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Santo Daime - Urban Communities

José Murilo C. Carvalho Jr.

I. Introduction

I first thought of writing something about my communal experience when I was invited to lecture on the Santo Daime Doctrine in the Meeting for a New Consciousness. This Meeting is well-known as an important forum where several thought trends are discussed in an ecumenical effort towards formulating the perspective for the coming millenium. I could thus fulfill my old need to share the experience we have in Céu do Planalto, the community housing the Santo Daime spiritual sessions in Brasília.

Being a psychologist, I feel my experience and the psychological focus of my account can be valuable both for those already studying altered states of consciousness, and those interested in communal life proposals and concerned about preserving environment. Research on human perception and consciousness, inquiry into one's inner spiritual dimension, communal life, and ecological consciousness (in its practical sense) are the primary features of the Céu do Planalto communal project.

However, all these features are integrated and working within a specific scope, according to the Santo Daime Doctrine general guidelines, as spread by CEFLURIS (Universal Flowing Light's Eclectic Center Raimundo Irineu Serra), an institution created by Sebastião Mota de Melo to manage the spreading of the ecological-communal ideals of this Doctrine founded by Master Raimundo Irineu Serra. Since such institution and personalities are the fountain-head of all that is about to be reported, I mention them with all my respect to invoke their approval and blessings, without which I would have had no chance to present this paper.

II. The Doctrine

It all began with an almost unlikely character, a very tall and strong black teenager from the State of Maranhão in Brazil, who at the age of 18 decided to take the route of the rubber extraction soldiers, heading west into the Amazonian rainforest. It was early 20th century, and young Irineu worked in the rubber extraction until he became a frontier soldier, having then access to the foreign lands neighboring the Brazilian Amazon region.

While in Peru and Bolivia, some friends acquainted him with the beverage known in the region as *ayahuasca*. He heard it was a research instrument into the realm of spiritual energies, the path of the shaman, having its healing powers but also bringing about physical and psychic torture. In fact, Irineu became interested in getting in touch with the *ayahuasca*, also translated as "the soul's wine."

The experience turned out to be a divine revelation directly assigning Irineu to found a spiritual doctrine, which would be centered around the consecration of that immemorially used beverage within the context of the Christian culture and symbolism and taking advantage of the American Indian, Brazilian, African, and Eastern transcendental wisdom. Such encompassing syncretism was born in the Brazilian city of Rio Branco, Acre State, where Irineu finally settled and started his saga as a spiritual leader.

In the course of the century, as from the mid nineteen thirties, Irineu was acknowledged as Master for his assisting, helping, and conducting all of those who became interested in his spiritual work. He naturally began to deal with spiritual healing, mainly approaching the cases in which medicine was fruitless and suffering met no relief. Irineu was the "sheltering tree" for many, even for prominent people - politicians and farmers - who would seek his help in times of severe pain.

Around this period he started to channel messages from the spiritual dimension which came to him in the form of simple chants, hymns, making up hymnals (collections of hymns), the doctrine's guiding principle. The Santo Daime worship movement grew up around Irineu Serra, and for those who know its power it is not hard to figure out the spiritual caliber required for performing such a herculean task.

In 1970, when he passed away to the spiritual dimension, Master Irineu was already the "Chief Empire", the monarch of a lineage ready to spread out for the task of "indoctrinating the whole world," as it is said in one of his hymns. However, it is worth mentioning one of the first commandments the Master received as the doctrine was revealed to him: inviting is not allowed.

Although we are not supposed to invite others into the doctrine, we can speak about it. And the very urge to speak about the doctrine and to truly live according to its teachings moved Sebastião Mota de Melo, one of Master Irineu's direct disciples, to take up his master's mission after his passing away. His charisma and reliance on the spiritual dimension and the doctrine led him to guide a group through the accomplishment of a communal project founded on the simple teachings disclosed by the hymns.

It was a question of re-establishing a living Christian fraternity, now imbued with a modern awareness suggesting we should turn back to nature and reminding us of simple but nearly forgotten values. Rainforest community, down-to-earth ecological consciousness, Amazonian region - Brazil. "Padrinho" Sebastião, as his many "godchildren" began to call him, opened the way into the forest, and, after some initial ventures, founded the Vila Céu do Mapiá, Amazonas State.

Two days away from the nearest village by canoe into the "igarapé" (natural waterway between two islands or between an island and the mainland) tracks, the Céu do Mapiá began to be visited by Brazilian and foreign followers, having become an outstanding place of pilgrimage. With about 700 inhabitants and a great floating population of visitors, it faces today the challenge of getting ready to play its role as the worldwide headquarters for a spiritual mission whose high quality is widely recognized.

But those who visit Mapiá go back to their places carrying the seed of a transformation proposal. The tools for accomplishing this proposal are translated into a sacrament, hymns to be communed by a current of spiritual awareness, and the required space and infrastructure for holding the sessions. Now that the formula is there, it is simply a matter of planting the seed in urban communities by getting the individual capacities together.

This is the reality of a living doctrine, which takes place within each of us and reveals its results on an everyday and down-to-earth basis. This is going on in several cities around the world nowadays, and so it is in Brasília, in the Céu do Planalto community. My purpose here is to point out some of the interesting insights we have had in the course of our spiritual experiences and to share them with our readers.

III - A Heaven Under Construction

I have always dreamt of putting into practice all I have seen brilliantly set forth in theoretical terms. Some way or other, that is what the Santo Daime doctrine has been providing me. Through this line of work and under the guidance of Fernando de La Rocque Couto, an anthropologist famed for having expounded his studies about shamanism in last year's Meeting for a New Consciousness, a group of people decided to go for a communal experience. Thus the Céu do Planalto community was created, now gathering around 40

inhabitants and about 90 guests, among collaborators, followers, and visitors.

The word Céu (heaven, sky) has become a standard designation after the Céu do Mapiá, the doctrine's headquarters at the banks of the Mapiá "igarapé", Purus River, Amazonas State. Padrinho Sebastião was intent on making Heaven real on Earth, and, following in his footsteps (but definitely with no modesty), we got together to form the Céu do Planalto. Five years ago, some of us were already aware that the individual inner revolutions taken place while spiritually working with the Daime would require a special communal space so that they could be externalized and turned into a transformed group performance. There was no clear idea, however, of how this would unfold.

We were also aware that the preconceived idea of what a community meant bore a number of clichés that would have to be demystified. Some of the people from the original group had already experienced other self-development paths, bringing with them both the valuable accomplishment background and the realization of how difficult it is to succeed in such a task, mainly when it is a joint project. Above all, we had to practice the doctrine's four cornerstones: Harmony, Love, Truth, and Justice, so as to build up the ideal space for each one's self-encounter. We had to truly seek how to achieve such an elevated stage of love whereby our inner Higher Self is recognized and to live the certainty that all our sisters and brothers are able to share this same (contagious) process.

The main idea, therefore, was that we should get together. Eight families set some savings aside in order to buy some land in an area near the city and with a privileged view, but protected enough from massive urban access. That is where we built the Church, at the land's highest spot. Then we began to hold our spiritual sessions, which traditionally take a long time (5 to 12 hours, depending on the kind of work). The place's beauty and proximity to the city were attractive enough to move some people into settling around the valley. Thus the Brasília's Santo Daime community was founded.

The first thing to decide was how to deal with the community's economic support. Since almost all the group's members were already satisfactorily employed, it was not difficult for them to help cover the expenditures deriving from the Church's activities. Led by Fernando La Rocque, they agreed on paying the Church a monthly fee and sharing any financial commitments thereof and on keeping their original professional positions so as not to directly depend on the doctrine's structure for a living.

Although some members, influenced by the above mentioned communal clichés, began to think of "living on the land", aiming at a bucolic life style revival, it was clear for most of us that such a proposal would be artificial and would not take into account each member's specialized professional background. Any agricultural effort would have to be as professional as every other already duly accomplished skill. Besides, our goal was to highlight our communal project on the basis of a spiritual experience,

and not otherwise. Therefore, we realized that agricultural or any other economic projects might deviate us from our main focus, which is to consecrate the Daime together. This realization also helped us see our integration role as regards our colleagues, family members, friends, and Brasilia.

So, from the very beginning that touchstone showed us which work should be developed. Through the Santo Daime, our headquarters in the rainforest, the Céu do Mapiá, radiates a new light of spirituality in harmony with nature. We were there and could testify to the strength of their heavenly message. Then we brought it to the city - something many believed would not be possible. A formula was worked out after which the urban community Céu do Planalto, the Santo Daime Church in the Central Brazilian Plateau, gradually built up its own identity and was thereby able to become an ideal tool for the spreading of that message in the city of Brasilia.

The need for again approaching nature and the basic survival values while in direct contact with the land, a feature which is always stressed by the Daime experience, became communally manifest through the cultivation of “rainha” and “jagube” gardens (“rainha” and “jagube” are the plants used for preparing the Daime beverage), and the preservation of the landscape in and around the community area. On the other hand, this same endeavor towards an ecologically conscious urban action fostered the group to form an NGO for the purpose of local environmental protection.

A quite complex and specialized infrastructure is required for us to strictly focus on providing people with the Santo Daime spiritual experience - and that is the joint task carried out by the Céu do Planalto community members. From guests greeting, which involves introductory lectures and evaluation interviews and anamnesis, to the spiritual sessions themselves, held by around 120 people and involving a staff of musicians, singers, inspectors, treasurers and receptionists, and the maintenance and handling of the Daime stock as well, all is carried out by turns of community members.

Apart from the sessions, the group living in the community is aware that the Santo Daime experience implies a dynamic inner pattern recycling which will naturally bring visitors closer to community members. The following question often arises: “What am I supposed to do next?” Therefore, visitors and followers usually look for community members in their houses, which makes the process of radiating a new relationship pattern easier and creates a specific kind of group identity. Each member living in the community is today aware of their role of providing everyone else with the material facilities for the smooth development of the spiritual sessions.

After all, what is this transformation all about? It sounds somewhat absurd to imagine that simply by taking a beverage people make up their minds and begin to live a new life together. Something seems to be missing for this process to be better understood. And that is one of the keys to the mystery - the spiritual means of communication

which has a very specific configuration within the Santo Daime doctrine: the hymns inspired by the spiritual dimension (or “received” from the spiritual dimension). Since Master Irineu had his initial revelation, each “fardado” (initiate) member is considered as a repository of the doctrine which radiates in the form of hymns to be chanted while special awareness moments are provided by the session’s harmony and the Daime consecrated within it.

Os hinos são as correntes [The hymns are the currents]
Tu bem viste em mim [You could see them in me]
Que sai da tua boca [They come out of your mouth]
E transmite em ti [And spread through you]

IV - The Hymns are the currents

Whenever I think of the Santo Daime doctrine, I feel a special emotion for being around such a living and ever increasing experience. Actually, the cultural movement we are dealing with is deeply concerned with the late century’s current urgencies, and bears significant specifications deserving highlighting. I refer here to the Santo Daime hymns, or “Daime Songs”, as they are already known, even in Internet. A constant personal and group revelation instrument, the hymn plays the role of spreading the doctrinal message and widens the search for harmony by means of the chanting, the music, and the rhythm during the sessions’ performance.

Like anything else regarding the Daime, everything about the hymns started with Raimundo Irineu Serra. Without any musical knowledge or skill, Master Irineu was assigned to introduce the chanting as a communion tool within the framework of the special state of consciousness the beverage brings about. In fact, the chanting of spiritually inspired songs in *ayahuasca* sessions is not something new, but the all-participant democratized performance is a trademark of the movement from Rio Branco.

On his early days with the *ayahuasca*, Master Irineu used to hear some singing murmurs along with the sacred assignment of sharing these messages with those who followed him and preparing the songs to be solemnly and vibrantly sung while consecrating the beverage in the spiritual sessions. Thus, by the Daime’s power, the messages he heard, from seemingly naive lines, gradually grew into a vigorous doctrinal guidance, and the vibration of ideas and symbols contained in the hymns revealed their unifying power.

In the course of the sessions, Master Irineu’s followers began to access that same revelation channel and to form their own hymnals. In this way, as the chanting goes on in the sessions, hymns are channeled by the members and the group is constantly fed with new relevant instructions. Revelation is democratized, thus making the members’ identification with the doctrine’s mission a direct experience, for a personal revelation is involved. The hymns are a fantastic means of fostering the group’s cohesion and restating the doctrine’s values.

Several concepts may be raised in an attempt to explain the inspiration process which gives rise to the hymns: one may speak of psycho-musicographic messages, or of musical-poetic messages from the spiritual dimension, or even of pure and simple personal spiritual inspiration. But only through the experience of “receiving a hymn” can one bear a closer testimony of the phenomenon. Those who get in touch with the doctrine and realize it backs up their process of self-realization immediately feel a special attraction for the message in the hymns, and they may even begin to hear their own singing murmurs.

The experience of “receiving hymns,” according to some, is similar to an “insight,” as it is known in psychotherapy terminology. Generally, it condenses a kind of vision or approach to a certain subject, invariably invoking positive forces through the Daime specific symbols. It may bear transforming messages both for the repository and the group. In short, the message received through the hymn can mean route corrections, greetings, invocations, teachings, or simply celebration, but it always highlights how valuable union is - and such union is actually represented in the communion of voices.

As from Padrinho Sebastião’s hymnal, and after some communities were founded on the basis of his application of the doctrine, a new practice was incorporated as regards the hymn channeling - now, when some hymns were received during the sessions, the repository was guided to dedicate them to a certain group member. Besides, it became a common occurrence for the repository to realize the relationship between the message and the person to whom it was dedicated. This mechanism has helped deepen the fraternal loving understanding among the group members.

When members from different churches travel to take part in national and international doctrine meetings, they interchange hymnals and listen to the “latest hymns” from more or less prominent brothers and sisters. Some are famous for the beauty of their hymns, while others collect tens of hymns offered by other people. Within the Daime culture, the hymns form a transcendental language whereby a number of liturgical, social and identity functions are naturally performed for the doctrine’s sake.

Then, in the communities as a whole there are “rehearsals”, when hymnals from prominent doctrine masters are sung so as to be perfectly performed in traditional festivities. This also enables each of the members to share the messages they receive and to see their hymns approved by the community and transformed into official doctrine hymns. Thus, a personal hymnal is like a banner to be unfurled, and that is a feature of the Daime doctrine which deserves special consideration.

In this process, several aspects of the individual self and the interpersonal relations are worked out by making use of the special state of consciousness provided by the Daime. For the hymn repository, singing it before the group while the beverage is being consecrated encompasses several purposes: (1) the personal

accomplishment of giving something out to the group, something which came from that very context and serves as a strengthening device; (2) the loving acceptance of the new hymn by the members, who sing it along; (3) the spreading of personal issues so that they may be immediately absorbed as a message to the group, something with a cathartic effect for the repository; and some other broader dimensions characteristic of the doctrine itself.

It is worth further analyzing the three above mentioned aspects. (1) The moment of showing the community a new received hymn implies a disclosure, when the “fardado” (initiate) shows the others the “flowers from his garden.” That is when the Daime teachings manifest themselves in the format of the doctrine, being expressed in hymns and portraying personal moments synthesized into symbols (generally pertaining to the Daime pantheon) that project personal issues powdered into positive solutions to the group. (2) As the other participants endeavor to align their voices to the melody and understand the message contained in the hymn, they are lovingly accepting the “gift” dedicated to them, being aware that the time will come when they will also face this situation of showing the group a hymn and that they will also be counting on the support from the group for the task of “confirming” the hymn. (3) In this process, the hymn message, at first focused on the repository’s viewpoint, acquires new nuances as it reaches other minds. The hymn’s “owner” thus gets a feedback on his contribution, and much of the energy from the situation which gave rise to the hymn is transmuted.

Generally speaking and exploring the well-known therapeutical functions of music and singing, we know there are several dimensions to a melodic structure: rhythm, cadency, melody, and specific dynamics, besides the very textual message. The quest for harmony among those who hold a musical performance involves a precision feature which permeates these dimensions. This process, taking place within the framework of a special state of mind provided by the Daime, helps the integration and absorption of experiences involving inner personal contents into the session’s flow. Apart from that, the hymn can be read, heard and felt, making use of the senses as integration tools here and now and emphasizing down-to-earth aspects. Reality and structure features take advantage of music as a valuable therapeutical and collective referential means within the Santo Daime spiritual work.

Rhythm is also highlighted, since several participants play “maracás,” metallic percussion instruments which determine the march, waltz, and mazurka (traditional Daime music styles) cadency. The several “maracás” have to get harmonized around the hymn’s pace, which may vary according the very peak the hymn reaches at certain moments of the sessions. But this always takes place by the guidance of the session leaders or the “puxadoras” (woman singers who first introduce the hymns for the rest of the group to follow). There are moments during the sessions when a certain disharmony is detected in the voices, “maracás”, and other instruments. Since each session participant is able to realize these changes, this will

certainly show them some personal nuance they should work on in order to bring harmony back into the group work. In situations such as these the session's "firmness" is requested so that disharmony may be transmuted into perfection and the work stream may effect, within the various individual dimensions, the necessary transmutations for those specific moments.

Therefore, the basic commandment is that each participant should seek their adequacy within the rite, or, as the hymns say, that they should "keep the stream up" by doing their best. As the Daime spiritual sessions are characteristically long, dealing with things such as fatigue, discouragement, and their respective symbolic corollaries is an important task. That is when one can realize that, within a Daime session, "the Master grants whatever is requested." The word "Daime" actually derives from verb to give ("dar" in Portuguese; whereas dai-me means "give me"). So a request, an invocation is made: give me light, give me strength, give me love. Once one realizes the energetic exchange mechanism permanently taking place during a session with the beverage, it is easier to take advantage of such a situation for the cleansing and transmutation process to take effect. With fatigue and discouragement being thus conquered and transmuted by the aid of the session's special state of mind, there is a great possibility that the same thing is also going to happen in every day life. However, the neophyte must be aware of the many stages he has to go through before attaining the perception of this mechanism, which demands a good deal of concentration, discipline, and willingness to work.

This has been a brief report on how the Santo Daime doctrine is practiced in its spiritual sessions, particularly as regards the hymns. Although the whole doctrine experience is too unique and broad to be covered in words, I have tried to present a few of its basic concepts for the reader's appreciation. I should also mention that so many other features are worth discussing, and that nothing replaces a direct experience with the beverage for those who are seriously interested in understanding the Santo Daime doctrine. But, as I said above, we are not supposed to invite anyone. Please be free to contact our Internet site for clarifying any doubts or obtaining any further information.

V. Possibilities.

Since the purpose of my presentation has been to describe an emerging cultural phenomenon, I will also try to demystify much of what the national media has reported about the Santo Daime doctrine. Thus, I will now discuss some of the possibilities the urban community Céu do Planalto would like to foster in Brasilia, and I will try to describe the significance of having them spread for the doctrine's sake within the framework of a new emerging consciousness.

Out of the heap of misinformation repeatedly released by our media about the Daime issue, they always tend to emphasize the tendency the doctrine followers would have to get away from their normal professional activities and from their families, denouncing a process of

alienation. They always accuse the Daime doctrine of breaking down mainstream moral and social ideas, and of inducing followers into fanaticism. For that matter, I think it would be wise to make a clarification and warning about the features of an experience with such a substance (the Daime beverage).

Since CEFLURIS was founded by Padrinho Sebastião, efforts have been made towards disciplining and regulating the Santo Daime use according to the standards traditionally prescribed by the doctrine's masters. We are aware that the transforming potential inherent in a spiritual rite with the beverage demands the guidance of qualified people, experienced enough to smoothly deal with the "alterations" deriving from individual and group cathartic processes.

Despite the notoriety the doctrine acquired at the beginning of the decade, when some TV celebrities announced their participation in the rituals, the CEFLURIS' board of directors always made sure that the beverage be strictly used in the rituals and new churches be authorized on the basis of officially settled rules. This, along with the usual difficulties derived from this kind of work, determined a quite slow pace of growth for the doctrine in terms of new followers. The doctrine does not encourage or recommend proselytism (inviting is not allowed), and whoever is interested in getting to know it has to first take part in rituals without the beverage, and to attend a lecture of introduction (after which newcomers have enough information to make up their minds as regards the doctrine). Besides, an anamnesis interview is held by a qualified "fardado" (initiate) in order to verify if the visitor is really ready to safely take part in a ritual with the beverage.

Again, these measures bring about a slow pace of growth for the doctrine in terms of followers. Besides, the process of becoming a "fardado" member has also been improved toward granting the neophyte a broad awareness of what this spiritual works entails, whereas, on the other hand, any "fardado" member is free to discontinue his or her participation in the sessions and to give up the doctrine at their own discretion.

Much of the criticism as regards the doctrine's alienating feature has to do with cases of individuals leading regular urban lives who suddenly give up all their responsibilities to live in Santo Daime communities, most of which were far from the great urban centers until a short while ago. In fact, since this is just the doctrine's beginning, its configuration possibilities are far from being exhausted. Now we are presenting a new community model, which reconciles the values pointed out by the doctrine's principles with an everyday urban life.

There is no contradiction, therefore, in the fact that the Santo Daime can coexist with the city, but its essential transformation feature is in no way excluded or overlooked - and hence the community is important. Any member from our Daime community in Brasilia can easily enumerate the changes brought about by their experience with the Daime and the community. However, being in the

city, we not only keep up with cultural and technological advances but can also take advantage of their positive aspects. Practically speaking, the Daime urban communities act as the means by which the Céu do Mapiá and other rural communities, in their proposal of full ecological integration, get the information enabling them to update their contact with the whole world.

In Brasília, we have a quite eclectic group, made up of university teachers, anthropologists, public clerks, artists, journalists, businessmen, meditation and yoga teachers, psychologists, all kinds of therapists, and so on. This rich diversity turns our group into a research laboratory within the scope of personal development possibilities. The individual capacities as regards group integration are taken advantage of in workshops held for the purpose of integrating meditation practices, yoga and other modern therapeutical methods with the special dimension provided by the contact with the Santo Daime. Such experience has provided interesting fruits, showing us that we can make use of several tools to access our self-realization and that these tools mould round specific dynamics and personal circumstances.

Another interesting experience we have been going through is the “eneagrama” study of the psychological types, as they are conceived by Dr. Cláudio Naranjo. (“Eneagrama” refers to a nine-fold geometrical figure.) Used as a self-realization tool among groups operating on a frequent interactive basis, the “eneagrama” study was introduced to some of the community members who had heard about Dr. Naranjo’s work. Nowadays, many community members make use of the nine psychological types for their inner research and for their interpersonal contacts, creating new situations in which the material from the spiritual sessions can be discussed in therapeutical terms.

Under any of these circumstances, the Céu do Planalto community has developed a successful model for introducing the Santo Daime transforming experience within the urban environment. The Céu do Mapiá, on its turn, keeps its position as an authentic representative of both the Amazonian rainforest’s magic power and the Daime in the whole world, distributing this so-called eco-religious culture in Brazilian cities and abroad. Groups getting in touch with such a power and identifying with it become naturally interested in the urban community model described here.

Our aim here, however, is neither to present a community proposal, for there is actually no officially organized project model under elaboration, nor to invite our readers to take up this spiritual path. Above all, I am glad to believe the experience and the process involved in the Santo Daime doctrine can serve as reference materials for anyone identified with its fundamental principles, namely: Harmony, Love, Truth, and Justice.

José Murilo Costa Carvalho Junior

*is the Vice-President of the
Céu do Planalto Community.*

*Psychologist, musician
and HTML designer.*

(www.geocities.com/RainForest/5949/)

(josemurilo@geocities.com)

*Original Portuguese text
translated into English by*

Marcio Pombo

(Email: mkbmrg@genetic.com.br)

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