



Preface from the book ***Forest of Visions (first edition 1999)***  
Renamed second edition 2010 *The Religion of Ayahuasca:*  
*The Teachings of the Church of Santo Daime*  
by Padrinho Alex Polari

The first time I drank Daime was on January 5, 1988 in a ritual led by Alex Polari de Alverga on a mountaintop in the countryside of Brazil. When I walked through the door of Alex's church, I embarked upon an adventure that has taken me into places--literally and figuratively--that I never even dreamed existed. Since that time I have entered onto a spiritual path, the Santo (Holy) Daime that has brought me personal healing and evolution, positively transformed relationships and professional life, and given me an opportunity to serve others in a real and deeply satisfying way. So I write this introduction with a sense of honor and excitement that comes with knowing that you who read this book will soon encounter truthful information about an extraordinary man, Sebastião Mota de Melo, and extraordinary path to God.

This book is the first in the English language written about the Daime by someone who knows his subject matter intimately. I have read many articles on the Internet and in several books by people who, in typical American style, drink Daime a few times and decide they understand enough to tell others about it. I often cringe at the descriptions and explanations offered by these writers, and find myself praying that no one else reads them. My prayer is the opposite for this book you hold in your hands. It is time for the Daime to step out of the shadows, and we are most blessed to have Alex Polari to reveal the light for us.

Because I first met Alex in the context of spiritual ritual, I knew his higher self before I knew him as the brother and friend he is to me today. I have been deeply impressed by both of these aspects of Alex. He is a man of extraordinary courage, wisdom, and compassion, who works harder than anybody I have ever met, traveling many months of the year to lead rituals all over the world as part of his duties as one of the leaders of the Daime Path. These rituals are powerful beyond my ability to describe them, but Alex projects a sense of calmness, strength, dignity, and an exquisite focus that allows those attending the rituals to enter into new depths of their own being.

When I was last in Céu do Mapiá, the center of the Daime religion located a two-day's canoe ride up a river in the Brazilian Amazon, I stayed with Alex and his wife, Sonia, and their four children in a three-bedroom house. I slept in Alex's library and the range of books I saw on the shelves, and the knowledge that Alex had not only read them all, but studied most of them, added to my already enormous respect for him. I saw books in English, Portuguese, and Spanish. I saw books written by and about Hindu saints, Buddhist lamas, and Christian mystics. Political histories sat next to explorations of spiritual, political, and economic systems from a wide variety of viewpoints. Alex has the ability to expound on any number of subjects in a way that teaches ways of thinking that I never considered. His intellect is extraordinary.

But Alex is also an activist. He is presently involved in a project to bring nutritious food to the region of the Amazon in which he lives, one of the poorest regions in the world and one beset by disease--much of which could be prevented by better nutrition and sanitation. He is a living example of the teachings of his guide and teacher, Sebastião Mota de Melo, about whom much of this book concerns. He puts theory into practice, and he writes about it beautifully. The Holy Daime is a syncretic religion whose origins and center are in the Amazon rain forest of Brazil. Its historical antecedents date back at least to the Inca Indians, who are known to have employed a sacredly prepared admixture of jungle plants to aid them in their spiritual life. According to legend, when the Spanish conquerors came to South America looking for gold, the

low level of their spiritual evolution led them to seek and take the golden metal in abundance in that region. What they failed to grasp was that the true gold, the golden realms of nonphysical reality that Inca initiates could enter into through their religious practices, was accessed by the drinking of a sacred tea. In the face of invasion many of the Incas abandoned their cities and found refuge in the depths of the jungle, taking with them the key to the golden realm, the tea that became known as *ayahuasca*, named after one of the priests who had led his people to safety.

Whatever the historical facts of the matter, we know for certain that many Indian tribes all over the Amazon basin, who are separated geographically by thousands of miles of jungle and who have had no physical means of communicating with each other, have extremely similar spiritual practices that center around the drinking of an almost identical sacred brew. Until the early part of this century these practices were exclusively the province of the Indian tribes.

Late in the second decade of this century, 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. He joined in a number of ceremonies, in between which he worked as a border guard in the Amazon region of Brazil. During one such ritual he received a vision that was to lead him to the formation of the Santo Daime religion. He saw a woman in the Moon who identified herself as the Queen of the Forest. She told him to go into the jungle by himself for a week to fast, pray, and drink the sacred tea. When he did this he was informed, to his total surprise, that he had a spiritual mission: He was to establish a new spiritual path to be called the Santo (Holy) Daime. He came to understand that the woman with whom he was communicating was in fact an embodiment of the Divine feminine in one of her aspects, the Queen of the Forest. He came to directly meet her and re-remember his relationship with her in another of Her aspects, the Virgin Mary, and learned that the lady of conception was offering herself as his patroness, guide, and protector. He also came to understand that she was instructing him to create a religion that would center around the direct experience of the divine forces contained both in the forest and in the astral plane. Access to these subtle realms would be facilitated by the drinking of the sacramental tea that, in its new context was to be called Daime.

One of the central mysteries of the Daime, and one that clearly shows Daime's uniqueness, concerns the nonphysical beings to which the religion is dedicated. These beings, some familiar to westerners from a Judeo-Christian background, are not merely archetypes and symbols. It is the experience of most people who become initiates within the Daime Path, and many who drink Daime but do not join the Path, that Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mother, and other beings not necessarily traditionally connected with Christianity, are palpable, seeable, heard, and, in some cases, touchable entities. It is not unusual for a person to directly experience teaching and healing within the *miração*, the living visions that the Daime often brings. The experience of those who participate in such direct communications is that they are not seeing visions, which implies a relationship to the experience similar to watching a movie. The experience of the *miração* is one of being taken within one's own consciousness into the dimensions inhabited by these beings, or, conversely, experiencing them actually entering the room itself where the ceremony is being conducted. The descriptions of these experiences are not unlike the descriptions of spiritual revelations and life-transforming visions reported by people throughout history.

It is important to note that this experience of direct contact with spiritual beings, spiritual teachings, and the Divinity both within oneself and outside oneself is not in any way reserved for an elite. There are no human intermediaries in the Daime. It was one of Padrinho Sebastião's main teachings that the purpose of religious practice is the direct experience of each participant with the Divine. A central mystery of the Daime is that of the nature of the sacrament itself. It is the experience of Daime practitioners that there is a vastly intelligent Divine Being embodied in the tea. It is simultaneously a Being and a gateway to other dimensions where other Beings reside. The physical tea is made in a ceremony in which an alchemical process takes place. There is a combining of elements in an intensely focused and sacredly held space that results in the incarnation, the embodying of a Divine Being into a liquid body. This is only strange to imagine until we consider that we incarnate by the same process. We, too, are divine beings in physical

(chemical) bodies who are born for a purpose that we grow to discover. The being of the Daime incarnates in order to provide teachings, comfort, healing, and spiritual evolution to those who join it. This Being in tea form is a true, living sacrament. When we drink it we enter into the most intimate communion possible. We take it into the interior of our bodies. It enters our bloodstream. By joining physically, body to body, we allow the spiritual joining that facilitates such rapid, yet real, growth.

The purpose of the ritual that takes place around the drinking of the sacrament is to create and hold a space for direct contact between the participant and the Divine. The role of the leaders of the ritual is never to interpret experience, but simply to be the human aspect of the center pole of the spiritual atmosphere. In this the Daime is true to the original teaching of Jesus, who never sought to establish an elite class of priests to intercede between people and the Divine. Rather he taught that direct experience of God was the birthright of all humans. The Daime Path is laid out for each of us who is drawn to it, to walk and evolve as we go, at an accelerated, but distinctly individual pace. The rituals are extremely organized and disciplined. A great emphasis is put on leaving expression of the individual ego out of the ritual. This creates a climate of inner freedom that allows participants deep, individual communion.

As Irineu Serra, who would become known throughout the Amazon region and eventually the world as Master Irineu, began to remember who he was, he came to understand that he had come into this life with a clear mission. Simply put, it was to "replant" the Doctrine of Jesus Christ on Earth. *Doctrine* is a very important word in the Holy Daime. It does not signify a set of rigid rules or an orthodox set of ideas. The Doctrine spoken of in many hymns of the Daime is a living matrix of consciousness. Jesus Christ implanted a conscious seed in this world by his life and death. This was his mission: to initiate the vast change in human consciousness that is now beginning to come to fruition. The Doctrine, which is the organizing principle of humanity's awakening, is seen within the Daime to possess an active intelligence of Its own. Legend has it that when Jesus died, the Doctrine saw the distortions being made to Jesus' teachings, and It knew the necessary darkness ahead for humanity. It left the world at large, entering the deep forest. There It secreted Itself in the jagube vine and the rainha leaf. It waited with Its guardians, the native peoples of the Amazon, for the day when humanity would be ready to re-embrace It. When the time arrived It called Master Irineu, who had been part of the original mission of Jesus, to his new mission of replanting the Doctrine in greater humanity. Through the Holy Daime, It is calling to Itself, one by one, the many souls who are ready to rapidly awaken the seed that Jesus planted, the Christ Consciousness, in themselves. It calls us not only for ourselves, but also to accept responsibility for helping to secure the Doctrine on Earth in these delicate times. The meaning of "these times" is captured in the symbols of the Holy Daime, the six-pointed star and the cross with two cross beams.

The six-pointed star is an ancient symbol that predates the Jewish people. It symbolized the joining of Heaven and Earth--male and female Divinity--and the creation of humanity as the result of this union. The symbol of the cross predates Christianity by millennium. It also symbolized the male and female principles of heaven and earth meeting in the place of androgyny: the heart. The particular cross given to Master Irineu for use in the Daime symbolizes the mission of Jesus Christ. The lower crossbeam, which it shares with other Christian religions as well as with many ancient peoples, symbolized the first part of the mission of Jesus, which was to plant the seed of compassion in humanity and to call us to direct, conscious connection with the Divine. The second crossbeam represents the Second Coming of Christ, which is the birth of that seed--the Christ--in the hearts of all humanity. It is in this context that the religion of the Holy Daime is best understood. It has been delivered to earth at this particular time to play Its particular part, along with many other paths and sacred technologies, in this "Second Coming."

On another level, the uniting of these symbols within a single religion, and the subsequent act of singing and dancing around them, symbolically reunites Christians and Jews. We were originally one people and the separation of this group into two religions, and the subsequent horrors of the past two thousand years, are entirely the distorted creation of misguided siblings.

It was an immensely liberating moment for me when I was shown this and was moved to declare peace with myself.

Master Irineu proceeded to do as he was instructed and began conducting rituals, or "works," in his home town of Rio Branco. By 1930 a core of people had gathered around him and out of this group the Santo Daime religion was born. Many of these early followers were poor and uneducated. Some came for the healing of serious illness, a motivation that is still a main entrance point for people coming to the Daime. The rituals Master Irineu was guided to lead, which are still performed today, involved the singing of and dancing to a series of songs, or hymns, that had been delivered to him and to others of his followers from Divine sources. This re-created, halfway around the world and almost two thousand years later, a main form of worship practiced by the followers of Jesus at the time of the early Christian communities.

It is the unique aspect of the Daime doctrine that all the teachings of the religion are delivered through songs. The songs are sung in a form that allows them to be learned in a call and response form. In one voice the whole community prays and praises God together musically.

The region of Brazil the Mestre Irineu lived in was, and still remains, the poorest in a poor country. I find it most interesting and extremely comforting that this mission was given to a very black man in the center of one of the poorest, and most important (from a global point of view) regions on the earth. It points a divine finger, dramatically and symbolically, to help reorient us to what is important in these times. Salvation will not come from those countries and religions that have herded us to the cliff's edge. It is coming from a return to mystery, a surrender to the Divine in and around us, and a new alliance with nature. The Amazon is a mystery and from it has come a key to entering the great mystery.

Interwoven with this impulse to praise God, in community and in total direct participation of all members of the community, were the influences and ritual forms drawn from the Indians of that region and from the religions of Africa brought to Brazil by Master Irineu's forbears. The resulting eclectic, yet highly organized and spiritually aligned ritual form, is centered around the drinking of the sacred tea that became known as the Daime, which in Portuguese means "give me," as in "give me strength, give me love, give me light." Over time the Daime became known as a "short cut," a very intense, demanding path to which people whose souls are ready to take a huge evolutionary leap are drawn, people who require a very deep cleansing and healing to take this leap, and who have motivation to find the courage to follow their soul's urging.

People came to the Daime from many backgrounds. One who came in the early 1960s was a man named Sebastião Mota de Melo. By trade he was a canoe maker, but by predilection he was a mediumistic healer of the first order. Before coming to the Daime he spent many years leading and training groups of mediums in the healing and service of souls in need, incarnate and disincarnate. In the course of his life he became deathly ill. He came to Master Irineu, as did many people, in the hope of being healed from the liver ailment that was killing him. In the course of his healing, which was a complete recovery, he became an initiate and close follower of Master Irineu.

Master Irineu died in 1971. Upon his death, three branches of the Holy Daime formed, one of them led by Sebastião Mota de Melo, who became known as Padrinho (Godfather) Sebastião. Padrinho Sebastião, through his own awakening, came to understand that his mission was to lead his followers to a new life in the center of the jungle itself, to bring his people into the heart of the life force of the planet, and to build a sustainable community. This book is the story of this great man, this true spiritual teacher, who discovered for himself and was discovered by the tradition to be the reincarnation of John the Baptist, the harbinger of the mission of the Master Jesus.

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 (River of Gold). They endured sickness and hardship that would have stopped people with even slightly less faith. After having lived there for a few years, they discovered that the land on which they were living was owned by an absentee owner.

Padrinho Sebastião declared that he "would not live on another man's land." And so he and his followers moved to another location. It took one year to move their possessions by canoe and by hand. Eventually they arrived at a site that became known as Céu do Mapiá, or "Heaven of Mapiá," where they began the task of establishing a viable community in the heart of the rain forest. Their commitment from the first was to live in a harmonious relationship with nature, according to the principles of the doctrine they were living. They knew they were there under the auspices of the Divine Beings who guided their life and work, and that those beings were "replanting" a way of life to serve as a center for a religion and as a model of a sustainable, harmonious, spiritually alive community.

To understand the significance of the existence of Céu do Mapiá, despite its small size, consider the fact that almost all settlements begun in the Amazon rainforest have taken two roads: they have become either ecological dominators, carving a "civilized" area out of the forest and destroying the ecological system of the area, or so many of the inhabitants of them have died of disease that the rest become discouraged and the projects have been abandoned. Sebastião Mota de Melo's dream was different. His people are successfully living in harmony with nature and yet gradually adding those technological advances that make their lives sustainable. Every resident, except for the children born there, has consciously and freely chosen to follow their spiritual calling to live in that community. They are living there because they want to, which makes a huge difference on all levels to the health of the community. Mapiá is surviving and growing in spite of social and economic questions that are sometimes of a life-and-death nature. It is a living laboratory for an ecologically harmonious, spiritually alive community organized around an intimate relationship with the forces of nature and the universe. This town is worth knowing about and supporting, whatever one's path. At present it is beginning to serve as a model for the reorganization of other village in the Amazon region.

In the early 1980s Daime communities formed in the large cities in southeastern Brazil and the Holy Daime became a national movement. Also during the '80s, the tea that is drunk in the Daime rituals, and is also still being drunk in Indian ceremonies and by other religious groups in Brazil, was declared to be protected in perpetuity by the Brazilian government. After long, careful investigation it was understood that by its nature Daime, or ayahuasca, or hoasca, as it is variously named, opens a gateway to spiritual realms of existence and does not lend itself to abuse even if there were those interested in doing so. This was a huge step for the Daime and other groups whose mission is to provide this gateway for those called to enter. It provides a model for the other countries that the Daime has entered.

During this initial phase of expansion of the Daime within Brazil, Alex Polari was released from the prison in which he had been incarcerated by the dictatorship. He has, as we all do, his own story of how he was led to the Daime, which involves his thinking he was making a film. Like many of us who arrive at a life that it had never even occurred to us to dream about, he discovered that there existed a plan for him that his conscious mind learned of only long after it was well into effect. He and his wife, Sonia Palhares, founded the community of Céu da Montanha with some of the new generation of Daimistas, people raised in the cities of southern Brazil who were discovering in Padrinho Sebastião and the Daime the direct experience of spiritual awakening, authentic transformation, and the potential for conscious community that their previous enterprises had spoken of and dreamed about, but never delivered. Alex developed a deep and multidimensional relationship with Padrinho Sebastião. He clearly was blessed by that relationship.

In January of 1990 Padrinho Sebastião died. He was succeeded by his son, Alfredo Gregorio de Melo, who currently presides over a new state in the evolution of this most unique religion. When Padrinho Sebastião died, there were only a dozen Daime communities in Brazil. At this moment the Holy Daime resides in over fifty locations, including almost twenty in Europe. There are even churches in Japan. The Holy Daime has spread from being the vision of a man in the heart of the Amazon forest, to being an authentic worldwide movement that attracts a growing number of people in many parts of the world. The possibilities of powerful and rapid spiritual awakening, deep healing, social relations based on respect, love and mutual support, the model

of a sustainable and supportable community in the jungle, and the perceived urgency of this moment on earth are drawing people from all levels of society and all backgrounds.

The Daime is by no means a panacea. It is a powerful spiritual path, a shortcut that I think will never be a mass religion. It is too demanding. Most people would not consciously choose to engage in a long, demanding ritual in which they have a good chance of being shown, up close, that which they have falsely created in their own consciousness and their living a life that separates them from their own Divine nature. And then have it cleaned out. With no excuses accepted. And no whining allowed.

But for those who feel called, the Daime often provides healing in the truest sense, the healing of our false perception of separation. It leads the way not only to improved health on all levels, but to the freedom that comes from knowing who we are, and that we are completely loved, and from the step-by-step surrender to the will of the Divine. As with everything else in the Daime, this knowledge and the experience of freedom is a palpable thing.

One of the most important teachings offered by Padrinho Sebastião, and embodied most beautifully in Alex Polari, is that our salvation must be rooted in work. The Daime is not a path of transcendence, it is a path of transformation. We bring Spirit to bear upon matter in our own bodies and in our lives. The result is that we are engaged in a dynamic process of constant discovery and in evolving relationships, both earthly and divine. We are called to work on earth, to interact directly with nature. We are called upon to fulfill our earthly responsibilities. We are called to support our families and to raise our children to be grounded, truthful, spiritual people. Whether or not the Daime is their path is a discovery and a negotiation between themselves and God. Some children of Daimistas join the path of their own accord when they reach an age of decision. Some do not.

Not everybody comes to the Daime to become an initiate, a member of the religion. It is strictly forbidden to proselytize or to in any way entice someone to participate in the rituals of the Daime. I have the right to tell you about my experience, as Alex Polari tells you about his with Padrinho Sebastião. Whether or not you drink Daime, and what you do with that relationship with that Divine Being, is between you and that Being. People come to the Daime because they are called from inside themselves. The motivation to hear the call may be an illness, or it may be a conscious search for awakening. It can also come by the way of intuition, or dreams, or by retrospectively viewed Divine orchestration. It may come to you from reading this book.

Whatever the initial motivation, those who arrive at the doorway soon understand they are entering a serious, demanding work whose rewards far exceed its demands, but whose demands include attention, humility, courage, and a willingness to undergo a deep transformative process that is oftentimes uncomfortable.

The rituals are called "works." And they are. Those who enter the Daime wanting a path that is both a shortcut and an easy shortcut are quickly disabused. They don't stay around long. Or they "change their opinion," as a hymn of Padrinho counsels us to do and do again.

The Holy Daime Path is an authentic mystery school. There are levels of knowledge, stages of initiation that one passes through in one's program of rapid evolution. Unlike some other paths and schools, the stages are not externally regulated. There are not specific programs or practices that an initiate follows, nor are there specific ceremonies to mark one's progress. The job of the initiate is to show up, drink Daime, work on the earth to live the teachings of the doctrine: love God, love the earth, love all beings in God's creation, including yourself, love and respect your brothers and sisters, accept the truth of your own divinity and of your own faults, learn to embody forgiveness and mercy, and gain the hard won humility that comes from meeting the Divine force head on. Each new doorway is marked by a difficult passage, a facing up to another level of unconscious separation.

The Holy Daime is not for everyone. The rituals of the Daime are not meant to be an "experience," but rather to provide a chance to interact intimately with a Divine Being of unimaginable intelligence, compassion, clarity, and spiritual power. They require us to bring our whole selves to the work. They provide an opportunity for seeing truth, gaining knowledge, and to transform oneself, one's health, and one's life. What we get out of them depends on our level

of readiness and our willingness to surrender our ideas of separation and enter into a new relationship with ourselves and with the Divine. As one of Padrinho Sebastião's hymns says:

*I live in the Forest  
I have my teachings  
I don't call myself Daime  
I am a Divine Being*

*I am a Divine Being  
I came here to teach you  
The more you ask of me  
The more I have to give to you.*

For those who are called to the Daime by an inner voice, this Divine Being offers a chance to awaken to spiritual reality in a way unique in all this world. Those who come looking to get high in an interesting spiritual context are quickly disabused of their expectations.

The Daime is, in actuality, a simple path. When you read the words of Padrinho Sebastião you will see that he was a simple man. It will help you to let go of false ideas about the relationship of complication and depth. His words will also show you that to be awake is not to be removed from living in the world, but to engage in it on God's terms, teaching by the example of your life. Padrinho was a man whose teachings have value to anyone who wants to know what a life totally surrendered to the will of God is like.

In October 1989 I had the indescribable privilege of spending a month with Padrinho Sebastião in Céu do Mapiá. I arrived to find I had been designated to be Padrinho's acupuncturist. He was suffering from congestive heart failure in the middle of the jungle, with no doctors, medication, or hospitals for hundreds of miles. He was dying, and it fell to my friend and teacher Jose Rosa, a M.D., and myself to keep him on earth long enough for medication and a helicopter to arrive. Immediately I found myself over my head. My training and experience in Chinese medicine were useless except in that they provided a grounding that facilitated the necessary surrender to Divine guidance that then allowed me to let go of my head and to become available as an instrument for Padrinho's healing. I was forced to take a quantum leap in my own spiritual process and in my healership to help this man who was so beloved of his people, and who would become so to me.

I remember clearly the moment I came to know the being who is Padrinho Sebastião and my relationship to him. Sitting upon his bed, propped up with pillows, he was having constant difficulty breathing. I was in the middle of giving him an acupuncture treatment when I looked up and our eyes met. He had the eyes of enlightened hawk. I that moment, I knew with utmost certainty that Padrinho saw everything about me. He saw my higher self, which at that time was a distant mystery to me. He saw my lower self, which I thought I was pretty adept at hiding. He saw my fears and my potential. He saw God in me and he saw everything I had done to hide God from myself. He saw me for real. And with all he saw he loved me totally and completely. He accepted all I was and all I wasn't, with truthfulness and yet without judgment. In that moment something in my heart eased and opened. Some veil of despair I had set there as a protection was pushed aside and I looked out through new eyes. In that moment I came to the spiritual life.

Padrinho showed me his love, but he also gave me something else just as important. He showed me a model, in himself, of how I could be. He showed me that truth and love are married to each other, eternally. He showed me that I had divorced them, and then created a story about how they couldn't live together any more. In his presence they began a new courtship inside me.

I was once told how to recognize a teacher of light from a teacher of darkness, and it has helped me immensely in my own discernment. It sometimes can be difficult to tell merely from the words a teacher speaks or the way they appear. To use the vernacular, everybody has a good rap. Many teachers are charismatic and exciting. Many can do various kinds of healing, various kinds of magic. Universal power is, after all, neutral. In the short run, the students of many

teachers feel expanded and liberated. But it can be useful to look at the students and ask yourself if the students are, over time, becoming more or less empowered in themselves? Is the relationship leading to more or less spiritual and practical maturity? Are the students becoming more or less independent in their thinking? Is everybody being energetically fed by the relationship or is the teacher feeding off the students?

As you meet Padrinho Sebastião Mota de Melo in these pages through the clear, loving eyes and the beautiful writing of Alex Polari, you will be meeting the real thing, the genuine article. You will meet not only Padrinho, but also some of his disciples, not the least of which is Alex himself. These are people who have been guided, in some cases saved from a destructive life, by their relationship with the man called Saint Sebastião. But they have also grown and evolved themselves, discovering their own higher nature that Padrinho saw long before they did. Some, like Alex and Sonia, have become spiritual and civic leaders in their own right.

Céu do Mapiá has five hundred inhabitants that have come of their own free, uncoerced will to live out the dream of Padrinho Sebastião. There are thousands of people around the world discovering the path begun by a black rubber tapper turned soldier and that was continued by a canoe maker in the Amazon. People from literally every walk of life, every social class, every race, and every background are, one by one, coming to study with the teacher that is Daimé.

The Daimé path and the life of Padrinho Sebastião are, if nothing else, extremely interesting because they are both so unusual and so very real. In reading this book, you have one advantage over me when I met Padrinho. Through Alex Polari's extraordinary writing ability and the beauty of this translation by Rosana Workman, you will understand what Padrinho is saying. So you can, if you wish to use the book in this way, study the words and learn the biography of a true teacher, a unique leader of a new religion. You can gain the inspiration that comes from witnessing the courage of a person who lived utterly true to his guidance and triumphed. That would be time well spent with any book. But there is another option if you wish to take it. If you choose to go beyond the story and the words of Padrinho, you can enter into a relationship with the Being who is still Sebastião Mota de Melo. He left his body behind, but he is as alive as he was in Céu do Mapiá and at the river Jordan.

*by Jonathan Goldman*