is syncretic, involving elements of Christianity, Catholicism,



African animism, shamanism, and Spiritism, which sets the stage for a spiritual communion with religious entities, such as Jesus Christ or Mary. Some participants, some of which were atheists or agnostics prior to attending services, revealed a new found rapture and understanding of the religious icons. For example, when wrapping up the interview, Sterling revealed that he had been an atheist prior to the church services, but through his experiences in the ceremonies, which included profound divine messages, he professed his new-found belief in the divine realm. A more detailed description of Sterling's encounter with these divine messages will be provided in the next section on Supernatural Contact (S-Co).

As a result of a direct, personal and meaningful connection to the divine realm—with no intermediaries—participants encounter divine light, illumination, spiritual messages, divine connection, and consequently spiritual transformation. It is this “special attention” from divine and benign beings within the celestial court that may further serve as a primary feature of potential positive coping mechanism development for daily and life stressors. However, it is important to reiterate, that contact with “astral” beings occurs not just within ESC, but also any time during a ceremony. Whenever it occurs, this is a unique phenomenon that deserves the courtesy of further examination.

### **Supernatural Contact (S-Co)**

Participants in this study reported a number of situations involving contact or interaction with a variety of supernatural beings. This is very wide-ranging and may often depend on the context, or type of ritual, as well as the thematic stage in which the participant is experiencing the contact. So far it has been discussed that much of the

spiritual/divine or religious entities, such as Jesus, Mary, or angelic beings, occur during ESC. However, at nearly all stages of the ritual are there reported contact with a variety of types of entities, including benevolent and malevolent beings, the latter of which may occur during the Trial; or abduction or alien-like contact, which may involve a type of “ethereal surgery;” or contact with mythical or healing spirits, such as those seen during mediumship practice within the healing works (i.e., curas and mesa blancas).

**Benevolent Beings.** It was observed earlier from several participants during the Trial that beings or spirits present themselves in a healing capacity. For example, when discussing divine light earlier, an excerpt from Wichar’s description of his most powerful session revealed “really bright forces.” He described this profound session in vivid detail:

So, these elders came up and they were doing two ceremonies...two days in a row. In the first one, we were calling in the powers of the archangels. And oh my God, did I feel them come! I felt really quickly dropping into a deep sacred ceremony and it happened all really fast and I felt the spirits arriving, and really bright forces. Pretty quickly, I had to lie down. I could feel the energy of the spirits moving around and I really felt ready to go for it. And I felt like I was at a doctor examination and they were looking at all my wounds, all my psychological problems—all inter-correlated. And they actually started looking at some of my deeper things, and they were like, ‘Yeah, I don’t think he’s ready.’ And I was like ‘I’m ready, I’m ready.’

Also highlighted earlier during the disembodiment phase of the Trial, a similar experience of being “operated on” came from Iris, when asked about her most profound experience, as she stated, “I had an experience [that] involved an interaction with a being

and all the energy with what I associated as me was having a complete overhaul with how it reacted with everything that I sensed as outside of myself. So, that was profound. I think the most profound tend to be those of that ilk. They all have this kind of sense of this very fundamental level of having things shifted about how I look at my life and myself and how I connect with other people and my environment.”

Another participant, Sterling, received what he labeled ‘psycho-emotional healing’ for his tinnitus, which had been preventing him from getting adequate sleep. The spirit came to him in the form of a hummingbird:

I went to a work...a concentration...and during the concentration period I went into a visionary state, which at that time was my first one. And a hummingbird appeared to me and asked me what I wanted. Ya know, kind of like, ‘what’s your wish?’ And, I wished for something else first but I had a whole experience that I ended up avoiding, because it was just too intense. And the hummingbird came back and sort of like sardonically said, ‘Well, what else did you want?’ At that point I remembered the tinnitus and wishing....for some help with that. I immediately went into another visionary state....and I could see my own body sitting in my chair and I could see this wire that went from one ear to the other ear, in my head—a black line. And I could tell immediately that it was the cause of the tinnitus and my visions started to zoom in on it and time started to slow down. I could see that what looked like a black line was just a tiny little hummingbird that was zipping around from one side of my head to the other and buzzing in my ears....it was talking into my ears....and it was so fast and at such a high frequency that I couldn’t hear anything else but ringing. To my ears it just

sounded like ringing. And it was very interesting, because I didn't have any sense of needing to know what was being said, and any message that I was missing out on not knowing what was being said. And my understanding was very clear that the tinnitus, the ringing in my ears, was divine messages that I was receiving, and that it wasn't something to be distracted by, and along with that was the knowledge that I could re-enter the mental state that I was in at that moment, which was relaxation and meditation, and if I did enter that state, that it would not go away, but sort of become like a background, like with fate....in my consciousness. And to this day it has been erased. Ya know, it's like I received this profoundly, and it was not in the form that I would have expected, but it was profound, life-changing, and healing nonetheless.

Individuals may also come in contact with spirits of the deceased, whether their siblings, parents, grandparents, or other relatives. Musashi first highlighted how he is not a visual person and also that he never receives messages from beings, nor is he ever really in direct contact with them. His experiences tend to involve an intense and diverse array of emotional feelings. However, on one occasion, he described one of his most powerful sessions, a brief excerpt of which was provided earlier in depicting the phenomenon of divine light:

Back in 2010, my mother had passed away. I cremated her and I had her ashes....and I went to a Daime work and I took my mother's ashes with me and I had them in my lap and I drank Daime. So, one name for the ayahuasca is *yage*, or 'strange force.' Another name for it is 'vine of the dead.' So, there's this idea of a lineage or link to the ancestors. And I have never experienced that, but on that day

of my mother's death, I had a very distinct something that was imprinted into my whole being. So, I was holding her ashes and this mantle of pink light shot up from my left side. As I had my eyes closed, there were angelic vibrations, and spheres were emanating, and it was not spoken, it was kind of like a 4<sup>th</sup> dimension where information was being exchanged....it was not spoken....it was something that I knew. And basically the message was....'we are the beings that have been assigned to assist your mother in her passage, and we want you to know that she will be okay.' And that was so clear! That was the first time in my life I can really say I received a message from the astral, and I came in contact with these beings, and it was, 'it's gonna be alright, we have this one.' It occurred for 10-15 minutes or so, and then it passed. So, that was assurance and comfort that I don't think I could have gotten anywhere from any psychotherapist or any person giving me their condolences. It was a reassurance that I got from a spiritual plane that I only had access to through the Daime and that I was most grateful, and that kind of reaffirmed my practice and devotion.

**Malevolent and Mystical Beings.** Participants in the church sessions going through the Trial or practicing mediumship may encounter malevolent spirits, or what is referred to occasionally as "suffering spirits." Many members will explain the attraction of these spirits to a source of their own suffering. For example, in the prior discussion on "divine light, Jagube retold his account of his most powerful experience when healing his own suffering with a psycho-spiritual addiction to marijuana. He had recalled, "It was an accumulation of works that led up to this one particular work a few years ago. I worked with this other person who was in the Daime who was more experienced and

understanding of how energies and spirits can kind of glom onto you. I had this experience with the *Ponto Das Almas* altar, which is an altar that's designed to help these darker more malevolent spirits and beings release and to help these beings be transformed and healed into the light." Again, here we have two themes within one account—that of malevolent spirits and divine light, the latter of which appears to be an effective tool for dealing with the former.

When prompted to discuss more about his mediumship works and how he was able to transform his work in that context, Santo Luz described, "So, this malevolent being attached itself to me. I made a prayer that God take this source of anger away from me, and a little while later I was called to go sit down (this refers to sitting down outside the circle for guardian duty) and I saw this kind of like machine thing come and attach itself to my head and pull out this energy, and I could feel it coming from my feet, and it was this being that was feeding on my anger and whatever else I was holding onto."

When asked about his most profound experience in the Daime, which also involved mediumship, he described how dealing with suffering spirits has consequently transformed his works on a positive level:

We were celebrating a padrinho's birthday, and the reason why this one was the most profound is because of what exactly took place. So, before that worked happened, I had incorporated a lot of suffering spirits and had a lot of difficult works....just being pounded by malevolent, trickster, mocker...spirits. And that work, I got hit by another one, and it was so painful and excruciating and I was struggling, and a guardian asked me if I wanted to go to the hospital (the *cura* and *mesa branca* works maintain "hospitals" where those Daimistas who practice

mediumship will channel healing spirits to work on those who need “healing” in a variety of areas—physical, emotional, psychological, etc.), and I said Yes!” And I was in agony in the hospital and finally something in me like said, ‘you want me to help you?’, and he did! And he entered my body and I could feel that whole spirit in like a second, and I was like, ‘Whhooa!’ And then the hands of another being, I don’t know who it was, just kept taking turns working on those evil spirits, and they just kept doing that. And that really changed it all for me, because, man, I started asking for help. I was praying to God for strength, for compassion, for forgiveness, and all these things, because if that thing is in me, I’m gonna pray for it, and for myself to have the strength...to push through the battle. And since that day, from knowing and then trusting and then asking, my works have become WAY more amazing than ever before!

In this description, he described his admittance into the “hospital,” which can be a very profound healing experience for participants during the healing works, such as curas or mesa blancas. At the beginning of a mesa blanca session, for example, anyone who feels a need for deeper levels of healing for any particular issue may put their name on a list. Typically during the second part of the work, they open the session up for mediumship and healing in the hospital. For example, when prompted to discuss her mediumship work in the hospital, Angel described, “So, at the mesa blanca it was so powerful! At the Divine Hospital, I have a doctor that works through me, and these doctors were actual physical doctors in a physical life at one point. And they now come back, through mediums to work on people at different levels, and my doctor works on the level of the energetic matrix.”

There can be anywhere from 3 to 6 mediums who claim to be channeling the spirits of Brazilian doctors. This is quite a unique process that includes a rather complex sophistication of spiritual technologies. Angel described the doctors and this process in full detail:

The doctor I work with is in the line of Dr. Bezerra de Menezes—he was a Brazilian doctor—a doctor for the poor. In fact, he would treat people and end up giving all of his money away trying to help people. What’s interesting is that he worked in the line of the Santo Daime as well as the line of John of God (João de Deus). He’s one of the main doctors in the line of John of God, which is a spiritist movement also. Alan Kardec is where the mediumship came into the Daime through Padrinho Sebastião (the 2<sup>nd</sup> leader of the Santo Daime church after Mestre Irineu. His son, Padrinho Alfredo, is now the current leader of the Santo Daime in Ceu Do Mapia). So, in the mesa branca, we call on the astral doctors—Dr. Fritz, and Dr. Bezerra de Menezes, and Dr. Antonio Jorge, who was a professor—he’s always connected to these two doctors. I mean, Dr. Fritz is so powerful that people—he is able to use the perispirit<sup>4</sup>, or liquid...viscous...they always talk about how the perispirit is like a magnetic fluid, and Dr. Fritz is so

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<sup>4</sup> “Perispirit” is a term found in Spiritism (mediumship), or the ritual communion with and interest in spirits of the deceased and their relation to the “earthly” plane. Often during this supernatural contact, mediums may encounter this perispirit, which is a complex and ethereal body used by the ghostly entity to essentially create a “bridge” to the living’s perceptual reality. This term was originally conceived of by Allan Kardec, whose name is often repeated in the Daime community as his style of mediumship was adopted for the mesa branca works, which involve active mediumship roles and spiritual hospitals where Brazilian doctors are channeled. Often, the perispirit is described by mediums in the church as a vaporous, possibly electromagnetic, and sometimes, when mutating into solid or liquid, a rather gross substance that allows the spirit to float around in real space. It could be seen as an envelope around which the spirit operates. It is interesting to note that often in South American shamanism, there are accounts of sorcerers who use ayahuasca to gain access to this perispirit to create “magic darts” for which to aim at their enemies. It is said these magic darts, often purple in color, cause its unlucky human recipients days and weeks of extreme nausea and illness.



powerful that back in the 1800s, when he would incorporate, well he wouldn't even incorporate into a medium—he would literally somehow make this magnetic perispirit fluid visible, so people would literally see him, so whatever it was in the spirit world, he could manipulate it so people could see it.

Angel further added, “The line of Dr. Bezerra de Menezes, and the way it works in the Daime is he incorporates, and his *phalanges* are any doctors who work through him. I know that my doctor is in that line, but I don't know names for any of mine. But he works through more of the energetic matrix, where everything starts.” Earlier in the discussion, she had talked about S-Co through her mediumship work as involving strange bodily movements, as if they were working through her on an energetic level. She provided a full description when asked what she thought these spirits were doing when they work with her and make her body move in peculiar ways:

They're running their energy through us. I sometimes get these strange mudras, what I call finger hieroglyphics. It's some energy that they are giving out.

Sometimes it's like an energy rod—moving energy potentials through the energy matrix. The Indians have a good grasp on this working with the meridians and energy, etc. There's some kind of energy that is transformative, whether it's for us, or for the salão, or the earth, I don't know. There are many beings that don't have to do that, but with our lineage, that's how we work with many of them.

S-Co represents a unique aspect of the spiritual works within the Daime. This type of contact is not limited necessarily to a specific ritual stage, as it may occur at any time during the spiritual works, although it is an especially prominent occurrence during the healing works, such as the mesa brancas, where the mediums in the group channel spirits.

It appears that mediums, or those who have special problems they are dealing with, such as addiction or trauma, have the additional responsibility of dealing with malevolent spirits. This is evidently a painful and stressful process, although the data suggests this additional struggle is consequently transformative and leads to a more fulfilling experience in the works and in one's daily life. It is this process of spiritual communion, illumination, and transformation that leads one to "open their hearts" and develop what many Daimistas discuss as one of the most healing concepts the world has ever known—love (rapture).

### **Rapture**

The spiritual process of opening the heart and experiencing love, which has been described as one of the most healing aspects of Daime rituals, is a process that first engenders a trial—a trial of struggle, facing the greatest fears, communing with angelic beings and receiving teachings, releasing and purging blockages, and affirming a new awareness of passion, clarity, confidence, charity, etc. To reiterate from Chapter 1, the literal translation of Daime means to "give me" as in "give me hope," "give me justice," "give me passion," "give me love."

Rapture was the fourth most frequent theme (along with Macrocosmic Kinship) that emerged from the group experience. There were 23 descriptors from the sub-themes, which include: Love (9), Heart Opening (8), Heart-Space (2), Heart-Centering (2), and Community Love (2). Although love may have several meanings and referents, as interpreted from the interview data, it typically referred to a general feeling of rapture and passion; receptivity for humanity and/or one's community and family; the divine realms,

including its ethereal occupants, Jesus, Mary, God, etc.; and love for nature or one's environment. Simply put, it appeared as though it was love for life itself—the whole of it, as related to a connection to all living entities, spiritual or otherwise, within an ethereal “Fountain of Being.”

**Love and Heart-Opening, Space, and Centering.** Several participants described their love for the world and of themselves as a type of affirmation, as though their experience through the trials of the Daime rituals gave them a “teaching” that all one really needs is love, to not necessarily survive, but rather to thrive. For example, when asked of her experience in coping with life challenges now, Angel asserted, “The Daime has really opened my heart, and it's all about the heart—it's about love. And the Daime is such a heart-opener.” Additionally, at the very beginning of the interview when asked about how she came to the church, she mentioned “an acquaintance who went to Peru to drink ayahuasca two years earlier. When he came back from that trip from drinking ayahuasca, I saw how his heart was really open. It really blew me away and I was like, ‘that's good medicine!’”

However, this notion that love appears to be a type of “ultimate panacea,” is not only a tacit and underlying mantra of the core belief system of the Santo Daime church, e.g., “Daime força, Daime amor” (Give me strength, Give me love), but it is affirmed—on the astral—through one's struggle during the trials and tribulations of a most intensive ritual. With that said, the opening of one's heart and their professed love for themselves and the outer world, tends to come toward the end of one's shamanic flight—as a sort of resolution—both in the work and in one's own life and ultimately has an impact on how they cope with life's challenges. This simple concept of love has an apparently profound

impact on the lives of participants who have attended church services as evident from the overall group experience.

Themes of love and opening the heart seem to be also related to creating simplicity in one's life, as well as an overall increase in passion for life. Angel revealed how her life had changed when asked about what was different since she had been attending church services:

And my life seems to....it's just gotten so much simpler, it's so beautiful, because I've gotten rid of all the distractions and all the worries and all the this's and that's—it's just about my heart. Keeps my heart open. And I'm not interested in drama, I'm not interested in stuff. It's gotten me to this passion, where I know what my mission is. I don't have that reaction of putting up a boundary. Ya know, I don't have this self-judgment and self-flagellation when I see things, because it's all love.

The affirmation of love appears to positively pervade a church member's life, something for which that was not as important prior to attending church services. Sterling responded to the question, "is there anything else you would like to share with me so that I can better understand your experience and what it means to you?"

For me, the Daime, if it has one overriding characteristic, that has pushed me into so many good things, and has shown me so many good things, and given me that detachment, and shown me what I really need. Well, that thing that I really need is simply love. And before taking Daime, I didn't value feeling love as highly as I do now. And I didn't see it as an end in and of itself. And now my understanding for myself is that love is all I need! And I will always have it! There's nothing in

this world that can take it away from me. I'm not perfect, but I at least understand where I want to be in a way that I never did before, which is that I always want to be feeling of love no matter what's going on or what I'm experiencing. I know intellectually that I have the capacity to do that, so now I have a road map of where I want to get to, and I know it's possible.

When describing her experience of coping with life challenges now and how it is different now from before she began attending church services, Kathy described, "the Daime helps me to be able to give people a lot more space and more credit and a lot more patience than I ever did before. And it helps me to love everybody, which is an interesting phenomenon, especially when you don't like them....even politicians!"

When asked to talk about her life when she first came to the church, Kathy also described her initial reservations with Christianity, even within the Santo Daime church, and the shift in her thinking as it related to the heart. She articulated, "I struggled with the whole Christianity.... 'You're not good enough' kind of thing, which is interesting because as I began to learn the tenants of Christianity I learned that, hey, this guy's all about love." Furthermore, when asked about her most profound experience, she also discussed the importance of being centered in the heart, which came toward the end of her relating her most intense experience involving the channeling of suffering spirits, which was the very beginning of her emerging work as a medium:

Being in your heart definitely helps. Giving those beings to the light and the cross and aligning your heart with the cross, which I always envisioned as this kind of....way up....like the light coming through the center and spreading out. In regular works, I try to sit right down and focus on the heart. You can have some

random, painful, dark stuff come through, and you can't really control that, but the best way to deal with it is to align with whatever you're feeling. Often I align with the Divine Mother because that feels safe and comforting and...I feel like she has a space around my heart that she can hold.

There are a certain number of people who claim to be mediums, and mediumship work, or the channeling of spirits, is only allowed during certain types of works, such as a *mesa branca* or a *cura*. In these works, the church will open what they call "hospitals," whereby someone who feels the need for healing, whether addiction, chronic pain, or whatever ailment they have, they can go to the hospital, lay down on a massage table, and receive "energetic" healing from Daimistas who claim to be channeling the spirits of actual Brazilian doctors. This was described earlier regarding mediumship within S-Co. However, the important thing to note here is that instruction in dealing with malevolent spirits, whether through channeling or simply feeling the presence of such entities, the often-heard Daime prescription is typically something along the lines of "affirm yourself in your heart," or "center yourself in the heart."

Another participant, Santo Luz, openly reported his mediumship work and a very strong presence of spiritual guides who continue to reside with him even outside the ceremonial context. When describing his most powerful experience, he portrayed the spirit essence of the Caboclos:

So, I have a friend (spirit guide) who is from Ogum, and has relationships to all these Orixas. Basically, he is my primary guide. He is with me all the time, he protects me...from spirits, that, ya know, try to hurt me. He's on my right shoulder all the time. And he's there for any reason, like if I have a question, or

even if sometimes I'm having a difficult time in my head, or if I'm worried about something....he'll say, 'where's your heart right now? Center yourself in the heart.' So, he's there to help me re-orient myself so I can, ya know, keep going

In further describing the key to mediumship, after prompting him to expand on his earlier experiences with channeling spirits, he replied, "Then a Daime leader came over and tried to center me, told me to breathe. And he taught me the key to mediumship...that it is in the heart. And now as a medium I can totally protect myself and get myself out of tricky situations. That was another turning point." When prompted on how he carries this work into his life in coping with life challenges, he described, "I feel like one thing the Daime has done is it's completely solidified in the cells of my body, but there in my consciousness and in my heart, is a piece of God..."

It is not uncommon for a Daimista, or even novice, to experience a profundity of spiritual love, whether it is a love for divine forces, be it God, Jesus, or Mary, or the feeling of receiving a teaching in one's work that love is a healing force that heals ailments, creates a peaceable community, or infiltrates all manner of negative or malign forces, energies, intentions, etc. It is often conveyed within the doctrine of the Santo Daime, as well as many other religious doctrines, that Jesus professed love as a sort of "panacea" for the evils of the world. Therefore, the concept of "heart" may often be tied to the notion of Jesus.

Angel, who was quoted previously, and when discussing her most powerful experience, mentioned, "So, throughout all my years of drinking Daime, it's really opened my heart to Jesus—who are you really?" Another participant, Juniper, conveyed

this concept when asked about his expectations about the church sessions, then described his very first session:

I mean, the first time I went, I had these incredible healing experiences where my body was shaking and all of these spirits were coming out of me, and I was puking and crying and laughing. At the very end there was this part where....there was this Jesus mantra and this was being fed to me while I was laying down. I kind of had my back turned to everybody because I kept feeling like that they were trying to like suck me into this weird cult....and when they were doing this Jesus mantra, the figure of Jesus like totally appeared in front of me....pulled his heart out and....showed it to me. Then I had this understanding that we are all a part of this same heart. A flood of memories came over me....past lives of having known this of course, like we all know from this universal place. Then I was like, ‘Oh, God, how could I have forgotten....again?’

Love and opening one’s heart may have a significantly positive impact when it comes to facing one’s inner-fears, realities, and other life stressors. For example, one of the unique and powerful profiles of ayahuasca is that it is somehow very quickly able to unlock psychologically repressed behaviors or events, e.g., negative patterns, addictions, traumas or abuses, and consequently force the individual to face it squarely. This could explain why individuals who drink ayahuasca may report horrific visions, demons, malevolent spirits, etc. Whatever the experience, it is painful and one important “lesson” in learning to effectively heal these emotional and psychological scars is to “open one’s heart.” A great example of this came from Juniper when discussing his most powerful



experience of dealing with a sexual abuse trauma, which was presented earlier in the

Trial:

A month ago, I finally saw who it was who abused me, and because all the work that I had done in the Daime and healing the psychic and emotional aspects of it, I was completely fine and I was in this space of forgiveness. I just opened my heart and let go and could feel this burden of carrying what I knew but didn't have an awareness of. So, that experience was something that completely changed my life that I imagined could have taken 20 or 30 years of normal therapy.

On the lighter and more positive side of sexuality, the Daime rituals may also aid individuals in releasing a healthy, repressed sexuality. For example, Adrienne, when asked what she took away from her most profound experience, of which she described going through multiple transformations by letting go of negative things in her psyche, stated, "I also feel that when we're fully in our bodies we realize a sexuality and sensuality that's part of nature—it's so repressed in our culture, then because the sexual part is so repressed, it's other parts that get repressed too. So that shaming of that instinctual part of who we are gets healed, and you know, get it connected back to the heart."

It appears that one theme that arose from the group experience related to greater sensations in the body—a "love" or greater appreciation for not only one's Self, but also one's body, as if they were becoming reacquainted with it. This enhanced sensation of feeling the subtleties of bodily energies may also account for increased feelings of love. When prompted on what made her want to become a Daimista, Adrienne further added,

“I felt it really opened my heart more in a compassionate way, allowing me to be more vulnerable and open. I was beginning to really learn about subtle energy.”

The data have revealed a very important component of the overall healing process—rapture, which includes the opening of the heart and general, pervasive sensations of absolute love. This may translate into greater love for oneself, significant others or family members, or love for community on all levels (i.e., micro and macro levels). It appears that this feeling of sweeping and permeating rapture is the end result of overcoming the obstacles of the Trial, and/or gaining “lessons” or “teachings” from the astral or celestial court, and communing with loving divine beings, as if one has found themselves with renewed vigor and enthusiasm. In addition to a heightened sensitivity to feelings of rapture for an individual’s social environment, it also appears from the data that a greater love, respect, and sensitivity to nature results from the combined experience of ethnopharmacological agents and the spiritual guidance of the church.

### **Macrocosmic Kinship**

In alignment with the Santo Daime church as a new spiritual paradigm is the concept of the intersection of two distinct but integral spiritual entities—the spirit of Christ and the spirit of the Daime (Juramidam). Of course, as described in Padrinho Goldman’s (1999) statement about the Doctrine and the Christ Consciousness being “secreted” into the Jagube vine and rainha leaf, the “living” sacrament is an integral part of the Christ Consciousness. Although when distinctions are made, there is a clear presence of a type of “nature spirit” or “Gaian spirit” combined with the Christ spirit. For example, when asked if there was anything else she could add to aid me in more clearly

understanding her overall experiences, Cedar stated, “I see it as a marriage between Christ and Gaia.”

**Sensitivity and Connection to Nature.** It is this “marriage” of spiritual forces that often creates a heightened connection to nature with many practitioners, as in Adrienne’s discussion on how she came to be a Daimista when asked about her life during her first encounters with the church. She beheld, “I was able to connect to nature again!” In responding to incorporating her works into coping with stressors, she stated, “I was able to go all the back to my lineage...to my mother...and how it disconnected me from my body and from nature.” This heightened sensitivity could occur during a particular session, such as during ESC, or a *miração*, or a practitioner may develop a greater appreciation for nature in the days following a session, which may also develop into a long-term appreciation, such as in Juniper’s previous testimonial about plant spirits. It was in his visions during the Daime works that prompted him to develop a school of “forest medicine” to teach others how to work with medicinal plants.

Of course, for Juniper, he already had a connection to nature, yet this deepened his connection, much like Wichar’s connection to nature when he described his most powerful work, which was his third one. He recalled, “I had gone a little bit deeper with my spiritual connection to the forest, but then I had some deeper insights and I really felt ready...to go for it!” When recalling his life events leading up to coming to the Daime, he described, “I moved here in January 2008, and meeting the fellow who became my teacher in many more senses after that, kind of led me into deepening my spiritual connection to nature. So I was really starting to explore that in a more diverse way around the time I started drinking Daime.”

Walda's most profound experience involved her taking a walk in nature, away from the ceremony. This is a rarity in most traditional works due to the rigid ceremonial structure and rules which do not allow participants to go outside of the building or structure in which the ceremony is taking place—they may only leave the circle within a short distance outside the circle to rest or lie down. It is crucial to maintain the “healing current,” and if individuals were allowed to simply wander off from the ceremony, it would skew the very delicate flow of energy that is used for the benefit of all who attend. Walda admitted to attending a ceremony with a very non-traditional Daime organization, led by a shamanic practitioner who imposed far less rules on its adherents:

I had this experience where....and I don't know how else to explain it except that it was Christ consciousness....where it was literally like I could hear and feel the life that was inherent in all of existence and it was profound....I had this compassion, but it wasn't personal...it was more transcendental than that. It is hard to put into words, but I remember hearing the life of the trees, like I could hear them buzzing with life....like I was looking at the grass and....how each blade of grass grew in relation to the sun during the day....It was like I understood nature completely and I understood the people around me completely.

It is the case with ayahuasca sessions involving shamans throughout the Amazon regions of South America that the sessions are always outdoors and in complete darkness, which is a stark contrast to the sessions like the Santo Daime, or other organized religious groups, such as the UDV and the Barquinha. Although it appears that both types of sessions tend to have equal results (Soibelman, 2005; Krippner & Sulla, 2011; Harris & Gurel, 2012). It appears that this enhanced sensibility to nature, or rather to the earth,

creates a type of grounding, where practitioners may feel they are more centered and firm, which consequently may translate into their daily lives.

When asked about coping with life challenges now, Juniper highlighted, “...it’s the being of the Daime. It’s a being of healing. And for me, I see that this medicine, ayahuasca, has spread from the jungle at this time in human history because we need that medicine. We need that medicine to help us remember to be in alignment with ourselves, and in alignment with and harmony with the rest of nature. It’s hard to say what’s responsible for what, because it’s kind of like a whole conglomerate for all the various plant spirits I work with, but with the Daime, ya know for sure, helping me to be more in my body, more grounded....on the earth, more aware.”

It is possible for one to acquire a shift in their daily actions, as if their unconscious mind knew what was really important in their lives, but was somehow blocked by the daily “noise” of modernity and routine. In describing her life when she first came to the church, Sunshine stated, “I just had that first Daime experience—it was a *cura*—yet it shifted my energy completely, so that the next day my husband asked to go out in nature, which I mentioned to you before, our sanctuary, and we were able to communicate and be with each other—not even discussing what created it, just allowing the shift to be real, and we never had to get that divorce, and never had to do much else, because of that Daime experience.”

It seems to follow common reasoning that a church that uses a revered plant medicine from the Amazon, further incorporating practices of shamanism, the goal of which is to reconnect individuals to nature, will create a more profound connection to nature in its adherents. Nature in this regard is a broader term, encompassing not only our

precious environment, but also both the “astral forest” from which is populated by our divine and spiritual allies, and the healing and diverse Amazon forests, which harbors many plant medicines other than ayahuasca. By ingesting the divine beverage beheld by the Santo Daime church, a participant is nurturing their “true and divine nature,” which opens them up to a realization that they are not only connected to nature, but an integral fragment of nature—born of nature. This connection ultimately plays a role in developing effective coping mechanisms for dealing with life challenges.

## Curriculum Vitae

**Justin Panneck**Email: panneck@hotmail.com

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**Objective**

To obtain a position as a part-time or full-time faculty member in general or health psychology for a community college or university.

**Education****Psychology Doctoral Program**

Walden University

Present  
Baltimore, MD

- Dissertation involves the maintenance and prevention of stress-related disorders as well as a coping mechanisms for daily and life stressors
- Cumulative GPA: 3.9
- **Expected Completion Date: January 2014**

**Master of Education in Instructional Technology**

American InterContinental University

July, 2006  
Hoffman Estates, IL

- Thesis was the "necessity of online instruction to meet the demands of cognition in respect to time-space perception in a modern digital global environment"
- Cumulative GPA: 3.75

**Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Communication**

University of Colorado

May 2001  
Boulder, CO

- Studies in business, philosophy, sociology, and pre-med curriculum
- Involved in 2 years of clinical research involving TAT, sexual disorders and twin studies in cognitive psychology
- Involved in college radio, sports broadcasting, faith-based discussion groups, Humanities Club chair, mediation, Ambassador's Club

**Diploma in General Studies**

Jonesboro High School

May 1993  
Jonesboro, AR

- Member of Future Business Leaders of America, Spanish Club, and Future Medical Career Club
- Member of marching, concert, and symphonic band.
- Most outstanding percussionist award and 1<sup>st</sup> chair

**Publications*****Healing Effects of Mythological and Symbolic Participation***

UK Press

January 2014  
London, UK

Accepted article due to be published in January 2014 that provides a psychological perspective and hermeneutical analysis of historical mythological motifs as tools for personal and spiritual development

- Spirituality & Plant Medicines: The Future of Psychopathology*** October 2010  
The Examiner Portland, OR
- First article involving religion, psychology, spirituality, and ethnopharmacology
- The Knight of Dark Wood*** August 2010  
Xlibris, Inc. Portland, OR
- First fiction novel involving themes of psychology, spirituality, mystery, and satire
- Eyes Wide Shut Review*** July 2002  
Oregonian Portland, OR
- Published movie review of Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* as guest movie reviewer as an attempt to defend its cinematic art form from the majority of critics who dispelled its enigma for a general audience
- PI Review and selected poetry*** June 1999  
Palimpsest Magazine & Journal Boulder, CO
- Published poetry and movie review of *PI* in highly competitive and coveted journal published through University of Colorado in the City of Boulder

### Conferences

- Speaker** October 2012  
California Institute of Integral Studies San Francisco, CA
- Scheduled to speak at CIIS for a two hour lecture entitled "Alchemy, Archetypes, and Ascension: Spiritual Optimal Living and Preparation for the Future."
- Speaker** April 2012  
Entheo-Visioning Conference (ERIE) San Francisco, CA
- Spoke at the first annual ERIE conference at the Happiness Institute regarding ancient mythology, Jungian archetypes, the future of spirituality, shamanism, and the *Modern Mythos*

### Research Experience

- Research Assistant** January 1999 – January 2000  
University of Colorado Psychology Department Boulder, CO
- Supported graduate students and Clinical Psychology professor in Thematic Apperception Testing data gathering and interpretation
  - Collaborated with Clinical Psychology graduate student in second study regarding psychosexual disorders
  - Intensely involved in research gathering, interpretation of results, roundtable discussions with peers, graduate students, and faculty of contributing ideas to dissertation and published journal articles
- Research Assistant** August 1998 – January 1999



University of Colorado Psychology Department Boulder, CO

- Assisted graduate students and Cognitive Psychology professor in interviewing twin children to gather data for thesis for one semester
- Involved in interpretation of results and discussion with peers, graduate students, and faculty
- Enriched their research by providing novel ideas and integrity in research administration

### **Volunteer Experience**

#### **Founder/Organizer**

July 2009 – August 2010

Health Practitioner's & Healer's Group

Portland, OR

- Led group of education facilities and health organizations to influence health prevention and personal and success motivation for children, adults and senior citizens
- Held monthly meeting with members to expose the club's vision to enhance health education innovation

#### **President**

February 2007 – February 2009

Educators' Network—AIU Online Chapter

Hoffman Estates, IL

- Led students in a Master's of Education program to the path of success by exposing them to guest speakers in the industry and giving them tips on academic and professional success
- Held weekly meetings with chair members to expose the club's vision to enhance the learning experience

#### **City Mediation Intern**

January 2000 – January 2001

City of Boulder Landlord Tenant & Victim-Offender Reconciliation Division

Boulder, CO

- Handled walk-in intake and information gathering for landlord and tenant disputes  
Successful in fulfilling duties of providing correct information and calming extremely irate clientele
- Assigned victim offender reconciliation cases with attorneys and professionals in family and community conflict/dispute resolution
- Helped organization to resolve disputes with learned communication skills and achieved 100% case resolution for every sit in meeting with colleagues and clientele

#### **Radio Show Host, DJ and Interviewer**

August 1999 – July 2000

University of Colorado College Radio KUCB 1190

Boulder, CO

- Hosted my own radio show that involved seeking out the city and nation's most interesting guests and obtaining intimate interviews of their life's goals, meanings, and secrets
- Held successful interviews with individuals such as Igor Gamov, inventor and protégé of Albert Einstein; and Roger Ebert, renowned movie critic of the Chicago Sun Times
- Put together and spoke about world news and sports in between DJ segments, as well as, hosted music variety on Friday nights

#### **Personal Mentor for Emotionally Troubled Teen**

September 1998 – June 1999

Private Family Mentor

Erie, CO

- Engaged in spending quality time and casual discussions with 15 year old subject of an alleged emotionally turbulent nature
- Utilized a behavioral and gestalt psychology approach to communication in uncovering the subject's true nature and feelings which led to the successful increase in levels of confidence in the subject

- Suggested family activities and approaches to open and dynamic communication patterns which helped subject to grow emotionally in positive direction

**Intake Volunteer Intern and Assistant to Social Workers** August 1997 – May 1998  
Emergency Family Assistance Boulder, CO

- Engaged in intake qualification interviews for families and individuals with financial and food bank assistance
- Frequently met with licensed social workers to discuss updated clientele information and the nature of people in need including the broad range of dealing with varying levels of aggression, mental illness, and personality types

### Affiliations

**Psi Chi Honors Society** – Member since October 2007

**American Psychological Association** – Member since October 2007

### Professional Experience

**Subject Matter Expert and Adjunct Faculty—Math 101** January 2014 – Present  
Blue Cliff College-HIMBC & CAMA Portland, OR

- Instrumental in the design and instruction of Applied Mathematics for Business to enhance students' ability to perform basic office tasks such as bookkeeping, payroll, budgeting, banking, and personal finance
- Assist students with meeting the needs of a growing business while developing financial organizational skills

**Subject Matter Expert—Course Development** April 2012 – June 2013  
Colorado Technical University Online Portland, OR

- Have currently developed 4 courses that have been integrated into the undergraduate curriculum of CTU Online, and include the following: HUMN400—Psychological Aspects of Film; CB465—Psychology of Consumer Economic Behavior; CB480—Capstone in Consumer Behavior; OB470—Capstone in Organizational Behavior
- Was responsible for creative input and the development of topical materials, classroom multimedia activities, phase resource materials (e.g., web-links for subject related articles and videos, etc.), discussion board assignments, individual projects, and culminating initial and final draft assignments

**Assistant Professor—General Psychology and Sociology** March 2007 – Present  
Colorado Technical University Online Portland, OR

- Instruct students on academic and professional success through live lectures, asynchronous discussion through White Board, and constructive feedback on class projects
- Provide live online lectures through Macromedia Breeze platform for 25 to 35 students currently in both introductory psychology and sociology.
- Have taught eight different courses at the undergraduate level: *Strategies for Success*; *World History: 1500 to Present*; *American History: 1900 to Present*; *American Culture*; *General Psychology*; *Psychology of the Individual*; *Research Methods*; and *Diversity in American Life*

**Private School Curriculum Developer** January 2008 – May 2008  
Village Home Private School Beaverton, OR

- Independently proposed new course/curriculum for Village Home that would involve self-esteem building, critical thinking, self-reflection, humor, and general knowledge and received acceptance

**Enrollment Counselor**

University of Phoenix

April 2007 – May 2008

Portland, OR

- Successfully counseled students on career paths, motivation to start school, time management, and long and short term goal-setting
- Assisted students with financial aid, academic, and some tutoring solutions to get them ready for classes
- Consistently maintained enrollment budget and student retention in my current position

**Associate Student Manager/Alumni Counselor/Ambassador**

American InterContinental University Online

June 2006 – March 2007

Portland, OR

- Handled and prepared the re-enrollment of cancelled students, employee degree and career path counseling for new and continuing students
- Served as ambassador to students who had concerns or questions regarding time management and product knowledge
- Contributed to admissions site achieving their student start budgets and was successful in helping site attain \$2 million in additional profit over their yearly budget

**Training Manager**

American InterContinental University Online

October 2004 – June 2006

Portland, OR

- Managed and developed specialized training sessions, orienting new advisors, evaluating for quality control, and motivating and counseling advisors
- Instrumental in the increased conversion rates for admissions teams by effectively developing and encouraging the success of expert advisors
- Developed computer-based training modules (CBTs) using Lectora software for employee training and increased employee retention

**Admissions Counselor/Senior Admission Counselor**

American InterContinental University Online

January 2004 – October 2006

Hoffman Estates, IL

- Handled task of enrolling 16 students per month and starting 12 by counseling them through the enrollment process
- Promoted to Senior Counselor at 6 months then leader and trainer for specialized training lab at Hoffman Estates for another 3 months
- Successfully aided my admissions team in becoming the highest producing team on site for two months in a row

**Account Executive & Specialist**

International Merchant Services, Inc.

June 2003 – January 2004

Oakbrook, IL

- Managed acquisition of merchant service contracts for Visa and Master card and the purchasing contract for processing equipment
- Promoted to sales specialist after 6 months for which responsibilities included the successful gain of business lost to competitors and executive control of equipment pricing

**District Manager**

Primerica Financial Services

June 2002 – January 2003

Portland, OR

- Handled financial analysis of clients in planning for retirement supplemented by insurance, mortgage, and securities sales
- Promoted to District Manager after 3 months for which responsibilities included interviewing, hiring, and field training new associates, as well as, speaking at regional training and motivational sessions

#### **Small Business Consultant**

May 2001 – January 2003

National Association for the Self Employed

Portland, OR

- Organized and set up meetings with business owners to discuss employee plans, insurance needs, tax savings, and success tools
- Handled marketing and appointment-setting aspect of my business, which included canvassing the community and reaching out to the small businesses
- Spoke at meeting sessions and trained new employees to be successful representatives, contributing to the overall success of the company

#### **Work Study Criminal and Civil Law Intake**

September 1996 – May 2001

University of Colorado Law School

Boulder, CO

- Interviewed and pre-qualified pro-bono clients for attorney representation at university law school work study program
- Worked with attorneys/professors in trial recordings, screening clients, brief and document proofing, transcription, and exam proctoring

#### **Assisted Living Aide for Post-Developmentally Disabled Adults**

October 1998 – June 1999

Center for People with Disabilities

Boulder, CO

- Provided basic living aid for clients who had physical and mental post-trauma from tragic accidents
- Successfully dealt with the emotional turbulence of clients by providing support and different ways of looking at the world in a positive light

#### **Healthcare Provider for Developmentally Disabled Clients**

January 1997 – October 1998

Boulder County Mental Health Services

Boulder, CO

- Provided basic needs care and emotional support for developmentally disabled clients exposed to traumatic situations in institutional settings
- Performed basic needs, including med administration, as well as planning trips for local outings contributing to the overall happiness and well-being of the clients

#### **Assistant Commodities Broker**

January 1995 – December 1996

Futures Technology & Securities Market Research

Boulder, CO

- Assisted CEO in taking notes on business proposals, updated national database for commodity figures, and created marketing ideas and executed them upon approval
- Called upon continuing clients to renew subscriptions to brokerage service

#### **Honors and Awards**

- Recently nominated by chair committee for the upcoming 2014 *Most Outstanding Dissertation Award* for excellence in dissertation content and writing

- Received three *Start Excellence* awards, *Team Leader* award, coveted *Twenty Plus Enrollment Club* plaque, numerous *Student Retention* awards for American Intercontinental University Online
- Received *Rookie of the Year* award in 2001 for my region at the National Association for the Self-Employed
- Received *Most Outstanding Percussionist* award for 1992 marching and symphonic high school band in Jonesboro, AR

### **Hobbies**

Fiction/short story writing, freelance journal writing (movie reviews, arts, nature), painting, poetry, independent film research, spiritual and world literature, amateur astronomy and mycology, rock climbing, mountain biking, classical guitar, percussion

### **Computer Skills**

Lectora, Microsoft Office Suite, Internet explorer, Front Page, some web design, Outlook