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COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE HERBS: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO INI CONSCIOUSNESS

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The Rastafari Way Of Life originated as individual, inborn seeds of Consciousness that grew into a global socio-political and spiritual movement. Initially, Rastafari seemed to be a response to exploitation and slavery that coalesced around the coronation of Ras Tafari Makonnen as Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930. However fresh Rastafari of many races are being born with these seeds of Consciousness and express Self through the use of sacred Herbs, Roots and Mystical Drumming. Rastas use mixtures of Biblical, Kushite, Kamitic and/or other perspectives to explain and contextualise their unique *insperiences* (inner experiences) of higher consciousness.

Rastafari is well known for music and ritual smoking of (The) *Herbs* (*Cannabis spp.*) to reach higher states of unity and interconnection (*inity*) with other living and etheric beings. There are many books on the origins and history of Rastafari and libraries of material on *Cannabis* and its properties. However, the inner truth of this combination has not been explored fully by western science. We need to know what are the holistic mechanisms that link herbsmen and women to *Cannabis*. How

are consciousness, healing, therapy, and meditative practices involved in the mechanics of this ethnobotanical relationship?

The *Herbs* is the most sacred medicine in the Rastafari pharmacopoeia and is used in divination, *reasoning* and meditation.^{1,2,3} Under the influence of *Herbs*, Rastafari establish ways of life based on intuited knowledge of the web of collective consciousness that connects all people, the ecosystem, inner-beings from etheric planes of existence and ultimately ‘the Most High,’ (Jah Rastafari; the first ancestor; the Source; the Creator). Through this genetic chord, Rastafari link through ‘*InI* consciousness’ to the very beginning of creation. Rastas thereby assert their inalienable right to cultivate, trade and heal with *Herbs*. In so doing, they are breaking current social, cultural and legal conventions as well as conventionally held beliefs about the world’s most popular illicit plant.

This chapter addresses the healing potential of exploring *InI* consciousness under the guidance of *Herbs*. *InI* consciousness is an intuited (right brain) experience/*insperience* of *inity*. This consciousness is a realistic awareness of the Universal Conscience (Divine Mind), which contains the body and the individual, inter-related mind. After describing our research process and providing more background on Rastafari and *InI* consciousness we will present a method of communication with *Herbs* (cultivation, breathing, smoking, meditation) that leads to holistic healing effects for individual, nation and planet.

RESEARCHING RASTAFARI

This chapter is inspired by the *Herbs* and based on Congo-Nyah’s long-term study with/for Rastafari elders in Jamaica. This work was finalised during ten months of anthropological research with Komaromi, Waldstein and Murray in England, using Rastafari information sharing techniques. Knowledge flows through Rasta networks via an intellectual teaching/reasoning process called *grounding*.⁴ *Grounding* is a sacred rite of passage in which groups of people use *Herbs* (as incense and/or smoked) to create a direct connection to common sense (not to be

mistaken with logic). At Breaking Convention 2011 the *Herbs* created a platform for a new and innovative research collaboration during a historic *grounding*.

Reasoning (discussion about important political, spiritual and social matters) is another essential part of *grounding*.⁴ Although often inspired by *Herbs*, Rastafari *reasoning* is founded on knowledge of the interconnectedness of all things and can therefore be used for opening the gates of *InI* consciousness without smoking. Congo-Nyah is an expert in imparting the teachings of the elders via *reasoning*. *Reasoning* has also been identified by anthropologists as an effective way of collecting ethnographic data on Rastafari.⁵ Likewise, Waldstein and Komaromi have found that *reasonings* with Congo-Nyah and Murray have been a fruitful source of knowledge and information on *Herbs* and *InI* consciousness.

Under Congo-Nyah’s guidance, Komaromi and Waldstein are also learning and practicing Rastafari inspired meditations, dietary habits and other daily rituals. Most of this participation in the Rastafari Way of Life has taken place privately, rather than in a social context as in conventional participant observation. However, the meditations require careful observation of the self, which leads to revelations about the underlying spiritual and practical logics of Rasta practices. Similar processes of sensorially engaged participant observation have been described by other anthropologists⁶ as a way of complementing data collected through discourse based techniques.

RASTAFARI AND INI CONSCIOUSNESS

As Rastafari has various expressions at different levels of cultivation/development of *InI* consciousness, it seems to lack a fully codified doctrine.⁷ However there are several foundational characteristics that define Rastafari, such as taking words of Haile Selassie as *I-vine* (divine) truth, seeking African repatriation, drumming and burning *Herbs*. At some point all initiates make their own personal connections to (and embody) Haile Selassie I as the perfect exemplar of *InI* consciousness

(God/Christ/Jah, etc). A few general facets of Rasta linguistics, philosophy and ethics help explain *InI* consciousness further.

I is an important word/sound of power in Rastafari.^{1,8,9} In Iyoric, the Rastafari language the pronoun *InI* (I and I) denotes the shared identity/source from which came all and is used to refer to 'I,' 'me,' 'we' and 'us' ('you,' is *the I*). The use of I in Iyoric emphasises the importance Rastafari places on identifying with and knowing the Self. Like the Sadhus, many Rastas experience a direct connection to the etheric double and find the Self's purpose in life through smoking *Herbs* and transcendental meditation. Rastas are united in and distinguished by knowing they are here to rebalance the earth by precipitating the collapse of global consumer capitalism (Babylon), returning descendants of African slaves to a motherland (Zion) that their ancestors were forcibly removed from⁸ and cultivating sustainable agricultural systems.

In Iyoric *high* and *I* are conflated through sound symbolism and both words are likewise connected to 'eye'/vision.⁵ By smoking *Herbs* and meditating Rastafari reach states of consciousness where they *insperience* the ability to communicate from the higher Self, via the *Herbs*, the ancestors, Haile Selassie/Empress Menen, etc. When Rastafari are high (I) these communications may be visual or verbal in nature. Most interesting is the *Herbs'* ability to impart even greater vision; in the sense of seeing connections between different global, historical and spiritual events that have shaped the African diaspora.

Central to Rasta ways of life (*livity*), is an ethic of harmonising with nature, peace and love. According to Rastafari *reasoning*, evidence of a blueprint of creation is empirically verified by looking at the womb or other mathematical patterns and ecological processes of nature. All forms of life on earth play a unique role/purpose in supporting its interconnection and interdependence. In Rastafari there is widespread respect for Life and the unique purpose/plan for each aspect of creation. Rastas who farm the land to provide the vegan food required of an *ital* diet are conscious of local ecological processes and use agricultural techniques that are similar to organic and biodynamic methods.^{1,8} They cultivate the (v)ital force (spirit/vibrations/energy) from the earth, the

air, the sun and the water through plants, which are consumed to build healthy bodies and worthy vessels to manifest 'Jah will on earth.'

The heart of Rastafari is a higher/wider awareness of being and existence and ultimately, re-connection with The Creator. Rastafari know that on earth, *InI* are all born of woman and that all beings possess a higher (divine) and an animal nature. In rebuilding connections with *InI* divinity, which is held in potential, Rastas eventually become aligned with The Source. This is associated with the realisation that we are consciousness and that the universe is an extension of the earthly body, which dwells in our mind. The earthly mind receives communications from greater universal cycles, energies and forces and can, in turn, create what we are inspired to manifest. This mystical *insperience* is similar to those that occur with the help of other psychedelic plant teachers or meditation techniques.

CULTIVATION OF HERBS

The ability of *Herbs* to lead Rastas to higher consciousness depends on how it is cultivated. Jamaican farmers usually grow strains of *Herbs* known to science as *Cannabis sativa* (as opposed to *C. indica* varieties). In Rastafari philosophy, wholesome existence depends upon truth, balance, order and justice. This is regulated by the Nyahbinghi order which states that the hungry must be fed, the naked clothed, the sick nourished, the infants cared for, the aged protected and the ignorant instructed. Thus, the Rastafari way of cultivating *Herbs* is concerned with balancing the order of the natural and spiritual worlds. From a Rasta perspective, hydroponic cultivation, use of artificial lighting and chemical fertilisers result in spiritually unbalanced *Herbs* that are tuned to a lower vibrational level and can create paranoia.

The Rasta herbsman holds a respectful relationship with the land on which he grows *Herbs*, recognising that everything is interrelated and interconnected by ecological and spiritual laws. The herbsman's thoughts while working are as crucial in the cultivation process as are the sun, earth, wind and water. He must be aware of the spiritual

balance of seed, sun and sound and acknowledge the ancestors of the land. He observes the rules of *ital* farming, uses only organic manure (for best results bat manure) and chants/cares for the plants in his field on a daily basis. This dedicated care requires him to be in constant communication with the *Herbs*, the divinity of Haile Selassie and the reflection of his own divinity; expressing this through his creative work in the field. At harvest time, he retains all his creative energies for the crop and must refrain from sexual intercourse to be at the ‘top of his game’ because *Herbs* is known as a sensitive *hempress*.

SMOKING HERBS

Many Rastas smoke *Herbs* as and when they can, depending on the time, *vibes* (energetic and musical vibrations) and task at hand. In many parts of the world tobacco is rolled with *Herbs* into *spliffs* (cigarettes) and Rastas often follow this custom. However, to reach higher states of consciousness *Herbs* must be smoked *ital* (i.e. without tobacco), ideally from a *chalice*. A Rasta *chalice* is a water-pipe made from a plastic hose, a *kutchie* (bowl made of hardwood or clay) and a body (usually made from a coconut shell, bamboo or a glass bottle) (FIGURE 1). The water used to fill the body should be chlorine-free, ideally from a natural spring. The *Herbs* are loaded into the *kutchie*, lit (preferably without sulphur or gas) and the smoke is pulled through the water-filled shell and hose into the lungs of the smoker via the mouth. Drawing a lungful of smoke from the *chalice* requires practice and coordination. Some Rastas blow the first puffs of smoke (without inhaling) into the air for the ancestors and for cleansing the face, hair and general environment.

During *reasonings* and other group meditations, the ritual prescription and general custom is three full pulls for each person in the session. This usually requires large quantities of *Herbs*, which can be difficult to find and/or afford in prohibitive societies that criminalise it, so experienced herbsmen and women must often make due with combinations of *Herbs*, tobacco and other admixtures (e.g. raspberry leaf). During private meditations, an experienced herbsman might use a *chalice* but higher

states may still be reached using more economical means of smoking *ital Herbs* (i.e. in a ‘pure’ *spliff* or with a smaller pipe).

Smoking the *chalice* is a ceremonial activity based on balancing the elements and becoming aware of the connection between earthly and spiritual planes; every spirit must manifest in flesh. In order to calibrate participants to a receptive state, before lighting the *chalice* Rastas give thanks to the *Herbs*; the sun, air, earth and water that provided her nourishment; the herbsman who cared for her; and all the people involved in making it possible for *Herbs* to help the lower natures to find higher ones. This thanksgiving acknowledges the order within nature and the forces acting upon us that herbsmen are always mindful of. The blessing also serves as a reminder of the commodity chain that links producers, traffickers and consumers of this illicit sacrament and inspires action to correct the injustices of prohibition. Following a chant, the herbsman is ready to light.

Despite conventional proscriptions on holding smoke in the lungs, Rasta herbsmen teach *InI* to inhale deeply, hold the breath and exhale



FIGURE 1: Coconut shell chalice. Courtesy of Reka Komaromi.

slowly through the nose when smoking *Herbs*. Rastas report that pure *Herbs*, which have been cultivated wisely and smoked in this way clear/burn out physical and spiritual debris that accumulates in human respiratory passages. *Herbs* is a known expectorant¹⁰ and does not appear to be a respiratory irritant/carcinogen.¹¹

Deep breathing is facilitated by loose fitting clothing and good posture. Rastas are mindful of standing up straight or sitting in the throne position (FIGURE 2) when smoking, *reasoning* and meditating. The key to holding the body in these postures for any length of time is balancing the head on the top of the spine and the spine on the hips and pelvis, while relaxing all muscles, save for the few that must be flexed to maintain bodily balance. Thus, adopting the stance of the *I-vine* King and Queen, while deeply inhaling *Herbs* smoke has beneficial effects on the entire body. The final stage in smoking *Herbs* for higher consciousness is putting down the *chalice* and arranging the hands in the 'seal' *mudra* (FIGURE 3), a hand posture that helps tune the mind, focus the intellect and instruct the spirit during *reasoning* and meditation.

MEDITATION WITH HERBS

Rastas consider the form of ecstatic trance that can be reached by smoking *Herbs* (and coincidentally through sex) to be a particularly valuable meditative state. Ecstatic trance is the highly receptive midpoint between sleep and wakefulness; between the subjective/objective, conscious/unconscious, material/etheric, higher/lower self etc. In ecstatic trance we can bridge the gap between the 'two worlds' and communicate with/from the higher Self and The Source. Trance states generally involve slowing/deepening patterns of breathing from 20 breaths of 250ml to 7.5 breaths of more than 500ml of air per minute, which the smoking techniques described above help achieve. *Herbs* meditation practice helps Rastafari to become conscious/aware of the oneness of all humans and our universal desires for joy, infallible guidance, inner peace and self reliance.



The higher Self and the individual (ego) unite in ecstatic trance, which (with practice) enables the Self to manifest higher states of being on earth. When the point of ecstatic trance is reached, messages and answers to questions are intuited from the space-beyond-thought in the form of visions, sounds and physical sensations. Using intuition can lead to better decisions than relying on human logic and/or emotions and unites *InI* with *Jah* to ensure that the forces of creation and destruction are balanced.

FIGURE 2: The throne position. Courtesy of Anna Waldstein.



Many Rastas combine smoking with defined meditation techniques, while for others creating music is a form of meditation. Murray follows an informal practice of meditation that begins with prayer and praise of Haile Selassie, followed by a free flow of ideas and visions that he relates to his own perspective on life. Congo-Nyah has been instructing Waldstein and Komaromi in a more structured meditation technique that was developed by Ra Un Nefer Amen, an expert on ancient

FIGURE 3: The seal mudra. Courtesy of Reka Komaromi.

Egyptian philosophy and spiritual culture.¹² While the method was not necessarily intended to be done under the guidance of *Herbs*, it has been used in Rasta communities worldwide as it provides an effective means of navigating ecstatic and other forms of trance.

The guided meditations are based on the Paut Neteru (cake of the gods), also known as the Kamitic ‘Tree of Life.’ In the meditations there is a stilling and clearing of the mind, which happens through focusing on the breath and silently chanting relevant words of power. These *hekau* (mantras) are designed to enhance different faculties of human consciousness (talents) and the initiate learns which ones to access at will in meditation (e.g. to awaken latent talents). During this process, the mind is freed from/rises above negative thought patterns and conditioning. This allows Rastas to (re)programme with the image, life and times of Haile Selassie who embodies impeccability, integrity, courage and wisdom. One can also visualise desired outcomes of situations relating to oneself, other people and/or the world via the Life Force or Spirit, which is why Rastafari always hail life. Together, *Herbs* and meditation inspire change/transcendence, as well as specific inventions, research, ideas, etc.

HEALING WITH HERBS

Rasta conceptions of health integrate physical and spiritual aspects of wellbeing so in some sense, all encounters with *Herbs* may be considered healing. In Jamaica, *Herbs* is profoundly medicinal and many Jamaican men, women and children take *Herbs* in the form of *ganja* tea, either daily or as needed.¹³ The tea contains many of the medicinal compounds of *Cannabis* and even THC may be extracted in water at a high enough temperature.¹⁴ Among its many other healing qualities, *ganja* tea helps children grow and do better in school.^{15,16} Like most Jamaican women, Rasta *Iyatas* prepare *Herbs* tea for themselves and their families. Congo-Nyah is living proof of the healing properties of a tonic made with *Herbs* that was administered to him by a local Rasta herbsman to cure his chronic asthma.

There is also evidence of medicinal benefits of smoked *Herbs* in Jamaica and elsewhere.^{13,17,18} When practiced regularly, meditation with *Herbs* provides general therapeutic effects of the plant combined with regular benefits of meditation and there is also a synergistic effect as *Herbs* aid the process of meditation. One way that smoking *Herbs* enhances the Tree of Life meditations is by increasing sensitivity to physical and nutritional needs (e.g. urges to stretch, eat specific foods, etc). In Rasta rituals *Herbs* as an incense is important for creating a healing atmosphere. The smoke may or may not be directly inhaled by all participants but in a small, enclosed shrine cannabinoids pass into the systems of all beings in the room. Rastas report that smoking *Herbs* takes the edge off of anger and helps people cope with stress more effectively. As spirits are heightened and a positive outlook is cultivated through *Herbs* and meditation, healing takes the form of relaxation, control over the emotions and knowledge of how to balance self-interests with the wellbeing of others.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS

The *insperiences* of ecstatic trance and *InI* consciousness that arise from meditation with *Herbs* share many characteristics with spiritual rituals that include other psychedelic sacraments. Komaromi has experienced *InI* consciousness as an emotionless state of stillness, embodied at a cellular level, through both Rasta meditations and in communal ayahuasca rituals.¹⁹ Gradually, with the aid of music, chanting and concentration on the breath, this state of ‘no-thought’ may also be entered without sacrament. As this stillness is accessed by emptying the mind of all images, words and emotions it makes us receptive to intuitions from the higher Self. Initiates in Rasta meditations learn to ask questions and manifest *I-vine* will through balance, harmony and *inity*. As such, *Herbs* heals in a holistic way that links human health with that of other living and etheric beings in a web of ecological and spiritual processes.

However, *Herbs* can also inspire particular ways of approaching the world that are not compatible with global consumer capitalism, which helps explain why this healing sacrament continues to be criminalised. The prohibition of *Herbs* has supported global surveillance, border control and incarceration industries while removing a significant challenge to the monopoly pharmaceutical companies hold over human health. Whether they smoke *Herbs* or not, Rastas share an interest in freeing the sacrament that has inspired and become symbolic of the movement, along with many other activists and (sub)cultural groups. While the medical benefits and relative safety of *Cannabis* and its derivatives have fuelled anti-prohibition movements in North America and Europe, Rastafari brings spirituality into debates about the legality of *Herbs* and other sacred medicines.

From the Rasta point of view, *Herbs* is more than recreational pleasure or even a medicinal plant, though its roles in leisure and medicine have wide recognition and appeal. *Herbs* is a way to connect the higher Self/The Source, in order to make wise decisions and realise our full potential.³ Rastafari offers a method of maximising the healing powers of *Herbs* while mitigating potential harms. Meditation with *Herbs* is not the only way to connect with the divine. However when people are free to cultivate and use *Herbs* wisely, this path to *InI* consciousness has both spiritual and earthly healing effects.

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