

Sacred Journey of a Lifetime

By Holly Gray Schuck

In December of 2010, I led a trip traveling to Chile, South America with a group of women friends who had studied with me for several years. We were going to do ceremony and ride horseback in the high Andes with my mentor and friend, a shamana in the Mapuche tradition. We came as an allyu, a like-minded community of women, who came together for teachings and ceremony when we could; as we normally tended to our mates, children and jobs in our small town communities in the Midwest. We had grown to love and respect each other, despite and because of our differences, and we were all excited to be together for this trip of a lifetime. We had no idea how much we would learn and grow from our experiences and how these experiences would come to shape our life and give it more meaning when we got home. We had no idea that one of our ceremonies might involve the Mother Plant, the Sacred Medicine plant Ayhuasca.

Known as the Vine of the Soul or Vine of the Dead, this powerful plant in combination with other sacred plants, is known for powerful visions. Its helpers are the Jaguar and Serpent powers, who often are seen in ayhuasca visions; indeed the name Vine of the Dead refers to the classic journey in which the participant "dies" to the mindset and cultural paradigms that keep us trapped in a rational, mechanistic world rather than the imaginable and magical world of shamans and ancient peoples.

After loading and packing the horses, we traveled into the rugged Andes Mountains, a wonderful world with no electronics, a world of natural forces, spirits or forces we came to honor and know in a more intimate way than we could in our daily lives. We were high on life, happy and laughing with each other, as we climbed higher and higher into the mountains towards our base camp. The next week we participated in several sacred ceremonies high in the Andes Mountains. Some ceremonies were from other indigenous traditions as well as Andean rites of passage.

On New Years Eve, we built a sweat lodge near a rushing stream, cleansing ourselves in the heat of the lodge, and then in the cold, mountain stream, preparing ourselves for the New Year. We feasted that night, under a full moon, which rose majestically over the Apus. (the Quechua word

for the mountain deities) We danced and drummed the New Year in with the cowboys who lived high in these mountains and took care of our horses, prepared our meals and tended the gardens that kept us in fresh produce during our visit.

At a sacred waterfall the next day, we celebrated by standing under the waterfall, feeling the rush and gasping for breath as the shock of the cold water poured over us. We basked in the high mountain sun, sitting contentedly naked by the singing stream, after giving our thanks and offerings to the waters of the Pachamama. Crossing the streams and waterfalls many times the next day, by horseback, we climbed high into the Andes, relying on our horses to keep us safe. As the land receded below us, it seemed we were riding through the air, in another dimension and time. We were so high up that there was no bottom we could see below us to the valley floor. We climbed into the clouds and then left even them below us.

There are so many fabulous memories of that trip: the cave with pottery shards another day's ride high into the mountains, the cold rushing stream we bathed and drank from, the power and presence of the mountain spirits, the water sprites, and the ancient ones. We called to the condors that accompanied us, and gained greater trust in our mounts. On one descent, I rode my horse down a 45% slope, and as his feet slipped on a bare rock face, he simply sat down on his butt, and we slid- both of us arrived at the bottom safely.

After resting a day, we prepared for yet another ceremony-one that had come to us as a gift. That day, each of us had to make a decision as to whether we would participate in this powerful all night ceremony. On the day of the ayhuawasca ceremony, I asked, and set an intention for, a vision. One that would carry me thru the next years-, how were we as a people and as a planet, to make it thru the end of the Mayan calendar to a new earth, a new way of being in the world. I asked for a vision for my life-something to guide and inspire me. We prepared with a special diet, prayers, fasting, ceremony and meditation for the evening ceremony with a master ayahuascano. This master shaman had trained for many years, learning how to combine the medicine plants and in what quantities. He had conducted many ceremonies over the years. He was a young man, with a wife and children and was well known for his skills and talents. His demeanor was soft, quiet, with a contained power that was palpable, just under the surface-his energy was similar to a jungle cat. I had experienced a man with that energy before, only he reminded me of a wild mustang, and was a Lakota medicine man and tribal leader.

My friend from Chile was also highly skilled and had partaken in numerous ceremonies with the sacred plant. Several of her friends also joined us, some on their own journeys, and some came simply to serve us, especially those new to the powerful plant medicine.

That evening, we assembled in a circle and began at dusk, making our prayers and intentions for this powerful night. The evening was warm, the breezes soft, with a humming vitality of the mountain air. We placed our sleeping mats and blankets, like spokes on a wheel, around the shaman's altar. He had a toy from his youngest son, as part of his medicine bundle or mesa. I sat across from him and my Chilean friend, and next to my partner on one side, and my daughter on the other. Although I had participated in the sacred plant ceremony several times before, it had been many years ago, when my children had been young. At that time, my son, who was only 13 years of age and he participated in a men's ceremony, in the jungle hut close to mine. But that is another story.

This time, my daughter, who was a young woman now, sat next to me and we squeezed each other's hand for reassurance. After the maestro prayed to the spirits and opened the sacred circle, we began to imbibe the distinctive brew. The taste was not as bad as I had remembered it, and I tossed it down quickly-telling my stomach sternly to settle down, as it started to pitch and roll like an ocean ship. As I felt the distinctive sensations of the hallucinogenic plant take effect in my body, I calmed myself and my body by telling it how well I took care of it and that tonight, it needed to take care of me. I continued to pray to my guides, monitoring myself and those around me. My partner was beginning to retch violently, repeatedly. My daughter inexplicably was singing songs in Spanish like she had known them all her life even though she knew some Spanish, this was fluent dialect. The maestro and my shamana friend were tending to my partner, so I turned my attention to the others. There were some quiet whispering sounds around the dimly lit circle, some quiet retching, and then silence. The candles guttered in the wind, and the air cooled. I pulled my blanket closer, or tried, but noticed I had lost the ability to command my limbs. I lay back. But as I did, the effects came on full force and I was alarmed. I tried to communicate telepathically to my daughter and tell her I was sorry I got her into this. Yet I could hear her sweetly singing the medicine songs as if she had grown up with them. Chaotic visions followed and for a brief while I fought to stay on top and not succumb but I was quickly being sucked under. Robotic ant-like creatures were scurrying around, up and down the passageways of my brain and body, too busy to interact with me-going about their business of clean and

cleansing. I fought harder to gain some control and the fear increased, as I was inexorably drug to this machine like thing-was it a locomotive-there were giant wheels and gears within gears-wait a minute, my visions should be ones from nature, not automated machines, wait, wait..... Then I realized, oh yeah, this is the surrender part-I talked to myself, "give up, just go ahead and die, it's not so hard" and I did. I gave up, and was sucked into a large machine. Then I was dead. I didn't exist. But if I didn't exist, who was talking-or was it thinking, out loud? Ok, I WAS alive. But where was I? I looked up and there was a hatch and I climbed up and went thru it. And on the other side-was our circle! There was the altar, the other people, my friends, my partner, my daughter, and everything was framed in classic psychedelic sacred geometric patterns. I was sitting up now, and we were clearly in a different dimension, a different reality. As I watched, each of my friends sat up also. Although it was dark, except for the light from the candles, I could feel each one of them checking themselves out and adjusting to the altitude of this new and higher dimension. And then I knew. This is how it is on this dimension. This is how it will be after the Shift, the end of the Mayan calendar, the end of a 260,000 year cycle. We will all sit up and take our place. The place we have prepared for ourselves; the place that the Christos has prepared for us. It exists. We exist. And we are here. The giant wheels I was ground up in, were the Mayan calendar wheels, gears within gears. And as time ends, our world or reality ends, and then simply begins again, within the next heartbeat. The vision is how we arrive safely together. How we all sit up and take our place in the new world: a world of peace, harmony and equity and the beginning of a new cycle of time.

This vision has served me well when I have faltered or lost hope, and now that we are on the other side of 12/21/12, I am so proud of my friends and family, our allyu, as we each sit up and take our place, in this new world. This trip of a lifetime met all the desires of my intentions and more. It is my intention, and invitation, to come with me on a sacred journey and let's explore together, how ancient wisdom and practices can enrich our new world.

Warm blessings,

The Shaman Portal Team

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