

*Sinchi, Sinchi, Negrito: Medicinal Use of Tobacco in the Upper Peruvian Amazon*¹

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INTRODUCTION

The negative connotation given to tobacco in contemporary society entails the risk of mistakenly considering this extraordinary medicinal plant almost a plague that needs to be eradicated. This stigmatization results from modern westerners' ignorance about the correct and ritualized use of this plant, which from time immemorial has been considered sacred throughout the Americas.

The reductionist mechanisms of positivist-rationalist thought lead to the profanation of the spiritual dimension of all authentic healing acts and, especially in the case of tobacco, they transform this remedy into poison. Tobacco, "powerful mediator between humans and gods", may play an essential curative role, particularly in psychotherapeutic processes and in the search for answers to the pressing existential questions of modernity.

The Amazonian ethnic groups hold fundamental empirical practice and ancient knowledge on the adequate use of tobacco that remains to this day. For the last twenty-five years and through our practice as doctors, we have explored the traditional use of tobacco among the peoples of the upper Peruvian Amazon, including participative observation, and following the guidelines of tobacco masters, who are the specialists in the native use of tobacco.

As a result of this experience, we have introduced the use of tobacco in our own therapeutic practice, especially applying it to drug addicts residing in Centro Takiwasi, which we have co-founded. In this article, we provide our reflection upon this first-rate curative plant, as well as the promising therapeutic potential we have discovered.

TOBACCO, SACRED PLANT OF THE AMERICAS

The following statements on the use of tobacco come from Amazonian inhabitants, mainly farmers and some *curanderos* (healers). These statements allow us to recognize the diversity of uses and the current importance of tobacco in the culture of this region:

- *The spirit, the father of tobacco, is the helicopter, zzuuummmm...! That's how it takes us up...* (Master *curandero* L.P., Tarapoto)
- *You cannot learn the medicine if you don't smoke...* (Master *curandero* G.P., Pucallpa)
- *No snake comes close to me; that's why I go [to the farm] smoking my mapacho.* (Farmer, San Martín)
- *Rraaannn! It makes you dizzy and it's like all your body goes up fast, that's where dizziness starts...* (Patient on tobacco diet, San Martín)
- *Put on mapacho mixed with water, so the fly does not follow you...* (Peasant, San Martín)

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- ... that little tar from mapacho, what stays there when you finish smoking, you put it at its little door so it takes out the worm. (Recipe for myiasis provided by “Curiosa”, San Martín)
- I have seen him... The father of tobacco is a strong, tall, black man... he wears a white hat and his eyes shine like fire, but he is good, he takes care of us... (Master curandero J.C., Tarapoto)
- Souls love tobacco because tobacco has its method, its strength. It attracts the *maninkari*. It is the best contact for a human being's life. (Narby, 1997: 36)
- The shaman woman opens up along her body because of *yiii*, the juice of tobacco [...] then, her voice comes out of her belly, sings, and her spirits come and talk to her... because tobacco is *pülasü*; it has powers. (Perrin, 1992: 35)

These statements illustrate the different uses and the current importance of tobacco in Amazonian culture, not only in daily activities but also as sacred and medicine plant that remains significant in our times as it was thousands of years ago.

In the Amazon, the tobacco plant (*Nicotiana rustica*) has accompanied the inhabitants of the Americas since the dawn of time, some eighteen thousand years, according to Hendrik Kelner (2005). It is estimated that it has been cultivated and used in different ways for thousands of years, between six and eight thousand. It even seems to have been the first regularly cultivated plant in the Americas. It grows easily when the soil has been turned over a little, on roadsides or near burials, showing that in certain villages there might be a relation between the plant and the world of the dead.

There are diverging opinions about its origin and denomination. While some researchers locate its origin in Ecuador and Peru, due to the finding of wild plants genetically described as predecessors of the current *Nicotiana tabacum* and *Nicotiana rustica*, other attribute its origin in Central America and support a later pan-American distribution.

There are sixty-four tobacco species, 60% of which are found in South America, others in Asia and Africa, but with almost no use. Only a dozen species contain enough nicotine to be effective in human beings.

Also, there are different theories regarding its name. Silvia Del Amo (1988) states that in Spain and Italy the words *tobacco*, *atabaca*, *altabaca* and other analogue forms from the Arabic *tabbak* denominated medicinal plants, with soporific or hallucinogenic effect. However, *tobacco* could also derive from Tobago, name of the Caribbean islands and of a fork-shaped pipe cane used by Central American and Caribbean natives to inhale and smoke. Cave paintings found in the Dominican Republic show Taino characters with this bifurcated element, one of whose ends is placed in the nose.

The word *cikar* was used by the Maya for the act of smoking, which was incorporated to their ritual and religious practices as confirmed by the friezes representing smoking characters.



Among the native names given to tobacco we find *petun* (Guarani), *tamun* (Araucano, Mapuche, in Chile and Argentina), *bahana* (Warao, Venezuela), *piciétl* (Nahuatl); other psychoactive substances which were inhaled on their own or together with tobacco are *cohiba* (Haiti) and *cohoba* (Mexico).

The name “tobacco” is early mentioned by the chroniclers of the time, such as Gonzalo Fernández Oviedo y Valdés in his 1534 *Historia general y natural de las Indias*.

In the native languages of the Peruvian Amazon we find few references to names for tobacco, with the exception of the Yagua, who use *súndehi* for tobacco and *sándipu* for cigarettes (Chaumeil, 1998: 93). Most of the other languages of the region show syncretism with the words “tobacco” and “cigarette”, e.g. *cigarrunchi*. Another word used, and in a more explicit way, is *mapacho*, which refers to the cigarettes made with local tobacco (dried, cured and chopped *Nicotiana rustica*), to the pipe or *shimitapon* (plug for the mouth or *shimi*), or to the plant’s medicinal power, *ampiri*, name given to the ash or tar produced by the final combustion of tobacco. The word *ampi* means “medicine” or “poison”.

In 1492, when Christopher Columbus and his men arrived at La Española (Haiti and Santo Domingo), they were surprised to see the natives taking a sort of “brand” or “torch” to their mouth “on which they blow”. They meant a cigarette crafted with rolled leaves that were called “tobaccos” as described by fray Bartolomé de las Casas in his transcription of Columbus’ *Diario de navegación*.

Seeing human beings expelling smoke through mouth and nose caused great reaction and surprise and so the act of smoking was related to demonic practices. This smoke production was initially considered an infernal act.

However, indigenous peoples believe tobacco is an exchange object offered to the mothers of plants and to bad spirits to “appease” them and that smoke “feeds the spirits” (Chaumeil, 1998: 72, 65). This welcome gift, their main medicine and means of relating with the spiritual world was part of the native products that the Taino, indigenous habitants of Guanahani, offered Columbus:

Wildly distributed nearly throughout the whole Americas (with the exception of Alaska), pre-Hispanic tobacco was used in diverse ways and with multiple purposes: chewed, pulverized and inhaled, smoked, macerated, to be drunk or for external use, in cataplasms, baths or drops, enemas, to prevent or treat physical ailments. Mainly, the master *curanderos* used it in rituals because of its psychoactive effects, which granted it the category of sacred plant. This allowed them to mediate in the contact with the other world and nourish their energetic body with this *yang* or warm masculine energy. (Bulher-Oppenheim, 1949: 34-41)

The product of decocting tobacco leaves and salt, known as *ambil* in Peru and Colombia, is equivalent to *chimó* or *chimú* in the Venezuelan paramo (Bühler-Oppenheim, 1949). It is kept in the mouth where it slowly breaks up.

Old reports describe it was used in strong doses in precise and time-limited moments (treatments, ceremonial acts...) as intentional intoxications, in opposition to the use in frequently repeated, small doses taken chronically, characteristic of our western society.

The Amazonian tobacco-plant-medicine that is mentioned in the abovementioned quotes is used by the master tobacco *curanderos* or *sheripiaris*, who are generally aged men but of robust health despite the hardships of their living conditions and the habitual tobacco consumption.

Among the “simple” medical or “non-shamanic” uses, tobacco is employed in different ways.

In San Martín, located in northeastern Peru, the rustic cigarette or *mapacho* accompanies the peasants to the farm, warming them in the humid daybreak and protecting them from the threat of poisonous insects and snakes, which dislike smoke.

This protective use is also described in the first chronicles of the sixteenth century, which report that when going to war the indians smoked *puros* made of tobacco leaves to “obviate the vapors and other inconveniences that may appear along the way” (Bernard, 2002).

Tobacco smoke envelops the body of the person as a protective veil, pervading its smell and awakening a state of alertness. For ritual purposes, blowing the *mapacho ikarado* on the main energetic points extends this protective action to the energetic body, cleaning and preserving against negative energies or entities. According to ethnologist Jean-Pierre Chaumeil (1998: 65, 93), the Yagua call it the “path of the souls” and attribute it with the capacity of granting lightness to the shaman.

The aqueous maceration of tobacco also serves as insect repellent, and is used in protection baths. *Ampiri*, the residue of tobacco combustion, is a strong poison that kills larvae if applied topically and so it is used to treat myiasis and even snake bites.

Therefore, there is a visible, simple, daily use and another medicinal, specialized and ritualized one. It is upon this second one that we wish to elaborate.

TRADITIONAL THERAPEUTIC USE OF TOBACCO

In the Amazon, the act of smoking tobacco has presently two connotations: the peasant’s habit when going to the farm and the curative or ceremonial use. The first one never involves an addictive or compulsive use of *mapacho*, since it is a simple habit with hygienic aims (repel insects, relax after a day’s work...).

Within the curative-religious context, the act of smoking always follows a previous use of solid or liquid preparations. In our opinion, this chronological order of ingestion shows a deep respect of the order of life proper. In fact, all vital processes are originated in the “feminine” realm to move towards the “masculine” one. All human beings are born from a woman, immersed in the feminine elements of flesh or solid matter (earth element) and the amniotic liquid (water element). At birth, human beings leave their mother’s body to become accessible to the father and be able to breathe (air element) and see (light-sun-fire element). In Spanish, “*dar a (la) luz*” (“to give birth”) literally means “to give (to the) light”. The ordered development of these stages in the perceptible world symbolizes a transcendent law that governs all human becoming.

Thus, in his observation of the Yagua in Peru, Chaumeil (1998: 127) indicates:

It is interesting to confirm that hallucinogens lose their importance as shamans dominate their visions: as soon as the shaman is able to see through thought, *mëtiaranëmu renuria*, “truly see” as the Yagua say, they practically do not resort to drugs. These are replaced by tobacco, which proves to be the shamanic plant par excellence, present in all magical activity [it is then not drunk but smoked].

At a given time, especially during puberty rites of passage, young boys are also called to abandon the feminine social and psychic matrix (the world of the mothers) to integrate into the world of “men” (adults or potential fathers), the world of social structure involving vocational definition and the appearance of parental and social responsibilities. If the first birth implies the person’s renouncement of a fetal, biologically dominant life to access psychic life, the second birth initiated

in puberty entails the person's renouncement of a psycho-affectively dominant life to access the spiritual dimension of being. And precisely, the use of tobacco can be found in the rites of passage of several Amazonian and Amerindian ethnic groups.

In Venezuela, the Guajiro present this "test of tobacco" to their young to evaluate their eventual qualification as future shamans:

In this particular case, it is the juice of chewed tobacco, consumed in high doses (*Nicotiana tabacum* or *N. rustica*; alkaloid: nicotine). First, significant "symptoms" accumulate in the future shaman along a slow process –therapeutic dreams, food phobias, repeated illness, etc.– considered signals of a privileged communication with the other world and, consequently, of a shamanic vocation. (Perrin, 1982: 34-35)

But if this communication is not under control, then there is a fainting fit, the "almost death", as the Guajiro say. It is a "reversal", provided its confirmation by the "test of tobacco". The reactions to the test "objectively" decide access to shamanism. If the apprentice endures the high doses of tobacco juice that the shaman woman who was urgently called makes him swallow, and if this liquid causes his quick rebirth from the major faint, he shall become a shaman. But if he vomits, he is declared unable. A positive reaction to tobacco means access to a new "species". The person "opened", as they say, to the other world; his four bad ailments became his "auxiliary spirits".

"EATING" TOBACCO

The ritual use of tobacco is not a form of instrumentalizing an object (tobacco) for the benefit of the human being, an idea that belongs to western mentality (Chaumeil, 1982). Instead, it has to do with assimilating the "strength", "energy" or "spirit" of tobacco —considered a living being— into the human being's own energy. It seems to be *a form of nourishment*, clearly deduced from the title of *sheripiari*, "the one who eats tobacco", that the Ashanika give to their master *curanderos*.

This concept is present throughout the Americas in relation to the use or consumption of teaching, master or psychoactive and visionary plants, wrongly called "hallucinogenic" (Llamazares, Martínez Sarasola y Funes, 2004). Thus, the Centro American entheogenic mushroom consumed by the Aztec (Schultes, 1979b) was called *teonanacatl*, i.e. "flesh of the gods", an expression that Peter Furst (1974) used as title of his classic work on visionary substances of the Americas.

Michel Perrin (1982) points to this chronic use of solid tobacco by the Guajiro shamans in Venezuela while Furst (1974: 63-71) describes its use throughout the whole pre-Hispanic Americas in various ways (chewed, inhaled, drunk, smoked and in enemas):

Only the shamans [...] may establish a diagnosis by communicating with the supernatural or supra-human world where the beings and the things that are the ultimate cause of the disease dwell. Shamans [...] are characters endowed with auxiliary spirits [...], immaterial beings that the peoples of this craft know how to summon *by absorbing juice of chewed tobacco*, singing and shaking a maraca.

Notwithstanding, it is clear that this ingestion is nourishing not only for the physical body but also for the energetic body of the person, a concept that is absent from modern western worldview. The energy obtained from tobacco has to be integrated first into the more dense dimensions of the body (matter and water = physical and psycho-emotional incarnations) in order for it to be then incorporated to the lighter and ethereal dimensions of the human energetic body (air and fire = inspired and creative mind), the spiritual dimension.

Consequently, tobacco is first consumed as a raw, aqueous extract (matter and water); then as a cooked extract (fire) and finally it is smoked (fire and air). These stages are followed in this strict, irreplaceable order. Thus, the western way of consuming tobacco —directly smoked— is equivalent to a potentially lethal transgression of the laws of life. It is equivalent to pretending to gain access to the spiritual knowledge without taking time to previously integrate the strength of tobacco in its material dimension.

“DIETING” AND PURGING

Regarding its ability to mediate with the inspiring powers of the invisible world, it is presumably possible to embody the messages or revelations from the other world into everyday life and hence transform one’s existence. The spirit descends towards the material dimension to enrich it and uplift it progressively. When the procedure is reverted, matter is directed towards a disembodiment that ultimately means death. As in the Icarus myth, the modern subject aspires to access knowledge for the sake of possession and mental enjoyment, and burns the wings of spirituality while his or her ego is inflated. In other words, it is the same as building a house by starting with the roof. It is, then, a Promethean gesture with fatal consequences, which the ancient Greeks have described in their myths.

Because of this, detoxification by smoked tobacco may also be carried out through purges with aqueous extract of tobacco, thus reverting the transgressive process. Vomiting is an expression of “giving back” what the patient has improperly seized. By restoring what was wrongfully appropriated, the convenient order is reestablished. In fact, when vomiting, the subject must lower the head (God calls the Jews “people of stiff neck” in reference to their pride and rigidity), a posture that shows humility, a request for forgiveness and recognition of one’s transgressive act.

It is worth noting that tobacco “juice” purges are effective not only for tobacco addiction but also in general for any dependence involving the same mechanism of misappropriation. Moreover, in a ritual context, vomiting also encompasses the purging of “toxic” thoughts and feelings resultant of that misappropriation procedure that stores feelings of grudge, nostalgia, rage, envy, revenge... The modern “religion” of possession halts the circulation of the vital flow. Tobacco purges restore it.

In addition, “eating” tobacco refers to tobacco being first and essentially ingested orally or gastrically. And it is also worthy of notice that this type of ingestion refers both to liquid extracts of the plant and to smoked tobacco. The *tabaquero* does not inhale the tobacco smoke but swallows it, directing it towards the stomach, where the energetic forces reside.

YACHAY, THE SHAMANIC “PHLEGM”

In order to understand this procedure, it is necessary to know that at the core of Amazonian shamanism lies the fact that the *curandero*’s body will gradually transform with the incorporation of the plants’ “force”. This force becomes evident in a twofold dimension: 1) the energetic, immaterial one, and 2) the embodied, physical or material sphere. Regarding the latter, the incorporated energy has a material element consisting of a phlegmy substance that resides in the stomach of the *curandero*, called *yachay* (knowledge or learning in Quechua) or also *mariri*.

Yachay is acquired by ingesting cooked plant preparations, especially of tree barks and roots. Ingestion of these preparations require precise and rigorous conditions to avoid that the force of the plants become toxic making the apprentice sick to the extent of causing madness or death.

These apprenticeship periods are popularly known as *diets*. They demand a strict way of eating, excluding salt, hot pepper or strong seasoning, pork, alcohol or fermented drinks, added to complete sexual abstinence and isolation in the jungle, away from all kinds of energetic interference. The latter may appear in the form of strong odors (to the point of making the person lose their mind), the presence of a person with toxic energy —either mean or too strong (menstruating or pregnant woman; drugged, drunk, or ill person; someone who did not cleanse after sexual intercourse, etc.)—; wide temperature variations or the voluntary interference of a witch located at a distance.

The apprentice, who is semi-fasting and lacking salt, is extremely sensitive to the slightest energetic stimulus, especially vulnerable, with a very “open” or porous energetic body, which facilitates the incorporation of the ingested plants’ energy but that at the same dangerously exposes the apprentice to the harmful interferences called “*cruzaderas*” (crossings). These may appear in the form of physical (diarrhea, vomit, migraine, etc.) or psychic discomforts (nightmares, unease, irritability, depression, even hallucinations and delirium). Thus, it is a delicate operation requiring a greatly skilled master and a strongly motivated apprentice. It is possible to *diet* for short periods of several days and up to two or three weeks, which is the most frequent way, or in the ancestral way of shamanic apprenticeship consisting of one period of several months and up to two years of isolation. It is generally accepted that in order to become a good *curandero*, the apprentice must *diet* for an accumulated minimum period of six months. The purpose of *dieting* is to accumulate in the apprentice’s body the *yachay* produced by the energy of the ingested plants.

THE “*CHUPADA*”, CONFRONTATIONS WITH EVIL

Once the *yachay* is acquired, the *curandero* swallows tobacco smoke since it mobilizes the *yachay* in the stomach and allows it to be materialized. The *curandero* then regurgitates it in the form of phlegm, a thick and sticky slime. Once in the mouth, the *curandero* begins to suck the sick parts of the patient’s body, letting the *yachay* do its work, as the *curanderos* describe it, like a magnet or sponge that attracts and absorbs the bad energies of the patient: it is the *chupada* or “sucking” (extracting buccal suction or aspiration). The *curandero* then spits this contaminated *yachay* because swallowing it would be dangerously intoxicating and even lethal.

In a previous stage of this sucking process or in case the *curandero* has more diffused *yachay*, swallowing tobacco smoke induces *yachay* mobilization to the tip of the tongue. There, in a triangular area (base towards the tip of the tongue and pointed end towards the pharynx), the *curandero* feels a sting that indicates the *yachay* is being mobilized to start the sucking. Also, during the sucking, the *curanderos* frequently chew tobacco to protect themselves and to strengthen the energetic aspiration. Other protecting elements may be used, such as a piece of cinnamon bark or camphor. When the disease is located in parts of the body of difficult access or in the intimate parts, the *curandero* employs a small tube to aspirate the bad energies.

The master *curandero* obtained the *yachay* after performing long *diets* and ingesting plenty of barks and roots of trees and bushes. He appropriates these forces through an extreme personal strain in which dieting leads not only to a physical purge but also to a spiritual one. The *curandero* is confronted with all his own human weaknesses, mental fantasies, fears, unsolved emotional problems, etc. The driving intention is to heal and it is only through true will and vocation that this is achieved. The process leads the *curandero* not only to acquire energetic forces but also to become wise.

Instead, the witch appropriates this *yachay* by means of “tricks”, not daring to enter self-confrontation, and so takes the plants without observing the diet —which also includes long periods of sexual abstinence. The witch is a weak person who wants to acquire powers without

willing to go through the unavoidable requirements of purification. There are certain techniques to absorb the energies of another person; so the witch makes an apprentice *diet* and when the latter has acquired enough forces, the witch then absorbs them from the apprentice. It is a true act of vampirism in which the apprentice remains as in the beginning and the witch is nourished by the work of the apprentice.

This is called *to suck the diet*. For witches, the *yachay* is like a poison in their body and must be regularly eliminated so that it does not kill them or drive them crazy. In other words, witches are possessed by forces they cannot control but that, on the contrary, control them. They attract bad spirits that do not leave them alone and slave them, tempting them, making them do evil things, stimulating their lowest desires, stinging them and leading them to feelings of rage, pride, irritability, envy, revenge. A classic way of expelling the *yachay* is to spit it materially and place it in the body of the subject by means of a tobacco exhalation (*soplada*, i.e. a blow), but more often by means of a dematerialization act (magic) towards a recipient, something that is possible to secretly carry out from a distance.

The act of magic is accompanied by an accurate harmful intent towards the victim: drive them crazy, take away their appetite so that they starve to death, make them sick in one way or another, cause an accident, prevent them from sleeping, drive them to despair and suicide... This *yachay* sent from a distance is similar to a dart shot through a blowgun or *pukuna* and so is called magic dart or *virote* (Chaumeil, 1998). The witch who specializes in this procedure is called *virotero* or *pukunero*. The *curandero* intervenes to *suck* the *virote* with his own *yachay*.

The *virote*s can no longer enter the body of a *curandero* who is sufficiently strengthened by *diets* and purges and, rather, they bounce back. Witches end their lives dominated by a more powerful witch who prevents them from expelling the toxic *yachay*, and so they develop clinical symptoms indicative of a high degree of intoxication. Popular language says “they rot from the inside”; their corpses decompose very quickly exhaling horrible fetid odors.

According to our observations, most Amazonian *curanderos* perform both healing and “minor” witchcraft acts, which they justify as a defense from witches or *maleros*, evildoers. This “minor” witchcraft also includes the traditional practice of *puzangas* or love filters of different nature that belong to a cultural context where seduction techniques between men and women are part of the daily social game and where polygamy is tacitly accepted (and even valued in the macho mestizo context): each man acknowledges a legal wife (the *legitimate*) and the “other ones”, in the same way he names his legitimate children and those “from the street”. Within this broad perspective, the *curanderos* are located in one end.

Therefore, *dieting* requires a clear intent, a real will, a disposition to go through self-confrontation and purification, and selecting an authentic master who ensures adequate protection and assumes an altruistic responsibility towards the apprentice. The result of the process is conditioned by how the rules regarding food and sexual activity during and after the *diet* (which may last several months) are observed, and their transgression disturbs the apprentice’s psychic-spiritual level and may end in an eventual possession that leads to transformation into a witch. Although many apprentices become minor *maleros* for not observing the diet correctly, they may slowly tend to an attitude more proper of a major witch. And there are only a few people who will deliberately pervert their diet with the aim of becoming *maleros* or *witches* on purpose, ingesting forbidden or toxic food, for example, scavenger birds such as vultures.

SMOKE: THE ENERGETIC VECTOR

All procedures related to *yachay* that are carried out by either the *curandero* or the witch, as well as the *diet*, require the mediation of tobacco smoke as energetic vector.

Tobacco masters and *curanderos* in general swallow tobacco smoke to balance forces in their energetic body. They vigorously swallow puffs and then belch out loudly to expel the smoke. Part of the apprenticeship involves developing belch-inducing abilities to eliminate bad energies together with the swallowed smoke and tobacco.

The interface role between the physical and the energetic bodies is assumed by both parts of the autonomic nervous system: the orthosympathetic (tonic) system and the parasympathetic (depressed) system. Hence, energetic intoxication or reorganization is basically evidenced by symptoms related with this system: burps, sneezes, yawns, sweating, vomiting and diarrhea.

We are also familiar with the localized incorporation of energies having an essentially protective role. As *yachay*, they physically consist of phlegm. The master may place these *defenses* in the fold of the arm, perpendicularly to it, as a barrier against any “bad energies” that may go up the hand of the *curandero* when touching a patient. The intention is to avoid the absorption of very toxic witchcraft energies that may eventually affect the patient. It is also used to shake hands with an enemy or a disguised witch without risking being harmed by them.

These defenses may be removed and mobilized in the arm against very toxic charges: they cause a strong pain, similar to one produced by a large wood splinter, and energetic disorders (disturbed sleep, nightmares, tiredness, apathy, irritability, etc.). The master perceives it in the apprentice’s body by feeling an energetic pulse different from the blood pulse. The pulse felt in the fold of the arm is radial while the energetic pulse is cubital. The *defenses* may also be placed on the neck to protect the throat when performing *chupadas* (extracting suction) or on the head. These defenses are rather dangerous if they move from their place or especially if they get near the throat and are swallowed. They are toxic energetic charges that may cause death if they reach the stomach, since once there the *curandero* cannot reach them to extract or mobilize them. Before this even happens, the *curandero* relocates them as soon as they move by means of strong and painful massages and with the aid of swallowed tobacco smoke blown over them. Then, they are put in their place and properly fixed. For this reason, the throat is a delicate and generally avoided location. Tobacco smoke is also used for transmitting and placing the apprentice’s *defenses*.

Yachay is transmissible from master to student but supposes the former’s loss of his or her own defenses and power and so it is performed when the master feels old and near death. The *curandero* regurgitates the *yachay* phlegm after having swallowed plenty of tobacco smoke and has the successor swallow it (Harner, 1979).

From this process, which we have not only heard from the *curanderos* but also observed in them and ourselves, and during healings, we understand that the strong and disconcerting aspect of Amazonian curanderism is *the science and art of transforming matter into energy and vice versa, and manipulating them*. In this way, it is possible to act on the physical body of the patient to reach the energetic dimension of his or her body and, inversely, modulate the patient’s energetic body to obtain physical effects. The possible transformations of matter into energy and of energy into matter—the procedures of materialization and dematerialization that enable modern physical and mathematical equations—are a fact that Amazonian *curanderos* have lived and practiced for centuries.

And in these practices the essential therapeutic instrument of the *curanderos* is their own body. A perfect example of this are the sometimes very strong physical pains felt when the energies (*yachay*, *defenses*, *arkanás*, *ikaros*...) move to the right position and require both physical and energetic procedures (massages, baths, *sopladas*...) to relocate properly and make them stop inflicting pain.

THE SOPLADA

The *soplada* (blow) is a more common and simple therapeutic act that is based on the same principle. In this case, the *curandero* exhales tobacco smoke on the patient's body, over the affected parts or the areas of energetic concentration, such as the crown of the head, the tip of fingers and toes, the back or the chest. Tobacco smoke is charged with the *curandero*'s energy and acts as an extension of his energetic body enveloping the patient's energetic body. Fusing with the energetic aura of the patient, the *curandero* transmits his energetic stability, and inversely, the energetic body of the *curandero* absorbs the energetic disturbances of the patient. If the latter are relatively strong, they may alter the energy of the master, who will immediately regulate it by means of an orthosympathetic reaction, generally burping and sometimes vomiting.

Mapachos contain a higher concentration of nicotine than commercial cigarettes and so their psychotropic effects are stronger, but at the same time we have observed that the smoker is quickly saturated and so it is hard to see *mapachos* being smoked recreationally.

Tobacco's relaxing effect and the pleasant feeling produced by the activation of the dopaminergic circuit and the nicotinic and cholinergic receptors of the central nervous system are very fast in the case of smoked tobacco —the first effects are felt in seven seconds— which may influence the attachment to its use. Addiction to *mapachos* is also apparently lower in comparison to commercial cigarettes.

TABACCO AND THE FOUR ELEMENTS

Tobacco is exceptional in the sense that it is related with the four elements of nature and this is why it is considered a “universal plant”. According to our knowledge, in Peru, this same characteristic is only found in the coca plant, whose central role in the Andean cultures is well known. Tobacco's universalist potential allows for its combination with any other plant without opposition or adverse effect. Thus, it invigorates and potentiates the effect of the plant to which it is associated. This quality makes it very useful in therapeutic uses.

Accordingly, tobacco is associated in different cultures to other psychoactive plants. For example, during the conquest of Mexico, Bernal Díaz del Castillo chronicles that after a meal Aztec king Moctezuma offered his guests cacao and pipes filled with tobacco (Bernard, 2002).

In the Peruvian Amazon it is mixed with *datura* and *ayahuasca*; and in the coast, with mescaline-containing cactus, such as San Pedro. Among the Yagua, the energy of each psychoactive plant is characterized by a certain “speed” that is felt in its direct effects or in dreams, with feelings of flying or journeying. Chaumeil (1982: 106) specifies, “tobacco, one of whose tasks is to accompany all the mothers of vegetables in their movements, has then to adapt to their speed”.

In the holistic vision of Amazonian curanderism, human beings connect with nature through its different elements: earth, water, air, fire. In turn, each element is associated with certain physical and psychological characteristics of humans and has its own spirits. In this same way, each plant manifests the energy of one of these elements. There are earth plants (*yawar panga* or *Aristolochia didyma*), water plants (*ushpawasha sanango*, *yaku sisa*...), air plants (*rosa sisa*, *Tagetes erecta*) and fire plants (*Ajo Sacha*, *Mansoa alliacea*; *mucura*, *Petivera alliacea*). If ingested in appropriate conditions, each plant will stimulate in the patient the physical and psychic functions corresponding to the referred element. Certain plants gather several elements in their energetic corpus; they are mixed plants — for example, *bobinzana* (*Callandria angustifolia*) connects with earth and water.

TO CHARGE OR IKARAR

Tobacco smoke fully exerts its effect when acting as vector of the conscious intentionality of the *tabaquero*, the tobacco master, and his energies. For this, the *curandero* charges tobacco by means of *ikaros* (therapeutic chants) using a prepared or *cured* pipe and prayers expressing the healing intention.

Jean-Pierre Chaumeil (1982: 66) provides an example of an *ikaro* calling the *mother* of tobacco during the initiation of a Yagua shaman:

I am going to call the mother of tobacco

[call] yeeeeee yeeeeee

mother of tobacco [bis]...

¡I am calling you!

¡let's smoke, I am calling you!

I dream for you (I sing for you to come)

I ask you that my people come

I dream of you, mother of tobacco

That's why I call you to light my cigar

I dream of you, we smoke together.

Ikaros are chants that the spirits reveal to the *curanderos* during the states of consciousness alteration: *diets*, ayahuasca sessions or other visionary plant ingestion (toé or *Datura sp.*, purgahuasca or *Banisteriopsis sp.*, tobacco), and dreams. They are not aesthetic creations but transmissions or teachings of the spiritual world with specific functions. When they come from a master, he incorporates them to the energetic body of the apprentice by chanting (*ikarando*) directly over his body and over the pipe at the same time; then the master proceeds to blow the smoke of this *charged* tobacco. *Ikaros* are energetic objects with an energetic “form” or structure of their own. They must fit perfectly in the body of the apprentice, patient or *curandero*. During *cruzaderas*—energetic interferences or disturbances—the *ikaros* may move from their place, no longer fitting correctly. This causes physical pain that is relieved when the *ikaro* is returned to its place with massages and tobacco smoke *sopladas*. Once again we see it is not an imaginary or virtual language but one that has to do with experiences reaching the physical, material dimension.

Besides the *ikaro*'s own strength, the *curandero* mobilizes his own energies when chanting, especially when invoking the spirits of the plants he has *dieted* and whose energy he has assimilated. When a person sings an *ikaro* that has been learnt by ear, without having received it in his body from a master and without having *dieted* the plants invoked in the chant, its effect is very much reduced or even null.

Certain techniques are used to incorporate into the patient's body the virtues or energetic matrix of the elements of nature (animals, rivers, whirlpools, heavenly bodies, rain and other natural phenomena) or more modern elements (steel, arms, knives, gasoline) by means of blowing tobacco smoke *charged* by the corresponding *ikaro*. Frequently, at this level, the strength and the

power of the *yanapuma* (black puma), the white boa, the *yanguntoro* (armadillo), and the black bull, among others, are invoked. These protections or defenses are called *arkanas* and are visualized as “soldiers” placed in key points.

It is worth mentioning that tobacco smoke tastes differently when it is *ikarado*—charged by the *ikaro*—an evidence of a real energy change that is perceptible through the senses.

The potency of the *soplada* is also connected to the quality of the tobacco used: the higher the nicotine content and aromas, the better the effect.

The pipe or *shimitapon* (what covers the mouth or *shimi*, in Quechua) plays an important role. It is traditionally made by hand from hard wood (bloodwood or *Brosimum paraense*) and even unrottable (quinilla, bulletwood or *Manilkara bidentata*). The mouthpiece may be made of a bored-through, straight, twig—often from the bush called *chiric sanango* (*Brumfelsia grandiflora*) or of bone (frequently from a bird’s leg, such as sunbittern or *Eurypyga helias*). It is also called *cachimba/o*, from the Bantu word *cazimba* through the Brazilian Portuguese *cacimba*. In order to be *cured* or prepared, the pipe must be cooked for long hours in the ayahuasca mixture, the main visionary potion in the Amazon (*Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*), and eventually with other tree barks. The master then goes on to *ikarar* the pipe with chants referring to tobacco. By using the *cachimba* to smoke, the tobacco is strengthened by ayahuasca and the other plants, and by the master’s *ikaro*. In this way, the pipe, as a consecrated object, is considered a unique personal belonging and an essential therapeutic instrument of the *curandero*.

Sometimes, the *curandero* adds the aromas of the cinnamon tree (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum* or *Cinnamomum verum J. Presl*), whether by chewing a piece of bark while blowing tobacco smoke, or by adding cinnamon to the burner so that it is consumed together with tobacco. Cinnamon plays the role of energy balancer.

Another type of *soplada* is used to specifically treat patients suffering witchcraft. In this case the *curandero* places the burning end of the *mapacho* over the patient’s body while blowing smoke over it. We observed this type of healing during an ayahuasca session when a Piarora master (Venezuela) extracted the toxic effects of a *virote*. He used a 30-centimeter long cigar and slowly blew the smoke over the patient’s body, very close to the skin, as if following invisible lines. Then he absorbed the mobilized bad energies and vomited them as a final and definitive liberation act.

Finally, as in all ritual acts, the intention of the *curandero* plays an essential role in the blowing procedure. This is expressed by means of prayers or invocations to the *curandero*’s protective spirits or allies. Frequently, he speaks directly to tobacco while holding the pipe burner to his mouth to whisper requests and express his intention.

THE SINGADA

Besides oral—digestive or pulmonary—ingestion, there is a third way of traditionally assimilating tobacco in Peruvian curanderism: through the nose. Nasal ingestion only includes solid forms (tobacco powder or snuff) or liquid presentations (extracts in water or sugarcane aguardiente). Snuff is common in the Amazon jungle, while liquid inhalation is preferred in Peruvian coast curanderism associated to the use of San Pedro or Huachuma cactus. Guillermo Cruz Sánchez (1951: 161) defines the act of *singar* (*singa* means nose in Quechua) as “the ability to absorb and swallow tobacco—macerated or in alcoholic extracts—through the nose”. Tobacco juice mixed with aguardiente is usually inhaled from a small shell, an action that is called “to *sobar*” tobacco. The abovementioned author provides the following description of a healing ceremony, or *mesada*, in the northern Peruvian coast:

The first thing the witch does is *singar*, that is, inhale through a nostril water-macerated tobacco or an infusion of tobacco and alcohol or water rich in tobacco leaves or *guaña*. The macerated preparation is placed in a big shell and then distributed in smaller portions of 10 to 20 cc to other smaller shells. It is possible to start the *singar* process through any nostril; the witch orders to do it two or three times through the right nostril and two or three through the left one. In this case it must be taken the same number of times through each nostril; or he orders three or four rounds, in this case the content is inhaled three or four times from one small shell through any nostril. If it is inhaled once through a nostril, the same has to be done through the other one. Wait 20 minutes for the next *singada* (inhalation), after two *singadas* the *Opuntia* is taken. It may also be taken without inhaling. This is a very old custom, probably dating from the pre-Inca period, since Montesinos mentions it in his chronicle. (Cruz Sánchez, 1951: 164)

Vomiting considered to be body and soul cleansing may follow this act.

This way of assimilating tobacco is described early and in several parts of the Americas. Towards the end of the fifteenth century chronicler Ramón Pané observed that the Taino from Española inhaled cohoba (*Piptadenia peregrina*) powder mixed with tobacco juice, a combination used in rituals reserved for chiefs and shamans. It was the most important ceremony of Taino religious life (Bernard, 2002).

In the jungle, finely pulverized tobacco is inhaled or blown by the subject (using a “v” shaped cane made of two bird bones joined by rubber) or by a third person in the nostrils. This stimulates the brain directly since the olfactory nerve is practically a protuberance of this organ. The psychic effect is immediate, accompanied by a sort of mental outburst of energy, headache, perception of luminous flashes and brief mental paralysis or stupefaction followed by a strong awakening of attention. Nasal and lachrymal effusions are produced. Depending on the doses, after a few seconds or minutes, thoughts become clear and eventually a visionary stage is generated. This violent awakening followed by concentration, mental clarity and calmness is used especially to make people come to during confusion states in ayahuasca sessions. Certain ethnic groups in the Brazilian jungle use a lighter version of this modality as a welcome rite.

THE SPIRIT OF TOBACCO

A spirit presides over each medicinal plant and corresponds to it “spiritual matrix” in the invisible or other world. This matrix is a live entity, not directly perceptible, incorporeal, but endowed of its own structure (specific form) and an energetic quality. The person who ingests tobacco correctly manifests these virtues in the different structural levels of the human being: body, mind and spirit. There is an energetic community between human beings and nature, of which the former are integral parts. Certain plants reach a high degree of “familiarity” with human beings, as it is the case of psychoactive plants.

This intimate relation is materially evidenced by the similarity (and sometimes identity) of these plants’ alkaloids with the neurotransmitters of the human brain. Therefore, the adequate ingestion of these plants does not constitute a violation or rupture of the human body but rather a stimulus of generally dormant and even atrophied natural physiological functions in the average western prototype. Thus, for example, dimethyltryptamine (DMT), which is present in certain psychoactive plants (*chacrana* or *Psychotria viridis*, *virola* or *Virola calophylla*, *yopo* or *Anadenanthera peregrina*, and other mimosas and acacias) is secreted by the human pineal gland and derives, like serotonin, from the metabolism of tryptophan.

The human brain unconsciously interprets the spirit of an ingested plant, assimilating its characteristics to referents from perceptible life. It is a representation or figuration of a non-

perceptible spiritual entity. The brain resorts to similarities from concrete experiences of daily life and to universal archetypes that may be deduced from the community of human life. In this last dimension, located at the deepest level of human psyche, representations are transcultural or rather pre-cultural.

Accordingly, a group of French people participating in a session of aqueous tobacco extract ingestion was requested to use adjectives to qualify their subjective perception of the qualities of the tobacco they tried. The following words were used: *powerful, purifying, dense, penetrating, structuring, warm, tranquilizing, pervading, just, silent, rigorous, faithful, giving good advice, reliable, safe, joyful, revitalizing.*

They pointed out how ingesting tobacco juice straightened them, awakening the mind, allowing access to other states of consciousness that authorize healthy understanding and giving entrance to metaphysical realities that nourish and purify the soul. And they concluded by acknowledging “tobacco is a regeneration instrument that allows to remember what was forgotten, that is to say, the truth of the body, of the energies, of both the outer and the inner reality, of the psyche, and of the intellect up to the sharp point of the soul” (Mouret, 2006: 61).

In these adjectives we find characteristics of masculine functions (*yang* in Oriental tradition), grouped around the concepts of strength and structure. Tobacco intervenes and acts to cleanse, order, verticalize. It represents a serene, secure, comforting, inspiring wisdom. It assumes a “paternal” function summarized in the popular saying “mothers give; fathers order”.

This is in line with the indigenous perceptions that consider tobacco a spirit with three main functions: *mental clarification, strength and protection.*

In indigenous medical practices, a visual anthropomorphic representation of the spirit of tobacco usually appears in the form of a short, muscular, dark-skinned man who sometimes wears a white hat. *Ikaros* refer to the *sinchi negrito* (*sinchi* means strong in Quechua; *negrito*, black and small), i.e. the black and strong man. In this image we visually recognize the same characteristics the French had described, although they were not familiar with Amazonian culture: masculinity, virility, density (dark color), power, protection and ordering of well-inspired (hat luminosity) thoughts (hat). It is worth stressing that black does not represent a negative quality but concentration of light, an extreme density.

In order to obtain the benefits of tobacco, first it is necessary to go through a period of purification of the opposite qualities. Thus, upon drinking the tobacco juice, the first feeling is of thought acceleration, confusion, headache, a heightened weakness that makes it difficult to even support the head, and a feeling of vulnerability and lack of protection.

After the tobacco purge through vomiting and diarrhea, or its gradual assimilation, the person gains access to beneficial states of mental calmness with concentration ability and positive inspiration, physical, mental and spiritual strength; a feeling of protection and defenses against “bad” energies. According to what one of us experienced, it was possible to go from feeling like a dislocated, exhausted “rag doll” to perceiving as if metal plates were placed on chest, back and rest of the body, which felt like becoming the “Robocop” of contemporary movies.

Tobacco causes a deep and violent cleansing effect. It allows the evacuation of physical toxins — such as drugs— psychic poisons —rage, pride, jealousy, sadness, etc.— and spiritual infestation caused by witchcraft, pejorative transgenerational legacies, rupture of a malignant spirit by means of magic, occultism, sexual abuse, incest, etc. The apprentice’s progress is manifested when he no longer vomits when drinking tobacco juice and is able to gradually increase the dose. It is then considered that the “strength” of tobacco has settled in the student’s clean body.

Once tobacco's power is assimilated in its solid and liquid forms, smoked tobacco will extend and exalt these same effects in an even more aerial and igneous dimension, in other words, facilitating a positive inspiration for thoughts and spiritual life. Tobacco smoke nourishes spiritual life, both the human spirit and the spirits of nature and the hierarchy of the superior world. For this reason, the master *curandero* frequently pours tobacco juice over the medicinal plants he uses or blows them with tobacco smoke.

There is another description of the universal ritual concept of nourishing the spirits through tobacco smoke in the Andean character called Ekeko.

Ekeko, the spirit of prosperity and abundance, is a clay doll that can be represented in several sizes, but it is generally around 20cm tall. It is a man dressed with the typical clothes of the Andean region extending from central Peru to northwestern Argentina. Small bags hang from his body like saddlebags containing cereals, tobacco, and rolled bills that favor in the manner of votives the acquisition of material goods. The person who has an Ekeko may add new miniature votives hanging from the statuette or place them on the side, representing what is desired. In order to obtain the requested favors, it is necessary to make the Ekeko "smoke" when the object is placed. For this, the figure has a cavity for mouth to place a lit cigarette. If the wish or request is accepted, smoke will puff out of the cigarette as if the Ekeko were really smoking. (Bertonio, *Vocabulario de la lengua aymara*, 14)

TRANSGRESSION AND DEPENDENCY

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that human tobacco smoking should be channeled by the correct ritual and a clear intention from the master or the tobacco user. Transgression of the norms ruling the correct use causes tobacco to become harmful. This inappropriate handling happens in two main and complementary ways.

The origin of a human being's parasite spirit infestation may be: transgenerational (inheritance of a spirit of suicide, incest, disbelief, etc.), casual (frequent visits to an infected place), an act of witchcraft (third party's intentional harm, sorcery, curses, etc.), spiritually transgressive practices (spiritism, occultism, incorrect channeling such as Reiki, divination, magic practices, profanation of sacred places or objects, etc.) or contagion during states of energetic permeability or vulnerability (drug taking, non-consecrated sexual acts).

The spirits that vampirize subjects feed on their energetic body and through negative mental suggestions induce them to continue transgressing vital laws. It is what classic ecclesiastic language calls "obsession" and that in rare cases, such as "possession" phenomena, may completely subdue the person. In such cases, tobacco smoke nourishes and strengthens the vampire spirit. Hence, one of the main divinities of the Nahua in Mexico, Tezcatlipoca, lord of the night and almighty witch, is also called "smoking mirror" (Bernard, 2002).

In a complementary way, not necessarily in presence of infestation, tobacco consumption in a subject who has not gone through the previous stages of solid-liquid tobacco ingestion, and that in addition inhales it instead of swallowing it, results in a sort of deviation of the spiritual energy towards the mind. In fact, this procedure is common among people who search for inspiration (writers, artists, musicians) by "pumping" tobacco smoke, which actually results in a pumping of their psychic and spiritual energies with the consequent wearing. The human being becomes dependent upon a vegetal spirit, once again reversing natural and contingent order. In certain way, the spirit of tobacco is perverted by a profanation act through which the very subject hands over the power over him or herself. The vital power of tobacco evolves into a lethal force that claims 3.5 to 4 million people in the world each year, one of the main three plagues of public health.

The founding father of the psychoanalytic school, Sigmund Freud, is an illustrative example of this procedure as described with finesse by Philippe Grinberg (1999:131):

Having smoked twenty cigars a day during his whole life until his death caused by jaw cancer, Freud admits that tobacco is his “work substance” and, in spite of that, he only deals with it once in his works describing its role as “masturbation substitute”. The immense role that tobacco played as creative stimulus in Freud’s life leads the author to write, “without fear of exaggeration, it may be asserted that, along its development, the Freudian theory nourished from the vapors of tobacco”. And there is an evident example of the results of this profanation in a psychoanalytic theory that reduced the human nature to its psycho-emotional dimension, with emphasis on the sexual aspect, and at the same time pretended to nullify the spiritual dimension by proclaiming the “death of God”.

Another parallelism emerges from the popular use of tobacco smoke and juice to repel poisonous insects, keep out snakes, and extract skin parasites (myiasis). These concrete practices echo the material dimension of an “exorcist” role of tobacco at an energetic or spiritual level. They symbolize a valid mechanism of tobacco in the different levels of creation—visible or invisible. Thus, in the appropriate conditions—preparation, intention, rituality—, smoked tobacco attracts good spirits and keeps away evil ones, generates good inspiration while protecting from the bad one. The Wauja from the Upper Xingu region in the Brazilian Amazon say “the smell of tobacco attracts spirits” (Barcelos-Nieto, 2006).

In other words, depending on the adequacy of the ritual context, tobacco smoke will nourish the human spirit or will be nourish from it; it will enhance it or empty it.

As Michel Mouret (2006: 61) points out, in its harmful form, tobacco smoke tends to feed the fantasized egotistical dimension of the subject to the detriment of his or her deep ego:

Through smoke and in its twofold aspect of death of the spiritual being in the benefit of the imaginary ego or of death of the imaginary ego in the benefit of the being by corporizing the spiritual side, it may be affirmed that tobacco could appear, allegorically, as the option of free will before the key of knowledge on good and evil [...] If I move away from the good or evil realities, I then enter the pure imaginary dimension, in other words, the things that have no consistency, that do not persist, that do not have a being in themselves, that is, that do not nourish the spirit.

Well-used tobacco allows us to come out of the fantasized virtual world to satisfy self-contemplation, to describe the true human vocation of attaining a full spiritual realization, consisting of contemplation of life or of God, that is, to go from the egotistical ego to the transcendent self, going through the intelligence of the heart that takes us back to the expression of the first chroniclers who qualified tobacco as “amiable herb” (Bernard, 2002).

Tobacco is the mediator par excellence between this world and the other world, the perceptible world and the invisible one, the primeval mythical world and the world of manifestation in which we live our daily life. It then assumes an inspirational role, allowing the reception of *ikaros*, the teaching of eternal wisdom, the reception and decoding of messages from the spiritual world. According to the Guajiro interviewed by anthropologist Michel Perrin (1992), this quality is assimilated to the power of the western processes of writing and reading. For this reason, it plays a key role in the multiple rituals of the Americas—especially in healing, religious and initiatic activities—and it is impossible to describe it exhaustively.

Perrin (1982: 35) recounts how tobacco serves as essential vehicle to connect with the invisible world:

A shaman woman told me this in 1979: “The shaman woman opens up along her body due to *yüü*, tobacco juice [...]. Then, her voice comes out of her belly, it sings, her spirits come and talk to her... Because tobacco is *pülasü*, it has powers [...] When the shaman woman finishes the tobacco juice, when she opens her eyes again, her chanting becomes shy, insecure and it stops...”. And in each healing it is with a blow charged with tobacco juice that the shaman will treat the ailments, making the souls return or expelling the pathogen elements from the body. *Tobacco is then, for the Guajiro, both a vehicle and a signal: it allows them to reach the other world and is the emblem of shamanism.*

TOBACCO PROFANATION IN THE WESTERN WORLD

Rooted from the cultures of the Americas and disconnected from its ritual use, tobacco arrived in Europe and Asia as an exotic gift, whose recreational use was rapidly discovered, causing fear and mixed opinions. Its early arrival in Europe is set in 1503 and within a century it spread throughout the planet, showing its universal ability to relate with humans. Tobacco was being cultivated in Japan as early as 1605.

Later, and thanks to Doctor Nicolás Monardes –who published *Historia medicinal de las cosas que se traen de la Nueva España* (1695)– and Doctor Jean Nicot, French ambassador in Portugal and physician at the court of King Henry II of France, its medicinal value, and soon enough its commercial one, were subsequently discovered, popularizing it and causing its global distribution.

Cigarette consumption increased significantly with the coming of the industrial era. The first cigarette-rolling machine, Le Maire’s, was built in 1843 in France. In the 1878 Universal Exhibition the Susini-Durand machine was presented, which could manufacture 3,600 cigarettes per hour. Individual, manual preparation of cigarettes —generally using corn husks— gradually disappeared to make industrial ready-to-smoke cigarettes available for consumers. At the same time, matches appeared by the end of the first half of the nineteenth century (1843) and gave immediate access to a lighting source for cigarettes.

It is relevant to add that, in this new context, the tobacco plant had lost its medicinal and spiritual role, and from then on the story is well-known: from oblivion of its ritualized and exclusive use as medicinal-sacred plant, to the commercial boom caused by its recreational and social use; from inclusion of synthetic additives in cigarettes to increase sales, to the confirmation of the harmful effect on health due to cigarette smoking. Tobacco use became completely profane and recreational; it lost all rituality. The sacred plant became a lethal poison (Perrin, 1982).

The medical benefits described in 1695 by Monardes were similar to those explained by Native Americans: useful to renew and cleanse the brain, chest ailments, halitosis, warms, pains; to heal wounds; antidote against injuries caused by poisonous animals and arrows. These effects were confirmed in 1828 when tobacco’s active ingredient, nicotine, was discovered and since then its impact on the central nervous system and the psyche was emphasized.

Tobacco’s medical applications have been studied since the end of the last century, especially in the prevention and treatment of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease (Bauru, 2006), and also as palliative for schizophrenia (Ott, 1998), deficit attention disorder and Tourette’s syndrome (Leary, 1997).

Despite the widespread ancestral use of tobacco in ethnic population, relatively few ethnological works focus on the uses of tobacco, such as those by Johannes Wilbert (1987), Ian Gatelly (2003) and Michel Perrin (1992). Unfailingly, current academic clinical discussions bring us to the oncological or legal fields, to the legal-political commitment of countries to control or punish its

use, what is only hindered by the huge economic interest of the tobacco industry. For this reason, we believe it is advisable to point out the relevance of the congress organized by Centro Takiwasi in 2006 on “tobacco as teaching and healing plant”.

Although western tobacco consumption initially included solid presentations (chewing tobacco, snuff), it is the smoking form the one that has dominated the Modern Age almost entirely.

In fact, in the western world it has been through tobacco that the act of smoking was discovered and introduced, understood as the direct and intentional absorption through the mouth of vapors and smokes produced by the combustion of some substance. Cannabis and opium, which were used medicinally in Europe in liquid form and orally ingested (in wine, infusions or decoctions), began to be smoked in the sixteenth century since the smoked use of tobacco became widespread. Currently, tobacco represents 75% of the smoked plants in Europe (Séligère Mishka, 2006).

The first primitive way of smoking dates back to antiquity, when certain aromatic vegetable or mineral substances were thrown over burning coals, thus liberating a thick aromatic smoke that fumigated the body and was indirectly inhaled. Incenses, sage, benzoin, myrrh and many other natural products were part of the therapeutic resources inhaled as described more than smoked. They already had a clear connection with spiritual practices and in the Jerusalem Temple there was an incense table as a central element of Judaic liturgy.

Partly, the use of pulverized and inhaled tobacco in Europe initially spread as an attribute of the nobility and the bourgeoisie while smoking was left for the common people. Then things would reverse: smoking became a feature of nobility.

Often, a little pulverized tobacco is placed onto the depression formed between the back of the hand and the base of the stretched thumb before taking it towards the nose and inhaling it. This use is so spread that anatomic descriptions have called this depression “anatomic tobacco pouch”.

Let us take the example of France to see how the spiritual dimension of tobacco generates various passions and conflicts.

Tobacco was introduced in France by André Thevet, a monk who returned from Brazil with the plant that was at first called *Thevetiana*. In 1623 Cardinal Richelieu, Prime Minister to the King, levied the first tax of 30 sols on every pound of tobacco entering France. However, in 1642 Pope VII issued a tobacco bull that made the use of tobacco during mass punishable by excommunication. King Luis XIV issued an edict in 1682, declaring:

Tobacco inhaling shall be allowed only once during mass and this intake shall be offered to parishioners by the butlers.

Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, famous preacher, proclaimed in his 1698 *Sermones* that it is a sin to consume tobacco during service and requests to “exterminate this outrageous indecency in the House of God”.

Despite all this, tobacco use would increase during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The poor chewed tobacco while noble women smoked pipe, an object that had been introduced by the British. Classic authors spread the fashion. Playwright Pierre Corneille affirmed: “Tobacco is divine; there is nothing like it”; while Molière declares: “It is the passion of the honest people, and those who live without tobacco are not worthy of living” (Blandin, 2003: 9).

Such are the complex reactions towards tobacco given its relation with the world of inspiration, its religious or spiritual dimensions and economic and political influences. The connection between religion and tobacco continued well into our times, especially in the French western region of Poitou, where some fifty years ago snuffing was still common during mass, as witnessed by the father of one of us:

The parish appointed three men –the butlers (*marguilliers*, in French)– mainly to assist the sexton during religious ceremonies [...] At the time the blessed bread was being distributed, the butlers held a tobacco box and, besides the piece of bread, they offered the men a pinch of tobacco. Those who accepted it took it and placed it on the back of the hand and inhaled it with a noisy sniff. You could hear the snorts in the silent church. It was something very special. (Mabit, 2010: 106-107)

This tradition continues to our days but as a folkloric element during the annual festivity of the parish in the city of Machecoul in Vendé. The tradition dates back to 1638, when the butlers offered snuff to the parishioners in Sunday mass, a task they used to carry out all year long.

DANGEROUS CIGARETTES

With no intention of elaborating on a subject that would exceed our work, it is fitting to establish a brief parallelism between the two currently most consumed substances: tobacco and cannabis.

While tobacco fully symbolizes masculine virtues, marijuana, in turn, fully represents feminine ones. The latter's recreational use in western postmodern society proceeds from the same consumerist, de-ritualized behavior. A profanation similar to that of tobacco generates the same problem, that is to say, feed the smokers at a mental level with spiritual realities they cannot assimilate or fulfill. The inspiring genius of marijuana will remain in projects that will never be realized in daily reality, weakening the mental energy (amotivational syndrome, distraction and forgetfulness), repressed aggressiveness, over-valorization of thoughts to the detriment of abated feelings, loss of the bond with the exterior world through an egotistical self-contemplation that, taken to the extreme, may unleash psychotic breaks.

Once again, traditional societies with lengthy experience in the use of cannabis ingested it in solid and liquid presentations within ritual procedures and extended apprenticeships before smoking it (Daniélou, 1992). We have developed this topic in another article (Mabit, 1997). Cannabis counters tobacco in the sense that, while the latter symbolizes entirely masculine virtues, the former embodies fully feminine virtues (receptivity, intuition, sensitivity, sweetness, etc.) While the banner for cannabis is condensed in the *peace and love* concept caricatured by long-haired, feminized hippies wearing loose-fitting, flowery clothes, tobacco advertising recreates images of so-called "machos" portrayed as roughly shaved, tanned, rustic, rude cowboys dressed in leather clothes. Tobacco has always been part of soldiers' rations since it symbolizes virility while it alleviates boredom, keeps conviviality, favors vigil and alertness reducing anguish (Molimard, 2006). However, in both cases there is a false assimilation of the virtues proper to each plant since the absorption is done through smoking without previous incorporation of the plant's forces in solid and liquid forms as determined by natural law: *the feminine sphere always precedes the masculine one*.

Moreover, the absence of preparation, the lack of conscious intention and coherent ritual, end up transforming the adolescent self-initiation gesture in a caricature. Unconsciously, and transgressing the abovementioned laws, the non-initiated smoker incorporates the virtues of the plant, which would otherwise be an aid in self-discovery and development if those adequate initiatic steps were respected. Instead, this profanation leads to a false sexualization-differentiation that excludes the psychic and spiritual dimension. Fascination for the plant's sexed energy leads the subject to become dependent on it: strong and drastic dependency (masculine) on tobacco and subtle and soft (feminine) dependency on cannabis, to the point that chronic cannabis consumers deny it although they smoke for decades and speak of "Mary Jane" with the indisputable tone of the inveterate lover.

They take no notice of the fact that, although they can stop consuming cannabis for several weeks and even some months (even though we have observed that averagely they rarely exceed two months), they return to do it in a chronic, although spaced, way. A lasting intoxication with these smoked plants even modifies the smoker physically, to the point of feminizing the chronic masculine consumer (thin, filiform, long-haired...) and masculinizing the feminine tobacco smoker (thick or hoarse voice, dry skin, short hair).

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The worldwide campaign against toxic tobacco consumption tends to erase the considerable therapeutic potential of the adequate use of tobacco, one of which is, also, the possible detoxification of smoked tobacco through aqueous tobacco maceration or its preparation in mother tincture and its dilutions.

Millenary traditions teach us that this unilateral stigmatization suffered by tobacco is inappropriate because it reduces tobacco to an object and pretends to ignore the conditions of use that determine its favorable or harmful effects. Our society pays for the consequences of profaning a sacred element. In this context, any prohibition will only displace the problem to other natural or synthetic substances as has happened for the last two centuries, besides favoring traffic and mafias. Each new psychoactive drug was presented as a medicament solution to the dependency on another drug: Freud used cocaine to treat his friend's heroine addiction, Freud himself resorted to tobacco to substitute his cocaine dependency, as happens today with methadone to treat heroine addiction. The empiric experience of ethnic peoples with psychoactive substances challenges us to see the truth about ourselves and to escape a collective suicidal negation.

Centro Takiwasi employs procedures inspired by this ancestral knowledge to face the much-extended addiction to smoked tobacco in our days and that is generally accompanied by abusive consumption of other potentially addictive substances (cannabis, alcohol, cocaine, crack, medicines, etc.). This poly-intoxication is one of the main public health problems in our current world.

This way of use, complemented with the adequate psychotherapeutic approach, has a remarkable effect on the abstinence syndrome and, in the long term, on tobacco addiction and other dependencies.

Likewise, the ritualized use of aqueous tobacco extracts shows great interest as facilitator in psychotherapeutic approaches, allowing to quickly and effectively unblock trapped processes. Besides physical detoxification, it stimulates oneiric life, allows the patients to reconnect with their inner world and grants them mental clarity, a feeling of strength, concentration ability and emotional stability. It reactivates the spiritual dimension and favors the reestablishment of a deep sense of life and of their own lives.

Against the global trend towards the feminization of society that lacks authentic "father" figures, this way of using tobacco offers each subject the possibility to develop his or her masculine psycho-spiritual virtues. It facilitates the differentiation process that extracts us from the lethal, undifferentiated and regressive forces that dominate the cultural outlook of globalization. In this horizon of human beings assimilated to passive, infantilized objects, tobacco is an extremely valuable ally to walk towards a personal encounter with self-singularity, uniqueness, human vocation and spiritual destiny.

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