



A Brief History of the Santo Daime Religion

The Santo (Holy) Daime is a religion whose origins and center are in the Amazon rainforest of Brazil. The religion derives its name from the sacrament used in its religious practice, whose historical antecedents date back at least to the Inca Indians who are known to have employed a sacredly prepared mixture of jungle plants to aid them in their spiritual life. According to legend, the Spanish conquerors came to South America looking for "gold." What they couldn't grasp was that the real gold, the golden realms of physical reality that the Inca initiates could enter through their religious practices, was accessed by the drinking of a sacred tea at this time. Many of the Incas abandoned their cities and entered the depths of the jungle, taking with them the key to the golden realm, the tea which became known as "Ayahuasca," after one of the priests who led his people to safety.

Whatever the material facts of the matter, what we know for certain is that many Indian tribes from all over the Amazon basin have extremely similar spiritual practices centering around the drinking of an almost identical sacred brew. And until the early 1900s, these practices were exclusively the province of the Indian tribes.

In the late part of the second decade of the 1900s, a young Brazilian man by the name of Raimundo Irineu Serra was invited by a friend to journey into Peru to participate in the ceremonies of a local tribe. Serra agreed to attend out of curiosity. He participated in a number of ceremonies, interspersing them with his job as a border guard in the Amazon region of Brazil. During one ritual he received a vision which was to lead him to the formation of the Santo Daime religion. He saw a vision of a woman in the Moon, who told him to go into the jungle by himself for a week, fast, pray and drink the sacred tea. He did this, and to his total surprise, was informed by another vision of this woman that his mission was to establish a new spiritual path to be called the Santo (Holy) Daime. He came to understand that the woman he was communicating with as the Queen of the Forest was in fact the Virgin Mary, in her aspect as Our Lady of Conception, and that she was offering herself as his patroness, guide and protector. He also came to understand that she was instructing him to create a region which would center around the direct experience of the Divine Forces contained both in the forest and in the Astral plane as a whole, through the drinking of the Divine tea.

Irineu Serra, who would become known throughout the Amazon region and eventually the world, as Master Irineu, proceeded to do as he was instructed. He began conducting rituals, or "works" in his hometown of Rio Branco. By the early thirties a core of people had gathered around him. Many of them were poor and uneducated. Many came for the healing of serious illness, a motivation which still is one of the main reasons people come to the Daime. The rituals that Master Irineu was guided to lead, and which are still performed today, involved the singing of and dancing to a series of devotional songs which had been delivered to him and to others of his followers from Divine Sources.

This blending of African, Christian and Amazonian Shamanistic influences resulted in an eclectic, and yet highly organized and spiritually aligned ritual form that was centered around the drinking of the sacred tea, which became known as the Daime (which means in Portuguese, "Give me," as in give me strength, give me love, give me grace, give me light). Over time the Daime has been shown to be a "short cut" to Self-realization. It is a demanding path, committed people are drawn to, whose souls are ready to receive the light of true enlightenment and to lead other souls to this illumination.

People came to the Daime from many backgrounds. One who came in the early 1960s was a man named Sebastião Mota de Melo. He was, by trade, a canoe maker and rubber tapper. By calling, he was an intuitive spiritual healer. He came to Master Irineu, as did many people, in the hopes of being healed from the liver ailment which was killing him. In the course of his healing, which was complete, he became an initiate and close follower of Master Irineu.

Master Irineu died in 1971. Upon his death, Sebastião Mota de Melo, who became known as Padrinho (Godfather) Sebastião, came to understand that his mission was to establish a community

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in the heart of the jungle itself in order to bring his people into the heart of the Life Force of the planet, and to build a sustainable community.

Although they had almost no material resources, Padrinho Sebastião and his people entered the jungle and established a village at a place called Rio do Ouro, or the "River of Gold." After they had finally established their community at Rio do Ouro, the Brazilian government forced them to move to another location. It took one year to move their possessions by canoe and by hand. Eventually they arrived at a site which became known as Céu do Mapiá, or the Heaven of Mapiá, where they began the task of establishing a viable community in the heart of the rainforest. Their commitment from the first was to live in a harmonious relationship with nature. They knew that they were there under the auspices of the Divine beings who guided their life and work. Those beings were "re-planting" a way of life to serve as a center for a religion and as a model of a sustainable, harmonious, spiritually alive community.

In the early 1980s, Daime communities formed in the large cities in southeastern Brazil, and the Holy Daime became a national movement. During the eighties also, Daime, as well as the tea that is drunk in Indian ceremonies and by other religious groups in Brazil, was declared to be protected in perpetuity by the Brazilian government. It was understood after long investigation that Daime, or Ayahuasca, is by its nature a gateway to spiritual realms of existence, and does not lend itself to abuse.

Padrinho Sebastião died in January of 1990. He was succeeded by his son, Alfredo Gregorio de Melo, who is presiding over a new stage in the evolution of this most unique religion in the area known as the lower Amazon basin. When Padrinho Sebastião died, there were a dozen communities in Brazil. At this moment, the Holy Daime resides in over 50 locations, including in Europe, Japan and North America. The Holy Daime has spread from the vision of a man in the heart of the Amazon Forest, to being a worldwide movement, speaking to the needs of a growing number of people in many parts of the world. The Holy Daime Religion at this moment is a dynamic, vital example of Divine Guidance put into practice in a grounded way.

People come to the Daime because they are called from within themselves. The motivation to hear the call may be an illness, or it may be a search for awakening. It can also come by intuition, or dreams, or synchronistic events. Whatever the initial motivation, those who arrive at the doorway soon understand that they are entering a serious, demanding and focused work whose rewards far exceed its demands. However, those demands include attention, humility, courage and willingness to face one's own issues.

The Spiritual Principles upon which the religion is based are the same in all Daime churches and communities and the Santo Daime Church of Brazil. They are: Harmony, Justice, Truth and Love. Upon these principles, we build the Santo Daime ritual.

As a Santo Daime church we pay close attention to the individuals who attend this work. We screen each person via health evaluation forms and personal consultations. This is serious spiritual work - not for everyone. We are offering a chance to awaken to a spiritual reality to those souls who are in alignment with this path. It is our honor, beyond description, to be the bearers of this mission.

Thank You and Blessings.

Excerpt from the preface of *The Religion of Ayahuasca: The Teachings of the Church of Santo Daime* by Padrinho Alex Polari. Preface by Jonathan Goldman.