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Mind Meets Body: The Sacred Roots of *Cacao*

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- KRISTINE OVSEPIAN

There's something so sacred about chocolate and its rich and creamy flavor. One bite boosts the body's endorphins — aka, those feel-good chemicals in the brain — leaving us with feelings of euphoric positivity. Not to mention: So many of us choose to reward ourselves with a piece, making it all the more satisfying to eat. But, the reason why chocolate feels so sacred isn't just because of its effect on the body. Chocolate feels sacred because it has sacred roots.

In its rawest form, chocolate is actually called cacao — a bean from the tropical cacao tree. The cacao bean is then roasted and ground up to create cocoa or chocolate. But, long before we created chocolate, we consumed cacao in the form of a ceremony. “Cacao ceremonies have their origins in Mesoamerican and cacao held an important position in Aztec and Mayan cultures, where it was used for both ceremonial and medicinal purposes,” says [Kristine Ovsepien](#), who is a certified hypnotherapist, life coach, NLP and EFT practitioner, and intuitive healer who leads cacao ceremonies in her practice. “Those ancient cultures knew what scientists have confirmed today: Compounds found in cacao — including theobromine and anandamide — can have beneficial effects,” Ovsepien adds, explaining how theobromine is the chemical cousin to caffeine and anandamide is a distant relative of THC, the active compound found in cannabis.



What Is a Cacao Ceremony?

“A cacao ceremony is a ritual that honors cacao, which the Mayans considered the gods’ food,” says Luis Arturo, the manager of Rancho La Puerta Spa, where he leads Mayan-style Cacao Ceremonies. “Cacao is viewed as a sacred medicine that provides happiness, fortitude, and strength,” he adds, explaining how it also “opens the heart, creates deep connections, and brings communities together.”

Arturo says that cacao ceremonies are not exactly uniform in their creation as “they include different rituals, intentions, and practices depending on where they are performed.” They can also be performed alone or with others. That being said, he adds that the ceremonies are traditionally performed during a Full Moon (though he says that you don’t need to wait for this moon phase and can conduct a cacao ceremony at any time if you prefer).

At Rancho La Puerta Spa, they forgo the traditional Full Moon ceremony and instead practice the ritual during the New Moon. “Each ceremony focuses on creating new intentions and cultivating positive communication,” he explains. “Ritual blessings are recited in Spanish around an altar that features flowers, corn, beans, cacao, whole fruits, clay, water, ornaments, dream catchers, and candles,” he adds, noting how they also place a traditional medicine plant on the altar as a gift for the gods. The altar also features a centerpiece of hot cacao and cups. “Prayers are stated over the cacao, a conch shell is blown, and herbs such as rosemary and salvia are burned,” Arturo explains. “Once the spiritual guide says blessings, the cups of hot cacao are passed around [and], as people drink, their mouths are purified by the cacao,” he adds. “Everyone speaks of an intention, positive wish, or prayer they have — this ceremony helps solidify the intention and help it become real.”



The Benefits of Sipping Chocolate

Cacao is deeply nourishing and high in antioxidants, which can strengthen the immune system and protect the body (and skin) from environmental aggressors such as the sun's UV rays and pollution. And while these physical benefits are reason in and of itself to give chocolate's raw form a try, there are also benefits that allow for a deeper mind-body connection.

"Spiritually speaking, cacao opens the heart and leads to a feeling of connecting deeply with life," Ovsepien explains. "Cacao is purifying and can enhance feelings of love for yourself and others, and feelings of belonging," she adds.

How to Create Your Own Sacred Cacao Ceremony

You don't need to travel far to experience the ritual and mind-body benefits of drinking cacao — you can create your own ceremony at home, either with yourself or with loved ones. Here's how:

1. The first step in creating a cacao ceremony is to make sure your space is set up for the ritual. "Hold your cacao ceremony in a private and positive space — a well-lit room is always ideal as sun is important for the ritual," Arturo explains. "It's ideal if there are plants in the room and the ability to play waterfall sounds or soothing music."
2. To prepare for the ceremony, Arturo says to gather items that represent the four elements of water, fire, earth, and air. "You can use a lit candle, a bowl filled with water, and a bit of dirt," he suggests. For the air element, Arturo says a conch shell is blown during his ceremonies but explains that blowing on the candle can also represent this element.
3. Once your element items are selected, collect "at least half a cup of corn and beans [known as 'the master grains'] and a pound of cacao beans."
4. To make the cacao drink, blend one tablespoon of organic cacao powder with hot water and mix well.
5. Next, Arturo says to "place your offerings and ceremony materials on the floor to show respect and humility."
6. Begin by writing down your intentions. "Cacao connects to your heart with your thoughts so you can convey messages of love, unity, fairness, and harmony," says Arturo. "Write down why you are calling on cacao to help you out."
7. Once everything is set up and your intentions are set, it's time to perform the ceremony. Arturo recommends doing the ceremony while sitting on the ground as it "physically grounds you" during the experience. "Send the cacao a blessing from your heart — this can be your own words," says Arturo. "Ask the cacao to be present and ask it to help you out with your positive intention," he explains,

8. Next, Arturo says to speak your intentions out loud while asking the cacao to help you. For example, he suggests saying something along the lines of “please help me to convey love, harmony, or fairness.”
9. After you speak your intentions, it’s time to sip on the cacao. “Drink the cacao to connect your thoughts with your heart,” Arturo explains.
10. The last step is to end the ceremony with a sense of gratitude and say “thank you, cacao.”

The ceremony of drinking cacao is a “simple yet powerful [experience] that brings people together and deepens the connection with self,” says Arturo. “Cacao can help you connect with a very positive and loving state of mind to achieve happiness,” he adds, explaining how we have the theobromine to thank for that.