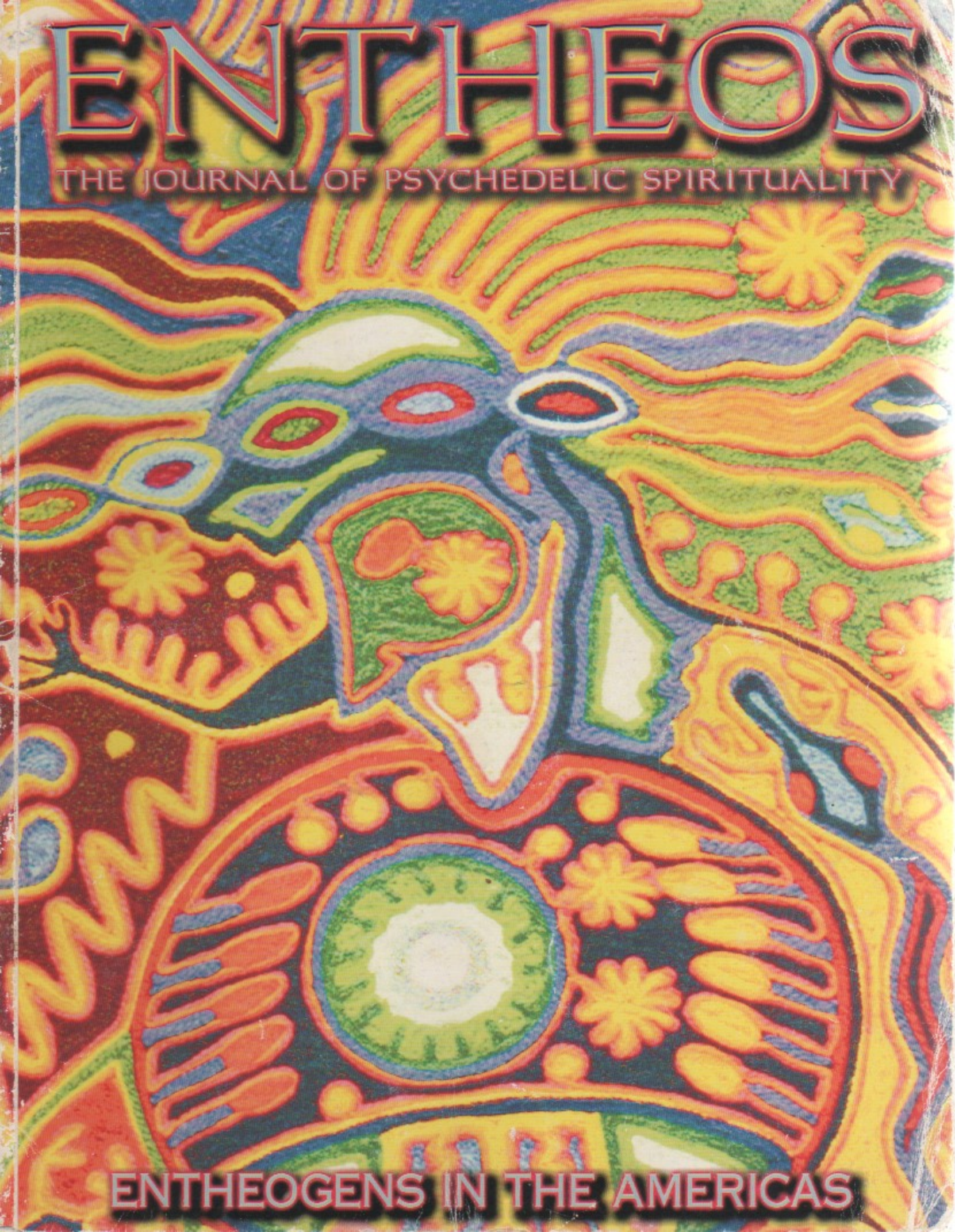


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The Man Who Ate Honey:

Kiéri and the Calling of a Huichol Shaman

As told by Catarino Carrillo
to Jay Fikes



In 1996 I made my first visit to the Huichol community of Tuxpan de Bolaños.¹ There I began developing rapport with an eighty year old shaman who we will call Catarino. Catarino has been kind enough to share many details about his life, including the explanation (below) of how he became a shaman.

He is a singer and healer and has served his community by taking on a variety of political and religious offices (*cargos*). He speaks Spanish fairly well, has two wives, numerous children, grandchildren and a few great-grandchildren. — Jay C. Fikes

Catarino explains how he obtained a blessing from Kiéri (translated from Huichol to Spanish by his son):

I was hunting birds, walking by myself through canyons, armed only with my bow and arrows. My best friend was my cousin. He and I would hunt birds together

everyday. My cousin and I were constant companions. We were walking back and forth along a stream. We had no domesticated animals to watch. In the middle of our hunting there was something coming toward us. We were both practically nude, wearing only a wool shirt. As we crossed the stream there were some plants called *Kutamé* (snake's tooth). When we came to these plants there was a honeycomb made by wasps (called *huariches* in Spanish and *Rumáste* in Huichol). My cousin asked me: "Do you see that honeycomb there?" I told him: "Knock it down with a big stick." My cousin decided to knock it down with his bow. It fell on the ground and there were a few wasps, not many. We opened it and tore it apart. I was gathering up the honey. Those honeycombs were beautiful, blue-green in color. Those wasps never stung us. After we had collected the honey we walked a short distance from that place and began eating honey. After eating the honey we went to the stream. We squeezed the honeycombs to make them like tamales. Then we headed toward home. As we ate the honey we suddenly started vomiting. We lay down under the *Kutamé* to vomit. Our vomit was a very yellow color. We left there and walked until we came to a cave. That is where we threw away our honeycomb-tamales. We continued feeling nauseous as we walked. We arrived at a seep and we wet our heads with water. We drank water and it made us feel worse. There is a trail that descends to a place called the white rock. The trail passed by it and when I turned to look up I saw a huge rock sliding down. That rock was sliding down toward us (but it was only an hallucination). The rocks were breaking apart at the same time I saw two paths dividing. I fled along the path that was going uphill. My cousin shouted at me, "Where are you going?" I heard him but I did not



not be able to grab a *cacaoyari* (male ancestor), not having a bow means that he will not be able to shoot an *itaoqui* (the spirit of a deceased shaman that appears in non-human form), not having an arrow means that he will not be an evil-doer using witchcraft]. Because if I were to give you a rope, a bow and an arrow it would be to do harm to your relatives, to your corn and your own fortune." That is how he told me I would only receive the five verses. Then he declared: "Memorize these verses and take them with you. Never add anything or subtract anything from these five. Just treasure exactly what I gave you." After he had told me all this he followed up by taking out a drum. The old man started singing and playing the drum. He sang the song of *tucuripa* (the day) and the song of *Huiru* (the night). He sang five verses of each. He told me: "These are the foundation for each of the songs that I am showing you. You must learn them and use them always during your life on earth." He ended that ceremony by declaring: "This is exactly what you are going to do, directing yourself to the four cardinal directions and ending with their intersection." Next he began the song of the *Hicuri Neixa* (peyote dance), using the same format he had in the previous songs. He stated: "This is the way you will begin. This is how you will sing and how you will place the *teparti* [T.N.: This is not merely the round rock we call *teparti* but also the prayer with all the symbols required to attract the ancestors. For example, we place the *teparti* in our cornfields to ask our ancestors to protect our corn against the crows, badgers, raccoons etc.] While he was telling me all this suddenly I heard the people shouting and dancing in the same manner that we dance the peyote dance today. They were all singing, repeating the words of the old man.

That is the way it happened. I never received anything by my own volition. [T.N.: This was a gift from the *Kieri* rather than a response to a person seeking favor from an ancestor.] I was calm and attentive to what the old man was saying to me. When I woke up the next morning, that is I surely must have awakened, when I immediately felt something cold on my head.

I came to my senses and began looking around in every direction. I was expecting to see and hear

reply. I continued climbing up the mountain. When I looked up at the summit I saw a boy who spoke to me: "Come on, come on." I climbed up to the top and began walking behind the boy. I followed him until we came to a hill covered with god-houses (*sherikite*). The boy declared to the crowd that was present at the god-houses: "Here is the boy you ordered me to bring to you." There was a singer's chair (*uwenti*) and they sat me down in it. [Translator's Note (TN): All this comes from a vision] There were numerous women and many houses forming a circle. Then an old man addressed me: "They have finally brought you here today. I have been searching for you for a long time. I had been looking for you but began thinking that my work would be in vain. Today the child finally found you and now you are here. I have been waiting for you. I have something that I have been waiting to give you. Today I will turn it all over to you and my duty of watching over it will end. Everything you see here, the women that are your sisters, the god-houses that form the circle there, you will understand. Listen carefully to everything because you are here to understand it all."

That is what the old man told me. His clothes were torn and had lots of patches. I was listening attentively to the old man, seated where they had seated me. Then he told me: "You know that I have been waiting to give you these things. Pay close attention and focus on what I am going to give you." Then he gave me the *lacuatz*, (an oblong basket containing the shaman's sacred paraphernalia) placing it on the ground in front of my feet. He opened the *lacuatz* and everybody could see the prayer feathers. He began singing the song of *huhane* [T.N.: This song is used in several ceremonies such as the parching of the corn, and for the bull and when the cornfield is cleared for planting].

"Listen well," he told me and he finished the song. Then he warned me: "Never harm any of your relatives, nor any cattle, horses or corn. If you harm any of them everything will go against you. Nor should you feel envious about anything other people accomplish." Speaking like that he sang five verses and told me: "I am only going to give you these five verses. I am never going to give you a rope, nor a bow, nor an arrow. [T.N.: "Not having a rope" means that he will

the same scenes again but I never saw or heard anything more. I was completely alone, sitting with my back against a boulder. Almost all of my body was numb. After I recovered my normal consciousness I spent almost all day laying down there, overcoming my numbness.²

I have never been able to understand completely everything that happened to me. Is it that I was born for this purpose, or is it that my ancestors were the ones that selected me? As I live and breathe today I do not worry about anything. Everything I do and everything I know is done without any fear because I never searched for this nor did I solicit it. It was the decision of Tamatzi Caoyomari tukimari (Kiéri pollen manifesting Our Elder Brother Caoyomari) and of Haoye Wekame.³ Nowadays I perform rituals for the welfare of my family, putting into practice all the customs that were revealed to me. I do not envy anybody. I do no harm to anybody. I only heal (carry out the cleansing) my family in accordance with the instructions for healing that were given to me.

Some people criticize me, saying that I am arrogant because of the evil that I do, saying that I am a witch and who knows what other falsehoods. None of this makes me uncomfortable nor do I worry because I am certain that I never do evil things against anybody or any of my family. This is because, for me, permission was never given to do such things. [T.N.: He was warned that if he were to do evil things it would go against the welfare of his family and his property.]

Anyway, when I returned to my house there was my grandfather.⁴ I explained to him everything that happened to me and he replied: "*Carai* (holy smoke) my little child it appears you are not doing so well. Considering what has become of you and what you were given I am not worthy of taking anything from you. The only thing I can do is rearrange what you have on your body. [T.N.: The grandfather recognized that Catarino had spiritual pollen, a spiritual trait or mark on his body.] The one thing I can advise you is that you were pitied (given a gift). You must never cheat or dishonor this gift. Such things are forbidden and whenever one does not mind the only result will be death. Starting today for the next ten days you must not eat salt. After you fast for

those ten days, I will finish your fast for you." That is what happened. According to my grandfather he fasted with me. I completed my vows for five years (this means five years of sexual abstinence). That is what happened up to now in my life. [T.N.: He did not need to visit the *Kiéri* for five consecutive years. Abstaining from sex for five years was easy, given his young age; his only sacrifice was the salt fast.]

Nowadays, even though it may not be sufficient for other singers, I understand the foundation of my culture (i.e., the gourd bowl and prayer-arrow). The rituals that I perform I do in order to obtain abundant life for myself and my family. Will that cause my death? I don't know; only God knows. I fulfill my obligations by performing them. I have numerous descendants that are alive today. I am their tree. I am alive today because of all that happened to me. Whether or not I have fulfilled all requirements, I have survived until today.

If the sun, the earth and the oceans exist, and I listen to their messages, I am the only one who knows, nobody else. These events happened just the way I said they did. It is said that if someone does not fulfill one's obligations, that person will die. That has not happened to me. I am still living. Then, I believe I have complied with what was required of me. While I am alive the sun, earth and oceans know whether anything bad will befall me. I have not made my life an exhibit for people (i.e., he never before has revealed such details about the gift *Kiéri* gave him). I hope they enjoy it.

Afterword by Jay Fikes

Huichols have warned me never to eat *Kiéri*. I feel compelled to emphasize that eating any part of this plant may well be hazardous to one's health. Traditionally, prayers and offerings to it initiate a pact that must be adhered to scrupulously with salt fasting and sexual purity. *Kiéri* can punish, with serious illness or death, all those who fail to abide by their vows. When transgressions against *Kiéri* are committed, forgiveness or atonement is virtually impossible.

In 1986 I was guided by the shaman I called Serratos and my compadre to a very old female *Kiéri* growing in a pine forest at about 2000 meters above sea level. That *Kiéri* is home to a divine spirit (*mara'acame*) Serratos calls Tamatzi Paritzica or Maxa Tehuiyari (Deer Person). Although that *Kiéri* is not visited by temple officers from Santa

venture, I hope to help increase reverence for the divine spirit manifested through the *Kieri* plant, and respect for those, like Catarino, who worship our Elder Brother in spirit and in truth.

Kieri and the Origin of Deer-Person

The true value of *Kieri* in Huichol culture has never been fully understood (see bibliography below). To better enable readers to appreciate how essential *Kieri* must have been to ancient Huichols, I will summarize Catarino's chronicle of how the culture hero and shaman's tutelary spirit, Tamatzí Caoyomari, was created via immaculate conception. (The entire myth, as dictated by Catarino, will be published in a forthcoming book.)

A Huichol couple wanted to have children. They were instructed on how to have a child, without having sex, by the ancestor-deity known as Buzard Person. He showed the man the *Kieri* pollen he would need to create the child and warned him to carry out fully all his instructions. The husband and wife placed the *Kieri* pollen inside their god-house and made the necessary prayers and offerings. Five days later a boy appeared in their god-house. The boy grew up rapidly, became an expert marks-

man, and learned to turn himself into a deer. In deer form he was enticed into the temple of the animal-people. Their lead singer, Wolf-Person, wanted to sacrifice him, but he escaped with the help of a small mouse, Tumurutzi. Tumurutzi stole the *iacuatzí* (an oblong basket containing the shaman's belongings) of Wolf-Person and handed it over to Tamatzí (our Elder Brother). The animal-



1. We placed offerings and candles beside this female *Kieri*.



2. I prayed to, and solicited aid from, Tamatzí Paritica (Caoyomari), whose spirit inhabits this entheogen.

Catarina both the cahuitero (whose songs I cited in my 1985 dissertation) and Serratos had made offerings to it. Serratos told me all Huichols know about this particular *Kieri* but most of them fear involvement with it because it punishes people who fail to comply with their vows. He warned me that both the seeker and his/her spouse must be sexually faithful to each other. Otherwise either of them may be punished by death, (which will appear to be an accident).

Late in the afternoon when we arrived at this *Kieri* I noticed it had received only a few offerings, none of which appeared to be recent. We placed our offerings and candles beside the *Kieri* (Fig. 1 & 2) and then Serratos and my compadre started a fire a short distance away. Serratos told me that before I prayed to Tamatzí Paritica I should confess all sexual experiences I had prior to getting married. I dutifully wrote down all their names, repeated them, and burned the paper in the fire. Then I ate some peyote and prayed in Huichol to Tamatzí Paritica. What happened during the rest of that evening as I sat beside this *Kieri* is too amazing to reveal. In fact, Serratos advised me against discussing the experience with anyone except my wife.

Serratos' warning illustrates Negtín's explanation of the Huichol policy of mutism—do not declare anything esoteric to anyone unless they already know it. My quest to acquire wisdom from this *Kieri* evidently convinced Catarino to divulge his childhood experiences with *Kieri* to me. In publishing Catarino's ad-

people began chasing the divine deer (Tamatzi), and eventually they kill him, but he is soon resuscitated by Buzzard-Person. Today, Huichol singers and healers are allied with Tamatzi because he took over the powers inherent in the *tacuatzi* of Wolf-Person.

I believe this myth establishes that *Kiéri* pollen is sacred, being the foundation for the divine deer who became, thanks to the efforts of Buzzard Person, the tutelary spirit of Huichol healers and singers. This myth also explains central elements in Huichol deer hunting, namely the ritual use of *Kiéri* pollen and the hunter's firm commitment to sexual purity (Fikes 1985, 216).

For more information on Catarino and to hear him sing, visit <http://www.entheomedia.com/singer>

NOTES

¹ On my first trip I delivered a copy of the footage shot there in 1934 by the anthropologist Robert Zingg, from which I prepared a documentary film based on Zingg's footage, "Huichol Indian Ceremonial Cycle" (available through [entheomedia.com](http://www.entheomedia.com)).

² This story of how he acquired his power after eating wasp's honey, derived from *Kiéri* pollen is remarkable. I will analyze it in detail in a forthcoming book. For now it suffices to say that there is no doubt that *Kiéri* is an ancient entheogen; one that surely predates peyote. *Kiéri* invokes a mixture of fear and reverence among all Huichols I have consulted, and it is widely considered to be an aid in deer hunting and violin playing (Fikes 1985).

The *Kiéri* whose spirit summoned Catarino is a species of *Solandra*, perhaps *Solandra guttata*. My preliminary research in Tuxpan as well as the publications of other researchers, show that *Kiéri* is a name that can be applied to various species, including those outside the genus *Solandra*. Particular care must be taken to determine what type of plant is meant when a Huichol uses the word.

Containing tropane alkaloids such as hyoscyamine, scopolamine, nortropine, etc., *Solandra* is closely related to the genus *Datura*, and is considered a dangerous plant; one that can cause delirium, paralysis, and sometimes death.

³ This is the messenger and passenger of the *Kiéri* plant that lives in one place. This messenger *Kiéri* appears in various places by means of the wind. It sings, shouts, whistles and plays the violin. The child that summoned Catarino represents this messenger *Kiéri*. The old man represents the *tukimarica*, the adult *Kiéri* and the *tacuatzi* he received represents Tamatzi.

⁴ The grandfather who fasted for Catarino was actually the husband of Catarino's father's sister. This would make him a *naoquixhui*; we would call him an uncle or an affine. This grandfather was himself a shaman and he knew that the salt fast was required. He fasted one month for Catarino.

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