

4. Chapter 4

GABOR MATÉ MEETS JACQUES MABIT

Canadian doctor and author Gabor Maté has spent years working with addicts. Frustrated with the available options for treatment, he visits Takiwasi to learn more about the center's approach. This is the first conversation between doctors Jacques Mabit and Gabor Maté. It takes place in Mabit's office.

MABIT: Welcome to Takiwasi.

GABOR: Yeah. Thank you.

MABIT: I am very glad to receive you here. In the short time that you stay with us, I hope we can make some exchange, share some ideas and maybe some experiences.

GABOR: Yes, of course.

MABIT: How did you become interested in ayahuasca?

GABOR: Well, after I finished writing my book on addiction, a lot of people asked me if I knew about ayahuasca and addiction, and I didn't know anything. But so many people asked me that I finally thought I had to find out. Then an opportunity came up to try it in Vancouver, so I had the experience with Ayahuasca, two years ago this July. In one week I drank three times and immediately, I understood that this would help addiction because I saw both, the trauma that it made visible in people's past ... but also the beauty and the wholeness that everybody still had. And the plant shows you both. It shows you the dark and it shows you the light.

MABIT: Yes.

GABOR: And it shows it to you. [Snaps his fingers.] It would take years of therapy.

And so then I heard about you! [Laughter] That there's this French doctor who came to Peru and is using the plant and... [Encouraging Mabit to continue]

MABIT: My own experience has been one of progressive discovery. It was never my interest to treat addicts. I was never interested in it. I had no personal experience with these substances. I first arrived to Perú working for Doctors Without Borders. Through my work I came in contact with the local traditional healers.

GABOR: Can I just ask a question?

MABIT: Yes.

GABOR: You are classically trained Western doctor, correct?

MABIT: Yes.

GABOR: Me too, and I found after a while practicing that it is very limiting and narrow. Was that the experience that you had?

MABIT: Of course. *Si, si.* It was, it was this disappointment that led me to try ayahuasca, but not just ayahuasca. It is always important here at Takiwasi to place ayahuasca as one element within a context that includes other plants, psychotherapy, community life, there are many other elements that accompany ayahuasca.

GABOR: I understand now.

MABIT: So my interest became to see if I, trained as a Western medical doctor in this very academic background, could be able to actually access this world that the shamans would tell me about in terms, you know, that were metaphorical and mythological.

This meant breaking the Western scientific paradigm of objectively studying things from a distance. It meant to live the experience, personally. I started working with the *curanderos* and it was them who introduced me to

ayahuasca, which was also a surprise for me. In my first session I had a very similar experience to the one you had, where in a single night I discovered more about myself than in years of psychotherapy. I was convinced that it was a therapeutic instrument of superior qualities and that it had potential to be of great help, when used correctly.

It wasn't until later, actually two months later, that I had an extraordinarily strong ayahuasca experience in which I saw a very clear, very real vision. I found myself in front of a group of people that were like a ... like a jury, as if you were in an exam. They were sitting in front of me and they told me: "We are the guardian spirits of the jungle." Something that was completely outside my culture or my background.

They asked me: "What do you want?"

I said, "I want to learn this medicine."

So they consulted each other, it was a little bit funny, because they were turning to each other, whispering among themselves, and finally the "president" of this jury ...[Gabor laughs] ... he addressed me and said: "Okay you are authorized to enter this territory, but this is the path, the direction, that you will take." I looked and I saw myself, working with addicts.

GABOR: Hmm.

MABIT: It was very surprising to me, because I had no

interest in the treatment of addiction. I knew they were very difficult patients, very frustrating, and though, in principle, I did say yes, deep down I was resisting the very idea of doing it.

GABOR: So I have two questions. First: this was an Ayahuasca experience you had, was it?

MABIT: Yes.

GABOR: And secondly, in retrospect, when you look at yourself, might there have been addiction issues in your life? I don't necessarily mean with drugs, but just compulsions, that you weren't in control of... I'm just wondering why that experience came to you, like was there something personal to you that might have... that this experience might have somehow reflected or, or, or somehow represented?

MABIT: Yeah. I understood that later, that the main character of the pathological characteristics of addicts are similar to mine.

GABOR: Yeah. Me too. [Laughter] Mm-hm.

MABIT: So I put it off for three years. I continued doing other things, and this made me feel better. And after three years I said to myself that I had not started yet, because I thought maybe the whole vision was just a projection of mine. I sort of put it off, and then, after three years, during an ayahuasca session a woman appeared to me.

To me she seemed like the very embodiment, the spirit of Ayahuasca itself. She asked me: “Do you still want to continue learning?” And I said: “Yes, I would like to”. And she said: “Okay, but don’t forget about the work with the addicts”.

GABOR: Mmm.

MABIT: I tried to put it off and negotiate, I said: “Well I’m not ready, I’m not prepared yet and I don’t have enough knowledge.” And she told me: “After a baby spends nine months in the mother’s womb, it comes out. The baby is not ready, it’s not prepared, but it is the time. You have been like this for three years. Now is the time to come out.” That’s how I began.

GABOR: Interesting. Where I have a problem with ayahuasca...I don’t have a problem, but it is not complete for me, because intellectually I understand it, and emotionally and psychologically, I completely understand it – I think. But what you said about the spirit, the *mujer Madre* that comes to you. I see that you’re very much into the spiritual and mythological aspects, and I’ve never had that kind of experience with the plant.

MABIT: Mm hm.

GABOR: And I don’t know whether it’s my own limitation or my own tightness, maybe there’s something just not ready to open up to that, or maybe the plant just doesn’t want to talk to me, I don’t know what it is.

But I was actually hoping in coming here that I would ... not necessarily that it would happen, because I can't guarantee it, I can't make it happen. But I'd very much love to experience that side of it that you clearly have experienced, and which obviously enters your work. For me, it is more on a psychological and emotional side, and I don't think it's quite complete enough. I think that there is something else there that I would love to experience, and, and see.

MABIT: Mm hm. This is where, this is really where the gap between the Western mind, and the traditional world happens. It's in the experience that there's something beyond ourselves, beyond our psyche, beyond our personality, something that transcends, that is transcendental, transpersonal, and that goes beyond. This is something that can only be experienced. It's an experience that you have and then you know. If you haven't had it, it's very easy to place it in one psychological compartment or another, or in one complex or another of the personality.

GABOR: Now that we talk about it, I realize that I have had that experience, I've had the experience of "beyond the person" and, and in fact, the dissolution, the dissipation of the person. I've had that experience and I've had a picture of Jesus! Being a good Jewish boy, I've had Jesus come to me three times with Ayahuasca.

MABIT: Mmm hmm.

GABOR: But maybe, maybe that's how it shows up for me, I've never had that mother experience with ayahuasca, and I haven't had the snakes and the jungle creatures. That may be the problem for me: that I have a certain idea of what it should look like. Maybe I've had the experience, but it hasn't looked like what I think it should look like.

MABIT: The upbringing might have something to do with it, but also very important, I think, is the role of the ritual. The ritual is the interface between this world and that other world.

GABOR: Mm hmm.

MABIT: The ritual is what permits you to access that other world but, most importantly, allows you to come back to this world enriched by the experience. I think often what happens with addicts is that they take plants or similar substances, that give them access to the other worlds. But they're not going through the proper channels, so they have problems returning to the everyday world.

The ritual – and you can see it in ayahuasca's rituals – does the opposite; the beginning of the experience can be very difficult, because you find yourself submerged in this place. But then, when you return and you're done, you come back enriched, and you're, you're at peace, you don't think of taking more. Whereas, when you do it the disorderly or the addict way, you go through that world

and you come back disturbed, because you want to return right away.

GABOR: Yes, and what I gather is that you've created a context here. It's not just the experience, it's a whole: it's not just the ayahuasca experience, it is a complete experience.

MABIT: Yeah.

GABOR: And people here live in an environment where they are held; they're safe, not just immediately, but for a while afterwards too. So that's what's missing for us in Canada: I've worked with ayahuasca and it's been very dramatic, in what people are able to see and understand, but there's not the context, and there's not the holding context one finds here. So I'm trying to see how I can adapt what I learn here to my experience back there, but I'm sure a big part of it is just that you've got this ...place here, and you've got all these people working with you, and the environment that you're in ...and so, did you think to create that? Did that work create itself over time, or did you have it planned? How did this happen, that you got this place here?

MABIT: Most everything that you see here was inspired from visions or from dreams, which to me are the same thing. The spiritual world is populated by...we can call them entities, and these entities give instructions, commands. Everything here, the structure of the ritual, was not my own making; had I made it myself ... I would

have made it shorter, I would have made it easier for me! [laughs] But this was received knowledge, all the way down to the shape of some of the buildings. Everything you find here, the songs, even the treatment processes itself, was received. Of course, we contributed many important things from our own knowledge and experience... but most of the things in place here were actually inspired, or arrived through visions. Maybe there's a possibility that during ayahuasca here you'll also have inspirations, that somehow could help or improve your work.

GABOR: Mmm.

MABIT: Another thing to remember is that ayahuasca itself is a feminine force, it takes part during night in darkness. The *Maloka* is like a uterus, and ayahuasca is like a giving and nourishing force, it gives you things, teachings. Now, the next step after receiving these things, is to put them to work, to give them structure, to build them, to construct them; this is the masculine force, the organizing principle.

GABOR: Mmm hmm.

MABIT: And for this, we use the *dieta* plants. These are the plants that help you construct and build. Then you start to build a foundation for remedy. It goes back and forth, you start to receive things from ayahuasca and the *dieta* plants start telling you how to make it, how to build it. Then you consult again with ayahuasca and again you

build it with the *dieta* plants. Our patients, when they finish their process, if you ask them what was the most important part, the most revealing part of their process, they always say the *dieta*, not the ayahuasca.

GABOR: So the *dieta* seems more important than the ayahuasca experience itself. How do you explain that?

MABIT: Ayahuasca is more like a lamp that lets you see the direction.

GABOR: Yes.

MABIT: But then, you find yourself back in the daylight, back in the day and you've only seen the direction...but not the steps to take. The *dieta* plants actually build change. Ayahuasca shows, but it doesn't build structures. It's the *dieta* plants that help build structures. When you're in a *dieta*, you spend eight days alone, in isolation, while you're taking these plants. That's when you really begin to see how this will come, how this will take place in the real world. Not only that, this structure is built, not only physiologically, inside the body, but also mentally, and internally. This is how you come out of the *dieta*, with this built structure: and you're ready to put these things into practice.

So, for example, with a person who smokes a lot of marijuana and lives in their head, with the mind constantly outside of the body, we would prescribe the *dieta* plants that will root them...back into the earth, back

into the ground. This change actually takes place, you see this structure emerge when the person comes out of the *dieta*.

GABOR: Okay.

MABIT: Western culture is very dependent on words, explanations, reasoning – and in this sense, psychotherapy, especially in terms of the work with symbols, is really valuable when working with ayahuasca. Because some ayahuasca visions are very clear and don't need interpretation, but others are very symbolic or metaphorical, and require help – from someone who will help you interpret and understand exactly what they mean. Otherwise there's a danger that the person's self, the ego of the person, would actually feed on this, taking the metaphorical as factual. And the vision will just be used to feed the ego, in a sort of inflation of the ego that can also occur with ayahuasca.

GABOR: I understand that. In Canada, people have been using ayahuasca in ceremonies for years, but missing any kind of processing, or psychological integration of the experience, and that's what I started to do...What's missing for me is the context, what's missing for me is the follow-up, the kind of, the *dieta*, and so on. I'm really here to learn and to think how can I apply this knowledge to my situation back home. Because, maybe some day we'll have a center like this up there, but that's hard to imagine right now-

MABIT: Mmm hmm.

GABOR: And I don't want to wait for the future, I want to learn what I can now because I can see how helpful and how powerful it is. So I need to ... I need to deepen my experience of it, and see what I can learn from you, even if I can't create what you've created here, but what can I take that I can still use to make that experience more healing and deeper for people.

MABIT: An idea came to my mind while you were speaking. The real king of the Amazonian medicinal plants is not ayahuasca but tobacco. It is really the master shamanic plant. Because it is legal and it's allowed in the West, there's some people already who are working with it Europe. Tobacco's somewhat easier to handle and easier to get. But in order to work, to really work with tobacco, you have to work with it both in its liquid form and in its solid form.

GABOR: Mmm.

MABIT: Tobacco has been very, very helpful with our patients. The effects are very, very powerful, and it's a very interesting plant to work with. If one could imagine working with ayahuasca and tobacco, tobacco is somewhat easier to handle. The *dieta* is very, very delicate and even dangerous technology, you have to learn a long time, but tobacco is easier to manage.

GABOR: Okay. That's not a thought I ever had: when I think of tobacco, I think of cigarettes.

MABIT: That's a good illustration of what happens with addiction. Addiction is a typical Western pathology. It didn't exist in traditional cultures until Westerners arrived. People drank fermented corn drinks, yucca beer. They would get drunk during a celebration, and that was it. There was no alcoholism. With tobacco, similarly, there was no addiction.

So the Western pathology is to transform, profane, the use of these sacred plants by using them without a context, without ritual, without preparation, without intention. Transforming the plants, their active principles; and finally, this degenerated their meaning, inverted it.

GABOR: I understand exactly what you are saying: the Western way has been to take the sacred plants and make them into addictive substances, and then to become afraid of them! Part of the problem about talking about ayahuasca in Canada is people saying "Well, it's a drug." And they think of it as a drug. That's the only context they know. Western man can only think of it as a drug, and of course there's many bad experiences with drugs that people have had, and so they can only understand it in terms of something negative or dangerous.

MABIT: Yeah ...

GABOR: We've really lost that connection to the healing

power of plants. Not just plants, we've lost our connection to healing, period.

I'm just laughing here because, if a group of Canadian or French doctors heard this conversation, they would immediately call the psychiatrists and have us both committed to some psychiatric institution, you know?

[Laughs]

GABOR: Well, I want to thank you very much for this conversation and for welcoming me here. It has already been a great teaching experience, and I look forward to the week or several days that I'll be here, I'm sure I'll go away much richer than I came.

MABIT: It's my pleasure. I also want to thank you for the confidence in coming all the way from Canada to meet a crazy man in the jungle, it shows that you have an open spirit.

We can talk and theorize all we want. But what we really want, clinically, as doctors, is to prove that a patient was doing badly, took the treatment and now is doing well. In Takiwasi we don't have 100% success rate but, yes, we can prove a rate of success that is better than most conventional centers. That is the idea behind what we do, and to let it be known so that other doctors, in Canada and other places, can be inspired by this model which we did not invent, but only received from the indigenous people.

5. Chapter 5

GABOR'S TOBACCO PURGE

After undergoing a rather difficult tobacco purge at Takiwasi, Gabor meets with Mabit to discuss. This is the transcription of their conversation.

MABIT: How are you?

GABOR: I feel wonderful, wonderful as my tummy explodes...

MABIT: Tired?

GABOR: Dizzy and queasy, and...I did the tobacco for – umm – the thing...

MABIT: The idea is for you to get know tobacco juice directly. As you can see, it is very different from smoking.

There are three main characteristics, three aspects that tobacco brings.

GABOR: Three characteristics?

MABIT: Yes. Strength. Protection.

GABOR: Protection ...

MABIT: ...and clarity of mind.

GABOR: Ok.

MABIT: But before getting these three things you will feel just the opposite. You feel weak, unprotected, and a little bit confused...

GABOR: Ok, in that case it's working because I feel all of those! [Laughing]

MABIT: You have to rest for the night, don't eat anything, nothing at all. Tomorrow morning you will feel the beneficial effects, that's the process.

Did you have any visions or messages during the process?

GABOR: No.

MABIT: But you came into it (the purging) easily.

GABOR: Very easily.

MABIT: Great.

GABOR: It came right away. Well, it came several times, but in the beginning it came right away.

MABIT: It's a little bit of preparation for tomorrow's ayahuasca session. Now you have to rest. Do you feel any pain?

GABOR: No pain. I mean, I believe what you say, I just feel not good right now, but that's okay.

MABIT: So you go home and take a shower and just rest. Probably, you might have some dreams, significant dreams.

GABOR: So that's it?

MABIT: Yes. It is OK. Do you need anything else?

GABOR: No.

MABIT: Take a shower and if you have any problem, just call me.

GABOR: Okay, thank you.

NEXT DAY, IN MABIT'S OFFICE

MABIT: How was the tobacco purge?

GABOR: A bit difficult. There were two other people doing it with me. I saw them drink these little cups. Then

it was my turn, I go up, and there is this 3 litre jar for me!
[Laughs]

It seemed to me that it took me a long time to finish it, and every time I looked in the jar there was still as much left as in the beginning. As soon as I drank some it made me throw up very quickly. I felt nauseated and dizzy. I had to lie down. It took me a little while to throw everything up. I felt better, but still weak, and I certainly was wondering why I was doing this to myself. I'd be interested to hear what the theory is.

I felt comfortable when I went to bed, but I didn't sleep very well. I kept waking up, and at one point I took some plant medicine to help me sleep. I also read and listened to music.

This morning I feel very light, calm, and physically good. I like the way I feel. There is an absence of heaviness and no fatigue. My head feels calm. The purge is nothing I'd be eager to do again any time soon. If you offered it to me right now I'd say thank you very much, *muchas gracias*, but no [laughs] It was an interesting experience, difficult, and it has left me feeling very good. That's what I can tell you.

MABIT: It's one of the few purges that the patients here ask for, they ask themselves for it, because of the benefits. As I told you yesterday, there are three basic effects of tobacco: mental clarity and strength, a feeling of being present and calm, and a feeling of protection.

GABOR: So, mental clarity and strength, and you say protection, what do you mean by protection?

MABIT: Protection from all exterior influences or energies, from absorbing things through contact with others, the energetic or psychological negativity from other people, negative environments with a lot of noise or disturbances, things like that.

There is always this process with the plants; before reaching the goal, one goes through the inverse effects. It is like expelling weakness, mental confusion, and a feeling of being unprotected, weak, or fragile. When they finally metabolize and eliminate these things; in a few hours, or by the next day they begin to perceive the positive effects of the plant.

GABOR: So, in the beginning, you feel the opposite, you feel more vulnerable, less strong, more weak, and more confused mentally, and then when the body metabolizes it ... OK.

MABIT: It is partly for this reason that you've been unable to sleep. Tobacco is a stimulant, creating mental acceleration and wakefulness until the next morning, when one goes beyond those effects and attains a mental clarity.

GABOR: My question is: I like it, how do I maintain it? How long does it last, this effect?

MABIT: There are two ways we use tobacco: The way you took it, diluted. We give it diluted because if the person drinking reaches their limit they can stop drinking. The other possibility is to take a small but very concentrated dose. In that case you have to drink water afterwards, all the tobacco is already inside your stomach, so you have to drink water to help purge it. At the beginning, we prefer to give it diluted so that the person can decide when they want to stop.

Besides taking tobacco as a purgative, you can also take it in small amounts, spread over time. In this case, you take a small amount of tobacco, about a cigarette worth, and put it into water to make an infusion, that is drunk at night. That small amount is enough, there will be no vomiting or purgative effects, but often there will be dreams at night.

The next morning there is mental clarity again, a feeling that things have returned to their place. You can do that long-term, but not permanently, you must space the doses out. This allows people – who are generally in a psychotherapeutic process – to clarify their minds, make better decisions, feel more centred, and more present in their time and space.

GABOR: So, every night?

MABIT: Each person has to find their own rhythm, it can be two or three nights in a row, then let 15 days pass. It can be once a week or for ten days straight, and then stop for a month. It's a personal thing. Also, if it bothers you

at night because you can't sleep, you can take it in the morning. This must always be done with respect to certain rules with food: you can't eat pork, alcohol, or spicy foods. You must keep a healthy diet, in a calm environment. It's not for a night that you are going to have sex or go to a party.

GABOR: What about ordinary or commercial cigarettes, the ones you buy in a store?

MABIT: No, the tobacco we use is a pure tobacco from this area, which has no additives or pesticides. Occasionally they add some grain alcohol so that it doesn't dry too much or get fungus. But no, it has to be good quality tobacco; as a matter of fact commercial tobacco is completely excluded.

GABOR: So, no commercial tobacco.

MABIT: No. However, it's interesting to observe that you took a strong tobacco yesterday, and today you don't want to take more. With tobacco juice, in liquid or solid form there is no addiction, as opposed to smoked tobacco. It's the same plant, but it's the way it's prepared and consumed that changes it.

Now, yesterday you underwent a physical cleansing, but at the same time, with the ritual, there was a cleansing on a different level – energetic – that will have effects and consequences at a psychological level, and eventually at a spiritual level.

GABOR: So just a cigarette in a glass of water, for how long? A few hours and then you drink it?

MABIT: There is no set time, just as long as it isn't ongoing consumption. It is toxic and strong, and since there's a level of mental stimulation, one must watch out that a person with addictive tendencies will not begin to use it as a new form of stimulus, in a permanent way, with toxic consequences. It should always be used with a specific therapeutic purpose, because the person is stressed, confused, affected by a situation, or feeling tired. This is to help straighten their path, to center them again, things like that, but not in a continued fashion. No plant should be taken in a continued fashion.

GABOR: So the effect that I have today, I know everyone is different, but is there some general idea of how long I can expect it to last?

MABIT: Many people, when they drink tobacco, have visions, insights, or very clear thoughts similar to an ayahuasca session. Their experience can be less visual and colourful, but with very important integrations and understandings. This is not predictable. The same person might experience this sometimes and others, not. A different person might not get it, but there is the possibility of having true insights.

When we do it for people who come just for tobacco, we prepare them beforehand. The ritual is much more elaborate, and there is an integration talk afterwards. In

those cases, a lot more material comes out, because this is very dependent on the ritual. In your case we did it just as a preparation for an ayahuasca session, as a cleansing so the ayahuasca can penetrate deeper and you will be better prepared for the ayahuasca session tonight.

GABOR: Good.

MABIT: What you expelled during the purge, at the physical and emotional level, that has been eliminated: no reason for it to return, unless you go back to the same life experiences, so that will hold. But in a therapeutic process one finds, sooner or later, a new level of difficulties, of problems not dealt with. So then again one will feel a little bit bad, one can do another purge, be it tobacco or something else, and that will bring back a certain calmness, and thus one continues, step by step, little by little.

GABOR: So, when you say what I purged, you don't mean the physical stuff that I threw up, you mean psychological and emotional stuff. What is your understanding of what that is?

MABIT: I think there are three levels of understanding. One is the classic psychoanalytic understanding: I am aware, I speak, I have a psychological panorama of my life, I understand the broad aspects about my parents, my family. That is the first point, which is what conventional psychoanalysis deals with.

After that, there is the psycho-corporal part, where the body begins to be present, not just for the verbalizations, understandings, or the rational, but the body begins to be solicited through emotions, crying, screaming, sadness. There are approaches that blend the mental, rational integration with the emotional and physical integration. That is the second level; this includes a lot of the new psychotherapeutic techniques.

But there is a third level, that in my understanding is often ignored, and that the plants can affect: that is the somatic memories, the profound integration, at the cellular level, which is lived, experienced as such, as a profound inscription that contains the archives of everything that happened to us in our life, and beyond that, the archives of our ancestors, our roots, our lineages, and beyond that, all of humanity, the universe, etc.

I think the body is fundamental in the approach of Traditional Amazonian Medicine as we practice it. Going all the way to the most profound, and most subconscious, somatic inscriptions. Many people who come here have done psychotherapy and understand the broad issues of their lives at an intellectual level. They often also have done gestalt therapy, rebirthing, or holotropic breathwork, so they have cried, and lived things emotionally, and they think that was it. When they take the plants again they go back to the old problems, daddy, mommy, all of that, but with a more profound, somatic and

spiritual connection, which is: what is the meaning of all my suffering?

At the same time, there's a deeper aspect, the physical and somatic level. There, we find the doorway to the spiritual world, the deep, transcendental, universal meaning of our own life, and of life in general.

Ayahuasca has a particular role in this field, which is to allow the lecture of what happens at this level of profound somatic memory. After all the cleansings, all the dietas, patients drink ayahuasca again, and then they can visualize what happened at this profound level. I take ayahuasca more in that sense, as a reader, to read those somatic archives.

Ayahuasca also has purgative effects, but the purge plants and the dietas are the ones who work at this profound somatic level; the ayahuasca is more a way of visualizing, and being aware of what happened.

GABOR: So then I have three questions. First it seems to me that shamans who developed these techniques and found these plants, obviously they were not working at the psychoanalytical level, or even on the emotional processing level, they must have been working at the cellular memory, spiritual levels, that's what must have drawn them to these plants. Would that be true?

MABIT: Yes, *curanderos* or shamans are not generally interested in the psychological part. For them the body

is first, everything else follows as a logical consequence. That's why after an ayahuasca session with a curandero, he doesn't ask, what did you see? How was it? What did you feel? He doesn't ask any of this. He asks: Did you throw up? Did you have diarrhea?

That's what he's interested in, because if that happened then the patient is purged, got cleansed, the rest will come by itself. You don't find the Western processing, the fixation on the individuation process, as Jung called it. For them this is accessory, an extra. What's important is the body. They speak like that; they speak of themselves in the third person. They say: my body tells me this, my body is afraid, or my body is calm. They don't say, I am afraid, I am calm... The conceptual part is secondary, what is important is what is inside, in the soma.

GABOR: Which leads me to my next question. People living in nature, in the Amazon, are living much closer to their bodies. In industrialized Western cities, people are divorced from their bodies, their psychological lives get very very complicated, roles are more confused. People don't know who they are and there is less of a sense of belonging.

It gets very jumbled up, so the kind of psychological work that's not necessary in the more jungle setting, seems to me to become very important in the setting that most people live in today – at least in North America, probably

here in the cities as well. So I have another question related to that, but first I want to hear your thoughts.

MABIT: This is the reason I believe that Westerners absolutely need their process to be accompanied, while they put their experiences in words in order to integrate them. That disassociation between the body and – we'll say 'the mind', to simplify things – needs a connection through words.

In the traditional Amazonian world, people know ayahuasca, they know its mythologies, its stories, they have a context that helps them put their experiences in their place. They know what the experience is about. The next day they will go back to work, to a life that's not very different from what happens with ayahuasca or in the *dietas*. The *dietas* are a small difference for them; they eat almost the same things, except without salt.

For us, a *dieta* is eating things we never ate, living in a completely different context. For Westerners there is almost a necessity for a translation, a decoding of the experience. They need to place the experience within the Western context, also so they will avoid taking the information that comes from ayahuasca at face value, when the language of ayahuasca is metaphorical, analogical, a symbolic language. So it's necessary to make a lecture because there can be a bad interpretation, a poor understanding of the contents, and that can certainly be dangerous.

Now, indigenous cultures who haven't had much contact with the West don't function as we do – in a process of individuation, where the individual is important, my life is important, me as a social being. They work in a community context, the community is important first, so that's the first thing they look for; how is the community, the family, the clan to which I belong, doing? That's what they're interested in, and that's what they try to harmonize. We Westerners are not so interested in that: what we are interested in is: am I going to have a job? Am I OK with my wife?

Generally, we're only interested in society at large in a secondary way. So the approach is different. We're aware that there's a process of individuation: I have to work on myself, I have to understand myself. This generally wasn't the problem for indigenous cultures – what they needed was to be well aligned with nature and well aligned with the community, all the rest follows.

GABOR: So there's more separation in industrialized societies, people are separated from the community and people are not connected, very much on their own.

MABIT: The priority is different.

GABOR: Yeah, I understand. So if I could, I'd like to mention to you what I perceive are some differences in my understanding of things that I've seen here. I'm not looking for an argument, just an exchange of views. I've talked to a couple of patients here who are going through

their process, about their experience and so on, and what struck me speaking to both of them is relating to something you mentioned. The psychoanalytic tradition is all about early experiences.

I don't mean to speak from a Freudian point of view, but if you read my book, you will see that I very much believe that the addiction is there to soothe an emotional pain. The brain circuits that are implicated in the addiction are actually developed early in life. It's not about what happens to you when you are 20 or 25, but rather when you are two, three, or five years old. That's when the brain and the emotions are organized.

It struck me that, when I brought up that issue with both of these patients, and I don't know how representative they are of the approach here, because it was only two – it was news to them. Looking at the early relationships wasn't part of their counseling. One thought it all started when his father was 20, and the other maybe when he was a teenager and his parents got divorced. I think it starts much earlier than that. So that's one difference I noticed in the psychological approach that you might have here. I'm wondering how you might see that.

MABIT: Yes, I agree completely that addiction is a symptom of something that happened earlier, often much much earlier, not just early childhood, but even during birth, during pregnancy, and even before. So I don't know

what you talked about with them, but this is an approach that is present here, that we try to see.

Now, the procedure that we follow here in Takiwasi is that the patient must discover these things by himself, so they might be revealed to him through ayahuasca, etc., without suggesting that this or that thing might have been it. This is done progressively, up to the point that we're capable. Yes, there are patients who relive very early experiences through the plants and ayahuasca, and we work on that, but how we accompany their process depends on each individual patient. The focus here is that the patient will find answers by himself, through the plants.

An important aspect is that our clinical experience shows that patients will discover certain things with us, but there's a certain part they will not discover. It will not come to the patient's awareness; however, the patients still heals. The patient doesn't need to see all and understand all. There are certain phenomena of profound psychological self-healing that do not require awareness, or if they do it will be lived in a very symbolic way. For example, patients will drink ayahuasca and see they have to perform a certain ritual. They are creating a symbolic healing. We do it with them and find that it is healing indeed, but the patient does not have the capacity to understand.

An example is the carved virgin that you saw, which came from a patient's vision. We made it a reality. We

could have also tried to interpret it. What does the hard rock represent? What does the carving of such hard rock symbolize? What does it mean to place a virgin there, and then to leave a ring that he crafted while in jail? All of those elements were in the patient's vision. But this patient didn't have access to the symbolic interpretation, he didn't have this capability, so we will make it real, live the ritual, build the vision in real life. This is operative, it works, even without the patient's awareness of what it means in his life.

GABOR: I agree that intellectual understanding is not the same as healing, not at all. Second, I agree that there is a healing process that occurs inside everybody regardless of the intellect, and that is the most important thing, to give that process support, not what I say or my interpretations. I totally understand. Still, my approach is different, in what I don't tell people, but I ask them to look at themselves.

It's my understanding that the past lives in the present, in fact that's the only thing that's wrong. If people could be in their present without their past, nobody would have any problem. Instead, the past shows up in their present in how they think, what they believe, their bodies, how they interact, interpret the world, and perceive things. I want patients to see how their past is in the way of their present; I just want them to see that. That is my approach, and I do that very very quickly.

The ayahuasca really helps me with that because it makes people much more open. In Canada, even though I don't have a clinic like this, I don't have the *purgas* and the plants, it's not what I am working with, it's a different context entirely; I find that people will have these ayahuasca experiences that are really deep for them, but they can process them afterward if they can talk about them.

Very often ayahuasca gives people an experience of their past in their present, it will show them: this is exactly the way it was for you. But they won't necessarily see that until they are helped to. They are given some interpretation, or at least they are helped to examine it.

I appreciate everything else that you do here, but it is just not available to me in Canada. I don't have access to any of this. So we have to make it work with what we have up there, and I don't mean personally. What we have is the ayahuasca. So I work with these curanderos and what I find is that it really opens people up, which means that the work I do with people becomes much deeper, quicker, more efficient, and more transformative.

I am wondering what you think about just working with the ayahuasca, not in this kind of long-term residential context, but just with what we can take from it, which is occasional, a few days at a time, over a long time, and so on. Whether you think that's potentially useful, or whether you have some concerns about that.

MABIT: I think it would be interesting, and useful, but not just with ayahuasca, because purges can also be done there. *Dietas* are more complicated. Purges, tobacco, and ayahuasca work very well, even if it's occasional, as long as they are done within the context of psychotherapeutic contention.

Our problem is the opposite: we have the plants, the center, all the traditional medicine, but we have many difficulties finding experienced therapists with a solid background and the necessary psychotherapeutic tools, who want to come here to stay and live. We have to work with a small team of young psychologists, because they're the only ones who can spend two or three years in the jungle, in difficult conditions with a small salary.

It would be ideal if we could bring together people with experience, like you have there, together with a proper use of the plants, then the process becomes empowered very quickly. There's always the need for a proper time for integration. We are establishing relationships with groups in Spain and South American countries so people can follow their patients and also come for a month or two, for a temporal interchange. This will allow them to use both techniques in two different spaces.

GABOR: So what you are saying is that the *dietas* are more difficult, but the *purgas* are possible. Thank you for that. I will look into it because the people that I work with know about the *purgas*. I will speak with them about that.

MABIT: I think there's an interesting aspect to the plants. For people who have a problem with verbalization or a hard time speaking or expressing themselves, the plants allow them to enter straight into psychic material without the use of words. Very often in people with a tendency to addiction there is a type of hyper-symbolization. They find working with symbols very easy. They live it, but they cannot express it. There is a very interesting application of plants, specifically for those types of patients

GABOR: There is a noticeable Christian orientation here. Songs about Jesus, you make the sign of the cross, etc. Well, you are living in a Catholic country, obviously. It's not a problem for me personally. Even though I'm Jewish, I had an experience with Jesus the other night. I really get it I think...I think I get it. But does that create a problem with some people?

In Canada for example, a lot of young people were abused in schools run by the Church, so they associate religion with something bad. It's hard for them to look at Jesus because between them and Jesus is the Church, and their experience wasn't that good. I wonder if that's a problem here at all, and if you ever deal with that.

MABIT: That is one more reason for reconciliation, one more reason to explore this question and find a way to disassociate what is the interference from parental figures, be they teachers, priests, or parents themselves, who transmit a form of religiosity that is inadequate,

dictatorial, or dogmatic – and to be able to get to the essence.

We find that not just here, also for example with Jews who arrive from an education that was very stiff and rigid, they have the same problem. They hurt. The question is not as much one type of church or religion or the other, but how it was lived. This is precisely the opportunity ayahuasca presents, for many people with a Judeo-Christian background: to reconcile themselves with their traditions.

That's one of the big problems of today's society: the desacralization of society due to a bad interpretation, poor teaching, or a bad transmission of the contents of a faith. The contents were transmitted intellectually, or as a list of social norms, instead of as a spiritual essence connected to the body.

Addiction, I don't know if you will agree: We find – to put it very simply – an excess of the mother figure, and a deficiency of the father figure. It's the father figure that makes the religious affiliation, which is the lineage. I exist in function of my lineage, I belong to a line, to a filiation, so I have to recognize paternal sources, fathers.

GABOR: In the ceremony the other night, right after I purged, you came to me and put your hand on my head, and you did the blowing (tobacco), the sign of the cross, and whatever else. When you did these things, I had an experience of father. Actually you brought my father and the memory of my father putting his hand on my head

and blessing me, but it was a deeper experience than I remembered, because what I remembered was a slightly embarrassing experience.

My father, not being very religious, was trying to carry out a ritual, and I not being religious at all as a child, received it with a bit of embarrassment. When you came up, and you did this blessing, I experienced my father really giving me a blessing, and I understood that underneath his embarrassment and my embarrassment, there really was a blessing from my father.

So I get what you are saying about the missing father figure, and sometimes it's not that the father wasn't there physically, but that there was some block in the way that leaves a big hole, and the addiction comes behind and tries to fill that hole. So that was very strong for me the other night.

MABIT: That's true. Precisely, it's necessary with addict patients, to reconnect with, to reconcile themselves with their filiation, and with the biological father, what paternity means through him. This is very important. And there has to be a transmission of meaning. One of the functions of the father, the paternal function, is protection from distance, not the protection from closeness of the mother.

GABOR: What I understand is that ayahuasca is seen as a mother. People who I've worked with have told me that it was very gentle with them. They expected something

much harsher, but it was very maternal, soft, and teaching something like a patient, kind mother would.

MABIT: Ayahuasca is a mother, that's why it needs masculine energy to balance it out. It's for this reason that, in my view, there are so few women *ayahuasqueras*: because ayahuasca needs a masculine presence, or the presence of plants like tobacco which are masculine. The objective is to balance the masculine and feminine sides.

The risk of taking only ayahuasca, when the therapists are not very masculine or very structured, is that it gets too feminized, people begin to take only ayahuasca, and they end up with a collection of experiences, but they cannot build on them. You need an objective, an intention, a direction, in the work with ayahuasca, otherwise it will just be just a collecting of experiences.

Now, the question of filiation again. The filiation is the paternal line, especially for men, so the therapist has to assume the paternal role in this case, and the paternal function, therapeutically, is protection, but protection from a distance, not the maternal protection that is enveloping. The father is the one who gives the child *la palabra fecunda*, the word that's fruitful, fecundated with meaning.

The father is the one who gives meaning to life, he transmits to his son or daughter that life has a meaning, that beyond the daily problems and difficulties, life is

worth it. "I believe in something." This is what the father has to transmit to his children, that beyond what is visible he has his sights set on something higher, something invisible.

Even when the transmission is poorly done, be it Catholic, Jewish, or something else, there is at least a baggage, an inheritance that can be worked on, a sort of raw material. Where we find many very difficult problems is when the parents didn't transmit anything at all to the children; usually because they wanted to let them be free, let them decide on their own when they became adults. In those cases where there is no fertilization of that spiritual soil, no transmitted word, there we find dissociative problems, of the schizophrenic type, psychotic, because the subject built himself like a tower that supposedly protects a treasure: but when one looks inside, we find there is nothing, emptiness. That person exists in their defenses, in their resistances, and one cannot touch those resistances because the person collapses in a psychotic implosion, for example. We have to come from above, spiritual life, and to sow some meaning, some hope, some light, a seed, and let that grow, and then we can touch their defenses.

The question of the paternal filiation has to do with this: one has to sow a seed. This is the "priestly" function of the therapist, who needs to be not just a doctor of the body, and a psychological doctor, but also a "priest", someone who dares to formulate a word that has meaning, that gives meaning for the patient.

As a therapist within a ritual context I have to make understood, to manifest, to signify, what I believe in. That doesn't mean that the patient has to adhere to it, to affiliate with it, or to believe in it. The patient receives it as an inheritance, and then transforms it, analyzes it, criticizes it, throws it away, whatever he wants. But I try to give them the *palabra fecunda*, the word that is impregnated with meaning. And this is what the addicts lack: someone, a paternal figure, who tells them: life has a meaning, life is worth it, the difficulties in life have a finality that is positive, that illuminates.

GABOR: That brings up two thoughts for me. One is about that father: I didn't bring my kids what you said, because I didn't have it myself. So that meant I had to work very hard with my adult children to give them this direction that I didn't give to them before, which included sending them down here to Peru to do ayahuasca. My two older sons, I have three children. So I understand exactly what you are saying there. It's never gone, but it's so much easier if you do it right the first time.

The second thing is just a quick thing, in one case that I worked with ayahuasca in groups, which I have done a few times now; one person afterwards had a psychotic break. He had a history of psychosis before, I didn't take a good enough history, I wasn't the one taking the history, but we didn't make sure. In general, would you work with anyone with plants if they had psychotic problems in their past?

MABIT: We also do a previous evaluation to see if there is a previous history of psychotic problems in the patients or their families. The problem is to define what is psychotic: certain patients, especially with cannabis, will have a cannabinoid psychosis that in my opinion is not a psychosis but an intoxication, a strong intoxication, but if the patient is detoxified the supposed psychosis disappears – so there's a question of definition at this level. However, if a patient has a true psychotic mental structure, I don't give ayahuasca to this person. I think it's not the proper approach. We don't treat psychotic patients here, we don't have the appropriate context of contention. As I said before, where there is a psychotic context there is a strong spiritual void, and often with a transgenerational transmission of previous problems. There are family secrets that are transmitted without having been verbalized. In the first generational line there is a strong transgression, a crime, a treason, a rape, that everyone knows but no one speaks about. In the second generation they know there is a secret, but they don't know what the secret is. In the third generation no one knows there is a secret, but subconsciously, it's still active. Those people will live with the feeling of being invested with something that doesn't belong to them, but they don't know this. They live it as their own. That's where dissociation comes into play: I am myself, and at the same time there is something that seems to be mine, but fundamentally isn't. So who am I? – This is the dissociation phenomenon. Generally, when we find a dissociative pattern, we find transgenerational problems.

Here the ritual is important, because it connects with the spiritual, with what is transgenerational, and beyond that what goes to human nature, God, etc. There it is purely spiritual: for this reason, in my opinion, many pathologies and many cases of addiction cannot be cured without approaching the spiritual. I mean spiritual in the semantic sense, spiritual as in: what makes meaning.

GABOR: Which in a culture where people are still very connected to their ancestors, must be much easier than in cultures where people don't even know who their ancestors are.

MABIT: Inside the ayahuasca session itself, people can approach that psychotic nucleus that we all have, because everyone has a family with problems, and people can live through a dissociative experience, where one approaches feelings of madness, or death, physical death or psychological death. But as long as it takes place within the contention of the ritual, there are no problems, quite the opposite: that madness is being expressed, but is being contained by the supra-order that the therapist puts in the ritual that contains the experience, allowing for an integration afterwards. When the session is over, or the next day, the person reintegrates to life, having touched areas that are very difficult and dangerous, terrifying, but they are at peace.

Now, if the psychotic attack occurs after the ayahuasca session, that means that either the person had a previous

history of psychotic effects and had not been properly screened, or there was an improper contention on the therapist's part, or there was a transgression by the person, like smoking cannabis, breaking the rules. As long as you maintain a very straight path, nothing happens, this is why there is a certain rigor at Takiwasi, and sometimes we are labelled as rigid. To me, it's rigor.

I had the case of a patient who had a psychotic episode in his past and didn't tell us, because he was afraid if he spoke the truth he wouldn't be allowed to drink ayahuasca. He came here, took the plants, and in the post-ayahuasca he was very quiet. During the session I could see he had an important problem, mentally, so I did a healing on him during every session, to contain him. Instead he imagined that he could communicate telepathically with me, that in the future he was going to be a shaman, and that every healing I did to him during a session was because I knew he was a chosen one, that I was teaching him telepathically. So he wouldn't speak. When he left he assumed he had been initiated by me. But he never spoke about his psychotic attacks or his experiences during the sessions. He went back to his country and had a psychotic episode, began shamanizing people on the street, and ended up in the hospital. He recovered, and now he wants to keep taking plants, so in time he was able to integrate the experience...but I don't want to repeat those types of things.

GABOR: I have certainly seen people, under ayahuasca,

have an experience that might be called a bad trip, but there is nothing bad about it, it's just something uncomfortable coming up that they don't understand, so they feel lost and scared. If the context is right, if they can be helped to metabolize and integrate the experience and understand it – it might be, as you say, a healing experience. So I'm not afraid of people having bad trips, there are no bad trips, there are just trips, it's a question of what there is to be learned.

I have another question then, two more actually. In many of the places where people go to treat addictions or have their addictions treated, the addiction is seen as an enemy, as a bad thing, and of course we all know the bad things that addictions do, and that's clear and that's why people need healing. But of course, I also understand that the addiction didn't come to one accidentally, that as you say, there is always an antecedent history. So the addiction serves a purpose, it gives some people a sense of power, it gives some people a sense of love, it gives them a sense of pain relief, a sense of connection, in the sense of vitality. So I encourage people to make friends with their addictions, not to invite them to keep happening, but in the way you'd recognize that this person who is trying to do something good for me, but not in the right way. I don't have to accept their advice, in fact thank you, you are not very bright, you are not very smart friend, but you tried to help.

Also the defenses that people develop, I was talking to

a guy yesterday who was talking about his pride and that he needs humility. Well of course, his pride was his defense against being very vulnerable when he was small, so rather than seeing it as a bad thing, seeing its value. In other words seeing the function that the addiction, or the psychological defense played in their life, and appreciating it, and looking for other ways to have their needs met, but not to reject it, to criticize themselves for it, and make it an enemy. The point is that if you treat it like a friend, you want it to go away, but it is not an enemy that you have to fight, that's what appeals to me, that is what I work with. I want to know what you think about that.

MABIT: I think that addiction, which usually first arises at ages 12, 13, 14, is a legitimate attempt of self-medication. It is an attempt to find an answer to a certain suffering. Now it's a peculiar attempt, because it's an attempt to look at something that's beyond the visible. Some people do sports, play music as a way out, but here there's an aspiration to something more, something else, something transcendental. That is a peculiarity of addiction, that is the search for answers in the invisible. That's why I believe there is a spiritual aspiration which is already present there, however poorly conducted it has been.

So our position here is that the patient, or person who consumes drugs, was making a legitimate attempt, not only because they needed the drugs at the moment, to solve a problematic situation... also, because I believe it's

a human need, to see beyond reality, to access the world of meaning, other levels of consciousness. I don't think this is a luxury, or a possible experience. I believe it's a fundamental human necessity, not just to eat, to sleep, and to reproduce, but also the need to find meaning, and if this need is not satisfied people die, physically or psychologically. So the addict's search is a legitimate one; however, he went about it the wrong way, without proper context, without a guide, without protection, without a clear intention, and so on. Our discourse to the patients is: OK, you wanted to search for a solution, to search for life's meaning, by trying a type of wild initiation. It's all right, your intention was good, your desire for healing was good. But look at yourself now, you're not well, because you did it in an incorrect way. If you want you can do it again, here, also through modified states of consciousness – because we don't deny their experience, we don't tell them you have to be normal and straight, no, they can be initiated too. However, there are certain rules. There is a path. You need a guide at the beginning.

So faced with this counter-initiation, or wild initiation, we take again the path of initiation, true initiation, that is guided: that will integrate the plants and the traditional medicine within the context of Western thought. That is why, inevitably, elements of the Judeo-Greek-Christian tradition will appear. Because even if one is not a practicing Christian or Jew, we are built inside of this paradigm, we can't evade it. We have to reclaim that Western paradigm, that has often been distorted. That's

why I often say the treatment here is radical, in the original sense of the word: returning to the root; the root of our personality, through our biography, the root of our lineage, through our culture, and eventually beyond that, trans-culturally, to reach the universal dimension. That is the highest perspective. Not everyone gets there, but this is what we propose.

GABOR: In the West they look at drugs and say everything is bad, because they associate it with all the negative experiences people have had. But much of the problem, I mean some drugs shouldn't be used at all, but much of the problem with drugs or these substances is the lack of a context of initiation, as you said, and that's what gets people into trouble: while they're looking for the right things, they're looking for things they need, but what's missing is the wisdom of the elders, and the tradition of initiation, that's what's lacking.

MABIT: But we have the tradition, our tradition, the Western tradition, Judeo-Greek-Christian – it is there. It's necessary to return to it somehow, but in the fundamental, essential, mystical content, not as a social guide of norms, but in its essence. That's why when people can regain contact with their own tradition, Jewish, Christian, by living it internally – reconciliation soon follows. Patients here often reconcile themselves with that, and then they continue on their own paths. Patients who are for example Jewish – I am Christian, I can sing calling Jesus, the Virgin and Saints, but this person listening will reconnect with

their Jewish roots. Patients don't have to identify themselves with the figures that support me, they will return to the roots of their own filiation, in this case Jewish. This has often happened to me with Jewish patients. So in that sense, theirs is a form of radicalism, meaning returning to each person's roots. So if they are Jews they will be better Jews, if they are Christians they will be better Christians, if they are Buddhist they will be better Buddhists. The object is to purify their essence.

GABOR: That's very interesting, because last night two major things happened. One was the father experience, but the other was actually a God experience, not in the sense of a visible God or a voice speaking to me, but very much the sense of a creator and, you know, just a very benign and protective and beautiful universe, and I had a very special relationship with it, and then I thought, what about everybody else? There are sixty billion other people in the world, and I thought, well they all have their own experience, but it was very much part of that experience the other night, that connection.

MABIT: Tobacco, masculine energy, the paternal figure, the blessing of the biological father...then what appears is the third dimension, the eternal father, the father creator, there it is, the connection between the plant, the body, the physical masculine part, the emotional and psychological masculine part, and the spiritual masculine part. That's the filiation being recreated, and that's what we search for, through tobacco, and the work here in general. Because

very often there is that deficiency of the masculine, while there's an excess of the maternal protection of the enveloping kind – so things must be rebalanced. Ayahuasca is a maternal plant, it's a new womb, a good mother, to face all that we could have lived with aspects of a bad mother. Tobacco and the therapist also act in that aspect of good mother, repairing the figure of the father. A father that has authority but is not authoritarian, he has natural authority, and is benevolent. This is what's missing in so many of our patients: either the father was absent, or his authority was vertical, and not affectionate. We try to rebuild that here.

I am happy to hear you say that you had good perception.

THREE DAYS LATER – LAST CONVERSATION

GABOR: I have two questions that are not related, one is a personal one. In the ayahuasca ceremony I did here, my father came up, as I told you in our previous conversation, and then last night I had a dream about him. It's the first time I've dreamt about him for many years. Now, he's been dead for nearly 20 years, he died 18 years ago. The dream was very pleasant in some way, to see him again, and also a little bit disturbing because I don't remember the details, but I didn't quite know what to do with him to make him comfortable. So I'm thinking that this dream must have been related to, or triggered by my ayahuasca

experience. And I just wonder if you have any comment on the significance of it?

MABIT: The Jewish part is from the father or the mother?

GABOR: Both.

MABIT: I have very little information, but it would seem to me your father would not be related to your experience with tobacco. As for ayahuasca, you mentioned that in your dream you didn't know how to make him comfortable.

GABOR: Yeah.

MABIT: Perhaps we are seeing a sort of doubt from you in this re-encounter with the father, and what he represents. And not knowing exactly how to integrate that, or how to place it, perhaps in relationship to the feminine, perhaps in relationship to something else...

GABOR: Mm hmm.

MABIT: There is also, as we discussed, an experiential matter, but it's a transgenerational one. In our experience at Takiwasi, it's the grandparents' generation that actually gives the spiritual affiliation.

GABOR: Yes, and my experience is that I didn't have grandparents. My grandparents were ... three of them were dead by the time I was aware, two of them were killed in Auschwitz when I was five months old. My paternal grandfather was dead long before I was born.

And then one grandmother left the country. So really, I grew up with no grandparents in my life, physically. They were there as psychological presences through my parents, but I had no direct contact. And I always felt I lost something, spiritually.

MABIT: I'd invite you to look deeper into it, especially into your father's father, who he was and his relationship with your father. Judaism itself is a traditional religion. I'd look into how your grandfather related to the religious aspect of Judaism, how he considered it, and obviously his relationship to you. Because in there, there is something for you to learn about this, what you have inherited.

GABOR: Okay. So you think I should explore the spiritual connection through my paternal grandfather, is that right?

MABIT: Yes.

GABOR: It's interesting, because he's the most absent in my mind. He's the one I had the least connection with, of all my grandparents. Okay. Thank you.

MABIT: You are welcome [smiles].

GABOR: Now, about the process here, about what you do here. I'm just reading a book, *1491*, it is, as the title implies, one year before the arrival of Columbus in the so-called new world. It describes the native societies in South and North America and what's striking throughout it all is the importance of community in people's lives, and the

way the parent was very much in community and children grew up in relationship to the whole community.

Now, in North America particularly, that's largely gone today, people grow up in isolated and even broken family homes. The community, the clan, the tribe, it's not there anymore. Here, at Takiwasi, although it's impossible to say which is the most important aspect, because you have all the plants, the purges, the therapy, the Ayahuasca... but also it seems that community is a very important aspect of what you do. There's a lot of research now actually showing that the biology of the brain depends very much for its development on people interacting with other people, particularly their caregivers, but really, the whole community. And there's an American psychiatrist, we even coined the phrase, *interpersonal neurobiology*.

MABIT: Yes.

GABOR: To indicate that people's nervous systems – and I would actually say not just nervous systems but their immunity and their hormones, and everything included – it all depends on interactions and community. They are not discreetly separated. So I wonder if you can comment on the importance, of the relative importance of community in the process of your work here.

MABIT: Yes, I agree with this. Obviously the plants are a great addition to psychotherapy and community life. But I think that if you took away the community, you would amputate a lot of their power, especially because,

as you see, when we work with plants in the community, the community gives back; it gives the necessary feedback so you can apply what you learn from the plants immediately, with other patients who are doing the same thing. And you can see how the other patients are changing with the plants; you can see your reflection in others. There are plants that can be perfectly integrated into the social life of the person.

In the indigenous, original use of these plants, people would work all day, and then at night they would join to drink the shaman's potion. So the ceremonies were very quickly brought back into everyday life.

I think community is especially important with addicted patients, who have the tendency to avoid reality. When you give them plants...a plant, sometimes, somehow will bring them back to reality.

GABOR: Yes. And of course, all addictions are based on a sense of isolation.

MABIT: Yes.

GABOR: The addict feels completely alone in the world, doesn't even go out. Doesn't matter what he believes formally, fundamentally, implicitly. In the addicted phase, it's only him or her, there's no community, there's no connection, there's no God, there's no anything else, just the internal world.

What's frustrating I'm sure for you, at least it has been for me, is that now we have all this research that shows the wisdom of the traditional ways of healing and the traditional ways of living. So we have the research. It's not just that we know it intuitively, we actually have the scientific research, the brain scans, but we don't apply it to our medical work!

There's a separation, not just between the past and the present, but also the future and the present. Because our research is telling us where we should be going, but we...we ignore the future as much as we ignore the past.

MABIT: Indeed.

GABOR: All right, well, this is our – our leaving tonight. It is my last meeting with you, and it's been a real pleasure. I've already given you my personal thank you for the experience that I had as an individual, healing and the spiritual opening, and just a pleasure. I also want to thank you professionally. I have learned a lot.

My intention is to carry this work on, in North America, under very different circumstances. But much of what I have learned here will help inform the model that we are trying to create there. So again, my gratitude to you, thank you.