



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAKIWASI

The founder of Takiwasi, Jacques Mabit

The House that Sings: The Therapeutic Use of Icaros at Takiwasi

by Susana Bustos

Located on the outskirts of Tarapoto, a small city in northeastern Peru, where the jungle inhabits the mountainous regions, Takiwasi is one of the first therapeutic centers to explore the promising interface between Western and Indigenous approaches to healing in the treatment of drug addictions. The purpose of the center is twofold. As a therapeutic community, it focuses on the rehabilitation of male drug addicts, combining traditional Amazonian healing methods with Western medicine and psychotherapy. As a research center, its goals include assessing the efficacy of its programs, refining its proposals, studying the psychophysical effects of the ritual use of plants, and translating those effects into a language comprehensible to Westerners.

The center's name, Takiwasi—which means “the singing house” in Quechua—honors and celebrates the traditional *curanderos'* songs, or *icaros*, that play a central role in the vast majority of the healing rituals held there. Founded in 1992 by French physician Jacques Mabit and a group of collaborators involved in Indigenous healing traditions, Takiwasi has developed an innovative pilot program integrating ayahuasca—one of the main psychoactive beverages utilized for thousands of years in Amazonian *curanderismo*—as well as other traditional plant diets and purges as potent psychotherapeutic catalysts in its drug treatment program.

Takiwasi's integrative approach has

been viewed with skepticism by holders of the “pure” ways. On the one hand, the use of mind-altering substances in addiction recovery seems esoteric and dangerous to many Western-trained specialists in the field; on the other hand, the practice of traditional healing methodologies by the Western doctors at the center has been questioned as to its validity and efficacy by many traditional healers and sympathizers of those ways. Nonetheless, after more than twelve years of work, Takiwasi shows an impressive success rate of 67% among those clients who have completed its basic nine-month treatment program (Giove 2002). This means that, five years after their graduation, most clients have not relapsed in the use of hard drugs, although some may occasionally use marijuana or alcohol. Considering the low success rates of other drug rehabilitation programs in Latin America and the United States, Takiwasi's treatment approach deserves closer attention.

This article addresses the role of *icaros* in guiding and shaping the ayahuasca ceremonies held at Takiwasi, and it points out some particularities of their use within the center's rehabilitation program. It is based primarily on in-depth interviews with Jacques Mabit and Rosa Giove, one of his closest collaborators, although their comments have been supplemented by information gathered by the author during a one-year research stay in the Peruvian Amazon, studying the healing properties

of *icaros*. Approximately one-third of that year was spent at Takiwasi, working as a therapist and conducting research.

The Role of Icaros in Curanderismo

Ikaró, *icaro*, or *ícaro* is the regional name given to the ritual songs employed by Peruvian Amazon *curanderos* in their healing work. There is no direct translation of the word *icaro*, but Colombian-born anthropologist Luis Eduardo Luna (1992) suggests that it may derive from a Quichua (Quechuan dialect) term, *ikaray*, which means “to blow smoke in order to cure.” During traditional curing rituals, *curanderos* may sing—*icarar* in Spanish—directly over the crowns of their clients' heads or onto specific parts of their bodies, in ways similar to how they blow black tobacco smoke onto their clients.

In the Amazonian cosmology, all beings—animate and inanimate—are viewed as containing particular *icaros*, which correspond to their essences, both material and immaterial. It is believed that singing an *icaro* over a person, substance, or object will invest that person or object with the specific essential power of the being the song embodies—for example, vigor, clarity, immunity, precision, or calm.

Traditionally, *icaros* are said to be “received” directly from the *madres* (spirit-mothers) of the plants, frequently through dreams, visions, or auditory stimuli experienced during intensive “diets” with the plants. These diets involve the ingestion of plants under strict ritual conditions.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAKIWASI

Jacques Mabit burns incense during an ayahuasca session at Takiwasi.

including isolation, food restrictions, and sexual abstinence. The *icaros* also can be taught directly to individuals by the spirits during ayahuasca ceremonies. Some are traditionally transmitted from master to student; less commonly, they may be composed intentionally by experienced *curanderos*.

Icaros may be sung and/or whistled. On occasion, they are accompanied by the percussive sound of the *shacapa*—a fan of leaves—or by other musical instruments, either autochthonous or introduced. The lyrics of *icaros* may be sung in traditional native languages, intermixed with words in Spanish, or sung entirely in Spanish, with the first category considered to be the most powerful. Although there are notable musical differences among distinct ethnic groups, most *icaros* are characterized by regular, normally rapid rhythms, limited melodic variations, and two or three repetitive phrases.

Icaros occupy a central position in the world of the *curanderos*. They have been described as the “quintessence of shamanic power,” along with the phlegm, or *mariri*, of the plants. *Icaros* are the *curanderos*’ weapons of healing, their sources of personal energy, symbols of their power and wisdom, and inheritances for their apprentices (Giove 1993; Luna 1992). When used during healing ceremonies, *icaros* are often sung along with the *sopladas*—the blowing of tobacco smoke or perfumes over the patient—in order to slowly “accommodate” their healing powers into the body to help loosen, repair, or “charge” the sick points. They are employed during the

preparation of plant remedies in order to enhance the physical and spiritual power of the medicines.

Traditionally, *icaros* were sometimes utilized in community-oriented contexts, such as rituals conducted to aid in the fishing or hunting of specific animals, and in private rituals aimed at creating amorous “bonds” between two persons, or for causing damage to another individual. One must keep in mind that, in Amazonian cosmology, healing involves restoring relationships established within the patient’s body-mind-spirit complex, as well as relationships with the community and with nature. It involves treating the patient’s whole “being in the world.”

The Use of Icaros in Ayahuasca Rituals

Icaros constitute a vital element of many Amazonian ceremonies, playing a particularly prominent role in healing ceremonies involving the use of ayahuasca. In Peruvian mestizo *curanderismo*, one of the common terms used to refer to ayahuasca is *la purga* (the purge), which refers to the physical and energetic cleansing effects of the brew, and the main healing approach of many *curanderos*. Traditionally, ayahuasca is sometimes combined with various purgative plants in order to fortify these cleansing effects.

Interestingly, the visionary aspect of the brew—produced by the combined action of *chacrana* (or *chacuruna*) leaves or analogues and the ayahuasca vine—which tends to intrigue Western users, actually plays an auxiliary role in several traditional mestizo healing ceremonies. The visionary state

is considered to be useful primarily to the *curanderos* and their apprentices, helping them to diagnose and treat the sickness, as well as deepening their healing knowledge, although the visionary process of the patient may be approached as contributing to clarifying the cause or other aspects of the disease. The goal of enhancing the patient’s self-awareness and inner exploration has become more predominant among mestizo healers in the last few decades, and is obviously one of the main objectives of the therapeutic use of ayahuasca rituals in Takiwasi’s treatment program.

During the ceremonies, *curanderos* rely on the act of *icarar* to invoke and praise the *madres* of the plants, animals, and natural elements, as well as the spirit doctors who work from the spiritual dimension. By singing their *icaros* and, occasionally, by reciting prayers, the *curanderos* are able to work collaboratively with the ally spirits invoked, who give their protection during the ritual and do most of the healing work. The action of *icarar* is often said to facilitate the healer’s inner vision in diagnosis. In addition, *curanderos* may use *icaros* to increase or decrease the state of *mareación*—the psychophysical effects of the ayahuasca—as well as to guide and even structure the visionary process. In the darkness of nighttime ayahuasca sessions, the voice of the *curandero* is typically one of the few perceptual referents connecting participants with the normal dimensions of space-time, influencing the patient’s subjective process and oftentimes playing a highly suggestive role in it.

Traditionally, *curanderos* speak of “curing” the person, which suggests a vertical doctor-patient relationship. However, several healers indicated that, in their healing work, the efficacy of the treatment also requires a stance of active receptivity on the part of the client, which is facilitated by the person’s trust in the healer’s powers, and is strengthened by the sonic bonding allowed through the *icaros*.

Takiwasi’s Treatment Program

As stated before, the treatment program at Takiwasi is an amalgamation of traditional shamanistic work—involving purgative, medicinal, and visionary plants—and therapeutic work directed at understanding and integrating the visionary experiences. The psychotherapeutic work takes place both individually and in group contexts, and it is complemented by the daily working routine of the patients at the center, as well as by other psycho-educational, physical, and recreational activities. In baking bread, cultivating the garden, playing soccer, or develop-

ing bonds with other patients, their inner work is challenged to manifest itself in concrete, palpable ways, with the community serving as a mirror to the work's effectiveness.

After undergoing an initial phase of detoxification, which lasts around a month, Takiwasi patients participate in weekly ayahuasca ceremonies, usually guided by Jacques. He is often accompanied by a master *curandero* and/or another member of the Takiwasi team, such as Rosa, who is a physician trained in both Western and Indigenous medicine and who is skilled in the art of *icarar*. When time and human resources are available, additional ayahuasca sessions may be conducted for patients who require special attention. Typically, a day before each ayahuasca session, patients undergo preparatory ritual purges, utilizing plants such as *yawar panga*, *rosa sisa*, or *azucena*, among others.

The ritual structure used at Takiwasi, and by many mestizo healers elsewhere in the Peruvian Amazon, consists of three main phases. In the first phase, the *curandero* sets up the "foundations of his work" by establishing protection of the ceremonial space, himself, and the group; invoking the presence of his ally spirits; calling the visions; and screening patients to ascertain their current states of health. At the completion of this phase, the leader serves the medicine to the participants. During the second phase, the *curandero* focuses on facilitating the activation of the medicine, and conducts the individual healings—*icarando* (singing) and *soplando* (blowing smoke) over each of the patients. The third and final phase basically includes completion of the healing work, integration, and the closing of the session.

Laying the Foundation for Healing

At Takiwasi, the ceremonial form of the ayahuasca sessions, in which a specific order of *icaros* is employed, follows a standard structure that has been adapted to the center's work with patients undergoing addiction treatment. This structure evolved out of Jacques' idiosyncratic training as a *curandero*, and it has been refined over time through direct instructions that he and Rosa have received from the spiritual world. The work in the sessions at Takiwasi has a seal of Christianity—the spiritual tradition followed by Jacques—which is also commonplace in the repertoire of most mestizo *curanderos* in Peru.

Jacques begins each ceremony by invoking the six directions—that is, the four cardinal points, above, and below—creating a circle of protection around the group,

"Madre Ayahuasca," Rosa Giove's Invocation Icaro

Madre Ayahuasca

Llévame hasta el sol

De la savia de la tierra

Hazme beber

Llévame contigo hacia el sol

Del sol interior hacia arriba

Hacia arriba subiré, hacia arriba subiré,

Madre...

Usame, hablame, enséñame

Enséñame a ver, a ver más allá

A ver al Hombre dentro del hombre

A ver el Sol dentro y fuera del hombre

Enséñame a ver,

A ver más allá, Madre...

Usa mi cuerpo

Hazme brillar

Con brillo de estrellas

Con calor del sol

Con luz de luna y fuerza de tierra

Con luz de luna y calor de sol.

Madre Ayahuasca

Llévame hacia el sol

Del sol interior hacia arriba

Hacia arriba subiré, hacia arriba subiré,

Madre...

Mother Ayahuasca

Carry me toward the sun

From the nectar of the earth

Make me drink

Bring me with you toward the sun

From the sun within toward the sky

Upwards I will rise, upwards I will rise,

Mother...

Use me, speak to me, teach me

Teach me to see, to see beyond

To see the Man inside the man

To see the Sun within and outside the man

Teach me to see,

To see beyond, Mother...

Use my body

Make me shine

With the light of the stars

With the heat of the sun

With the light of the moon and power of the earth

With the light of the moon and the heat of the sun.

Mother ayahuasca

Carry me toward the sun

From the sun within toward the sky

Upwards I will rise, upwards I will rise,

Mother...

in order to keep negative energies from entering the session. He explains: "Before serving the ayahuasca, the connection of the participants with the spiritual world has not been opened yet. Therefore, if negative energies appear in the session after cleansing and closing the space, it is assumed that they have emerged from the participants themselves, or from some energetically charged object that someone has brought into the session." For this reason, participants are instructed not to bring anything but what they wear into the session. In this way, the *curandero* also protects his work and delimits its scope.

Each Takiwasi session opens with an *icaro* that invokes the spirit of instruction through lyrics that call upon animal youngsters and relate how a duck teaches her ducklings. Jacques explains the reason for this: "In Takiwasi, the general orientation of the sessions is directed at helping clients learn through the healing process. Other *curanderos* heal their patients by themselves, and the patient doesn't see anything of what occurs. We want people to become conscious of the process and learn from it, so that it serves them in their lives. That is why I open each session with that song."

At Takiwasi, before participants at the sessions are "invited" to drink, the ayahuasca is sung over with an *icaro* received by Rosa. This opening *icaro* originally came to Rosa during an ayahuasca session, and it literally pursued her for months in dreams and sessions until finally she wrote it down. When she eventually shared it with Jacques, he immediately recognized it as an *icaro*. Rosa says: "Its presence was so insistent. In one ayahuasca session, I was explicitly told that I had to sing this song at the beginning of each session. The *icaro* essentially asks permission of the plant to utilize it. I was told that when one enters a home, one needs to greet the host."

After "inviting" the ayahuasca into the session, Jacques explains, the Takiwasi ritual proceeds with two chants: the song of the *suy-suy*, and the *icaro* of the *lupuna*. "The song of the *suy-suy* calls the birds that fly, and it serves to heighten the *mareación* so that one can enter into flight. Because the *lupuna* is the tallest tree of the forest and is very straight, invoking its energy generates a vertical axis and, at the same time, a cap or container so that the people can fly without dispersing their spirit in space. These two *icaros* work together by introducing both movements into the



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAKIWASI

*Don Lucho, one of the Takiwasi curanderos, blows a *soplado* over a patient's head.*

session; one helps raise the flight, and the other controls it.

"After those two songs, I blow tobacco smoke over all the participants in order to establish a connection between them and my own body. In this way, a person couldn't lose his mind without my losing mine as well, because the person's force would have to first overcome my own. My work as a *curandero* requires that I fortify my body's energies, because everything in the session begins and ends in it." It should be noted that the concept of *body* used by *curanderos* transcends our Western understanding, encompassing a complex physical-energetic matrix that could be better described as the physical-mental-soul "moment" of the person.

Jacques establishes the connection with the spiritual world through a succession of three invocational songs originally taught to him by his teachers during his training as a *curandero*. The first *icaro* invokes the presence of God the Father and his authority above all the other spirits called in the session. The second song invokes the *otorongo*—one of the largest felines in the Peruvian rainforest, and the primary animal ally of one of Jacques' teachers. This *icaro* also invokes the principal elements and beings of nature that have *yachay*, or healing spirit, which the *curanderos* use to suck out and then expectorate the diseases without damaging themselves. The third *icaro* invokes the protective power of metal, so that, as Jacques explains, "the body will be as impenetrable as metal."

The ritual instructions for this first

phase of the session are very strict. Rosa states: "If someone feels sick during this phase, while Jacques is setting the foundations of the session, I cannot get up in order to assist him." However, once Jacques has laid the foundation for the session, other collaborators are allowed to sing, and those participants who need to leave the circle temporarily may do so.

Deepening the Visionary Work

During the second phase of the ceremony, the purgative and visionary effects of the ayahuasca are most intense. During this time, Jacques may follow a general order of songs, but he will make variations according to special instructions received from the spiritual world.

As a general rule, he begins this portion by singing the "Icaro of the Tribes," which invokes the warrior spirits of Peruvian jungle tribes, the energies of the rainforest, and the region's curative traditions. He says, "This uplifting song is about strength and masculinity. Many times, participants don't start to experience their visions until I sing this *icaro*."

Next, Jacques sings a *huarmi icaro*—a woman's *icaro*—that he learned from one of his teachers, which he has modified by integrating the Virgin Mary as a feminine principle. He explains: "In this *icaro*, one sings to the ayahuasca, to the *chacrana*, and to the *datura*, which are the principal plants. One sings first to the strong medicine (*sinchi sinchi medicina*) and to the white medicine (*yura yura medicina*), and then to the *camalonga*, which is a feminine

medicine that takes out bad energies and brings the light with the golden serpent.

"Then I invoke Christ, the Virgin, the Holy Spirit, and Saint Michael. Here we begin to enter deeper into the spiritual world. After this *icaro*, all the possibilities open, and what happens depends upon the session. If I see that the session is already well launched and that there is a lot of *mareación*, I may wait a while before offering participants a second serving of ayahuasca. I will sing, metabolizing the energy that is in the air. As I have told you, my body is the thermostat."

By this time during the session, most patients have accessed important personal material, purged, and momentarily left the circle to go to the bathroom.

At some point, Jacques begins to sing the *icaro* "Ayahuasca Curandera" and blow basil water over each participant in order to cleanse and protect each one from whatever the others have purged. "This was a very strong instruction," Jacques says. "I cannot give a second cup of ayahuasca without first singing this song during the individual cleansings, thus restoring to each person what is theirs. Many times, the participants vomit at this moment."

Breaking through Barriers

In many mestizo healing ceremonies, the *curanderos* serve each patient one dose of ayahuasca, at the beginning of the session. Usually, in those ceremonies, the *mareación* begins rapidly, and the work is completed within three or four hours. In contrast, at Takiwasi, a second dose of ayahuasca may be served, and the sessions can last between six and eight hours.

Jacques explains: "At Takiwasi, we essentially conduct two sessions in one. It takes a little longer—which is inconvenient in regard to the following day's activities—but, at the same time, we can go farther. Many times, the patients await the second cup. Because my style encourages strong spiritual work that sometimes can release bad spirits, some participants experience a blockage, unable to enter into visions. Usually after this type of work, participants break through those barriers, so they enter into more profound visions—and they become ready to do so by drinking a second cup. I often utilize tobacco, perfume, or *agua de florida* (cologne) in the second serving, but rarely in the first."

Jacques observes that his sessions tend to "rise" slowly and become most intense toward the conclusion, when the songs of the air are sung, and he suggests that occurs because his personality is closer to the element of air than to the earth or water

energies carried by most mestizo *curanderos*. He explains: "When a *curandero* has the energy of earth, he can take to flight more rapidly because he is on the earth. But for myself, being of the air element, it takes more time to rise from the earth, and my energy expands more toward the end."

Ingesting the second dose of ayahuasca is optional, and many times it is combined with the ingestion of some black tobacco diluted in water, which has strong purgative effects, accelerating the release of deep psycho-physical material. The individual healings begin shortly after participants finish their second dose of the brew.

Icaros in Individual Healings

The individual healing is usually conducted when the most dramatic effects of the first dose of ayahuasca have decreased. At this point in the ritual, patients are called by their names to approach the *curandero* or his collaborator for individual work. The person is then sung over (*icarada*) and blown upon (*soplada*) by the healers. In contrast to the *icaros* that are sung to the entire group during the first and third phases, the *icaros* sung during individual healings are selected according to special instructions that the *curandero* or his collaborator have received directly or indirectly from the spiritual world. The songs don't necessarily change, but the curative intention is directed to meet the healing needs of each particular patient.

Rosa explains: "At such a time, what is going to happen is fairly unpredictable. Sometimes, by the time we do the healing, the *mareación* has already begun to subside for us, but sometimes, at the moment of singing, the state of *mareación* recommences. Sometimes, we may receive instructions earlier in the session, indicating that it will be good to do this or that for a patient. Often, the need to do a massage here or a prayer there will come to me. Sometimes, I start to sing one *icaro* and a different one comes forth. With my patients, the *icaros* almost always come out spontaneously. I don't know if I am selecting the songs unconsciously because I know the clients. With visiting seminarists and guests, it's different because I don't know them, and I often consult with Jacques about which *icaro* to sing to them."

Jacques explains that the instructions as to which *icaros* should be used for individual healings may come in seven ways: one may hear a voice directing what to sing; one may see a vision of a plant or spirit corresponding to an *icaro*; one may have a repetitive thought; one may physically sense what is appropriate to sing;



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAKIWASI

Rosa Giove helps a participant make a cast face mask during an art therapy session.

one may rationally decide to sing one *icaro* and find that another *icaro* comes forth; a patient or collaborator may make reference to a symbol that suggests a song; or a collaborator may directly suggest a song. Jacques says, "Rosa clues me in on what to sing. And I do it, because I know that she has seen it for a reason. This is also a way of receiving a direction."

As mentioned previously, each *icaro* represents the special powers of the particular plant invoked. For example, *chiric sanango* is a powerful plant used to heal cold, fear, shyness, excessive self-absorption, rigidity, internal contortion, and the inability to receive or display human warmth. Jacques explains: "It is a plant that will awaken and loosen up everything that is shrunken, closed, or bent. For example, it can bring flexibility to a rigid spinal column. If a person has such an energy in his body, and one sings the *chiric sanango icaro* into his body, the contrary energies are obliged to leave the person. This *icaro* can cause vomiting or diarrhea, or the energies can disperse into space. When I sing to such a person, his energies come into my body while the *icaro* fits itself to him, accommodating itself into his energetic body."

The effectiveness of these healing songs may depend on both individual and group factors. Jacques suggests that there are two ways of overcoming energetic blockages through the means of the song—battling against them, or illuminating them with the light of love. Depending on the directions given by the spirit world, a smooth, sweet song of invocation can achieve

results comparable to those produced by a battle song.

Closure of the Session

The close of Takiwasi sessions is marked by two *icaros*. The first is "Patuy-Patuy," sung in Quechua, which was also performed at the beginning of the session. As stated, this *icaro* invokes all the animal youngsters—particularly ducklings—that are guided by the instincts of their species but that also learn from their progenitors. Jacques says, "This *icaro* highlights the need to submit ourselves to instruction, in spite of our own impulses or aspirations."

The second closing *icaro* gives thanks to God for the session. This *icaro*, which was received by a seminarist, sings of the spiritual combat and faith needed to overcome negative forces. "It also refers to the four elements, particularly the fire that cleanses the heart, illumines the soul, and directs the vertical movement upward towards the Divine," states Jacques.

Then, Jacques offers a final prayer of thanksgiving to God the Father and to all those spiritual beings that have been present to protect the session and support the participants during their process of healing and inner exploration. After the termination of the ritual is announced, the lights of the *maloca* (ceremonial building) are gently turned on, and the participants spontaneously share their experiences with each other. Jacques and Rosa typically dedicate about an hour to listening to and sharing experiences. Meanwhile,



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAKIWASI

The ceremonial maloca at Takiwasi—"the house that sings"

the light of dawn and the songs of the birds announce the birth of a new day.

The Origin of Icaros Sung at Takiwasi

Jacques has a repertoire of around twenty-five *icaros*, and Rosa has twelve of her own. In addition, as indicated earlier, other collaborators may be invited to sing their *icaros* during sessions. Because Jacques received some of his *icaros* directly from his teachers, some in dreams, and some during diets with the plants, his *icaros* utilize a variety of languages, including Quechua, Spanish, and French.

Jacques offers this description of how he received a beautiful curing *icaro* in French during a dream: "I was in the house of my parents in France, curing a little boy. That boy was simultaneously my French nephew and the son of a Peruvian therapist at Takiwasi. In my hand, I held a datura flower that served me as a *shacapa*, and I was curing him using that *icaro*. At the same time that I was singing it onto him, I realized in the dream that it was an *icaro* that I did not know. While I was singing, I began to hear people arriving with guitars, confusing my singing. I began to concentrate seriously, and I woke up with the song in my head. I had the good luck to have a recording machine near at hand, so I leapt out of bed and rushed to the bathroom in order to record it before I lost the thread. Rosa thought I had diarrhea. The purpose of this song is for the curing of childhood wounds."

Rosa also has received *icaros* in her dreams and during diets, and she distinguishes these from the ones that come spontaneously to her during ayahuasca

sessions. Sometimes, she will receive a new *icaro* seemingly tailor made to help in a particular situation, and she later completely forgets it. Rosa's *icaros* all come to her accompanied by visionary images. She describes one of these experiences: "I had a very strong ayahuasca session, in which I saw a figure with the seven chakras. I could see that each chakra had a color and a key, and that each key was a song—a sound. I was told I was going to be given eight sounds. And I began to receive the *icaros* to the extent that I was simultaneously doing work in those chakras. The process is still not complete."

Occasionally, Rosa and others at Takiwasi have received *icaros* with the specific instruction to give them to Jacques. For example, as mentioned earlier, the *icaro* used to invoke and ask permission of the ayahuasca, sung at the beginning of the session, was a song received by Rosa, but it has been adopted as part of the basic ceremonial structure used at Takiwasi. Other visitors have been given *icaros* for Jacques that were received in Spanish, French, or even languages not known to the person, such as Quechua.

Singing Counterpoint

During traditional ayahuasca ceremonies, mestizo *curanderos* often employ a gentle volume, easy tempo, and rhythmical singing style. In contrast, Jacques' singing style is strong, massive, penetrating, and "rapid"—a reflection of his strong personality. Jacques acknowledges, "I am passionate. I like the thing to get out, now, to move forward."

Interestingly, Jacques no longer employs

the traditional *shacapa* as accompaniment for his *icaros*, preferring to use a *maraca* (rattle). He explains: "I used the *shacapa* before going to Africa to initiate myself in the iboga tradition. There I was given a *maraca*, which I brought back to Takiwasi. During one session, I was directed to use it. Because I was accustomed to using the *shacapa*, which has a gentler sound, I had my doubts, but once I used the *maraca*, it opened up for me marvelously. Since then, I cannot seem to use the *shacapa* with any of my songs, although I don't utilize the *maraca* with all my songs."

He continues: "Whenever I listen to myself in recordings, I wonder why I sing so rapidly. However, I cannot sing more slowly, even if I want to. If I try to sing slower, I lose it; it's as if I don't have support. It's the same with praying; I don't understand why I need to pray with such velocity. But it's like asking a person with a fast walking pace to walk slowly. He gets tired; it's the opposite of what one would expect. I imagine that, with time, things are going to calm down."

One of the stated goals of the work at Takiwasi is to help the patients, who are all males, reestablish their connection with a positive masculine archetype. This entails restoring their willpower, nourishing their sense of direction and internal structure, and encouraging the manifesting of their individual expression in the external world. Through his style of singing, Jacques provides a strong masculine presence that appears to stimulate this reconnection.

The singing styles of Rosa and most other collaborators at Takiwasi tend to be calmer. As Jacques points out, this reflects their primary connections to the elements of earth and water. The gentler songs of the earth, received and sung by Rosa, seem to serve the therapeutic function of cleaning and opening the regenerative channels of the body in accordance with more natural rhythms. In this way, an interesting musical counterpoint is established between Jacques and the others during the Takiwasi sessions, enabling the participants to face their inner material from different angles.

In sessions with mestizo *curanderos*, periods of silence tend to be more extensive than during Takiwasi ceremonies. Depending on the state of the person and the group context, these periods of silence can allow a participant to concentrate on inner work, can heighten the visionary state, and can facilitate the metabolization of the energies being unfolded. Nonetheless, too much silence can also subvert these

processes and obstruct the inner vision. In such cases, singing can tranquilize and loosen up the person, as well as providing structure for the work (see also Katz and Dobkin de Rios 1971).

Icaros as Protection of the Curandero

Traditional healing work requires the *curandero* to connect with the patient's disease within the physical-energetic vessel of the *curandero's* own body. Jacques points out that when this connection is established, he often experiences various discomforts—physical pain, exhaustion, negative thoughts, bad humor—inside himself. The singing of a suitable healing *icaro* provokes the raising of those sensations until the point when the *curandero* can metabolize these energies inside his body. For this reason, it is crucial for the healer to carefully prepare and fortify his body through plant diets and purges. The teachers help protect the student by inserting *icaros* of defense, or *arkanás*, into his body during the apprenticeship.

Jacques explains: "The song is an energetic-structural matrix, an energy form that is incorporated gradually into a person's body. There is a difference between the healer temporarily putting a song into a patient and a teacher putting an *icaro* into a student so that he will be able to heal. In the second case, the intention is to infuse the song into the student so that it can be utilized later for healing. Having dieted with a plant, the *curandero* incorporates the plant in his body. Whenever the healer sings the plant's *icaro*, his voice invokes the energy resident in his body and reactivates it by resonance. In this manner, the *icaro* helps the healing energy unfold in the healer as much as in the person whom he is curing."

The Central Role of Icaros at Takiwasi

Probably one of the most important side contributions of the therapeutic work at Takiwasi has been the attempt to identify, expand, and translate the therapeutic effects of medicinal plants and their *icaros* within the context of a Western psychological paradigm. Traditional *curanderos* typically allude to the physical and spiritual aspects of diseases, employing expressions such as: "He is under a *daño*," or "He is *cruzado* (crossed)." A *daño* is an intentional attack upon the energetic body by spiritual means, solicited or directly committed by some adversary. *Cruzado* involves some sort of blockage said to be caused by the transgression of a personal or social norm. *Curanderos* rarely refer directly to psychological states, and even when they do, their interpretations tend to include



Takiwasi residents often sing icaros while they participate in group work projects.

broad connotations and involve somatic aspects. For example: "He's nervous," or "She has coldness in the body."

This attempt to translate the profound holistic effect of Indigenous plant treatments into psychological language, rooted in modern dialectic, is a formidable task, and Takiwasi is definitely one of the pioneer centers engaged in this endeavor. This task is further complicated by the fact that the administration of different types of plant diets and purges aims to meet the particular psychospiritual and physical needs of each patient, and the selection of *icaros* used in these ritual contexts is grounded in concrete and intuitive knowledge of the ways in which specific plants and *icaros* can affect these dimensions. Precisely because the work at Takiwasi is complex, the models and applied knowledge require continual adaptation.

It is clear that the *icaros* fulfill a central role in the structure of the ayahuasca sessions. They mark out a predictable sequence of events that, together with the strict rules of behavior in the sessions, provide a psychological container for this challenging work. These controls are particularly important for addicts, whose ego structures may be weak, and in whom the constant transgressions of internal choices and external norms have sapped the will and the sense of personal direction.

The treatment at Takiwasi works to gradually encourage patients to connect with their essences, confront their conflicts, acknowledge their dreams, and encounter their profound yearning for the embrace of the vast world of spirit, filled with meaning—the fundamental unconscious drive behind the addictive impulse. The focus on

opening to the divine and to deep personal understanding constitutes the foundation of rehabilitation work at Takiwasi, and that foundation is supported by the powerful, inspired language of the *icaros*.

Symbolically, each addict can be seen as a prodigal son, a child from a wealthy home wandering among the poor, and the songs of Takiwasi recall him to his original dwelling place. Significantly, one can often hear the patients at Takiwasi singing or whistling the *icaros* outside of the ayahuasca sessions, during their daily activities. Singing these songs seems to help patients sustain the healing experience of the sessions, while also encouraging them to celebrate their hard work. We can, therefore, with good reason, legitimize the name of the center as "The House that Sings."

References

- Giove, R. 1993. "Acerca del 'Icaro' o Canto Shamánico." *Revista Takiwasi* 2(1), 7-27. Tarapoto, Peru.
- Giove, R. 2002. *La Liana de los Muertos al Rescate de la Vida: Medicina Tradicional Amazónica en el Tratamiento de las Toxicomanías*. Tarapoto: Takiwasi.
- Giove, R. 2004. Personal Interview.
- Katz, F., and M. Dobkin de Rios. 1971. "Hallucinogenic Music: An Analysis of the Role of Whistling in Peruvian Ayahuasca Sessions." *Journal of American Folklore*, 84(333), pp. 320-327.
- Luna, L. E. 1992. "Magical Melodies Among the Mestizo Shamans of the Peruvian Amazon." In *Portals of Power: Shamanism in South America*, edited by E. J. Langdon (pp. 231-253). Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Mabit, J. 2004. Personal Interview.
- Susana Bustos** has worked for over ten years as a clinical psychologist, researcher, and drug abuse prevention consultant in Chile, her home country. Her interest in the healing potential of expanded states of consciousness and her passion for music and singing have dovetailed over the years, and she has trained in methods incorporating both. Susana has given workshops and lectures in South America, North America, Europe, and Asia. She is currently working on her doctoral research at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, California. Susana is also cultivating a happy marriage and a beautiful garden at her home in the East Bay.

