

Ayahuasca-Induced Interiority Transformation in 3 Middle-Aged Educated Women

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Abstract

This study focuses upon 3 women whose lives had become conflictful, emotionally painful and anomic.

The consequences of pain crosses gender and culture lines, especially if one is not aware of their afflictions or knows no way to a fulfilling life. Through the life histories of these 3 women I trace their struggle out of past life experience into an “ayahuasca world” of unlimited possibilities and transformative experience. They came to know themselves more clearly.

Many women, usually educated and literate, have the resources and ability to change their lives by cultivating new relationships, assuming new occupations, or adopting more fulfilling social roles. A greater number who are not well-educated or who live by tradition may not find their way to successful adaptation. Many ethnographic studies describe tradition in change, or the effects of globalization on indigenous societies. Some record the use of ayahuasca, but do not study the outcome.

We need to nurture the genius that has moved humans into higher levels of consciousness since time immemorial; the gifts of the few who have transcended normal consciousness, nurtured their own spirituality, and who have become leaders and teachers.

Rites of passage are universal in human society and suggest the need for identity development and cultural sustenance. They propel the human mind into deeper levels of consciousness and conscience.

This study is about 3 women’s spiritual quest for a transformative experience they can share with others. It describes the possibility of a new consciousness through guided shamanic ritual.

A Quote from: *The Way Forward Is With A Broken Heart*.

“These are the stories that came to me
to be told after the close of a magical marriage
to an extraordinary man that ended in a
less-than-magical divorce. I found myself unmoored, unmated, ungrounded
in a way that challenged everything I’d ever thought
about human relationships. Situated squarely in that
terrifying paradise called freedom, precipitously out
on so many emotional limbs, it was as if I had been born;
and in fact I was being reborn as the woman I was to become.”

“...dedicated to all those who love, and who seek the path
instinctively of that which leads us to love, requires us to
become intimate with what is foreign, and helps us to grow.”

Alice Walker

PART I: PERSPECTIVES

Introduction. This paper describes 3 women motivated by growing malaise from unfulfilled wishes and occasional abuse, seeking peace and fulfillment which they believed could be actualized within the shamanic-led ayahuasca experience.

To appreciate their experience and emerging consciousness I shall introduce a deprivation-based model of motivation. I will then present qualities of spirituality, the healer's role, and ayahuasca consciousness. I shall include the attractions of indigenous healing in general, and particularly, shamanic experience. I shall summarize the precursors to seeking out the ayahuasca experience, how they located their guides, the ritual experience itself, and the transformation that followed. My conclusion considers a small but growing movement of people in their quest for spiritual experience.

1. A Motivation Model.

I begin with a deprivation-derived model of motivation. As Abraham Maslow said, a satisfied need is no longer a motivation. Alternatively, a state of deprivation leads to other stage-related dispositional responses:

Deprivation>Frustration>Hostility>Disposition to Aggression>Modes of Response.

Deprivation creates need, whether absolute or relative. Absolute deprivation refers to basic needs for food, shelter, protection, nurturance, cognitive stimulation, and the like. Absolute deprivation can cause long-lasting psychological infirmities.

Relative deprivation refers to feelings of frustration because one's situation does not meet one's expectations or desires. The basic categories of relative deprivation, as Aberle suggests, are possessions, status, self worth, behavior, and power. These represent basic needs shaped by the culture's ideals and expectations. I posit that the closer one gets to a goal the greater the motivation, and the nearer the barrier to the goal the higher the frustration. This leads to greater experience of deprivation because of a) the nearness of the goal, and b) the amount of investment. The disposition of hostility leading to anger, conscious or unconscious, leads to certain modes of response. The first 5 response categories are fairly primitive: impulsivity, displacement, involution, i.e., depression or psychosomatic response, social isolation, and denial. The sixth category involves creative responses to these deprivations, such as sports, verbal contests, law, literature, medicine, the military, police, social movements, and finally spiritual movements.

This last category is normally the recognition of anomie and the search for greater meaning. Sources of deprivation are many and options for alleviating frustration are many. In this paper we will examine the situations that led these women on their spiritual, psychedelic quest.

2. *Motivations for the Spiritual Quest.*

William James wrote that “saintliness...is the ripe fruits of religion” (Moro, Myers, Lehmann). Let us substitute “saintliness” with “spirituality”. James asserted, and anthropologists and others have corroborated, that this state of being is universal. It involves a group of spiritual emotions that form the “habitual center” of personal energy. It includes:

- a. Feeling one has a wider life than selfish interests, and a conviction of the existence of an ideal power
- b. Sensing friendly continuity of this power with life, and willing self-surrender to its control
- c. Feeling elation and freedom, from escaping confining selfhood
- d. Shifting emotions toward loving and harmonious affections. (*Ibid.*, p. 203 quoted in de Ropp article)

Spirituality is consistent, manifesting as a permanent set of values. “There is an awareness of the presence of the power that some religions call “God”. This awareness is a source of repose and confidence” (*Ibid.*).

Comparing the realms of science, religion, and spirituality: Science is empirically based knowing; religion is believing; spirituality is being. The aim of spirituality is to raise the level of consciousness, to understand the meaning by personal experience. The fruits of this expansion of consciousness include:

- a. Indifference to possessions
- b. Impartial objective love
- c. Compassion
- d. Indifference to physical discomfort
- e. Freedom from fear of death
- f. Regarding sentient beings with compassion
- g. I add another quality that holds potential for deepening consciousness of and appreciation for other beings: empathic sensitivity, the ability to appreciate the experience of another. Empathic sensitivity fosters altruism and can potentially raise people to a higher level of consciousness.

Why do some people need or want the use of psychotropic substances? What is the motivational basis for psychedelic drug use? De Ropp (*Ibid.*) suggests that many feel a sense of futility spreading throughout American society. Economically, jobs and sex role functions are lost to the automatization of production. Paul Tillich, in *Courage to Be*, called this “the abyss of meaninglessness”. Drug use is the attempt to escape from this disquieting experience (*Ibid.*,206).

General drug use is most often employed as an analgesic, but it is also a vehicle to alter consciousness. The experience of shaman-guided ayahuasca is in a category shared by only a few psychedelic plant products.

3. *The Attractions of Shamanism.*

Carlos Casteneda's works in the early 1970's expressed the sentiments of the 1960's counter-culture, providing a powerful orientation for American and European youth who were seeking alternative lifeways, greater meaning, and a spiritual experience. Then, in 1980, Michael Harner's *The Way of the Shaman* was marked as a milestone publication of neoshamanism, providing a manual for this practice.

Shamanism has become defined as "a spiritual approach to real-life problem-solving informed by an animistic philosophy. Shamans systematically utilize a technique or combination of techniques to alter consciousness in such a way that they reliably access *nonordinary reality* [italics original]" (Brunton, 172). Nonordinary reality is the state of consciousness with which the shaman interacts, learns from, and gains power from (*Ibid.*). It is attractive to people who are seeking to assuage their sense of *anomie* and broaden their perspectives on everyday life through shamanic spirituality.

Other attractions of shamanism:

1. A retreat from the mechanical, materialistic, "soulless" way of life.
2. A soulful, mystical, and fulfilling daily life experience
3. A refuge from the sense of isolation living in an impersonal society
4. Feeling one is not alone
5. A possible occupation as a healer, or alternative to allopathic medicine.
6. A quest for personal freedom.
7. The linear birth-to-death paradigm of Western civilization offers fear of aging and death, whereas the circle metaphor of indigenous tradition offers eternal, continuous connection.
8. Answers to questions for which Western science has no explanation:
 - 1) Prescient information gleaned in dreams,
 - 2) Answered prayers,
 - 3) Clairvoyance (paranormal power to see objects or actions beyond normal human capacity; instant intuitive knowledge).
 - 4) Clairaudience (ability to hear sounds beyond ordinary experience.
 - 5) visions.
9. "...Shamanism is a loving embrace that channels their natural abilities and spontaneous experiences into purposeful and powerful life skills and resources for others in their community" (*Ibid.*, 177) (Brunton, in Brunton, ed., pp. 176-7)

It is not difficult to see the themes of nurturance and fulfillment. A salient role of the shaman is that of healer. The healer is a person of nurturance and love. The healer has personal qualities that are attractive to novices in the spiritual quest seeking to dissipate their history.

Carl Rogers (1957/2008 in Moro, Myers, Lehmann) cites the personal qualities of a good healer:

1. Congruence: genuineness and integrated personality.
2. Unconditional positive regard: warm acceptance and nonpossessive caring.
3. Empathic sensitivity: understanding the client's experience.

Additional research has shown that effective healers are also:

Intelligent, Responsible, Creative, Sincere, Energetic, Warm, Tolerant, Respectful, Supportive, Self-confident, Keenly attentive, Benign, Concerned, Reassuring, Firm, Persuasive, Encouraging, Credible, Sensitive, Gentle, Trustworthy.

These traits are based on American research they may not all be universal (quoted in Wedenoja, in Lehmann, Moro, Myers, Lehmann, 231).

Brunton asks why shamanic workshops are preponderantly female when American culture is oriented to masculine "rugged individualism" and self-sufficient problem-solving where individuals can access their own personal tools (shamanic methods, power animals, spirit-helpers, psychotropic substances) to achieve their goals. Brunton then cites Ian Lewis who states that 1) it is women who are the innovators in religion, and 2) a segment of American women struggle to become more self-sufficient, free from male domination, and to fulfill personal goals of actualization (Brunton, 176). I suspect that men, are hesitant to place themselves under the aegis of a healer 1) unless there is a material payoff, 2) since it could feel like a submissive role, 3) and hesitant to become part of a predominantly female group.

4. *The Physical Nature of Ayahuasca.*

The Inca word, Ayahuasca, meaning "vine of the dead", refers to the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine. The Jivaro boil the leaves with other related leaves to produce a brew that contains the hallucinogenic alkaloids harmaline, harmine, d-tetrahydroharmine, and possibly also dimethyltryptamine (DMT). Harmine is a major alkaloid found in ayahuasca. It is an indole (plant hormone) hallucinogen derived from plant materials. It has a complex chemistry and pharmacology. An important molecular component of ayahuasca is the indole ring molecule. This same ring is found in serotonin (5-hydroxytryptamine) which is salient in the workings of the CNS, transmitting nerve impulses (de Rios, 22).

Other hallucinogenic substances may be added to the ayahuasca brew to alter or accentuate the experience, including:

- Chacrana (*B. rusbyana*), believed to contain N-N-dimethyltryptamine.
- Toa' (*Datura suaveolens*) which is powerful enough to create ASC by itself.
- Tobacco smoke containing *Nicotiana tabacum*, the stronger rainforest variety, is often used to accompany the ayahuasca ritual.
- A daily dose of cane alcohol mixed with camphor that acts as a stimulant.
- *Agua florida*, perfumed water, to add another dimension of sensory experience.

The *banisteriopsis caapi* vine per se is not the only variable in the ayahuasca experience. Other variables include:

- Dosage level.
 - How drug is administered.
 - Who administers the drug.
 - The emotional atmosphere.
 - Music.
 - The instruments, song, whistles, and nature of the music.
 - The participant's mood, personality and expectations.
 - Who is in the group and the size of the group
- (de Rios, 22-3)

Shamanic ritual most often occurs in the company of family and friends.

The anxiety of the client and the confidence of the shaman work to create a level of suggestibility that conditions the client to accept healing (Moro, Meyers, Lehmann, 181).

In tropical rainforest societies ayahuasca facilitates:

- a. Supernatural activities: a) magic and religious ritual to communicate and commune with spirits and to attain divine guidance; b) divination to determine safety; c) witchcraft to cause illness or to protect against the malevolence of others.
- b. Treatment of disease: to determine causes and to effect cures.
- c. Pleasure and social interaction: (de Rios, 45).

5. Major Characteristics of the Ayahuasca Experience.

Arnold Ludwig (in de Rios) proposed 10 characteristics of this hallucinogenic altered state of consciousness:

- Alterations in thinking.
 - Disturbed sense of time.
 - Loss of control.
 - Changes in emotional expression
 - Changes in body image.
 - Perceptual distortions.
 - Changes in meaning or significance
 - Sense of the ineffable (the inability to communicate the experience to someone else)
 - Feelings of rejuvenation.
 - Hyper-suggestibility.
- (de. Rios, 23-4)

Harnier (1973) found common themes in the ayahuasca experiences of Indian informants from various regions of Amazonia:

- The soul is believed to separate from the body.
- Visions of jaguars and snakes.

- A sense of communion with the supernatural realm.
- Visions of distant persons, cities, or landscapes.
- Feeling of seeing the “detailed enactment of recent unsolved crimes, particularly homicide and theft” (in Fuerst, 51).

[All but the last point were also reported by my informants.]

Michael Harner’s essay, “The Sound of Rushing Water” (Moro, Meyers, Lehmann), provides a graphic example of an ayahuasca experience:

“He had drunk, and now he softly sang. Gradually, faint lines and forms began to appear in the darkness, and the shrill music of the *tsentsak*, the spirit helpers, arose around him. The power of the drink fed them. He called, and they came. First, *pangi*, the anaconda, coiled about his head, transmuted into a crown of gold. Then *wampang*, the giant butterfly hovered above his shoulder and sang to him with its wings. Snakes, spiders, birds, and the bats danced in the air above him. On his arms appeared a thousand eyes as his demon helpers emerged to search the night for enemies. The sound of rushing water filled his ears, and listening to its roar, he knew he possessed the power of *tsungi*, the first shaman. Now he could see. Now he could find the truth” (Moro, Meyers, Lehmann, 195).

In a theoretical treatise Shanon proposes 11 “structural parameters”, the experiential qualities, of ayahuasca consciousness.

2. Agenthood. Experiencing thoughts as not being one’s own.
3. Identification with whatever one is looking at.
4. Unity. Being one’s self, yet, being someone or something else.
5. Loss of boundary between inner and outer reality.
6. Individuation. Self-transcendence but with consciousness still maintained.
7. Change in perceptions of one’s size, weight, posture, etc.
8. Locus of Consciousness. Consciousness located outside one’s body.
9. Variations in time, including its speed.
10. Self Consciousness.
11. Non-intentionality. No object to which thought is being directed and no content entertained by the mind, often leading to a sense of “the void” or “pure consciousness”.
12. Connectedness, knowledge, and the Conferring of Reality. A noetic feeling that one is privy to true knowledge.

PART II: THE PROCESS OF CONSCIOUSNESS TRANSFORMATION

The Transformation of Consciousness in 3 Women.

Two of the women, Karole and Ginger, both aged 58, had their ayahuasca experience in Peru. The other, Abigail, aged 65, did hers in Brazil with the Santo Daime Church. (the names are fictitious.) From the description, the “daime” brew appeared to be less concentrated and more prone to a more varied experience. I will divide the cases into 10 parts: the formative years, accessing the spiritual path, turning point, finding the shaman/guide, preparation, initiation, the ritual of ayahuasca, return to normalcy, transformations in relationships, the learning.

Case #1: Abigail

1. Formative Years.

Abigail, age 65, is thin, frail and sophisticated. She feels physically challenged because of aching joints, but she feels spiritually ageless. She grew up with both parents in the suburbs of Chicago and in Massachusetts on Cape Cod. She never liked public school because she felt it didn't offer her creative work. She felt limited and controlled. There was familial modeling around domesticity, but little emphasis on femininity. Abigail felt her childhood and years growing up were conflicted and later learned of early childhood sexual abuse. She had an authoritarian father who dictated her education and career. Abigail had always felt androgynous and didn't want to have anything to do with growing up. She rejected her developing breasts and wore tight undershirts to flatten her chest. She was terrified of getting her menstrual period. “I didn't know what to do with my adolescence and I didn't know what to do with my womanhood.” But, at one point she did marry a black man. He was violent and abusive for four years. “I barely got out of it alive!” With a Master's degree in early child development Abigail taught for several years until her mother died of cancer.

2. Accessing The Spiritual Path.

[1st Person] At age 30 I asked ‘What do I really know?’ What I really knew in 1970-71 was that I was highly intuitive. I had to know what my path was. I got involved in Eastern religions for a year and a half. My unfolding was really my own intuitive roots. I needed the space of what I needed to know.

3. A Turning Point.

A major turning point for me was reading *Autobiography of a Yogi* when I was 36 years old. With my interest in Eastern religions I began regular classes in meditation with a well-known channel who told me I went into highly intuitive realms of a very refined dimensional frequency.

I had been in psychic pain for many years emotionally and somatically. I was treated by many practitioners, like light therapists, psychologists, hypnotherapists, Native American healers, and I did past life work and such. Early sexual abuse was confirmed repeatedly, beginning when I was 2 months old. I was possessed by this

horrible energy and, at times, I would leave my body. I was possessed by some dark entities that didn't want me to continue in my life.

[How did you learn of the abuse that occurred at 2 months of age?] I was doing light work, working with light, and before that I had done some incredible Ericksonian hypnosis with 2 practitioners who also had deep dark pasts. Once I went home and had that experience in my whole body—the penis in my mouth. This was after 3 sessions with Ken Sachek and I was a raging maniac; and I called Ken and he said “yes, you are probably fantasizing about this”; it was after 10 years of doing deep work with Brent Baum who works with p.t.s.d. He immediately gets you into the altered state. It was all there; it was a full blown experience and after 6 months I had occupational therapy. I had to clear all the remnants of this madness. That's what I was asking for: the healing in Abijania [Brazil]. Then I worked with a doctor who cleared me of the entities. The problem was I wasn't living in my body and the entities were ruling me. It was like I was in an insane asylum and I needed to go to Abijania and tell the beings that I need healing in my psyche. The gift is that ayahuasca will help. I had to intuit that. I had to intuit that I had to stay on my own and not get mixed up with other people's issues. I needed to do my own healing.

[For a few months before her travel to Brazil she would go through a morning ablution that involved holding healing oils in her mouth for a half hour and then rinsing with a variety of solutions while choking and gagging and clearing her throat as if she were trying to free herself from something choking her. It was not difficult to interpret the meaning of her experience as the infant choking on her father's semen.]

I could never forgive my father. I was psychologically confused. It was for this pain that I went to Abijania to ask for healing.

4. Finding the Shaman/Guide.

I was gifted by my friend Marcia who suggested the trip to Brazil to see John of God. She had told me about John of God. I took the herbs for 2 months prior to going. Marcia had already been in Brazil and gave my picture to John of God. At that moment, I was struck by a presence and began to weep. Marcia said it was at that moment that she had given my picture to John of God.

5. Preparation For the Rites.

I went to Brazil to have psychic surgery by John of God, to remove the horrible afflictions that I've carried for years. There are 33 entities who came through John of God. He does deep psychic work which I needed to heal the pain of my father's sexual abuse. These entities are surgeons and had been surgeons when they lived on this earth. When you're over 55 years old they will do invisible surgery only and they will do surgery in 1 session on as many as 9 different body places.

When I met John of God I had only 20 seconds to tell my issues.

Because I was prepared he said I would have surgery in the afternoon. In the procedure room, I remember looking at very peaceful loving eyes. Then the person of John of God came into the room and brought in the “entities” who performed the surgeries. I could feel things all over my body and it took about 15 minutes. Cutting and changing--I could feel this energy in different parts of my body.

Being as sensitive as I am I felt the surgeries everywhere. I had a 40 day recovery period. I took a taxi back to where I was living and I was out of it for 3 full days. I spent 8 days out of the sun. I could not lift anything heavy; I felt like I had medical surgery.

Now the thing that led me to ayahuasca—it was like it was *presented* to me toward the end of my very deep 40 day recovery. The entities were done with my surgery and I was directed to do my own work. So the entities came to tell me, ‘Abigail, think about ayahuasca!’ and so here is this beautiful invitation to Santo Daime. Two days later the lady I rented the apartment from invited me to a Santo Daime meditation which is the church of ayahuasca in Brazil. I went to Abijania.

I felt like I must take ayahuasca. At some point I had picked up Alice Walker’s autobiographical book. She gave an account of her ayahuasca experience with a shaman which reminded me that I had heard about ayahuasca before. I had never been interested in mind-altering substances and had forgotten about it.

6. *Initiation.*

My landlady Gisela had been doing Santo Daime for several years when she invited me to go to a meditation. This meditation involved the taking of Santo Daime which I had never heard of before. I only knew the term ayahuasca.

We drove out of Abijania, and then high on a hill and saw a brightly illuminated double cross. It was chilly. The women had to wear skirts so I borrowed a skirt. We went down steep ramps to the church. The men and women sat separately. Everything is formal but simple in nature. Then I saw this container with ayahuasca, but they called it *daime* which means “give me light”. Everybody sat down and was quiet. There was a prayer in Portuguese. Then we went up one by one. The men were served by the men, the *padrino*. The women, were served by the women, the *padrina*.

7. Ritual of Ayahuasca.

I drank half of a little plastic cup of daime. I didn’t know what I was doing. I had the same amount as those who had done it before. Everything is very reverent. You pause before you drink; you double-cross yourself; it tasted like fermented beer. Then we went back to our seats. When the *padrino* and *padrina* stood we would stand and when they sat we would sit. There are guitars and sometimes percussion which accompanied the prayers in Portuguese. Everything is the music. Then after about an hour the light was lowered and we were invited to meditate.

I never had any experience like it!
All of a sudden my body was like stone. I couldn't lift my limbs.
I was alert and aware, but my body was heavy.

Then I experienced the trunk of my body becoming an ovoid golden ivory pulsating body of white light. The presence of the Divine Mother was powerful! It was so large and huge and that's all that there was and it just kept going.

It was getting cold. I was glad I had something for my head. We even had gloves because it was so cold. I could hardly get up. Then there was no more meditation. It started about 8 o'clock and we didn't finish 'til midnight.

I did feel a little nauseous but what I did feel more was that I was going to have diarrhea. I did manage to control myself until I got back to my little place.

One must take the daime in a highly protective place otherwise you could open yourself up to all kinds of spirits. Everybody leaves you alone. They don't touch you. You are having your own experience and if you touch someone you could get very mixed up. If someone falls on the floor they let them fall on the floor. But the daime is so protective and profound it will not let you hurt yourself. I slept after that. That was my first daime experience.

When I woke up I felt like I was in another "chamber" if you will. I was processing and felt I had to stay with it. I felt compelled to look at this deep psychological stuff that was coming up. Whatever was inside of me the entities were graciously directing. I was able to carry on with normal activities, but part of my attention was to things internal and unknown. And it took me at least 8 days to recover.

There were no hallucinations. There was only that white oval. I asked Gisela about it and she said that was an advanced state. I felt deeply connected to the place where I was. Connected to nature and integrated within myself, connected to my own unfolding. There was no feeling of elation. I was just conscious of that ovoid light pulsating inside of me, penetrating all parts of my body and doing the work.

After 1 month I was invited to attend a big healing in Brasilia. The sanctuary in Brasilia was enclosed and it was full of Mother energy. There was a little grotto with saints, the Divine Mother and the Christ. The men sat on one side and the women on the other. There were more people doing the music. One son played the violin and channeled the music. The other son played the bongos. There were people with guitars, drums and violins; they do *ubanda*, and the *madrina* summons the nature spirits. Now in Abijania they do not summon the nature spirits, but in Brasilia they do.

Gisela told the madrina that I wanted to go very deep. I had no idea what was going to happen. The music is channeled and very repetitive. It is designed to open all the chakras. I went back to my seat and I started to learn how to go along with the music. The music was starting and we were going up and down and I couldn't get up! All of a sudden the daime hits me and I'm turning into this intense stone! It was painful. All I know is that I sat with intense pain inside of my body and I thought I was going to fall on the floor. The daime was teaching me inside myself. The daime was teaching me that I needed to not get sick and needed to take the light into me. To let it shed light on all the dark recesses of my body.

And daime also taught me that as soon as I could process it I would be able to open my eyes and participate in the music. It taught me that it was very important for me to stand up and sit down. The people who needed to throw up just threw up; I saw all kinds of people there in their altered states and they were seeing visions and their hands were going up and down, and all I could do was pray to bring myself back. I tried to tap my toes; to get the energy going in my feet. It was most painful, like I was breaking open! It was breaking into me and it was breaking through me! It was like something was going into my gut and was breaking me! I didn't know how I could tolerate the intensity! I did not know what I was seeing. Sometimes the Buddha would come to me; I invited Raminaharshi to come to me; the Great Beings—Si Baba would come to me. I'm sure the serpents were there but they didn't scare me. I kept going and then I sat down.

They offered me the daime a second time! And I said to Gisela, I can't do this! And Gisela said, "You have to do the work! even if you take a drop." Well, I didn't understand that when you are together with the others there is a synergy and you're not only getting your own thing, you're getting everybody else's! Then I went into a deeper place and I was like concrete! I was breaking apart a little bit more and more and I was starting to feel a little bit nauseous but I didn't go to the bathroom; every time I felt it I told myself to go into the light inside of me. It was so painful! I kept on tapping my foot. I could not move my arms! My arms were hanging limp! I couldn't move anything. If there was a fire the Divine would've had to carry me out. But then I was able to stand up and sit down. And then, they began the daime dance. This is very controlled and formal. Everything is prescribed. But I was not able to follow. I wanted to do my own stuff. I was reprimanded and commanded to beat out the rhythm. I was asked to keep my whole being present with my self. Then the dance started and that lasted for an hour and a half—2 steps one way and 2 steps the other, like a swaying. This moves the daime more wonderfully. Then they said their prayers, 6 hours later. It was a 2 hour drive back to Brasilia. I went upstairs and lay down; I don't even know how I got up the next morning! I had to go to the bathroom, and had to find my way downstairs. It was painful. Then I had to go back upstairs and I don't know what I could do. I just wanted to go home and be in my own space. And it went on for days and days and days back in Abijania.

Then I went to the ayahuasca plants and asked them to reveal themselves to me; to tell me what it was all about. I had this waking vision of a giant Amazonian man and woman and their heads were coming together and they embraced. They were showing me themselves in their most primitive form; in their most primal form. The thing that was so accentuated was their heads. They were totally face-to-face and they were telling me, this is who they are! They were huge. And in that dance between them, the serpent was in the middle. It was the dance of the serpent between their bodies! And they were deepening my understanding; I wanted to know directly what santo daime is. What they were showing me was they are the essence of the earth in the brightest light. And they are there to reveal the light within you. Then there was the Divine Mother in all that brilliant light and then the Sun Father. And any time I wanted them I would lie down and I would call them and they would be there. But they wouldn't be there in a form I could see but I could sense them. It would just vibrate inside me. That was the second time.

Eventually I drifted back into normalcy, but I was devoted; even if I thought I would not do this again because I could get so sick, the foundation was set. So the next one was in Pironopolis and their rituals were also very structured. I was going with friends who also had deep abuse issues. And I was focused on the feeling that I could never feel any kind of forgiveness for the deep sexual abuse I suffered at 2 months of age. I was like a maniac—even though there was a love-hate relationship; and even though I had done all this light work and sound work, it would just keep coming up and up and up so all the time I'm asked to come out of the depths of this; and what I found was that in all the healings, at one point that forgiveness came out of a deep understanding from the roots of my being; and it was not just of my father, it was of my mother and for everyone! I was sitting next to a friend who also had deep abuse issues and what I learned was that we were having tandem experiences. I found out that if you touch somebody you could have their experience!

I think it was the 3rd daime, in Pironopolis, when in the middle of my heart; from the middle of my solar plexus came this brilliant shining blue white light. It was such a blinding light! Now, that ovoid light was soft and misty, but this light—oh my goodness!

As I visited more and more churches I found I needed less and less daime. And I didn't have to have my body turn into stone anymore. All I needed to do was to lie on my bed and call daime in. When I ingested it, it was in a sacred way. Even as I speak the daime is with me and the wisdom of the plant is so filled with the light of the present, of the source, that the plant will respond to your intention.

On my ninth and last daime journey I was invited to help make the tea, although this doesn't happen unless you are a regular member of the church. This was a huge honor. But I was very very sick. I couldn't get my head off the pillow and I couldn't even go to the bathroom. On the 4th night, 7 of my daime sisters came to me with the

tea – on that night they actually came and brought me daime. They sang the songs in my room. And I asked how many days would I have to be this way and they said “Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday—4 days”. One never has daime by one’s self or without the protection of the church and you don’t take daime without the music. The madrina gave me a bottle and said “you take this as you need it until you get better. The next morning I was able to get up and the next day I was perfectly normal. Then they came and got me for preparing the leaves. They were brewed, boiled and we took daime and I took some of that new daime. That was my final experience.

8. *The Return to Normalcy.*

I left on Thursday the 27th of October. I flew back to Atlanta to my IA (Intuitive Awareness) conference. I was great for that! Then I flew back to Chicago on November 1st. When I first came back I was not well; it was an assault on my senses. It was very hard to be back in the U.S. with all those people who want more and more. They’re not in touch with nature and the depth of things. And my body had to get acclimated and needed a time to get reintegrated.

I had the daime the madrina had given me. I put some of it in a dropper bottle. I wanted to see how much of it I could process by just holding the bottle. It was profound what the daime would do. What the lessons were—I could feel it inside me just as if I had drunk it. I have such love in my heart for daime; it’s as if it is already inside of me; it’s on the planet as a gift for everyone. It is already radiating through me; it is staying with me. And now that I’m home I take a little bit of daime each day and I know that it’s working. I just feel it’s the most wonderful thing I have ever experienced.

9. *Transformations in Relationships.*

[*When you returned to Chicago, did you notice a change in your relationships?*] I realized how profoundly this work had affected me: in my perceptions, in my interactions with people, it’s been ongoing, like a flower or a plant, the more I go out, the more I see this hasn’t stopped working. Like I don’t have this obsessive compulsive thing with people. I’m not taken with people who are judgmental. I’m not as reactive. There’s a space the way I see things. The understanding I’ve always had has a space to live more fully. I still have my stuff; but when I go back into the sublime, I know what kind of work was done. And I can apply it every single day as I go on.

[*Can you pick one person that you noticed a change in your relationship?*] Yes, one person was particularly troublesome because the judgments would be so damaging it would throw me off base. I happened to have seen her and I saw that she was doing whatever she was doing but my emotional charge was nonexistent, and I would look at that – I can see it and I can look at it but the charge was just dissolved. The other thing is I have no feeling inside of me—this is the big one: about the sexual abuse with my father. It was more than forgiveness, it was like anything that ever had to do

with that energetic exchange, and now that was that and I can go on my way; I needed to know my true self – I need to feel this, I need to feel differently. I can feel the presence of the grace every day – thank God for the presence of the feeling of nature – some people just take it for granted, but you can't feel it when you are all locked up with these traumas. Your body just can't feel this. And this is the greatest for me: Feeling the nature of the day and feeling the presence of Being.

10. *The Learning.*

What I learned is that it's a living, breathing force of light and wisdom. The thing I love about it is that it is connected with the roots of the earth. It is our roots, our *natural beingness*! It is there to heal your psyche like nothing else! You're intensely with yourself, although you may feel you are in another realm. It's a deep solid experience.

When I see these people with their reverence and their light, it's amazing. I have great respect for the people who dispense daime and who take care of the churches. And to see the children who are around these people, they have resonance with nature. The children are not out of control, they are very respectful, they accept the work and it's done.

[*So, in conclusion, who is Abigail?*] There really is nothing to say other than Being. I can't give you all the particulars. I am who I am and everything else can be subtracted. Abigail is the one without the other. The tree inside of me, the daime, its love being expressed! This plant and vines have a presence; like they're in here and they're just saying "yes, express more of that presence of life." I can't live with just technique; it must be that living presence. When discomfort comes, I ask, just allow me to feel more and more with the presence of "Beingness" so that just dissolves. But I can't force it. The natural process of santo daime will take care of it. That's what daime gave me, the doorway into The Feeling.

Case #2: Karole

1. *Formative Years.*

At age 58 Karole feels 18 and very good about life. She is a tall, bright, athletic woman with a rather impish look, who practices yoga. She is interested in leading people into the natural, so-called eco-psychology movement—learning from the earth. Karole wants to teach about alternative medicine and shamanism.

Karole's growing-up years were much milder than the other two cases. Growing up in Chagrin Falls, an upscale exurban town outside of Cleveland, Ohio, she was shy and terrified of public school and hated the structure of education. She missed her troubled mother. But school improved as she progressed. Karole was obsessed about doing things well. She needed to be a good girl and to do well in school. She had lots of friends as she got on in school and excelled in English and biology. Once Karole discovered boys she was in "7th Heaven" and at age 14 had something of a "Romeo

and Juliet” relationship with a boy which lasted for 5 years into college. At age 15 Karole felt she had matured as a woman. She went to Mexico for the summer and that culture allowed “drinking beer and other stuff”. Sexual awareness came in the form of hormonal feelings and falling in love, all of which was “very magical”. She graduated high school in 1965 loving music and anti-war issues.

2. Accessing the Spiritual Path.

At American University Karole’s emotional experience was a “roller coaster ride”. The student body was dominantly New York Jewish and for a while Karole was intimidated by this. All the non-Jews were segregated to one floor in the dorm. She went from a “terrifying time” to “having the time of my life” at A.U. Karole’s father was a minister, aloof from the family. Her mother was a spiritual person and Karole learned a great deal from her. Karole matured as a woman developing her sexuality, spirituality, and philosophical interests. “I was always the little philosopher”. Her best friends were also into philosophical issues. Therefore, the groundwork was already laid for spiritual interests. At age 18 Karole’s beliefs came into their own and have deepened since then, the nature of which she identifies as Paul Redmond consciousness. She graduated college precociously at age 20 in order to get married to the man she met while in college. She had an obsessive work ethic and was teaching while still in college.

Karole was always a feminist and gave speeches although she felt people didn’t respect her enough, not because of her gender as much as her age of 27. As Karole developed her own skills she grew further and further apart from her patent lawyer husband. He wasn’t a seeker, he had no vision. This was disappointing to Karole. Once she brought home clothes from shopping and her husband ordered her to take them back.

3. A Turning Point.

That was a major turning point for her. It was a marker, a realization of who this person really was. But, having their first child kept the two together a bit longer. She found her ideal in her second husband who was smart, had vision, expansiveness, and was funny. “He adored me and showed it all the time”. “I didn’t want perfection. I wanted challenge; someone spiritual who had intellect.” Spiritual did not refer to any religion but was beyond that. I wasn’t attracted to any particular religion although I studied a bunch of them. I was very interested in the Eastern stuff.” Karole has something of a cabbalistic orientation where the universe is made of light and as that light thickens the materiality of things appear.

4. Finding the Shaman/Guide.

[1st person] At one point, in the mid-‘90’s, my friend Linda and I were discussing spirituality. I was telling her about some of the issues I was interested in and she suggested that I consider coming with her and this anthropologist to visit a shaman he knows. Linda had met this anthropologist at an experience in the Peruvian Amazon. I

was very taken with the idea and hardly thought about it before realizing how excited I was about it. Having been impressed in my younger years reading Carlos Castaneda I yearned for a similar experience. I wanted to open my consciousness to a deeper level. I also liked the idea of going with someone who would find us a real shaman and not just someone who hangs out a shaman shingle simply for the money. Our shaman was exchanging US\$700.00 cash for a 10 day experience. My husband was supportive but disgruntled about my going on this trip. He himself was not interested in traveling with me. So, I packed up and went!

At Iquitos we went with this scruffy little guy to this place—but it is the shaman! He's got many wives; and he's got this 1 young wife suckling a baby. At first sight we can't discriminate that this is a brilliant man. We figured him out real fast after he started talking. He told us what we were gonna do and not to talk to any of the little kids down there—the Shining Path is still operating down there—dangerous. Next morning we woke up and had breakfast.

We took a 4 hour boat ride with an outboard motor with a little roof on it. There was delicious vegetarian food. It was the last thing we ate for 10 days. After 4 hours we pulled up to a village—looked like a Tarzan movie—they put down a board for us to get off the boat. We walked through fields and into the jungle. Our shaman cut a V out of a tree and told us to suck on that. It was a thick vine called the “ice cream plant” because they say it's sweet like ice cream. We all jumped into the stream. The piranhas were all upstream—so we were told.

5. Preparation for the Rites.

The ayahuasquero's place included one big dorm and one big eating hall. He had a lot of assistant shamans—apprentices. But he was the ayahuasquero. We studied for 3 days straight. We talked about the class, about medicine, about the death weed, ayahuasca, and to experience our own death. We had to do our own churning, brewing. They cut down all the vines and we smashed and boiled them all day long. He mixed it with a poison, a white plant called *oje*. A certain mix of that could kill you! We were going to be doing it the 3rd night; the 3rd night, the 5th night, and the 7th night and we had a lot of preparation. We were pretty scared; and some people said they were not going to do it. But everybody did. What we were to do—it was an all-nighter; he took us to the place we were going to do it. It was another mile into the jungle. He had built a beautiful conical 2-tiered roof structure. The large room was wide open and in the center was a rock and a ceremonial drum. He walked us through the ritual and what we were to do. He said we might vomit but to try not to. If you had to this was the area to do it, and if you had to go to the bathroom you would do it over here and because it was night you would have a semblance of privacy. And when we came back we went on a rice diet, and that night we drank *oje* in a big bowl and we drank it all at once because we hated it. It's gonna make us vomit, and while we're vomiting and having diarrhea women will be coming around with water and you better drink it because you might die if you don't. This is to clear out your system;

and I don't know if I could ever do it again because I'm sensitive; and the women later said they were really worried about me because I just couldn't stop vomiting. I just hated this feeling. The intense throwing up went on for about an hour.

After we had finished all of that we went into the water and the gay beautician—I just remember him washing my hair for me; we were all giving each other massages. We were all so strung out; and it was such a gentle beautiful loving touch and I felt so close with everybody.

6. *Initiation.*

And so that night we were to wear white, not just for the ceremony, but also if we were to wander off into the jungle and get lost, we'd be easier to see. Can you imagine wandering off into the jungle never to be found? We were told to walk to this site. We used walking sticks because it was hard to walk; we were to walk on a board over a stream. The easiest way to do that was to have a stick to steady your step. We were scared, but we weren't to speak at all. We were to walk single file silently. When we got there he would direct us. There were 10 of us and there were 10 of his helpers, apprentices. We were told specifically where to sit. He said he was going to be playing this orca that he made himself—during our ayahuasca trance. It was sitar-like and flute-like and it had a bass note and a higher note—a wind instrument; he said he would come and play for us and help us in our ayahuasca trance. We went through an elaborate smoke ceremony; and he blew smoke on us; blew smoke down on our head and it came out of our mouths and he smudged us with some kind of plant. Then we sat down. He did a lot of drumming and chanting. The ayahuasca brew looked like thick cola. He had filled up American Coca Cola bottles with this stuff. He poured the brew into these little shot glasses and we drank this all at once, just drink it down! It smelled and tasted horrible! Thick, sticky, awful, scary stuff, although you know it's gonna put you into a trance and you are terrified and you're gonna have nausea. I was sweating I was so scared. We had a mosquito net. We were all told to bring an entire outfit of mosquito clothing because at night they are out there. And it is a malaria area. They came out in force. We had preventative stuff [for mosquitoes] and stuff we got to use if we got bit. I remember all that; but now here's the problem: I can't distinguish between the 3 trances. I can't find my notes. But I can give you impressions of those 3 trances.

7. *Ritual of Ayahuasca.*

The first one—you have to get yourself into a comfortable position, you're gonna be there all night. I got into a seated position and then bent all the way over like this. You were not to lie down. We were on a bench and were given some pillows to sit on. And we each had our little thing of water, and a flashlight. We were told what to bring and I remember the mosquito clothing was bulky and I wished I didn't have to wear it and I sat like this [bent over] all night long. And the next morning when I came around, it didn't feel like anything I've ever had; I did not throw up because I didn't want to lose any of the effect of the brew; if you threw up you weren't gonna have as much of

the trance. I do remember feeling immobilized! My mind was completely active. Not like anything I've had; not like speed, not like marijuana; just very clear and going places.

My eyes were shut and I wasn't wearing glasses; I took out my contacts. When you shut your eyes you're in the dark, but I remember the dark becoming jaguars, serpents, and animals. And what was happening as a backdrop was a beautiful blue-eyed jaguar or cat-like animal! The whole universe became that face and I was going through those blue-green eyes and came face-to-face with this jaguar-universe-like thing. Then it disappeared. One very long vision was a serpent. They say with ayahuasca people do have animal visions, especially in the jungle. And he also told us we would have shared visions; we would be seeing some of the same things as a group. We were not to touch anybody. He said no one will ever touch us. Each night it was a little different. The 3rd night we were giggling and dancing and being really silly. But our 1st and 2nd nights were very serious. The serpent took me underground and I followed. He said that he was not an odious creature, that he was a sentient being. He said he wanted to share his world with me and he wanted me to come with him—all said nonverbally. It was almost like a house tour. He showed me his house and his tunnels. He wasn't that big a snake but like a realistic anaconda but not a huge serpent. It was a friendly snake and I became very small so I could go through there. Then later, I don't know if it was the 2nd trance? I flew with—not a condor—maybe it was a hawk although we did see a white owl. It flew off the top of that coned roof. The 1st night I saw the stars and the snake. The ayahuasquero said there were other things that were real important, like he said we might contact people who made the transition to the other side. I was really hoping to make contact with my mother; and it just wasn't happening. At one point my Day Planner went floating across my space. Parts of my psyche were floating away. While I was wishing to be with my mother the ayahuasquero stopped in front of me and played "ke sera sera" which was what she sang to me when I was a child! Then he played his own music in a minor key. I had a vision, as he was walking away with his orca, I had a vision that I was on a wagon and was dying. I was being wheeled out into the depths of the jungle to be dropped off to sink back into the earth. I faded down into the leaves and my hair turned into the vines and I became part of the jungle and it was a death and it was a most beautiful thing; it was sweet, holy; not scary; it was warm and it was integrating; it was wonderful! Later I saw another shaman and he brought his shamanic art and I was going through his pictures and, oh my god, he had drawn my shamanic vision! There was this woman in the earth! And he said, "everybody has that vision!" I bought that picture and had it sent but it never arrived. I'm over it. Those are the big memories of those first 2 nights. One other thing: coming back, each of the 3 nights at 6 a.m. we could see perfectly! We'd been up all night, but we felt we could see! Our perception was very sharp. We could see everything! And coming back we were perfectly balanced and feeling beautiful. We would sleep all day.

8. *Return to Normalcy.*

Those images have stayed with me. I've had flashes of all of those. This star thing comes up a lot; seeing faces in the night sky. Now we're back at the camp and coming down from our 3rd trip. We hiked and took the trip back, spent another day or so in Iquitos market and bought some medicinal plants; he wrote prescriptions for all of us. Another thing: my friend who was with Edmundo; we had a party and a cake in an Hispanic setting; he wore Western clothes with a t-shirt that had pictures of all the possible sexual positions done by frogs.

We danced. It was like a transition to being more appropriate with one-another as opposed to swimming naked together and romping around in the dorm. We withdrew a little, but I became terribly close to a woman; Jacquelin Miller who is a shaman. Our ayahuasquero really loved her and she became sort of his assistant; she's a hypnotherapist—I'll show you her picture—and you'll see how exquisite she is. I said I was in awe of her and she said she was in awe of me. So after the 10 days we retraced our steps, went back to Miami tired and bonded. We were picked up and went home. I told my husband and my daughter, who was 18. They were stunned by my stories. I talked to everyone who would listen. The problem of my going away, I think, is resolved.

9. *Transformations.*

I became more eco-oriented. Before that it was a Buddhist thing; after that it was more of an animal and mystic thing; more involvement with shamanism.

I just am more connected to sentient beings. An awareness is there of a separate being within me. When I flew to Israel, on the plane, I had food poisoning and was really really sick and I felt, being on the window seat, I just couldn't ... and so I went inside of myself and found another being in there and a voice started--like I thought I was going to die there—and it said “it's been really wonderful being with you all these years! Glad to be in this carriage.” And I thought “Am I on the way out?” and it didn't feel bad! And the fear of death went away. It took away my fear of death! I felt there must be some kind of energy and I am at peace with it.

[*So, what's the experience of feeling there's another being within you?*] Well, it's surprising! It's sad. It took me for a loop! It surprised me! It was mind-blowing!

[*So, is there a relationship with that being or just a presence felt?*] A little bit I'm a part of everything, yet I still have my own identity. I do believe as it is a part of cabbala and it's wonderful. All good. I'm glad I did it!

10. *The Learning.*

I know more of who I am. I am more genuine. I'm more authentic. Before, I was being in a sort of adolescent way which enlarged me with facades. The ayahuasca helped me discover authenticity. I learned that there is a truth out there and that the truth lies in the cosmos and that we continue to push the boundaries.

Case #3: Ginger.

1. Formative Years.

At age 58 Ginger feels wonderful about her age and feels she is growing younger. She is tall, sinewy, with strong features of expression. Ginger grew up in Brooklyn, New York in a Jewish family and completed public school and college there. In primary school Ginger felt terrified; never felt safe and was afraid to speak. She was a “good child” and didn’t enjoy school. Ginger felt she had very little childhood, except for an occasional joyful experience, because she had to take care of her mother. She was responsible for her mother and had to be the love for her mother. At 13 or 14 her mother divorced. Ginger had adult responsibilities. Her mother worked and Ginger had dinner ready when her mother came home. Ginger was preoccupied with the thought of “How do I get away from her?” “I realized I was giving myself away, because I never had the experience of being myself. I only knew how to do for others. I only knew to be good, quiet and not to disturb anyone. I watched my sister brutally beaten by my father and I knew I had to shut up or I could be killed. Before I was born my father tried to strangle my mother when she told him she was pregnant with me. So, even before birth I had experienced the violence.”

At age 14 Ginger met the man she was to marry when she became 21. Her older sister became pregnant in college and couldn’t finish. Ginger’s mother said, “You will not do that in life! You’ll go to college and you’ll become a teacher.” Going to school in New York, she didn’t really have a decent college experience; “I did everything I had to do, but never felt freedom and joy that comes from college life”. At the time of graduation with a psychology and education major, Ginger married. It signaled freedom from her mother and commencement of a career. Although emancipated from her mother, she didn’t feel free because now she was married.

[1st person] “The nature of my marriage was awful. The wedding night I shut the door on my heart and slammed the door on his. I was a virgin, I had known him since I was 14; I was 21; I always had that finger pointed at me: “You will not get pregnant before you’re married!” “You’ll kill me if you do.” So I had this taboo about pregnancy; and while he and I played, I could never allow myself to let go. The night of the wedding he was drunk and the sex was horrible, it was just something to get over. And I thought to myself, “What is this!?” I had no tools for relationship. I closed my heart down and slammed the door on his. Five years later I had Jennifer.

At 28, I was washing the dishes and heard in my head a loud voice “I am not happy!” It was so loud I flipped my head around to see who said that. And then I realized that the words came out of *my mouth* and I thought “Oh my god! I’m not happy!” And then I turned the water back on and I whispered, “Good. No one heard me.” And that lasted 30 seconds and then I shut the water off, I got on the phone with my sister and I said I was not happy; and she thought it was some existential state of being I was talking about. I insisted. And she said, “Oh my! You woke up! Here’s the name of my

therapist.” And that started my life—I woke up from my fantasy. I was divorced at 30.

I went to this wonderful therapist. I hadn’t fucked anybody. I hadn’t made love. So I was in a Gestalt therapy workshop and met this guy who was the second bassoonist in a national symphony orchestra. He and I had an affair. Sometimes I’d get out of my husband’s bed in the middle of the night and drive to his house and drive back and be there in the morning when Jennifer woke up. I mean I just didn’t know what to do with myself. I didn’t have a clue. [So this man was something of a life raft for you?] Yeah, I was learning about myself. He provided me with my first experience of myself; he allowed me to be able to make love and he became my lover.

I had a friend from San Francisco and I moved there to be with him. I was working and going to graduate school again. I was also in a custody battle and on my own. I was finally finding out who I was. I had gotten my Master’s on the East Coast when I was married to my husband when he was in graduate school. It was in educational psychology. This second one was in holistic health with an emphasis on holistic nutrition. Anorexia and bulimia was my field of specialization.

But I continued to live with the question: “Who’s Ginny?” “I don’t know who I am!” And that was my biggest journey, to find out “who am I as a spiritual being”.

2. Accessing the Spiritual Path.

My spiritual path began when I began yoga. I had just had Jennifer, 1972, and moved to Washington, D.C. After that I joined a health club. My yoga teacher was a dancer from the American Ballet Theater, had injured herself and began teaching yoga. I studied with her a year and a half and read about yoga. I delved into the philosophy. I read the *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Yogananda that was the first book I read that was “Oh my!” In yoga I discovered my spirit self; the real me; the 3-d reality. Whatever my personality had to learn to get closer to my spirit was my purpose. I practiced meditation and explored other realms of consciousness. I never smoked pot in high school or college, but after college, I first tried marijuana. So when we got to Georgetown in the ‘70’s we were smoking a lot of pot. Richard Hittleman was my yoga teacher in D.C. I got his book and then I studied with him. My friends in NYC studied with him. I think it was true for me too and I got his 30 day book of yoga. I went into long fasts and I felt as though my skull blew open with a new consciousness and I was just in another place and realized that, oh my God, the decisions I made in my life were to protect my heart. That realization became wonderful because it was like a salvation; I knew that I was on the path to finding myself.

It was years of being in the yoga world and opening myself up more and more, in California, and going to India to study with B.K.S. Iyengar and immersing myself in yoga. And when I had my 40th birthday I wondered who my next teachers would be. I

wanted to do a vision quest. I said to myself, when I get to 40 I want to do a vision quest. What does that mean? I did not know. It just came into my head. I wanted to open myself up to my next teaching. I was too scared to go up onto a mountain. I couldn't find my place. I didn't know what it was, so I just said, Let it be. It will come.

When I was 43 I moved back east from California. I was always teaching yoga, but I was one of many great teachers. So I never made a real living; I bought my groceries. When I was 43 my friend in Connecticut said you got to get off that it's over for you there. So I went back east; and somewhere in my being I knew I was going to find my next teaching.

3. A Turning Point.

I met a woman in Northhampton, Mass. She was a full-blooded Cherokee. She came into my life very briefly. She gave me a book in a used book store, saying "it's not for me, it's for you". It was called *The Four Winds* by Alberto Viloldo. I knew he'd be my next teacher. I finished the book and I called Angela [the Indian] and I asked her, "Where did you get this? I need to meet this man!" She said "I found it in a used book store". She said she bought a second book. I got that book and called the publisher. I said, "Where is he?" They said he lives in Florida and I asked if he did workshops. They suggested I look in the back of the book. It didn't say. The publisher said they weren't at liberty to give out his address.

4. Finding the Shaman/Guide.

So I meditated on it and felt that this man would have to find me. And a week later I went to my mailbox in New Haven and I had not received my Omega catalogue. Soon after I opened my mailbox and there was the catalogue and I put my glasses on downstairs at the mailbox and I opened it to a random page and there was a workshop advertised. I asked, I wonder who is doing that one and I looked closely and there it was, Alberto Viloldo was doing that workshop. And I said "Thank you very much for finding me!"

5. Preparation for the Rites.

I studied with Alberto for 3 years in Providence, R.I. He traveled all over the states giving shamanic sessions. He said he would never suggest ayahuasca to anyone outside of the Amazon. But he did say if I considered it he would help me and of course I signed on. A year before the ayahuasca journey, he said I must start preparing. "You will need one year to set your intention." He said it is not something to be toyed with, he would support me in this journey. It is not a drug. You will come to this as another ride. "Oh, wow!" It is not a fun trip. Therefore, I will need to know who you are and what will be your intention before I accept you. And so I started that year long journey. I began getting ready by setting my intention for healing. What is it I am going into this that I seek? And I was clear by the time I got to the jungle. My intention was to heal every misperception of this lifetime and all previous lifetimes.

Once having seen, felt, healed that, I wanted to go to the source of my beginning and experience every lifetime as an organism of who I am—not in a body. Once having gotten that I want to be with God. That’s what my intention was. He accepted that. He knew I was ready.

I worked an amazing 2 weeks with the medicine people led by Don Manuel Quisque, who initiated me into the ancient Inca medicine rites. I was with him in the mountains—the mountains is where I source from. Up in the mountains of Peru, high in the villages, we did ceremony after ceremony to pray for our people, and when I came down from that trip I rested for a week. And then I met up with Alberto and the others. We went to the Amazon.

[What kind of exercises were you doing in preparation?] Being “in the medicine”, being with the medicine people and their ceremony: singing, chanting, gifting; we made these offerings out of coca leaves and made mandalas with the coca leaves and we would blow our prayers onto each other. We’d go the entire round; round and round; we’d put candy, money and flowers in and make these terrific packages and then burn them in the fire. So these were our exercises—we were part of the land, part of the spirit, we were in Machu Pichu, on the death stone; we were in our light body and taken off and thrown out into the universe and ready to start anew again. It was constant cleansing and cleansing. Staying with the intention, to heal every misperception from this lifetime and lifetimes before; it was a mantra to be said over and over again. There was always drumming, music and chanting. I didn’t look at this as my preparation, but it certainly was; and being with our intention for healing was where Alberto was really taking us. All of us on this journey were in the medicine way for years. There were people here from many different countries; medical doctors, heavy world hitters together in this hut and they had done it many times; they knew it was their way to access peace.

6. *Initiation.*

[So when did you first get in touch with the Ayahuasquero?] We did two journeys: the first night we were on Monkey Island where there were maybe 100 different species of monkey. We were on the beach. This ayahuasquero was very imbued with Christianity. When the conquistadors came, many Indians fled to the mountains to escape Christianity. But those that didn’t play-acted as Christians while maintaining their indigenous ways underground. We were in ceremony—there were forty of us, they said it would only be ten people, but he was so into money, greedy, but he knew all of these people. So one at a time we went up to the shaman and we had to cross ourselves and smoke a cigarette; tobacco is a sacrament. I was given the cup and I had to drink and then go back to my place. I was fearful. I had never had any experience with hallucinogenic drugs before. Would I lose control? Would I vomit? I knew it was part of the process; but I’m not a vomiter. I am not vomiting! This is my Mantra! I can hold it; I’m a strong woman! But in my fear was excitement! I’m going to find out about myself! I’m going to find my spirit and God! So I was excited,

nervous but excited. I kept rattling off my intention. And I sit down and we're in the Southern hemisphere. The sky is completely different. We were looking at the stars and I asked Jill who was sitting next to me, "Jill, do you feel anything?" "No!" "Do you?" "Not a thing!" Two hours go by. N o t h i n g. Some people are vomiting. People are retching, and meanwhile I say to myself, "ok, great Ginny! This first experience is bogus. Here I am in the Amazon and nothing; so just meditate and look at the sky and be in the stars! This is your journey. Have no judgement." Alberto asks if anyone wants a little more. Do you go up to the shaman and get a little more? Not pretty twoshoes. Pretty twoshoes just takes the experience and thinks, maybe I just haven't gotten there yet. I won't get more. I got what I was given. That was it!

All of a sudden, we're taking the canoes back to the island, I say wow! I just blew my first ayahuasca experience. I feel nice but I'm in the stars in the Amazon. The next morning we go around the room telling about our experience. We were in the stars. Every one of us had the same experience of being in the stars. And I realized that that was to ready us for the next night. So last night, on a scale of 1-10: a 2. Tonight would be very different. We got scared. John and I took walks in the jungle. We were fasting, Alberto said, y'know, restate your intention to each other, and I said, John, I'm not doing it. After all, Alberto said we had every ability to say no. It's not the right day for me. Jill said no; her guts were ripped up from the night before and she was inflamed. Maybe I'll just be a bucket person. And Alberto said, Honey, you haven't gone through all that and gotten here just to catch someone's vomit. I'm scared to death, but we're doing this.

7. Ritual of Ayahuasca.

So we walked through the day terrified, agreeing that this is good. We're not being flippant about this; and came the sunset, and entered this sacred hut in the valley. There were no windows, just a round candle-lit hut. And then a wizened old man walks in with his grandchild, about 8; his skin is leather; wrinkles and wrinkles, the beauty of this human being. His eyes! He went around the room and looked each of us in the eyes, and his grandchild sat waiting for him. She carried the bucket of the brew. Alberto said, last night the brew was from the new part of the bark and not very strong. This is ancient and it will taste different, it will smell different, it will go down differently. You are required to drink a whole glass. I looked at John across the room. Looked here and there, Jim wasn't doing it. Alberto repeated, "If you consider this a drug experience, you will miss out. Especially you old druggies, you will miss out. So when the experience begins to get really intense, maybe in a half hour, and the ride begins, with the psychedelic experience; you will have to stay focused. Those of you with a yoga background will fare well, because of your breathing. Do not let go of your breathing! I said, "I'm golden, I got the tools. Let 'er go!"

The shaman went first. Then Alberto took the drink. Then next was me. He blessed me, and by the time we got almost around to the person sitting on the other side of the room, I started feeling it. Tingling in my fingers and my toes, my eyesight started to

be weird, blurry, and I said I guess its time to close my eyes. And I began to trip out. I was so nauseous I knew I was gonna puke on my own body! How disgusting was that! I remembered to breathe, and the vomit would get up to my throat and I would exhale and made it go down. And each time I breathed I would root myself. I was sitting in lotus; I can't sit comfortably in lotus more than 15 minutes, so I knew I wasn't gonna be in lotus for very long, but I didn't know how I was sitting because the ride, where I was sitting, was so intense that the lights and stream of lights...I couldn't hold on to anything. I was being dragged and nauseous, dragged from one light stream to another, I just kept breathing. I just kept saying to myself, "breathe, breathe".

Occasionally I heard Alberto's voice. The shaman walked around, rattling leaves, not even dry leaves; and rattled and chanted in front of us. And that kept me focused. It could have been the first hour, I dropped into another place. When the shaman stood in front of me, I heard him say—he didn't speak any English—I heard him say, "State your intention!" Loud. He was in front of me. "My intention for healing is to heal every misperception in this lifetime and every other lifetime and having gotten that I want to go to the source of my beginning and once I've gotten that I want to be with God." And I said it over and over again. At that point I was so sick I said "I better open my eyes to see where the door is, because if I have to go out of here to throw up or have diarrhea. I want to know where the door is! I gotta know where I am!" I opened my eyes and what I saw were these huge scorpions walking around the room. And I said, "Not safe out there!" I closed my eyes.

If I threw up it was going on my lap. "I don't know what those things are, but I ain't goin'!" So I closed my eyes and the scorpions went away. I started to travel into different realms and different beings and different forms of life. At one point I was in what looked like a rocket ship. There were beings in the rocket ship, and I was one. Big heads, bald heads and they didn't look human. I was—everything was fast! I was soaring through realms of existence; going through and through, streaks and streams of light, the light was me; I was light energy. I went into the earth, into rock formations. I was experiencing a tactile sensation level, other realms of existence, a blade of grass, I could taste it—on a cellular level! At that point I was going so fast, I remember, shoo! I wish I could control this! Slow down! But I couldn't. And that went on—I don't know how long that went on. It could've been a long time. It could've been minutes. I was in a timeless realm! And then after bouncing through all of these realms, occasionally I would hear the shaman, the rattle, and I would hear him say, "State your intention!"

Even in this stream I could state my intention, and I could breathe, so I knew I was in control of the situation. I felt safe. I was scared, but I felt safe. And all of a sudden things started to slow down enough for me to say, "huh, I could ride this wave! Ok! This is ok." I must be in a different phase now. And, in front of me was this enormous man, like from the Arabian Nights; with flowing skirts wrapped around him and a big

turban. He was a beautiful black man. And in his hand he was carrying a book. And it was so heavy, and he's a huge being, but it weighs a lot. And the book opens up in front of me. And you know in those old movies the pages flow and they are going that fast; and I know that every page is a lifetime and every single page is a misperception of that lifetime! And I am in ecstasy, because it is I who am about to receive everything I came for! I'm going to heal every misperception from every lifetime as a human personality. And it's awesome. And I don't even have to focus on a single page because it's going so fast! But every once in awhile I see a page and get hooked into it. One lifetime I was a dancing girl in India. And I'm wearing these amazing colors and I'm twirling like a whirling dervish and I have bangles on my ankles and my wrists and I'm twirling in ecstasy. At that moment the shaman's in front of me, rattling; "State your intention!" I got off the path. "My intention is to ... every lifetime, heal every misperception, and having done that I want to be with God. So now I'm in the misperception phase and I say this 3 times. I focus on my intention every time he brings me back. That was amazing; I have no idea how long that was.

After that was over I again shoot out of a canon; not a rocket ship; I shoot out of a canon and am physically experiencing every life form, one after another, starting at that beginning part—and I couldn't control it. But from the moment of my inception as a life form on the planet; I'm experiencing every life form from the tiniest speck of soil, amoebas in water; growing and growing into these various life forms—evolution. And then I'm aware that I can be present in the room at the same time. So I'm plugging into other people's journeys too! I'm like—Alberto is outside. There is a jaguar! And the jaguar is my power animal! And he becomes Jaguar and he is out there in the jungle and he is roaring. And then at one point I hear him. He's sitting next to me, the shaman he's asking for direction is in his brain, in Spanish—and I understand enough Spanish to know what he's doing. I say to myself "oh my he's done this so much he's carving new pathways in his brain! Ginger, be present; be aware! This is your first carving here! To carve new pathways in the brain for new knowledge. So I'm back in my journey and the shaman says, "State your intention..." don't get lost. I get back into my journey. I'm at the place where I state my intention: "I want to be with God!" I've gone to the source of my beginning; I want to be with God.

So now I'm going to be with God. All of a sudden I again get shot out of a canon. But I'm not an "I"! I'm not a body! I'm not anything! I do have my breath and now I'm like a giant amoebic – what do call those things—you make a fire—and I can experience the universe as this---[Ginger demonstrates deep inhalation, deep exhalation with arms going away from the body, and her arms going toward her body]. It is me! It's around me! It's the only thing that exists, and then if I could say that a smile comes over my being; it wasn't a physical smile because I wasn't a physical being; the awareness in that moment [sobbing] I was God! I was [I say: experiencing the breath of the life force of the universe] ...and there was nothing else! And I was there! So there wasn't any thought, there wasn't anything. And the

next thing that I remember was coming back into my physical body and I was sitting in lotus for however long that was.

I don't sit in lotus; I don't sit in lotus for long periods. My legs opened up; my eyes were closed; I positioned myself near the wall of the building because I didn't know if I was going to pass out. I said to myself, at least you won't pass out on the floor if you're leaning against the wall. I set myself up so I wouldn't fall. So I leaned back and my hands went to my abdomen and my hands were way out! I was 9 months pregnant! And I just—I was sobbing. All of a sudden I was in labor! I said, “oh my god! I'm having a baby!” and I went through labor completely. I birthed a baby! And at the end of this birth I took this deep sigh and said, “oh my God! I birthed myself!: And my friend was sitting next to me, staring at me. She said “I've been with you for the last two hours of your journey! Mine was over two hours ago. “You just birthed yourself!” “I witnessed your entire birth!” [we are both crying]. Then I looked around the room—the shaman was gone. Alberto was gone! There were only 4 people in the room. Everybody was gone! We were done.

8. *Return to Normalcy.*

And I said, “How long have we been here?!” and she said, “It's over nine hours.” I said, “I've been sitting in full lotus for nine hours?” I said, “what are we supposed to do now?” “We are to go back to our room and take a freezing cold shower”, “This is part of the ceremony”. And I said, “I'm telling you, I'm not taking a freezing cold shower! I'm not doing that!” I got in there, she jumped in the shower and jumped out. The next morning we got on boats to go down river to go back to Cuzco to have our clearing. We went to sleep in the hotel and woke the next morning and each one of us had a story to tell. Alberto was there to hear the stories. Everyone that came got what they came for.

We were in the Cuzco pizza parlor; someone had a bottle of spirits and we were supposed to drink their *pizca*. So we're going around the table and it gets to me. Oh no, I don't do that to my body, anything I put into my body is sacred. And the shamans are howling with laughter listening to my bullshit. “Why are you laughing at me? My body is my sacred vessel!” “Your being an asshole!” “Ginny, when in Peru”...my friend Nancy next to me says “have a fucking shot glass and shut up!” They are howling and one shaman asks me “Where did you come from?” I said I've been doing yoga for so many years, I'm so in tune with my body why would I want to do that? And he said, “For no other reason other than you are willing to let go of control.” Oh, that's a good reason. I'll have another *pizco*! That did it! I was so drunk! I couldn't find the bathroom; I peed in my pants!

9. *Transformations in Relationships.*

[As a woman of the present, what are your wishes for others you come in contact with?] To manifest that who I am and clear out any of the shadow, any of the

suffering because that is not the truth of the spirit beings; so every person I'm with is an opportunity for me to mirror what that truth may be.

I feel blessed, honored to be alive. In this time I'm part of it. I've had those magic rocks beaten over my head. My shaman takes his healing bags of rocks and bam...on all my chakras and he comes to me, I have my guides. My Chinese doctor, Raymond, his mission is the same. His healing is to open me up so my channels are flowing. So I could be the healer; so I could experience the healing. I'm receiving, finally willing to receive my essence and not doubt who I am; and so my essence is wholeness, abundance and love. I'm rich! I have no fear; I don't worry; because it was a misperception; there is no such thing. If I'm going to choose my stories, I might as well make it abundance! My shamanic journey has taught me that my healing of it heals all those that came before me in my life and all those who come after me.

So my mother will never experience the fear of lack again. And that to me is exquisite because her being was wracked with suffering...who she is now, or who she's come back to be; I just know she's come in to the best family and she gets to experience a lifetime of ease, whoever she is. I wonder who she is and I wonder if I'll meet her in this lifetime. Others have told me that my grandchild Jennifer was my mother in my past lifetime. So to have her taken from me in a custody battle was lifetimes deep. We both know who we are to each other. [So this is your gift to your mother?] Yes. It's so wonderful to experience healing; so wonderful.

10. *The Learning.*

In the years after my journey, I could be anywhere. I could be sitting on the couch or walking down the street, and a page in the book [of lifetimes] is in front of me and that misperception in thought form comes into my mind and I literally say, "And I believe that?!" Poof! Gone! And it would happen often; to revisit that [and then to extinguish it] and I know they [the spirit guides] are still working on me, I know that. So when I look at that journey and I look at where I am as a spirit as I get closer to the end of this life I see it as preparation; what came before; to be present to the now. To be present for the true person I am as a spirit being. So for me that experience has stripped away the false me, the masks; it's allowed me to take the masks off.

Epilogue.

I got an email the next morning from some woman I don't even know – "Someone gave me your name; said you may be interested in this; one of my teachers from Peru is coming for a weekend; Juan Nunez del Prado." I had met him. He wanted to deliver a message to my teacher, Alberto. The shamans felt Alberto was way out of line taking advantage of the shamans, so I was the *chosky*, the messenger, and he said to me, "do you want to be a *chosky*?" And I said, I don't have a clue what a *chosky* is. And he said I'm the messenger. Oh my god! They're all angry with Alberto for exploiting the shaman; bringing him and the apprentices out of the mountains to do the teaching. And then they can't go back up especially the older who initiated me, as

well as the elders; he had emphysema; he could not go back up; but eventually he did go up to die. But he couldn't go up; his wife and family were up there. So people were really mad at Alberto and I don't know if he's made his peace.

Conclusion.

The shaman-guided ayahuasca ritual is but one pathway among many leading to a higher level ecology based on the love of nature, the nurturance of sentient beings—including plants and trees, and the preservation of a healthful environment. Ayahuasca consciousness is an exploration into one's interiority, contrasted with the modal cultural orientation of exploring our external environment, including outer space. It is but one pathway in the quest for a deeper, broader consciousness and conscience. It is but one dimension energizing a culture seeking personal authenticity and an environmentally balanced ecology. This idea of balance is not new; it is ancient; simple technologies maintained some semblance of balance in nature and it is present in the cosmologies of many tribal peoples. With a growing number of people on all our continents appreciating the nature of the imbalance and seeing the consequences thereof, this cultural movement has quickened as we look backwards to the traditions that have sustained our species and enlightened our minds. The "So what?" are the perspectives presented here and the ethnographic histories of 3 women who have experienced a powerful modality of nonordinary reality. The "Now what?" is to appreciate and explore the only partially-charted regions of human interiority and continue the mission, building a greater momentum to the ecology movement that holds great promise of survival, growth, and positive cultural evolution.

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