

## **Faith and Ayahuasca** **(How to speak of my faith in God since my experience with medicinal plants)<sup>1</sup>**

Father Cristian Alejandría Ágreda  
*Catholic Priest, Pastoral Guidance at the Takiwasi Center, Tarapoto, Peru*

### **A bit of fear**

I am a little afraid of what will be said given that the Church has always been reserved and somewhat suspicious on the topics of shamanism, witchcraft and the way the work with the plants can be managed. While spending time with the traditional healers or associating with people who work with the plants I asked myself, *“What will the Bishop say? How will my brothers in the priesthood react when they learn I’ve accepted this process?”* Well, I received many answers to these inner questions. First of all, it was the Bishop, may he rest in peace, who asked me to come in his name, and to give spiritual services at the Takiwasi Center. I gladly accepted the chance to do my priestly labor and work as pastor within these systems of healing and curing.

In order to understand the patients’ experience, I saw that it was necessary to experience what they were doing, that is, drinking purgatives and beginning the process until getting to the master plant Ayahuasca. I had to accept this in order to, from then on, have answers for the many questions the patients would have and everything they wanted to clarify about their lives.

### **Counting on my freedom to make decisions**

Once I had begun drinking the plants I spoke to the Bishop about what I had done and he gave me his support. His response was very clear. *“If what you are doing and seeking with the plants at Takiwasi is to achieve the goal of saving souls, and if this also helps to clarify things for you, you can count on my authorization, you have proceeded well”*. That was his response. This first contact was in 2003.

Soon I had to address my personal affairs. The pressure of my problems had me live through some very dark moments where perhaps things had lost their meaning, including the meaning of my vocation as priest. I heard Dr. Jacques Mabit’s invitation. Not only did I accept the job of attending to the patients, but also the work of facing my own problems and confronting them. This was my first step towards addressing my faith in God through Mother Nature. It was essential to make decisions counting on my freedom. Given that the Bishop had approved and accepted the work I was doing, my consciousness opened up and said to me, *“Welcome, good choice”*, and I said, *“I am free”*. Freedom lies in doing what aligns me towards good, the good for others and also the good for my own benefit.

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<sup>1</sup> Conference presented in the Congress “Medicinas Tradicionales, Interculturalidad y Salud Mental”, Tarapoto, 2009 and published in the memory book. Original title “Fe y Ayahuasca (Cómo hablar de mi fe en Dios desde mi experiencia con las plantas)”. Article translated in July 2017 from Spanish to English by Valeria Paz Villegas.

## **First steps with the plants**

I had made the decision to drink the plants, even though it was not easy because there was always fear, a malevolent fear. There is a natural fear that is normal, the one that warns you to look after yourself. But malevolent fear is any type of threat that generates an attitude of submission, a sort of impediment preventing us from doing the things we are supposed to do. In these first encounters with the plant I began to understand that the fear was threatening me so I would not enter into a world I was not familiar with. I asked for help from God and the Virgin Mary, I used everything I had learned as a priest from my Holy Mother Church, and began the first session.

This first session was excellent. From the beginning I felt well received, as if someone had welcomed me. A female voice was telling me *“Welcome, you are in your home, this is your place, where you live.”* Even though initially I did not understand, I began to comprehend that I am part of nature, that I was arriving at my origin, where my physical presence is born, where the breath of God lies. And so trust began awakening in me, trust in that voice and trust in me, trust in my faith. And I had the feeling that God was approving everything, as if congratulating me. And so I saw the good side, everything beautiful and lovely. When the session finished I was very impressed. Right decision.

But already by the second session we began entering the “dark side”, and I came to realize that the first session was a reinforcement of the bases, those being faith and trust, in order to cross into the side I had never before known. It was an emotional experience to see myself taken to that dark side and to say what I can say today in all certainty, *“I saw the face of the devil (Satan)”*, because that is the devil, it is the darkness, the darkness of our ignorance, of the little we know about our past, of our history, of everything we have not learned well, including faith itself. All the mess and all the incoherence of our inner mix ups between the spiritual and the mundane appear; what we have misunderstood and not learned well. This was the way in which I had come to understand life! In this first level, I was a complete mess, like a disassembled jigsaw puzzle where everything appeared with its own face, where every evil part had a diabolic face. The most horrible thing I could come to know was the face of Satan, in person. I even felt that he came and touched me, smelling of sulfur, and that he was by my side. He then accompanied me in several sessions, about ten sessions, while I was being healed and developing, not only as a person, but also as a priest. This was how I realized that God commissioned this mysterious plant to show me all His power and ability and that it passed through me as a priest. For I am a person who from childhood dreamed of being a priest, and there was a time when I suffered a lot to achieve this vocation. God wanted me to find myself in the place I had always dreamed of.

The remaining experiences were battles after battles, where the plant always set the scene and then waited for my acceptance. This way I began to understand that my surrender, my participation, depended totally on me, and this applied not only in sessions with ayahuasca but in real life. I understood what Jesus says to the paralytic in the Gospel, *“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”* God indicates the solution, gives the initial push and every person has to do their part, get up and walk, do what they have to do. And so I gradually understood that this was my participation, that every battle where I accepted evil I’d lose, and little by little I was seeing that good always wins.

I could also see Jesus crucified in those battles. At one moment the cross touched my shoulder and in a second I could see a vision of what that cross symbolized, the full weight of human history,

all the wars, a fleeting vision that I could not bear. It was not an evil vision, instead it came from God, but it was something intolerable where in an instant the crude images of the whole history of the world and its conflicts created an atmosphere of death. A wise voice, I do not know whether of my conscience, faith or the plant, told me: *"You are a priest and this is the path that awaits you."* Soon after this experience I was able to say: *"This is what I was born for, this was my dream and now I see it with more clarity and I accept with pleasure"*. When I said that, I could see Lucifer behind the cross, chained to hell. This reminds me of the Apocalypse where the devil is already subdued with his followers, just waiting for the time when God will do justice.

I realized after having overcome my most personal problems that the other sessions were a training path. I was learning and understanding the virtue of good over evil, what faith and trust are capable of, and what God is capable of. In our ignorant minds, the devil makes us believe in his indomitable strength, but as St. Paul says: *"Where sin abounds grace abounds"*, that is, that while it may be true that the devil has great power, it is limited power, and God's power is infinite. What is that, against God? *"And do not forget,"* I was told *"that you are a creation."* I could see the devil by my side waiting for a moment of weakness and I said to him, *"You have power over me, but not over God; from now on you will have to fight against my faith. I'm not going to start a war with you. And you will not only have to fight against my faith but against that of all the people who will pass through my office and through my hands, take note. "*

From there, through the path of goodness, a little voice spoke to me, a soothing voice that said very softly *"You need to know three teachers, **humility, patience and trust**<sup>2</sup>, to better learn and to better defend yourself against all this evil."*

Man needs:

- . to be humble in the face of ego, pride and selfishness,
- . to have patience in the face of arrogance and authoritative attitudes,
- . to be filled with confidence in the face of fear.

I said to myself *"I am the one who needs all this, because I need to be well. What good is it for me to take care of others who need this if I am the first one who needs this?"* The voice answered, *"That's right, you're getting it."* It said, *"They will be your teachers, time will prove this for you little by little and so will God."* The devil does what he wants because we believe him, we believe the Liar, but failing to believe in him and believing in God, he can do nothing against us.

## Understanding the depth of my vocation

To be a priest first one has to be Christian, because the priesthood is simply a ministerial function in the name of Christ for the world - but on a personal level I am above all, a Christian. The personal experience with the plants left an impression on me, because it is one thing to hear arguments in defense of or a demonstration of one's philosophy, but it is another thing to see it, to live it and to feel it. Once in a session I was told through Ayahuasca: *"Rule number one, do not try too much to understand, but wait to feel, because what is felt is lived, and what you live can be preached."* That's what I always wanted to understand: why is there so much talk of God, of love, of

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<sup>2</sup> In Father Cristian's office, these three words are written in a small frame on the wall. He says they are there so that others can read them and remember them always.

forgiveness, when it is forgotten so quickly and then everything is done backwards? Now I understand, the issue is not in "talking" but in "feeling" and then cementing it, living it, this is the most important thing.

To be a priest you must discover the vocation of the priesthood, because it is not me who is the priest, Jesus Christ is the one and only great Priest. I have to learn that as a priest I am invited by the Father, in a very special way, to do his work. This is how I saw the Eucharist, the sacrament that did not come from my hands but from the hands of Jesus Christ. Then I saw myself dressed in the white robe and I understood that Jesus Christ uses my body as an instrument. He uses my knowledge and what I have been learning; thus the greatness of this special vocation was gradually discovered.

Really the difficulty started there for me, after those clarifications. I realized the problem I had gotten myself into when faced with this high and noble role, all my bad habits of the past appeared. *"And how am I going to change all this?"* I asked. I had just realized the consequences of my decision but nonetheless I had to keep on going with what I had chosen, my choice towards God, and that would be all. Here I felt that trust was speaking to me. The fear began to go away. My skin shivered and I had goosebumps, I even felt hairy and that I was the devil. I became aware that I had to teach myself, to undertake a personal development. So I began to accept and learn how to let go of all the evil, the fears, the ignorance, the unknown, the doubts, the false beliefs... I was removing all the confusion, even the one I had between healers and sorcerers. I had thought *"how can I accept all this if it is witchcraft?"*. There I clarified these doubts and learned how to differentiate "healer" from "sorcerer". The master plant cleared my doubts because society has to know what each one means. In the end what the plant transmitted to me was that the path of the healer is adequate, it is the path of healing, cleansing, and teaching. Plants cure but need help from the person who is at their service: that is the healer. The sorcerer on the other hand destroys the power of plants to do evil, to harm, to deceive, to subdue, to confuse.

Once in a session I saw Dr. Jacques turn into a plant, into Ayahuasca, and I saw Jesus Christ use that plant to make a preparation. I thought: *"Dr. Jacques has transformed into a plant and that same plant is in the hands of Jesus Christ; that is, it is the medicine of God "*. And God told me *"He is my instrument, as you are my instrument, as a spiritual healer"*. The true medicine is Jesus Christ and when it's time for the session it is Jesus Christ who does his work through the healer and Ayahuasca. That's why demons come out here. The voice during the session told me *"Yes, God wants the man to be saved, it depends on him"; "It's up to me,"* - I said - *"Work through me, not through them themselves."*

I saw every session of Ayahuasca like a classroom, classes at a school, and in every class when I spoke about me, when I asked for the work to be for me, it was noticeable that there was more approval. It is because of this that I can say that curing and teaching happened together, a training on how to respond to these concerns: now I can hear them because I know what truth there is in all of this.

## **Curing and blessing**

At another stage, I was informed that the true healers within the session, as some of the sacred songs or "ikaros"<sup>3</sup> say, are Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. There you find both, although I did not see the Virgin Mary, I felt her in the sessions in which I participated. Since then, the most beautiful thing I have begun to feel and live is my inner reality in a clearer and more transparent way, conscious that I must be sincere with myself, transparent in feelings, thinking, manner and speech. Aware that Jesus Christ has put His spirit in my hands, which for me was an impressive act. I also understood that between curing and blessing there is a great similarity, but they are not identical. They are not identical in the sense that the session is about healing/curing through plants, while outside the session God's grace is received directly from the priest's blessing. In short, in both the action is the same, but with a different "flavour", and in the end everything comes from Him. I could understand that God has all the means to reach men and has many sources. The main one is the Church and its sacraments, the word of God, and undoubtedly that is not changed because it is well placed. However, this does not mean that they are the only sources of grace, there are many more. It is not religion that makes a man good, but his commitment, his sincerity, his transparency, his desire to change and to do good. And of course, good does not mix with evil in the least, because then it ceases to be. God is within the reach of all, of any person, and I could clearly understand what is meant by "*God wants everyone to be saved*" and it pains me to hear that "*He wants everyone to be saved, but not everyone wants to be saved.*" But that's what we're here for, to awaken consciences, to speak to them and make them understand with our example and life. I would like it to be true to uphold that "*All who are by my side will know how to find God*".

The plant put my curing and blessing into effect in three ways: as a healer, a doctor and a teacher. I dared to call the plant "my healer". When I drink it I know it is a curer which I welcome into my body, I know who I am with, with my healer. It is a curer because it cleanses the body, the mind, cleanses witchcraft, cleanses everything. It is also a doctor because it does "surgical intervention", operates the diseased heart, the malformed brain... In addition, it acts as a teacher in the session, as I mentioned previously. Those are the three functions of the master plant and for it to act as such it is important that the patient place on it their greatest faith, confidence and concentration when entering a session, and to let it do its work. I had the clear and precise feeling of recognizing it in its three functions. Just like in real life how the grace of God helps me to get ahead, to know the light and to defend myself from all evils, also within the sessions the plants are sacred medicines to me.

Finally, if I could define in one phrase what has been my work within the Takiwasi Center throughout the years, I would summarize it in this way: "God's Spiritual Healer".

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<sup>3</sup> The ikaros are songs that form the rhythm of the session and accompany the inner journey of the subject who is under the effects of the Ayahuasca. At Takiwasi various ikaros exist that allude to Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, among them: La canoíta, Pájaro cantor, Ayahuasca Yari.