

ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF AYAHUASCA
AND AMAZONIAN
SHAMANISM

THE SHORTEST PATH TO SUCCESS,
WEALTH, AND ENLIGHTENMENT

PAUL HEALINGOD



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The shortest path to success, wealth, and enlightenment, 2023

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Who is Paul Healingod?



- The king of healers, millionaire and philanthropist, who has transformed the lives of thousands of people worldwide.
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- Creator of MycoMysticism, a new religion set to seed spiritual awakening and personal transformation globally.
- Author of the legendary “Hypno-Coaching.”
- Founder of the American Academy of Hypnosis and the American Academy of Business.
- Founder of the Immortality Research Institute Inc.
- Personal hypnotherapist, trusted by prominent American politicians and Hollywood celebrities.
- A visionary who confronts the ultimate frontier of human existence: healing death itself.
- Author of 19 best-selling books. Editions available in both English and Spanish.

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INTRODUCTION

I will forever remember this day: April 9, 2019. During a psychedelic trip, the spirits explained to me how I would start my one million dollar-a-year business. It was the next day, on April 10, in my hotel room, that I recorded my first video: this would be the beginning of teaching online courses on hypnotherapy and healing. This is how my career in Hypno-Coaching began. In the first year, the work brought me the promised million, and much more followed in the years to come. But what was most important about this day was that I gained an understanding of the magic of Ayahuasca, teacher plants, and mushrooms. This is the day that my life got divided into a before and after.

I have been practicing hypnotherapy since the year 2000 and teaching it since 2005. Since 2007, I have been running a private practice in the United States. I didn't need to go to the movies to see Hollywood stars—they came to me. I didn't need to go to Wall Street to meet important business men such as Jordan Belfort's (*The Wolf of Wall Street*) and his inner circle. They became my clients. Through my practice, I have helped many people quit smoking and cope with their addictions. I have helped people build relationships with loved ones, by letting go of their past. I have treated Russian oligarchs and American politicians—so well-known that they would never confirm our acquaintance if I suddenly started naming names. I was treating everyone, but somehow I couldn't heal myself.

Hypnotherapy is the most powerful tool available to a healer. But sometimes, even hypnotherapy may fail to correct the deep subconscious programming to change a human being. I was a successful businessman. I was involved in cargo transportation and real estate. Rightfully so, I was considered the main Russian-speaking expert on business immigration to the United States. I dealt with millions of dollars, but I never felt wealthy, successful, or happy. My business took a tremendous amount of energy and time. I knew there must be a way

to eliminate this feeling: that life was slipping through my fingers. If someone had told me ten years ago that it would take an ancient Indian ritual to heal me from this, I would never have believed it. But God has a sense of humor, doesn't he? I spoke with Him.

I dared to drink a triple dose of the “Vine of Spirits” decoction at one of the Ayahuasca ceremonies—this was already far from my first time. I don't recommend doing this: it's extremely dangerous. At some point, I felt something grow and awaken inside me. It was the consciousness of God. God told me why He'd created the Universe and all beings: as a sandbox for play. This experience informed me that I could perform miracles—even stop death. My mission was to return to the people the four most important and necessary parts of life: health, wealth, love, and happiness. Everything surprisingly came together—as if some higher power were helping me. Since then, that's all I've been doing.

When I was ready to organize retreats, I flew to Ecuador without a clear action plan, and without any guides or contacts who could help me on-site. I needed to figure out where to start, choose the right shaman, and how to navigate this new country. Additionally, I needed help stringing a few words together in Spanish.

There, I met Ari Shaffir—a stand-up comedian with his own Netflix show. Before that, I had never heard of him. He approached me to find out what someone like me was doing in Ecuador. I explained my work there, and his companion told me she had recently undergone an Ayahuasca ceremony, and had experienced excellent results. That's how I met Jesus—an experienced shaman and president of one of the Kichwa tribes. And at our very first retreat a miracle happened. One of my students never told anyone that a tumor was growing in her chest. When she returned home after her Ayahuasca ceremony

and underwent a medical examination, it turned out that the tumor had disappeared.

This book is an exhaustive, one-of-a-kind guide to Ayahuasca and teacher plants. It took tremendous effort to gather all the information presented here and to verify its truth with shamans. In this book, I share my unique experience with you, because this is my mission and my calling: I want to return health, wealth, love, and happiness back to people. Ayahuasca and teacher plants give you all this, as they have given me and the dozens of people who have already attended our retreats. Through my experience and by giving you the knowledge here, I grant the same to you.

Ayahuasca is true magic—as it turns out, it actually exists. This is an opportunity to peek behind the scenes of creation, where ordinary mortals are not usually allowed. It’s an opportunity to heal from deadly ailments and achieve anything. It’s the answer to everything—the answer to your entire life.



CHAPTER 1.

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO AYAHUASCA**

The Main Drink of Your Life

An entheogen and a hallucinogen come together in a brew that contained the “molecule of spirit,” a thousand years before humanity knew about the existence of not only DMT (dimethyltryptamine) but any molecules at all. Ayahuasca, yagé, daime (and the thirty-nine names it is known by) cannot convey the power contained in this one drink. Formally, it is a brew made from the “Vine of the Spirits” (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and Chacruna (*Psychotria viridis* or *Diplopterys cabrerana*), immersing a person in a psychedelic trip lasting from four to six hours. In fact, it is a drink that allows you to interact with the spirit of the “maestro” *Banisteriopsis caapi*, to see the true nature of things, heal the mind and body, find answers to any questions, and achieve what is commonly called “Enlightenment.”



Ayahuasca was discovered by the Kichwa—one of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, who once surpassed the Mayans and the Aztecs in cultural and technological developments. They carried the magic of this brew through the centuries and remained faithful to *Pachamama* (Mother Earth). The spears of the conquistadors did not break them,

nor did the fires of Jesuit inquisitors, “anti-drug” propagandas, or governments that banned the sacred drink in almost every countries. Despite everything, the truth prevails. From the mid-twentieth century onward, Ayahuasca has experienced a real renaissance. People from all corners of the world make long journeys to the Amazonian jungle to undergo a ceremony with a true shaman.

If you are reading this book, then you must already know about Ayahuasca. I will skip the generalizations and the information you can so easily find on the internet. Rather, I will get into the specifics of Ayahuasca and all its magical properties. Let me first start by telling you a little bit about its history, so that you can decide if you want to go further in learning more.

From Ancient Times to the Present day: A Brief History of the Most Famous of Shamanic Brews

Although people know Ayahuasca is an ancient drink, they consider it to be a recent fad. They say that “psychedelic tourism” is at most ten years old, and soon the hype will die down. Somehow everyone will forget about the indigenous tribes called Kichwa and Shipibo-Conibo. Only someone who knows nothing about the history of Ayahuasca can spread such nonsense. So, it’s time to shed light on this topic. I am sure that after reading this chapter, every skeptic will finally understand: the brew from the “Vine of Spirits” has been with us for a long time and is here to stay.

Before Columbus

The year is 905 AD. There are still eighty-three years before the baptism of Rus, 191 years before the First Crusade, and 587 years before Columbus comes upon America. The ingredients for preparing Ayahuasca are already in the leather

bag of an indigenous shaman. This bag was discovered in 2019 in the Bolivian Andes—at least 500 kilometers from where the “Vine of Spirits” and chacruna grow. This means that by the time the brew from the “Vine of Spirits” was widely known on the continent, the exchange and delivery of ingredients for its preparation had been successfully established. The bag’s age was determined by radiocarbon dating—the most accurate of the methods available today.

The tradition of using psychoactive substances in vegetalista rituals is even older. Archaeologists in modern-day Ecuador have found smoking pipes and plant powders, along with containers for their storage. Their discovery indicates that—between the years of 1500-2000 BC—indigenous people consumed coca, mapacho, and individual ingredients of Ayahuasca. History has no evidence that shamans brewed it then, but interaction with plant-teachers was undoubtedly already in practice.

Followers of the União do Vegetal (UDV) Church claim that in the early tenth century BC, the Jewish King Solomon journeyed to South America and passed the Ayahuasca recipe to the indigenous people. By the beginning of colonization, the ritual of consuming the brew from the “Vine of Spirits” was already considered an ancient practice, as evidenced by Spanish missionaries records of the early sixteenth century. Ayahuasca ceremonies were so widespread on the continent that the Roman Catholic Church even declared a war against it.

During the Period of Colonization

The Jesuits called Ayahuasca “the work of the devil’s hand.” They destroyed the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine, and for many centuries, converted the followers of the cult of Pachamama (Mother Earth) to Christianity through fire and their sword. This war resulted in the following declaration:

“Worshipping Pachamama is nothing more than recognizing God and His grace, which gave food to your ancestors from the land they cultivated.” These words were spoken by Pope John Paul II on February 3, 1985, during a sermon in Peru. Worshiping Mother Earth officially ceased to be heresy, and Ayahuasca was no longer considered a devilish concoction. The Roman Catholic Church fought for five centuries and eventually admitted defeat in this matter.

However, Christianity left a significant mark on the spiritual life of the indigenous people of the Amazon. Colonization formed syncretic beliefs in which Pachamama, for example, is depicted in the image of the Virgin Mary. Mostly, these beliefs are widespread among *mestizos*—descendants of mixed marriages between indigenous people and colonizers, who mainly live in cities. Tribes living deep in the jungle have preserved their spiritual identity. The Kichwa and Shipibo-Conibo tribes perform Ayahuasca ceremonies as their ancestors did centuries ago.

In Contemporary Times

The official “birth year” of Ayahuasca is 1851. It was in this year that the English botanist Richard Spruce first documented how the Tucano tribe used a scientifically unnamed vine to concoct a hallucinogenic brew. It was Spruce who gave it a name: *Banisteria caapi*. Eighty years later, in 1931, the “Vine of Spirits” acquired its modern botanical name: *Banisteriopsis caapi*.

Spruce’s “botanical notes” later inspired a man named Richard Schultes—a scientist destined to become the father of modern ethnobotany. In 1941, after graduating from Harvard, he embarked on an expedition to Latin America, which lasted (with small breaks) for more than fifteen years. Schultes learned from shamans, and essentially introduced Ayahuasca to the Beat Generation. A famous example from this period comes

from the life of writer William Burroughs. A close friend of Burroughs suggested that he could use the "Vine of Spirits" to heal his opiate addiction. Burroughs describes his experience in the hippie cult book *The Yage Letters*, where Schultes is a prototype of the character called Professor Schindler.

In 1967, during the Summer of Love, the US government held a symposium called, "The Ethnopharmacologic Search for Psychoactive Drugs." This event gathered world-renowned luminaries in ethnobotany (including Richard Schultes), chemistry, and medicine. In the following years, humanity learned about the biochemical mechanisms of Ayahuasca's effects on the body. When the hippie movement declined—and the state apparatus began tightening their screws on everything related to psychedelic substances—research on Ayahuasca also slowed down. Still, the number of its adherents only increased.

In the mid-1980s, Colombian anthropologist and psychedelic substance researcher Luis Eduardo Luna, scientifically substantiated the need for a preparatory diet before an Ayahuasca ceremony and introduced the term "teacher-plants" into official science. Since then, the world had received convincing evidence that the brew from the "Vine of Spirits" is effective for healing: therapy-resistant depression; opiate, alcohol, and tobacco addictions; post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); Alzheimer's disease; and even some cancers. The number of people visiting South America for the sole purpose of participating in an Ayahuasca ceremony has continued to grow yearly, since then.

In Conclusion

In most countries, Ayahuasca could not be broken by colonizers, Jesuit Christians, or governments that passed laws banning DMT-containing products. All this only fueled the interest of tens of thousands of people. While attempts were

made to cast the study of Ayahuasca out of official science, this only reinforced scientists’ enthusiasm, proving the brew’s effectiveness against diseases that seemed incurable. The history of Ayahuasca goes back centuries, but its popularity is just beginning. I assure you that the most exciting things are yet to come.

The Diverse “Vine of Spirits”: Six Varieties of the *Banisteriopsis Caapi*



As you know, Ayahuasca is a union of several teacher-plants, primarily the “Vine of Spirits” and chacruna. However, Ayahuasca is the one most associated in our minds with the famous shamanic brew and its related ceremony. Despite *Banisteriopsis caapi* being the real star among teacher-plants (or the “maestro”), the adherents of Kichwa beliefs know little about it.

The main misconception is that the “Vine of the Dead” is considered a plant with only one variation. In reality, it has

many varieties. Through trial and error, indigenous shamans have found the key to each variety and the situations in which they can fully reveal their potential. Today, Ayahuasceros distinguish six main types of this vine. Their chemical compositions differ; but shamans, of course, can note the primary differences between the spirits of these plants.

☑ Celestial Ayahuasca (*Ayahuasca cielo*); also called “yellow” (*Ayahuasca Amarilla*) grows in Peru and is most popular among so-called “mestizo curanderismo,” who are healers of mixed European and indigenous descent. With this brew, the ceremony is straightforward yet effective; participants gain a powerful transcendent experience and observe vivid visual and auditory distortions. Therefore, this “celestial” variation of the vine is an ideal choice for beginners.

☑ White Ayahuasca (*Ayahuasca blanca*) has a spirit that acts very gently. Sometimes its effect is even softer than the “celestial” variety. Shamans collect the leaves of this vine only from young shoots. Indigenous people actively use it in other rituals related to white magic (love) and red magic (evil).

☑ Thunder Ayahuasca (*Ayahuasca trueno*); the Kichwa also call it “black” (*Ayahuasca Negra*) has earned its nicknames for a reason. This maestro is a rigorous teacher, acting harshly on the mind and body, providing a powerful cleansing. Shamans use this variety primarily for therapeutic purposes.

☑ Indian Ayahuasca (*Ayahuasca india*), also nicknamed “black” (*Ayahuasca negra*), is considered, if not the first, then at least one of the first varieties encountered by the people of the Amazon. In the pre-Columbian era, it was used to prepare the Ayahuasca brew. It primarily grows far from civilization—deep in the jungle, where no human has ever set foot; this vine grows among humans only in exceptional cases.

☑ Red Ayahuasca (*Ayahuasca colorada*) is a somewhat less potent variety in its effects than its “black” counterparts. This type of vine is considered heavy artillery due to its specificity.

Therefore, during a ceremony, the brew from it is usually consumed only by the shamans themselves.

☑ Noisy Ayahuasca (*Ayahuasca cascabel*) is the most powerful of all the listed maestros. It does not hold back with its proteges and has a colossal effect. Usually, the “noisy” variety provides a prolonged and intense trip, after which you return a completely different person. Naturally, this option is for those already familiar with the “Vine of Spirits” and ready for such an intense experience.

Theoretical preparation has never hurt anyone; do not rush to judgment against it. After all, the Ayahuasca ceremony is not a trip to the supermarket, and the shaman is not a sales consultant who will immediately bring an item to you, as you point your finger at. Shamans have their own recipes, honed over years of practice or received from a mentor. They will calculate the ideal dosage for you and do everything necessary to make the ritual go as smoothly as possible.

Shamans are not the kind to reveal their secrets. However, the most curious can communicate with the plant’s spirit. After all, that’s why you came, right—to get answers?

Secrets of Chacruna: The Gray Eminence of Enlightenment



When we say Ayahuasca, we imply “Vine of Spirits”; and when we say “Vine of Spirits,” we imply Ayahuasca. Adepts of this shamanic brew have become accustomed to associating it primarily with the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi*, as if it is the main component of the drink, and all others play a supporting role. This assumption seems unfair to an irreplaceable teacher-plant, known to us as chacruna.

Chacruna is a plant that contains DMT and thus provides visual hallucinations and other incredible experiences. In this way, the “Vine of Spirits” is an auxiliary component for chacruna. The alkaloids harmine and harmaline contained in it are monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), which enhance and prolong the effect of DMT. They slow down the excretion of the “spirit molecule” from the body, so it can enter the bloodstream in sufficient quantities and reach the brain.

The traditional classification of the teacher-plant by the Kichwa tribe has given rise to a misunderstanding, since they name two varying plants as chacruna: the *Psychotria viridis* (green chacruna) and the *Diplopterys cabrerana* (chaliponga). These two plant-teachers belong to completely different families, but are united by one thing—they contain tryptamines, including DMT.

Chacruna got its nickname from the Kichwa word *ch-aqruy*—meaning “to mix”; and there is a good reason for that. Shamans value it primarily for its ability to interact with other plant-teachers. After all, communication between the maestros in the brew is one of the key guarantees of a successful ceremony. Only the interaction of the spirits of these plants reveals the true picture of the world to the ritual participant.

In the traditional understanding of the Kichwa, chacruna is a plant with a feminine principle, as its crucial ability is to connect and establish communication. However, it also has a masculine principle, manifested primarily through its focus on vision. Green chacruna and chaliponga gravitate toward the

company of other power plants, and Ayahuasca fully satisfies this need.

According to the legends of Native and Indigenous Americans, these plants of vision were responsible for the appearance of all power plants on our planet. They seemed to hint to the spirits where different maestros should grow. Both the “Vine of Spirits” and all other Ayahuasca components owe their appearance to chacruna.

The ability to interact with chacruna is one of the chief indicators of a shaman’s skill. Mixing Ayahuasca components is an important task, but calculating the dose of chacruna is an even more precarious step—as it ensures communication between the other maestros.

Uninitiated people perceive the trip as a set of visual, auditory, and other distortions, allowing for a new experience. But shamans are confident that chacruna lifts the veil, allowing the healer to comprehend both space and time. A novice’s seemingly uncontrollable experiences is perceived by experienced Ayahuasceros as the accumulation of knowledge about spiritual realms.

Chacruna’s name—“mixed”—comes from its role; it is rarely used separately from other plants. The desired effect can only be achieved by interacting with other maestros. It directs them, and they direct it. Only together do the teacher-plants point the way. This is true both on a spiritual and physical level. If used alone, and when not supported by inhibitors, charuna does not cause any harm; but, at the same time, the correct sensations should not be expected.

Kichwa shamans describe the interaction of *Psychotria viridis* and *Diplopterys cabrerana* with their essential companion, *Banisteriopsis caapi*, as a rope with which they can climb to the heavens. At the same time, this rope remains a channel of communication with reality, where one must eventually return. They believe that the spirit of chacruna—in its desire

to explain as much as possible to the ceremonial participant—raises consciousness. Today, the fame of chacruna, like Ayahuasca, has gone far beyond the Amazon, where it holds a long and sacred heritage— in several South American countries, this status is even official. This plant is revered outside its historical homeland, in various syncretic religions— one such example being the Santo Daime.

The Quechua, themselves, maintain a skeptical attitude toward its popularity. They are convinced that ceremonies using this plant-teacher only make sense in places where it was intended to grow by higher powers. Only there, where the spirit of the maestro is active, can one imbibe the wisdom of Mother Earth. Any attempts to export chacruna to other continents directly insults the plant-teacher.

I can endlessly discuss the possibilities of chacruna but think it's best to let this maestro speak for itself. It's a fantastic storyteller. Get to know it, and you will see for yourself.

To Each Is Their Own: Which Ayahuasca Recipe Is Best?

Ayahuasca is not only the collective heritage of the Quechua people, but also the individual creation of each separate shaman. The shaman is the main figure in the ritual, and all aspects of the ceremony depend on them. Their primary focus is the recipe of the drink. Every true curandero learns their art for years and even decades. They receive their recipe from their mentor, but may improve the formula during their career and through their own experience.

At first glance, the recipe for the brew seems extremely simple. But even combining “spirit vine” (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and chacruna (*Psychotria viridis* or *Diplopterys cabrerana*) is a challenging task, as they never grow beside each other. It

is likely that, at first, shamans brewed a drink from the vine alone and then sought their own combinations through trial and error— especially since some Quechua communities still consume single-component beverages.

Modern curanderos use up to twenty plant components to prepare Ayahuasca. Today, there is no universal recipe, although in most cases, it comes down to a particular sequence of actions:

- ☑ chopping the plants;
- ☑ boiling them for several hours;
- ☑ straining and re-boiling;
- ☑ dividing into portions and cooling;
- ☑ boiling down the decoction on the next day;
- ☑ straining, removing sediment, and heating the drink

before consumption.

Of course, the shaman can improvise in his own way at any of these stages. This may be the main difficulty for an outsider evaluating the recipe. The shaman's hut is not a pharmacy; no one will give the shaman a piece of paper with the exact composition of the preparation.

The good news is that every recipe has a common primary ingredient: the mastery of the shaman. After all, Ayahuasca is about “how one prepares” rather than “what they prepare.”

That is why the best recipe for a decoction from the “spirit vine” is practiced by a true curandero: they collect the right plants in the right places; they clearly understand your goals, objectively assessing your parameters; and they selects the perfect dose. The shaman conducts ceremonies not for profit, but only with one goal in mind—to help people improve their lives.

The reputation of a true curandero precedes them. However, finding one simply by arriving in a foreign country can be challenging. But we managed to do it!

Eleven Friends of the “Vine of Spirits”: What Is Added to Ayahuasca and Why

Ayahuasca is like pizza. The most “correct” version includes only two ingredients besides the crust: tomato sauce and mozzarella. But do people only eat margherita versions of pizza? The case here is the same. In indigenous customs, the traditional, psychedelic “tea” consists of just the “Vine of Spirits” (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and chacruna (*Psychotria viridis* or *Diplopterys cabrerana*). But why would curanderos carefully store and pass on their own Ayahuasca recipes if everything was so simple? That’s right, there can be many more components. And it’s about more than *mapacho* or *brugmansia* (which I will describe later in detail in one of the following sections). Here are eleven not-so-common but extremely intriguing ingredients that can become components of the traditional brew.

Ayahuma (Couroupita Guianensis)

In Hinduism, this tree is considered sacred, and the indigenous people of the Amazon regard it as a maestro and use it as medicine. The flesh of its large fruits, resembling cannonballs, is used to disinfect wounds and treat skin diseases. The bark is used for hypertension, colds, and stomach disorders. Young leaves are chewed for toothaches, and a mixture of crushed dried fruits and bark is used as an anti-inflammatory agent. In Ayahuasca, *Ayahuma* bark is added to rid the ceremonial participant of *susto*— what the Indigenous people call a disease resembling PTSD. Its symptoms are lethargy, depression, and panic attacks after experiencing traumatic events.

Capirona (Calycophyllum Spruceanum)

Colonizers found only one use for this huge tree (that reaches thirty meters in height): they turn it into parquet flooring. The Indigenous peoples, however, see deep symbolism in its ability to shed its bark completely one to two times a year—it does this to avoid the appearance of lichens, fungi, vines, and epiphytes. They have long used its dried bark to remedy skin fungus, diabetes, and eye infections. Curanderos believe that the bark of this plant enhances the detoxifying properties of Ayahuasca while softening its effects.

Uchu Sanango (Tabernaemontana Sananho)

“Grandfather Sanango” gets along just fine without companions. The Indigenous people believe dieting with this maestro heals: physical and mental ailments; bestows inner harmony; improves memory; and strengthens muscles. It is also used for wound healing, high fever, and is an emetic and diuretic agent. When added to Ayahuasca, *Uchu Sanango* cleanses the body at the cellular level and significantly increases the effectiveness of the decoction in combating alcohol, tobacco, and drug addictions.

Punga Amarilla

Curanderos claim that the spirit of this maestro appears as a yellow anaconda: wise, all-understanding, and filled with peace. The anaconda teaches persistence and flexible thinking and offers protection from evil spirits. Ayahuasca, strengthened by the bark of this massive tree, more effectively rids the ceremonial participant of negative energy and even drives out attached dark entities. The anaconda is merciless to its foes.

Remo Caspi (Macaglia Excelsa)

This thirty-meter-tall tree is easily recognizable by its extensive root system. The Indigenous people of the Amazon

use its bark as a remedy against: malaria and other fevers (possibly due to its high content of indole alkaloids); hepatitis; bronchitis; diabetes; cancer; and as an aphrodisiac (thanks to yohimbine). The Shipibo-Conibo chew the bark and leaves of *Remo Caspi* to soothe toothaches and prevent cavities. Curanderos believe that Ayahuasca, seasoned with the bark of this tree's roots, helps to find inner strength, and rid oneself of harmful behavioral patterns.

Bobinsana (Calliandra Angustifolia)

Cervical cancer, edema, arthritis, rheumatism, and the prolapse of pelvic organs are just a few ailments this moisture-loving tree combats. Indigenous people use it to purify blood, as an aphrodisiac and contraceptive, and consider it a maestro plant. Curanderos believe dieting with *Bobinsana* brings peace and harmony with nature and oneself and opens the heart to new experiences. This is why many shamans recommend taking decoctions and infusions of this plant before the Ayahuasca ceremony. If *Bobinsana* is added directly to the "Vine of the Spirits" brew, it helps to find the root causes of problems in relationships with loved ones.

Lopuna Blanca

Indigenous people believe that the bark of this gigantic tree—one of the tallest in the Amazon jungles—provides strength, courage, and a sense of self-worth. When added to Ayahuasca, it protects against evil spirits and serves as a conduit between worlds, thus simplifying astral travels. According to indigenous beliefs, the deep symbolism of this mission lies in the *Lopuna Blanca* itself, as it serves as a connecting link: the tree stands firmly on the ground but reaches up to the sky.

Shiwawaku (Coumarouna Odorata)

The bark of this tree has been an ancient remedy for arthritis, rheumatism, diarrhea, malaria, and Lyme disease. Indigenous people also use it as a tonic and healing agent. Curanderos add Shiwawaku bark to Ayahuasca when the ceremonial participant primarily needs healing from physical ailments. This plant shifts the focus but does not weaken the mental effects of the "Vine of Spirits" brew.

Wyra Caspi (Cedrelinga Catanaeformis)

The bark of this tree has long been used to treat gastrointestinal diseases. However, in Ayahuasca, its task is more straightforward: to induce vomiting. Shamans are convinced this is not a side effect but part of "la purge"—physical and mental cleansing of the body. Without this unsightly phenomenon, the "Vine of Spirits" cannot fully reveal its potential. This means that *Wyra Caspi*, as a component of Ayahuasca, is much more important than it seems.

Chullachaki Caspi (Byrsonima Christianeae)

Healers of the Shipibo-Conibo tribe consider dieting with this maestro as one of the most dangerous vegetal practices. According to belief, if it turns out that the participant's intentions are not pure, the spirit of the tree-protector of the jungle will deprive them of their sanity. In Ayahuasca, the bark of this plant-teacher is added in small amounts. Curanderos are convinced that when combined with chacruna and the "Vine of Spirits," *Chullachaki Caspi* is a physical and mental detoxifier.

Huacapurana (Campsiandra Angustifolia)

The bark of this tree, like *Shiwawaku*, is effective against fevers (including malaria) and Lyme disease. Ground into a powder, it is used to cleanse purulent wounds and treat fungal infections. Ayahuasca is intended to cleanse and heal the body when the

ceremonial participant seeks help rather than enlightenment—also, for example, if modern medicine has proven powerless.

In Conclusion

I have already mentioned that any Ayahuasca is correct if prepared by an experienced curandero. Among other things, the charm of this drink lies in the variety of recipes. There are no two identical decoctions; and as a result, no two identical psychedelic trips. Each experience is unique, useful, and instructive.

DMT: Five Facts That Will Change Your Perception of the “Spirit Molecule”

Dimethyltryptamine is not what it seems. Even many who use psychedelics for self-development are convinced that this substance is something like LSD but plant-based. It’s time to explain a few things: why is the main chemical component of Ayahuasca more than just a hallucinogen and psychoactive substance? Why is DMT nicknamed the “spirit molecule”? And why we still know so little about its mechanisms of action on the brain?

Nº1. The Common Denominator of All Living Organisms

What do humans, raccoons, dogs, apple trees, and the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus have in common? They all contain L-tryptophan—the amino acid precursor of DMT. Just three relatively simple enzymatic reactions and L-tryptophan turns into *dimethyltryptamine*. In the human body, this occurs in the pineal gland (pineal body)—an endocrine gland of the brain. Long before the discovery of the psychedelic properties of DMT, French philosopher Descartes called the pineal gland the repository of the soul.

Scientists suggest that the mandatory presence of L-tryptophan in all living organisms, without exception, may mean that *dimethyltryptamine* is a universal molecular language, understandable to all forms of life on our planet (and possibly beyond). This hypothesis is amazingly consistent with Amazonian vegetalism, as shamans are convinced that consuming DMT-containing Ayahuasca allows communication with the spirit of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine.

Nº2. The Hormone of Pre-Death Revelations

The pineal gland constantly produces *dimethyltryptamine*, but in small amounts and within the normal metabolic range. Because its chemical structure is like the “happy hormone” serotonin, dysfunction of the pineal gland can lead to altered perception: without endogenous (i.e., produced by the organism) *dimethyltryptamine*, life may seem dull and devoid of prospects. During REM sleep, its synthesis increases, which is one of the reasons we dream.

But the most significant release of endogenous DMT occurs in pre-agony states and during clinical death. In these moments: one's life flashes before their eyes; the light appears at the end of the tunnel; one may observe their own body as an outsider; and much more. The visions described by those who have experienced cardiac arrest, are essentially *dimethyltryptamine* trips.

In the last moments of life, DMT grants clarity of thought: a person suddenly realizes everything, but it is often too late.

Nº3. A Portal to Other Worlds

From 1990 to 1995, American psychiatrist and psychopharmacology researcher Rick Strassman conducted clinical studies on the effects of *dimethyltryptamine* at the University of New Mexico. Many volunteers claimed that after taking the drug, they entered other worlds where they met intelligent

beings trying to learn information about our reality. These beings resembled: reptiles, clowns, mantises, spiders, bees, mechanical robots, elves, gnomes, and cacti. Some participants described sexual experiences with these beings.

The volunteers were unfamiliar with each other and had different social statuses, financial situations, and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, much of what they shared overlapped. Participants called these beings “guides” or “helpers,” explaining that the “spirit molecule” granted humans access to a parallel reality and the ability to establish contact with extraterrestrial civilizations.

Nº4. Barely Studied by Official Science

Individual studies—the results of which are published in authoritative scientific publications—suggest that Ayahuasca (and, therefore, DMT) is effective in treating therapy-resistant depression and addictions (primarily cocaine, alcohol, and tobacco). One would think that this alone would be enough to cause a sensation. However, the scientific community pretends that nothing has happened. There are no additional, more extensive research, nor are findings implemented in therapeutic practices. *Dimethyltryptamine*—considered “biological noise” forty years ago—is only studied by science enthusiasts.

All this resembles a conspiracy theory. Rick Strassman, (whom we have already mentioned), admitted that “serious people” repeatedly tried to persuade him to shift the focus of his research. They suggested not studying DMT from a psychotherapy perspective but limiting it to pure physiology—like measuring the heart rate before and after substance use. It was also suggested that he ignore the transcendent experience gained during the trip and its impact on mental health.

Nº5. Religion Too

Dimethyltryptamine gives people what other religions only promise. Those who have used DMT—or products containing it (primarily Ayahuasca)—claim that they have felt: their consciousness leaving their bodies; or have ended up where souls await rebirth; or have even spoken with God. Prevalent religions have no convincing answer as to why the miracles described in sacred texts no longer happen. However, *dimethyltryptamine* is ready to show real magic to everyone. The emergence of a religion based on this was only a matter of time.

The most popular churches of this kind are Santo Daime and União do Vegetal (UDV). The latter defended its right to use Ayahuasca in the United States for religious purposes. In 2006, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the ban on DMT-containing brew violated Americans' freedom of religion. An interesting study by Charles Grob from the University of California found that followers of UDV are mentally and physically healthier than the average population.

In Conclusion

Dimethyltryptamine is possibly one of humanity's most significant discoveries, helping our civilization understand itself and the world around us. Those preparing for an Ayahuasca ceremony can experience this sooner than others and become one of the pioneers of enlightenment. Are you ready?

Ayahuasca vs. Pharmahuasca: Are the Sensations Not the Same Without a Shaman?

If Ayahuasca is a cocktail of *dimethyltryptamine* and *monoamine oxidase* inhibitors, the natural question arises: why not prepare it in a laboratory from purified substances? How

convenient! Swallow a couple of pills and get the same effect as doing the ceremony. This way, you know a shaman in a funny costume hasn't added anything extra to the brew. Is it that simple? If you don't mind vitamins from a pharmacy, does that mean you should try Ayahuasca in tablets—or pharmahuasca?

A Shaman's Opinion

For many who have not yet undergone a ceremony, Ayahuasca may seem like just a type of mystical entertainment, a psychedelic attraction. Such people come to South America looking at it as an Amsterdam coffee shop. I once treated the brew of the “Vine of Spirits” and chacruna without much seriousness. I remember persuading the shaman not to skimp on the dosage but to pour me a full glass of his concoction: I grew up in Brooklyn, where local kids had heroin instead of a pacifier! Ayahuasca, of course, put me in my place.

But even now, I don't approach this ritual with the same reverence as the locals. For the Indigenous people, Ayahuasca is a religion, a spiritual practice, a way to communicate with spirits—it is an integral part of growing up. They know very little about biochemistry but are convinced that the spirit-teacher of *Banisteriopsis caapi* may be offended if the established ceremony is neglected, and the performance of icaros (ritual songs) is just as important as the consumption of the drink.

The idea that an Ayahuasca ceremony could be replaced with two capsules—50 milligrams of DMT and 100 milligrams of harmaline—seems blasphemous to shamans. It's probably as blasphemous as suggesting to a Christian that he baptize a child in a puddle of water, rather than a proper baptismal ceremony. After all, the “active ingredient” in both cases is the same—water.

Expert Opinions on Psychedelics

Have you heard of Timothy Leary? He was a great scientist whose name should stand alongside those of Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls, and Abraham Maslow as an icon of the hippie movement. He was nicknamed the LSD-Guru, to whom The Beatles dedicated their famous song *Come Together*. Throughout his conscious life, Leary studied psychedelic drugs and states of expanded consciousness. Through these studies, he developed a model which offered us information about the effects of psychedelics on humans. He argued that the saturation and quality of such an experience depended on three factors:

- ☑ Mindset: mental, psychological, emotional attitude, as well as expectations from the trip;

- ☑ Setting: physical and, no less importantly, social environment;

- ☑ Drug: active substance.

In his 1969 book, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Leary states: “The dose of the substance does not directly determine the transcendent experience. The substance serves only as a chemical key that opens the mind and frees the nervous system from its usual structures and patterns. The nature of the experiences depends almost entirely on the mindset and setting.”

The Kichwa shamans have hardly read Timothy Leary’s work, but have long paid great attention to creating the appropriate mindset and setting. The ceremony takes place in a secluded location in the middle of the jungle, surrounded by like-minded people, and in an atmosphere of complete trust and relaxation (which is achieved, among other things, by rituals with mapacho and the performance of icaros).

By replacing the brew from the “Vine of the Spirits” and chacruna with DMT and harmaline capsules—and preserving the other attributes of the ceremony that define the mindset and setting—you may achieve a similar or even identical

mystical experience. However, this is a fantastic scenario. Shamans would never abandon their traditions, and pharmahuasca was invented to avoid flying to shamanic ceremonies on the other side of the world. But it turns out that such a pragmatic approach yields, at best, a third of the result.

Opinions of Those Who Tried Ayahuasca and Pharmahuasca

I wanted to have something to compare. So I asked. All of whom I asked to compare their experiences, noted the difference in trips after taking the tablets and the natural product. Of course, you can't argue with biochemistry: the "molecule of the spirit" works in both cases—although many note that after taking pharmahuasca their visions are less clear and structured. Accordingly, it is more challenging to integrate the gained experience effectively. At the same time, nausea occurs much less often and is not as strong. The chemical purity of the drug plays a role.

But is the absence of nausea a good thing? Shamans are convinced that Ayahuasca cleanses at both the mental and physical levels, and these processes are inseparable. I noticed that the more mental dirt a person has accumulated, the stronger they vomit during the ceremony. I also experienced this and cannot call nausea a side effect. On the contrary, I felt that it was an important component of the Ayahuasca effect.

In Conclusion

Computer technicians joke about their guiding principle: "If it works, don't touch it!" We should also apply it to those who try to explore the unknown. Ayahuasca works, and tens of thousands of people have confirmed this. But the mechanism of its effect on consciousness and the subconscious still needs to be fully understood. Should we try to improve it? Should we

alter what we cannot even understand? Everyone will have to answer these questions for themselves.

What's Wrong with Enlightenment?: Deconstructing the Effects of Ayahuasca

Recently, I came across a warning on the internet: if a retreat organizer or shaman mentions the word “enlightenment,” he’s a fraud. No one who’s gone through a real ceremony will talk about the effects of Ayahuasca in this way. Enlightenment is supposedly a cliché from the industry of fake self-development. You know what? That author is right. To refer to a four-to-six-hour incomparable mystical experience as “Enlightenment” is not really suitable. What this author doesn’t recognize is that there are no other words in our language to accurately describe this entire experience.

I will try to find the words. I will sort out my experience, the stories of students, and the scientific view on the states of expanded consciousness

The Transcendental Conundrum

Imagine being in the dim light of a cave with figures passing by you. You can’t distinguish them: you only see silhouettes and shadows. You make assumptions about who they are and what they carry. You find some hypotheses quite reasonable and even think you’ve tracked some patterns. But then the light comes on, and your imaginary picture collapses. Everything was different from what you assumed. Ayahuasca works similarly: it turns on the light. It enlightens the world around you, allowing you to see the true picture of the universe.

Did I come up with the cave analogy? No, Plato did. He claimed our “objective reality” is blurred shadows on a cave wall. We perceive and understand the world as our senses,

consciousness, and subconsciousness allow us to. What is it really like? Ayahuasca answers this question. More precisely, it helps you find the answer yourself. But sharing this answer is pointless. What seems clear and self-evident in a state of expanded consciousness is no more than a “drug-induced delusion” to an ordinary person—the experience of which is transcendental; it is, unknowable, to a limited consciousness.

What Happens When Ayahuasca Removes the Blinds?

Everyone’s trip is different, but some effects occur much more frequently than others:

☑ **Synesthesia:** A person gains the superpower to perceive the surrounding world in all its multiple facets. One such example is the ability to see music. Scientists still can’t explain why the impact on one sense can also cause a unique response in the other senses.

☑ **Pulsating Space:** Things that seemed motionless can change sizes and proportions before your eyes, come to life, shimmer, and flow into one another.

☑ **Altered Perception of Time:** The course of time not only slows down, you gain the ability to go beyond time. Time loses its familiar meaning. There is an understanding that time is malleable.

☑ **Life Anew:** You relive the past, sometimes this is your own (most often—emotional episodes from childhood), and sometimes more. Regression of past lives is a common occurrence during a trip.

☑ **Birth and Death:** Memories of birth and being in the mother’s womb are revealed to you. Then you experience your own death and are reborn.

☑ **Clarity of Thought:** Tasks that seem difficult or even impossible are solved as easily as the snap of a finger. You

feel that your brain was not working at full capacity before Ayahuasca.

☑ **Visual Distortions:** As soon as you close your eyes, geometrically correct kaleidoscopic patterns and psychedelic compositions appear before you—eyes, feathers, and leaves are usually discerned.

☑ **Transpersonal Experiences:** You can go beyond the physical body and reconnect with the spirit of the plant-teacher and what people simply call God.

☑ **Increased Sensitivity:** Colors become brighter and sounds grow louder. This is why the ceremony must take place away from civilization, because city noise can ruin the trip. Emotions also become more concentrated.

In Conclusion

Have I managed to describe the action of Ayahuasca? No. I read this chapter again and realized that everything might be correct, but useless. No descriptions will bring you closer to understanding the sensations and possibilities that unfold before a person during this ceremony. This experience is one that must be lived through.

Expansion of Consciousness: What Does Science Have to Do with It?

Many seekers of psychedelic enlightenment do not trust official science much. They are convinced that in Ayahuasca, it ends where the ceremony begins. They say that the biochemistry of the process is somewhat described: scientists know that DMT “causes hallucinations.” But everything else goes far beyond the scope of dry dissertations. The desire for the expansion of consciousness is what self-development strives for. What we mean by the “expansion of consciousness” is

hastily labeled anti-scientific nonsense by rigid rationalists. Of course, they are mistaken.

Meet the Higher States of Consciousness!

This is what official science calls a class of altered states of consciousness characterized by heightened emotions, attentiveness, cognitive abilities, and a sense of meaningful existence. It's as if a person puts on glasses and discovers that only now can they see the true essence of things, whereas before, they judged them by blurred silhouettes. The first scientific mention of higher states of consciousness was almost 120 years ago (their descriptions in religious and mystical texts are much older). In 1902, Canadian psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke formulated the theory of the three levels of consciousness:

☑ **Simple Consciousness:** is characteristic of all higher animals; it is based on instincts, reflexes, and primitive analysis of empirical experiences. A dog, for example, realizes danger and threat to life but does not possess the category of the finiteness of life as such. Bucke writes: "The animal is immersed in its consciousness, like a fish in water. It cannot escape from it for a moment, nor can it realize this."

☑ **Self-Awareness:** is a distinctive feature of humans, who realize: their own "I" as an active principle; think about their place in the world the properties of their personality; and form a system of social and moral self-assessments. According to Bucke, we can think about what we think, which makes us human.

☑ **Cosmic Consciousness:** is a resounding "understanding of life and the world system"; it is a sense of unity with the universal energy (God). Only a few people dwell in such a state constantly and are, therefore, capable of changing the course of human history. According to Bucke, Jesus Christ, Buddha, Muhammad, Dante Alighieri, and Walt Whitman were carriers

of cosmic consciousness. Ordinary people can only access this level of awareness in the form of short-lived illuminations. Interest in higher states of consciousness grew in the 1960s, in the wake of the psychedelic revolution, and are closely associated with the names of Timothy Leary and Stanislav Grof. At that time, the broader Western public—particularly the Beatnik and Hippie movements—educated themselves, and became seriously interested in Ayahuasca and other vegetal rituals. Today, one of the key figures studying higher states of consciousness is Columbia University Professor, and close friend of the Dalai Lama, Robert Thurman (the father of actor Uma Thurman).

How to Achieve Scientifically Proven Enlightenment?

Contrary to stereotypes, consuming psychoactive substances is unnecessary to achieve higher states of consciousness. However, it is these substances (e.g., *dimethyltryptamine* from Ayahuasca or mescaline from San Pedro) that provide the most pronounced clarity of consciousness and increased brain activity. “Natural” factors that expand consciousness are mainly associated with extreme situations. For example, in pre-agony states or during clinical death, a person feels that they have reached a state of extreme clarity.

Higher states of consciousness also include the so-called “runner’s high”—which can last for several days after a long and intense run (e.g., a marathon or ultramarathon)—and is characterized by: clarity of thought; ease in solving life problems; tranquility; and a sense of happiness. There have been cases where people achieved the same effects using meditative psycho-techniques.

Scientists hold a conservative view in this regard: that higher states of consciousness do not give a person information that they did not possess before, and the phenomenon

of out-of-body experiences (the soul leaving the body) is merely hallucinations—the nature of which has not yet been explained. Of course, we cannot know how much information is stored in our consciousness and how much of it we use in our everyday lives. However, there are documented cases where yoga masters, through deep meditation, have recalled, for example, the moment of their own conception in detail.

In Conclusion

Professor Thurman once compared higher states of consciousness to an orgasm: “You let go of your own ‘I,’ detach from the body, and dissolve into absolute bliss. At first, it may be scary because it is light, pure energy. But at that very moment, you are Buddha.” I don’t know how accurate his comparisons are. But the fact that expanding consciousness helps to get incomparable pleasure from life is pure truth, verified by me and my students.

“I Don’t Feel Anything”: Four Reasons Why Ayahuasca May Not Work

Yes, it happens—not only when you bought some murky liquid from local dealers or from some strange man in a colorful T-shirt who supposedly knows a shaman. Genuine Ayahuasca, prepared according to centuries-old recipes of the Quechua people, may not work. You fly to the other side of the world to find an experienced shaman, spend several days in the jungle, drink a decoction of the “vine of the spirits”—and nothing! While the other group members immerse themselves in a mystical trip, you only feel boredom and nausea. What could be wrong with you?

Nº1: You Didn't Prepare for the Ceremony

There are indeed many recommendations for preparation. Some are convinced that it is enough to follow only those that, if neglected, will harm your health. These include: limiting the consumption of tyramine products to avoid tyramine syndrome; discontinuing SSRI drugs to avoid serotonin syndrome; and refraining from *dextromethorphan* medications to avoid conflict with the MAOI from the "Vine of Spirits." Any other restrictions—like avoiding alcohol, having sex, and or even masturbating before the ceremony—are just shamanic quirks.

Can there be a scientific justification for this? No. But practice shows that those who prepare strictly according to the given instructions, have a more positive and constructive experience than those who prefer to do everything their way. Those people who decide to smoke marijuana or to take LSD and MDMA in the jungle, often end up with unsuccessful Ayahuasca trips!

Nº2: You Are Skeptical

Indigenous people believe that the mystical effects of Ayahuasca are not caused by psychedelic substances but by interaction with the spirit of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine. This spirit is infinitely wise, with its own personality, and is easily offended if you violate established ceremonial practices or present an ironic mood. If you are not open to new experiences and have not let go of prejudices, Ayahuasca may play a cruel joke on you. Either the visions will turn into nightmares, or there will be none.

This scenario has a scientific explanation. According to Timothy Leary's model, the intensity of a psychedelic trip depends not only on the active substance and its dosage, but also on the mindset (mood) and setting (surrounding environment). If you expect the ceremony to be a fraud, that's

what you'll get. This doesn't only apply to Ayahuasca. Once, a longtime friend, who is highly skeptical, came to me for a hypnotherapy session. He was sarcastic and dreamed of proving to me (or perhaps himself) that hypnosis doesn't exist. Naturally, the session failed.

Nº3: The Effect Manifests Differently Than You Expected

Consuming the brew usually leads to four to six hours of visions and mystical experiences, caused by *dimethyl-tryptamine*. But Ayahuasca is not just a plant-based “spirit molecule.” Its impact on consciousness and the subconscious is more extensive, complex, and not limited to a psychedelic trip. Its absence does not mean that Ayahuasca didn't work. Many people who do not get their desired result during the ceremony, discover that they have changed in the days following it. They may let go of long-held grudges eating them up inside, or may gain an unusual sense of clarity.

It is believed that an Ayahuasca ceremony replaces one hundred hours on a psychotherapist's couch. This effect does not necessarily manifest itself in the manner of being hit on the head with a club. Sometimes the “Vine of Spirits” prefers to act gently and unobtrusively.

Nº4. You Have Aphantasia

Scientists claim that this psychophysical disorder affects about two percent of the population. A person with severe aphantasia cannot visualize images unless they are supported with sensory information. In other words, they cannot imagine what they have not previously seen or heard. Their brains do not know how to fantasize, so they are not receptive to the psychedelic experience.

But do not rush to judge yourself as a person without imagination. Severe forms of this ailment are extremely rare,

and a mild form means your trip will not be as intense as you would like. An increased dose of Ayahuasca may fix the situation, but be extremely cautious: increase it only under the guidance and supervision of an experienced shaman. And remember that the therapeutic effect of the brew manifests itself not only during the trip.

In Conclusion

They say fortune favors the bold—and those who are patient, sincere, and open to new experiences. This is the same for Ayahuasca. If it didn't work, it's most likely your fault. The "Vine of Spirits" is a teacher. As we know, learning is a mutual process. Respect the teacher, follow their requirements, strive for knowledge, and you will be surprised how productive the interaction with nature can be. Ayahuasca has, without exaggeration, divided my life into a before and after—this is still ahead for you, too.

Outside the Law: Ayahuasca Is Not a Drug, but Why Is It Prohibited Almost Everywhere?

The drink from the "Vine of Spirits" cannot be purchased at the nearest store. To find it, you must fly to another country or to the other side of the world, like Ecuador, Brazil, or Peru. Deep in the Amazon jungle of South America, real shamans conduct traditional Ayahuasca ceremonies. This also happens slightly to the north, in Costa Rica. For those willing to sacrifice authenticity for comfort, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, and the American city of Oakland, California, are waiting. In other places, Ayahuasca is outlawed because it is classified as a narcotic substance.

The State Is Against It!

Nothing strengthens the belief in conspiracy theories like the legal status of Ayahuasca. The authorities do everything possible to ensure that people like you never try it. This is true even in Russia, where we know the severity of the law is compensated itself through unnecessary enforcement. For example, a few years ago, designer Maxim Gert from Nizhny Tagil was imprisoned for eleven and a half years, just for bringing one and a half liters of Ayahuasca from Peru into the country. His sentence was only reduced to two years because of a public outcry. Maxim did not even realize the potential of this drink; he intended to treat his back with it. Just imagine that a person was sentenced to two years in prison, just for intending to try alternative medicine!

The system would prefer to ban Ayahuasca everywhere. But in South and Central America, this would risk popular uprisings. For locals, the healing decoction from the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine is not just an exotic psychedelic, but a national treasure that remains an integral part of local, religious cults. Religion becomes a legal loophole in countries with no such traditions. For example, in the United States, several churches have defended their right to conduct religious ceremonies with Ayahuasca. These churches managed to work around the system; but this quickly backfired when large-scale information campaigns were launched against these churches, marginalizing them. They were branded as sects, and their supporters were labeled drug addicts.

So, What Is a Drug?

It's time to define the word. I asked several dozen people, and all of them named the same characteristics that, in their opinion, should be inherent in all narcotic substances:

Causes addiction: this does not mean just psychological (which can occur with anything, even coffee or tea) but also

physical. The drug addict experiences an irresistible urge to take a dose, and if this doesn't happen, withdrawal symptoms set in. Few people can resist this state, but even the most resilient—who endure several weeks of pain and suffering—face many months of depression. This is why former drug addicts who have returned to normal lives are so proud of themselves. They not only stopped using certain substances but went through dozens of cycles of hell.

☑ **Provokes Crime:** The desire to take a dose becomes so overwhelming for drug addicts that they first take money from their loved ones without asking, then sell everything they can from their homes—to the point where there is nothing left to take, and so they begin to rob other people. This happens in the form of petty theft, to robbery, to violent assault, and sometimes even murder. According to statistics, in CIS countries, up to eighty percent of all street crimes are committed by drug addicts. This rate does not drop below fifty percent in even Moscow, which is seemingly prosperous. In search of a new dose, a drug addict will stop at nothing—not even the murder of a spouse, parents, or children.

☑ **Causes Irreparable Harm to Health:** Medical professionals claim that a person can burn out once hooked on a heavy drug in six to eight months. Usually, however, those who become addicted to heavy drugs die within five to seven years of their first injection. This often happens due to indirect causes: murder by another drug addict; overdose; blood infection; and gangrene from dirty syringes. But even those who manage to quit are left with problems in virtually every system of their body: from acquired heart defects and catastrophic immunity to mental disorders and potency issues.

What Does Ayahuasca Have to Do With This?

Ayahuasca does not cause addiction or dependency. Moreover, one should try to go through the ceremony a

second or third time. There are cases where women, having taken the “Vine of Spirits” brew, experience non-stop orgasms for the four to five hours after drinking the tea. But more often, this ritual is like surgery with almost no anesthesia: you understand it’s all for the good, but there’s little pleasure. Drugs, on the other hand, are taken for the sake of pleasure, right?

And it is for this feeling of pleasure that addicts commit crimes. But as of 2021, not a single crime has been committed worldwide by a person under the influence of Ayahuasca: no murder, theft, or even traffic violations.

Could it be that this potion causes harm to health? No, not this, either. It has no long-term physiological effects—only a temporary and slight increase in blood pressure and body temperature, as well as vomiting (shamans perceive it as a symbol of cleansing) and sometimes diarrhea (if you do not follow the prescribed diet during preparation for the ritual). Modern science has only proved the benefits of Ayahuasca, which I will describe in more detail later.

The Genuine Reasons for the Ban on Ayahuasca

So how did it happen that almost all countries classified such a valuable and safe drink as a heavy drug? After all, it has none of the characteristics that would make it a drug! It is elementary, my dear Watson. The system doesn’t care about characteristics. If one looks into the legislation of any country, you won’t find any explanations. Instead, you will read something like this: “Drugs are the substances listed below.” Often, such lists coincide with those attached to the “1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs,” as amended in accordance with the 1972 Protocol—but also, not necessarily.

Think about it: a group of people endowed with power gathered around and decided what you, as a free person, can

consume, store, and transport and what would land you in jail for eleven and a half years, like Maxim Gert. At the same time, no one relied on rational arguments. Otherwise, how can you explain that alcohol, which causes addiction, catastrophic damage to health, destroys the personality, and provokes crime, is not considered a drug, but Ayahuasca is?

In Conclusion

Alcohol turns a person into an animal that is easy to control, while Ayahuasca helps you become the master of your own life. Do you think the system needs enlightened and conscious people who understand their actual goals and relentlessly pursue them? Far from it! The system needs human material: spineless animals who sip beer in front of the TV, take on debt, and remain poor their whole lives. The system needs bricks. Are you ready to become another brick in the wall? Or do you have the right to take back your life?

"Crime" and Punishment: The Legal Status of Ayahuasca in Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan

In most countries, Ayahuasca is illegal because it contains DMT—a chemical compound that does not cause addiction or harm health. Paradoxical, right? Let's figure out how Ayahuasca got onto the list of narcotic substances and whether residents of CIS countries going on a retreat to South America should fear criminal liability upon returning home.

The Legal Status of Ayahuasca in Russia

Dimethyltryptamine is included in the Schedule I list of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances, and their Precursors, subject to control in the Russian Federation. This means the following: whatever you do with DMT-containing products

in the territory of the Russian Federation, law enforcement agencies will try to punish you. This can appear through a number of ways:

☑ For consumption: a fine of 4,000 to 5,000 rubles or administrative arrest for up to fifteen days (per Article 6.9 of the Code of Administrative Offenses);

☑ For acquisition, storage, transportation, manufacturing, and processing: a fine of up to 500,000 rubles and (not or!) deprivation of liberty for up to fifteen years (per Article 228 of the Criminal Code);

☑ For attempting to import it from abroad: a fine of up to 1,000,000 rubles and deprivation of liberty for up to seven years (per Article 229.1 of the Criminal Code). Russian legislation does not see a difference between Ayahuasca and, for example, heroin. It imposes fines and real prison sentences for any action taken with the finished product and plants containing prohibited substances.

The Legal Status of Ayahuasca in Ukraine

Unfortunately, the situation in the Ukraine is similar to that of Russian. By the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 770 “On Approval of the List of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances, and Precursors,” dated May 6, 2000, DMT is undeservedly included in the list of “particularly dangerous psychotropic substances whose circulation is prohibited.” But the penalties are slightly less frightening, and are as follows:

☑ For public consumption in places where educational, sports, and cultural events are held, as well as in any places of mass gathering of citizens: deprivation of liberty for up to three years (per Article 316 of the Criminal Code);

☑ For production, acquisition, storage, transportation, shipment, and sale: deprivation of liberty for a period of four to eight years (per Article 307 of the Criminal Code);

☑ For attempting to import or export from the country: deprivation of liberty for up to eight years (per Article 305 of the Criminal Code).

Unlike Russia, Ukraine does not impose fines on criminal articles, and *de jure* has no claims against those who use prohibited substances privately. De facto, however, the police and the prosecutor's office, in such cases, "sew" a person under Article 307 of the Criminal Code since consumption, they say, is impossible without manufacturing or acquiring, transporting, and storing.

The Legal Status of Ayahuasca in Kazakhstan

DMT is mentioned in Kazakhstan's List of Controlled Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances, and Precursors. However, compared to Russia and Ukraine, the legislation is quite lenient. For example, the law interprets drug-related offenses differently, whether committed for the purpose of sale or not. If you interact with Ayahuasca for anything but commercial gain in Kazakhstan, according to Article 296 of the Criminal Code, you face the following:

☑ For consumption in public places: arrest for up to twenty days, up to eighty hours of community service, or a fine of up to 202,000 tenge (about \$470);

☑ For manufacturing, processing, acquisition, storage, and transportation: arrest for up to fifty days, up to two hundred hours of community service, or a fine of up to 505,000 tenge (about \$1,180).

Per Article 286 of the Criminal Code, smuggling is punishable by deprivation of liberty for up to five years (with or without confiscation of property), a fine of up to 12,625,000 tenge (about \$29,500), or corrective labor in the same amount.

Three Main Tips

☑ Think twice before telling border guards the real purpose of your trip. Undergoing an Ayahuasca ceremony in countries where it is officially allowed is legal, including for foreigners. You can confidently declare at the border that you are going to Ecuador to try a decoction from the “Vine of Spirits”—and no one has the right to make any claims against you. However, after such words, an uneducated border guard will immediately put you in the “risk group” and may arrange a thorough inspection. So, it is better to be cautious about what you share with border officials to avoid unnecessary complications during your trip.

☑ Do not attempt to bring Ayahuasca across the border. If airport security discovers containers with suspicious, dark, DMT-containing liquid in your belongings, you will be immediately accused of smuggling narcotics and psychotropic substances. It is possible that you may even be charged with particularly large-scale smuggling, which almost guarantees a prison sentence.

☑ Do not attempt to buy Ayahuasca in CIS countries. This applies to both the brew itself and the plants for its preparation. Especially avoid purchasing through public platforms or dubious Telegram channels. Most likely, these are police traps. And instead of ayahuasca, you may be sold some unknown surrogate. Remember that the ceremony is much more than just consuming the beverage.

In Conclusion

You are forced to accept the rules imposed by the state for your safety. But no one can forbid you from participating in a retreat in countries where Ayahuasca is legal.

"Maybe Sometime Later": Five Myths That Separate You from the Ayahuasca Ceremony

Strict medical reasons, a complete lack of money, or a panicky fear of air travel, there are plenty of valid, or at least significant reasons, not to participate in a retreat—although some of these problems can be overcome. For example, if one of these things were stopping you from participating in a ceremony, you could quit your low-paying job and start your own business. If you felt scared, you eliminate your phobia by working with a psychotherapist or hypnotherapist.

But you could also ignore them. They are all just false stereotypes. Some are even created intentionally to hinder the self-development of those who desire it. Here are five harmful myths about Ayahuasca that should be debunked:

Nº1. I'm Afraid of Addiction

For decades, Ayahuasca has been unable to shake off the "narcotic trail" attributed to it by those on the outside. The average citizen is used to equating psychedelics with drugs. Sadly, the "shamanic tea" remains in the public consciousness as nothing more than another way to get high—just a slightly more exotic one.

Calling Ayahuasca a "drug" is foolish, and calling it a "recreational drug"—even more so. It answers questions, allows you to get rid of problems, and enables you to truly get to know yourself and the world around you. But the Ayahuasca ritual is not something you would want to experience again. To cleanse yourself mentally and physically is a challenge. Developing an addiction to Ayahuasca is like "getting hooked" on dental procedures.

Nº2. It's Illegal

Declaring Ayahuasca illegal is as absurd as classifying it as a drug. But unfortunately, it is. The authorities in most countries (including the CIS) are not interested in citizens breaking mental shackles and going beyond boundaries. Therefore, storing, manufacturing, transporting, and selling Ayahuasca can result in a fine (at best), and a significant prison sentence (at worst).

But you shouldn't worry when participating in the retreat. After all, we conduct the ceremony in a country where Ayahuasca is not prohibited. And everything that happens in Ecuador stays in Ecuador. Law enforcement authorities in your country have no grounds for making claims against you. The main thing is not to try to smuggle the "Vine of the Spirits" decoction across the border.

Nº3. It's Dangerous

Yes, Ayahuasca requires preparation and can punish those who disregard the rules. But, like any real teacher, it is strict but fair. Those who violate the diet pay with more intensive and prolonged vomiting, diarrhea, or other unpleasant sensations. But Ayahuasca never intends to cause irreparable harm to one's health.

Exceptions occur only in the presence of serious chronic diseases. One factor is that Ayahuasca increases blood pressure—something a healthy person can easily tolerate, but one that can provoke serious problems for patients with cardiovascular diseases. Therefore, you must consult your primary care physician before attending a retreat, and you must fulfill all of the preparatory conditions. Then, everything will go smoothly.

Nº4. I'll Be Taken Advantage of in My Helplessness

Are you afraid that someone will suggest something to you during the ceremony? This is impossible. No one can

interfere with your dialogue with Ayahuasca. Even more so, no one will try to take your property. All participants in the ritual, including the shaman, immerse themselves in the same state. You and everyone else will be “helpless” during the ceremony. Moreover, who among the participants would want to be distracted from a trip that has cost thousands of dollars?

It is even more pointless to expect a trick from the shaman. Curanderos do not strive for material possessions and do not accumulate colossal wealth. The principal value of a shaman is their reputation and status. If you lose them, consider that you have lost everything. What could the opportunity to manipulate an unfamiliar “gringo” going abroad in a few days give them? How would the shaman subdue you to their will if you hardly speak Spanish and Quechua, and the shaman has no knowledge of Russian?

Nº5. Indigenous People Make up too Much

Many representatives of Western civilization perceive Ayahuasca primarily as a combination of DMT, MAOIs, and other substances that do their business at the chemical level and make a person's brain work differently. The spiritual aspect of the ceremony for them is nothing more than shamanic tricks—an exotic show for foreign tourists.

Modern scientists have explained many things and given mundane explanations for many elevated phenomena—but not all of them. The Ayahuasca ritual is more than just drinking a hallucinogenic decoction. Any experienced Ayahuasca user will confirm: the more accurately the ancient traditions of the Quechua people are observed, the richer the trip and the more impressive its results.

In Conclusion

Approaching the issue with full responsibility and thoroughly researching potential risks is extremely wise. I wholeheartedly support this strategy. And yet, one must learn how to distinguish truth from fiction. During the Ayahuasca ceremony, Ayahuasca will help you see everything in its true light.

Ayahuasca, The Kichwa People, and Success: Uncomfortable Questions and Debunking Stereotypes

Various skeptics love finding gaps in advanced theories, even if they are repeatedly proven in practice. Of course, plenty of people are willing to find inconsistencies related to Ayahuasca rituals. While scientists research how the “Vine of Spirits” works, skeptics search for what to find fault with it. And they allegedly found it.

Not the Most Successful People



Ayahuasca is a tool for self-knowledge and understanding the world around us. It allows us to comprehend what is

hidden from most people. Even after undergoing the ceremony just once, you can change your life forever and achieve things you never dared to dream of. And here, skeptics have a question: if the Kichwa have practiced these rituals for centuries, why haven't they become the most successful ethnic group in human history?

Admittedly, the Kichwa Indians can't boast of having the millions. They don't produce luxury cars; they don't amaze the world with the tallest skyscrapers; they don't introduce new smartphones to the public every year; and they certainly don't invent robots with advanced artificial intelligence. They don't eat with golden spoons from silver plates.

Usually, the Kichwa are engaged in agriculture and cattle breeding, like their ancestors. Some work in factories and mines, while others even perform domestic duties. Many modern Kichwa live in modest houses, without luxurious renovations and many household appliances. Of course, there are also those who adhere to their people's traditional way of life, formed centuries ago. And yet, considering the Kichwa Indians as an ethnic group left on the sidelines of life would be a big mistake.

Excursion Into the Past

Let us begin with some brief history. At the time of the invasion of white colonizers on the American continent, the ancestors of the Kichwa were the most developed and influential people in the Americas. In terms of culture, they surpassed all their neighbors—including the Mayans and Aztecs—because their civilization had already entered the Bronze Age, while other ethnic groups across the Americas remained in the Copper Age.

What happened next, you know very well. Physical extermination and enslavement don't contribute to the development of Indigenous people. Many Kichwa were forced to renounce their language and culture. But some carried the

traditions of their ancestors through the centuries. We can only imagine what the Kichwa people would be today without colonization in their history? It can be said with certainty that things would be much better for them.

Geography With Ethnography

It is not entirely correct to compare the Kichwa with other groups of peoples, even if they temporarily lost their statehood, and then restored it—this story is the same for the many victims who fell under the colonial projects of the British, French, Spanish, Russian, and other countries. Modern Kichwa do not have their own ethnic state. This nation inhabits the territory of several countries, all of which once encompassed their indigenous lands.

Most of this group of Indigenous people—almost fourteen million of them—live in Peru. Another six million are in Ecuador; nearly four million live in Bolivia; and almost one-and-a-half million in Argentina. Plus, about 40,000 have settled in Colombia and thirteen-and-a-half thousand in Chile. Even with the most optimistic data, Kichwa Indians don't form a majority in these countries. In Peru, they make up forty-seven percent of the population; in Ecuador, they make up forty-one percent of the population; and in Bolivia, they make up 37.1 percent of the total population (other data indicate around thirty percent).

It is significant to note that large majority of the Kichwa people only formally remain representative of their ethnicity, as they have lost touch with the cultural traditions and beliefs, forced to abandon their native language in favor of the colonial language (in this case Spanish), and therefore are no different from the average resident of Latin America. Moreover, today the Kichwa people consist of thousands of communities, often relatively isolated.

All these factors have created serious barriers for the Kichwa people and their status, according to "Western civilization." However, they do not strive for this or worry about it because they think about success differently.

One Size Does Not Fit All

Here we come to the first critical mistake of the skeptic—the desire to evaluate representatives of another culture through their own standards. They cannot comprehend how a person from the Kichwa tribe would not strive to fill their house with gold, or shake the world with their invention. Even more so, they cannot understand how this same person does not dream of having as many tanks, planes, and missiles as possible in their country's army—something, which they could use to threaten the rest of the world.

The second fundamental mistake of the skeptic is to think that Ayahuasca can teach anyone, absolutely anything, on the spur of the moment. You don't drink a decoction of the "Vine of Spirits" and master French perfectly, even though you have never studied it. In the same way, an ordinary farmer, after such a ritual, will not invent an engine for a rocket ship or create a multi-million-dollar digital business scheme. Ayahuasca allows for a colossal breakthrough, but only within the paradigm in which a person has always existed.

If most Kichwa strive to attain harmony with the surrounding world, their loved ones, and themselves, that is precisely what the "Vine of Spirits" offers them. They have their own concept of success. Primarily, it lies in attaining simple human happiness, which has been familiar to the Kichwa people since immemorial time. In this, they have succeeded more than anyone obsessed with material grandeur.

Don't be surprised when you see a shaman living in a small house with modest surroundings. External attributes of success are insignificant to this culture. Being respected

by everyone, without exception, and having the opportunity to help others find themselves and solve their accumulated problems—that’s what is truly prestigious for these people.

In Conclusion

No matter how the Kichwa people live, the drink they invented has become a universal tool for achieving life goals—whether that is gaining abundance, improving health, having harmonious relationships, or acquiring social status. The only important thing is your desire to reach a new level—and it is Ayahuasca that will suggest the optimal recipe.

The Enlightened Life of Remarkable People: Six Celebrities Who Underwent the Ayahuasca Ritual

Thousands worldwide owe their wealth, social status, personal happiness, and physical and mental health to Ayahuasca. But only some publicize it. Some are wary of the public’s reaction, considering the decoction of the “Vine of Spirits” as just another exotic drug. Some fear that revealing the secret of success will devalue their achievements. But some are happy to share their experience, and how they participated in the most significant ceremony of their life.

Sting

Sting received the CBE (Commander of the British Empire) award in 2003, has won seventeen Grammy awards, and is one of the greatest performers of our times. He described his participation in the Ayahuasca ritual in detail in his 2004 autobiography, *Broken Music*: “I had no way of understanding who I was, where I was, and where I came from. I was in a holographic geometric rotating ‘extraterrestrial’ world.”

One of the indirect confirmations of the effects of Ayahuasca happened after his trip to the Amazon when Sting expanded his charity work, establishing the Rainforest Foundation with his wife.

David Icke

Once a successful football player, commentator, and now a well-known conspiracy theorist and author of two dozen books, Icke went through the ceremony twice. One assumes that Ayahuasca developed his ability to notice things in detail that others do not, and to carefully analyze these collected facts.

According to David Icke, some people have to go through a complex and unpleasant experience during the ritual, but some are lucky to experience a fantastic range of emotions. He writes that his participation in the ceremony was *unforgettable*—specifically noting the powerful, concentrated energy that passed through him.

Lindsay Lohan

Lindsay Lohan is one of those actresses who could not cope with the colossal fame that befell her in early childhood. She became dangerously promiscuous, drinking and drugging, which resulted in legal problems. Lindsay's career was on the wane, just like her life. Fortunately, she came to her senses quickly and sought help, checking herself into rehab and turning her life around.

She focused on various spiritual practices and eventually came to Ayahuasca. The actress recalls of her experience: "Physically, at that moment, I almost died, but since then, I have been able to let go of everything and start recovering." After her ritual with Ayahuasca, Lindsay's film and music career started flourishing again.

Natalia Andreichenko

The brilliant actress who played Mary Poppins in the Soviet adaptation is rarely seen on screens today. But that no longer bothers her. All that is in the past, like her unsuccessful marriages, wanderings between several countries, and alcoholism. Today, Natalia Andreichenko lives in harmony with herself and the world around her.

The actress went through the Ayahuasca ceremony under the guidance of Peruvian shamans. She was eager to share her gratitude and love for humanity in a video shot in early 2020.

“In this amazing place, you are in complete solitude, and no one has the right to bother you. Before that, for two weeks, I was in a purification retreat and cleansed my body,” Andreichenko told her fans.

Victoria Bonya

The popular TV presenter, model, businesswoman, and socialite revealed the secret of her success not so long ago, in 2020. Victoria Bonya told journalists that she had gone through the ceremony fifteen times over ten years. At one time, she even turned to the spirits with a request for a pregnancy, and this dream was immediately fulfilled.

Like many who have achieved enlightenment through Ayahuasca, Bonya introduced this practice to her loved ones. Victoria’s mother, Galina, was able to get rid of psychological blocks and shed the heavy burdens of her past in this way.

Yana Troyanova

The star of *The Land of Oz* and TV series *Olga* faced the most terrible of life’s possible trials—her son’s death. For years, the actress could not recover from the tragedy, and in attempts to fill the void, she sought solace at the bottom of a bottle.

Fortunately, Yana didn't only emerge from the depths of alcohol addiction but also landed on safe shores thanks to Ayahuasca. She spent an entire month in the company of Amazonian shamans, examining herself through every possible angle, and regained her sense of purpose—and it worked!

In Conclusion

They chased dreams and ran from problems. They aspired to reach unattainable heights and tried to climb out of the abyss. They broadened their horizons and left the past behind. They did this in front of you. You know their stories; and, if you wish, you can study them in more detail. Thanks to Ayahuasca, these stars did not fade and could shine even brighter.

CHAPTER 2.

**PREPARATION FOR
THE CEREMONY**

On the Eve of Enlightenment: All Aspects of the Preparatory Diet

The Ayahuasca ceremony is a multi-component ritual in which success depends not only on the quality and quantity of the active substance, but also on every detail: this starts with a preliminary preparation and ends with your time in the retreat center. Therefore, the ceremony is preceded by a mandatory purification, which is both physical and spiritual.

Comprehensive Approach

Certain restrictions must be followed before moving to a new level of consciousness. This purification is achieved in five essential and unavoidable ways:

☑ **Diet:** On the eve of the ceremony, you will have to give up excesses in your diet in favor of ascetic and light foods.

☑ **Alcohol and Drugs:** These temporary escapes can prevent you from seeing the world around you clearly.

☑ **Medical Prescriptions:** During the purification period, antidepressants, nootropics, and several prescription drugs are contraindicated.

☑ **Sexual:** This refers not only to the absence of intimacy with a partner but also to masturbation.

☑ **Behavioral:** Try to lead a more measured lifestyle, avoiding conflict and negative experiences.

Two Aspects of the Suggested Diet and Three Main Reasons to Follow It

Limit your diet in two ways: both physical and spiritual. You must view your diet as:

☑ preparation for the use of Ayahuasca;

☑ a deeper practice directly related to the teachings of shamans and teacher-plants.

There is a whole list of reasons for following this specific diet, but the top three are worth highlighting:

- ☑ to prove you are ready to work on yourself seriously;
- ☑ to eliminate the risk of harming your health;
- ☑ to gain the maximum effect from the ceremony and the experience.

Ideally, the preparatory period of purification should last two weeks or even a month. Unfortunately, due to various reasons, not everyone can achieve this. But a diet for at least three days is mandatory.

The Recommended Diet

Each shaman has their own recipe and traditions, and therefore, their own dietary requirements. But overall, it's not complicated. The cleaner you get, the better. However, this is not a reason to go to extremes. Your menu should be extremely simple, not overloading the digestive system and the body as a whole. Give preference to fresh or freshly prepared products, like fish and meat, if they require heat. Your menu may include the following:

- ☑ organic vegetables and fruits;
- ☑ fish;
- ☑ chicken;
- ☑ eggs;
- ☑ rice, lentils, amaranth, quinoa, and other cereals;
- ☑ seeds;
- ☑ olive, coconut, and other natural oils;
- ☑ fresh herbs;
- ☑ honey;
- ☑ sea salt.

Diet After the Ceremony

Ayahuasca is a ritual after which you will mentally never return to your previous life, because you will become a

new person. However, nothing prevents you from returning to your previous diet. A sudden return is not allowed—the menu must be changed gradually. The effect of Ayahuasca is not limited to just a few hours; it continues to work in your body, as confirmed by experienced shamans and authors of scientific research, who have named this phenomenon the “afterglow effect.” To prolong it, you need a proper diet.

Usually, the requirements for the eve of the ceremony are the same for after it. But, you should consult with a mentor on this issue. After all, each teacher-plant provides additional restrictions. And the recipes, as you remember, are unique to each shaman. As a rule, the post-diet lasts from two to four weeks.

In Conclusion

By following all the dietary recommendations, you can go through the ceremony without any risk to your health. If you neglect the preparation, or abruptly return to your previous diet after the ritual, you should not expect maximum effectiveness from Ayahuasca.

Under No Circumstances: List of Prohibited Substances

The “Vine of Spirits” decoction is safe for a healthy body. But on the eve of the ceremony, and after consuming the shamanic drink, it is forbidden to take:

- ☑ drugs with an anorexigenic effect or appetite suppressant (for example, dexfenfluramine, chlorphentermine hydrochloride, mazindol);

- ☑ barbiturates and any other drugs that depress the central nervous system (for example, pentobarbital, talbutal, aprobarbital);

☑ corticosteroids and other medications prescribed for asthma and bronchitis (for example, dexamethasone, medrol, betaspan);

☑ beta-blockers, ACE inhibitors, and other drugs to lower blood pressure (for example, nebilet, concor, lisinopril);

☑ antihistamines, or anti-allergic drugs (for example, mebhydroline, suprastin, diphenhydramine);

☑ cough medicines containing dextromethorphan (DXM);

☑ tranquilizers, both anxiolytics (for example, lorazepam, hydroxyzine, aminophenylbutyric acid) and neuroleptics (for example, betamax, xanax, haloperidol);

☑ vasodilators, or vasodilating agents (for example, bosentan, nicotinic acid, magnesium sulfate).

Seven and preferably fourteen days before the ceremony, it is also necessary to stop taking:

☑ SSRIs—selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (for example, paxil, fevarin, zoloft);

☑ MAOIs—monoamine oxidase inhibitors (for example, azilect, jumex, rasagiline);

☑ psychoactive substances, primarily MDMA (ecstasy), ephedrine, amphetamine;

☑ alcohol;

☑ products containing tyramine (for example, sharp and aged cheeses, kefir, long-stored sausages, oysters, sauerkraut, mushrooms, red wine).

ATTENTION! If you have been diagnosed with a cardiovascular system pathology, consult your doctor before the ceremony and start taking the decoction in reduced doses. Ayahuasca increases pulse and blood pressure (primarily “lower” diastolic). For a healthy person, this is not dangerous, but it can worsen the condition of a patient suffering from certain cardiovascular diseases.

Coupled with narcotic, psychoactive, and some medicinal drugs, Ayahuasca can cause severe harm and even fatalities.

Therefore, remember these instructions and strictly follow the recommendations!

Tyramine Syndrome: Why Ayahuasca Is Incompatible With Cheese and Wine

The ancient Quechuas did not know the words “tyramine” and “monoamine oxidase inhibitors,” but they discovered that if they ate, for example, fried game shortly before the ceremony, Ayahuasca would punish them with a throbbing headache, heart rhythm disturbances, convulsions, and profuse sweating. The Quechuas decided that some products offend the “Vine of Spirits” and chacruna. Centuries later, scientists found the answer as to why a special diet before the ceremony is not just a tribute to tradition but a medical necessity.

About Shamanic Rituals—In the Language of Biochemistry

If we put aside theories about interaction with spirits, the psychedelic effects of Ayahuasca are due to its high content of *dimethyltryptamine* (DMT) and *monoamine oxidase* inhibitors (MAOIs) that enhance and prolong its effects. Inhibition means slowing down physiological processes. *Monoamine oxidase* is an enzyme that neutralizes (metabolizes) DMT before it enters the bloodstream. In this way, MAOIs (specifically, the alkaloids harmine and harmaline, which are sourced from the “Vine of Spirits”) prevent the enzyme from breaking down DMT from the chacruna plant. DMT enters the bloodstream, then the brain, and the ceremonial participant goes on a four-to-six-hour psychedelic trip.

The problem is that MAOIs slow down the neutralization of DMT, tyramine, and tyrosine in the intestine and liver—they are organic compounds that increase blood pressure.

Tyramine can be endogenous (i.e., synthesized by the body itself) or exogenous (obtained externally through food or medication). If the participant did not follow the shamanic diet, their body will have high levels of tyramine and tyrosine during the ceremony. The MAOIs from the Ayahuasca will prevent their breakdown, which will then enter the bloodstream and cause a sharp increase in blood pressure.

For those who followed the shaman's recommendations, blood pressure will also rise, but only slightly. This is due to endogenous nature of tyramine. If the participant received a large amount of it from external sources, they are almost guaranteed a hypertensive crisis—a sharp increase in blood pressure accompanied by headache, chest pain, shortness of breath, vomiting, profuse sweating, convulsions, and impaired consciousness. The risk of acute heart failure, stroke, and myocardial infarction increases significantly.

Tyramine syndrome rarely develops so tragically—only against the background of chronic pathologies. Therefore, we insist that if you have cardiovascular problems, consult a doctor before the ceremony. In most cases, strict adherence to the shamanic diet and reduced doses of Ayahuasca are enough to avoid health consequences altogether.

Main Peace Disturbers

We have already described the diet that should be followed for at least three days before and after the Ayahuasca ceremony (but it is better to extend the period to two weeks). Let us remind you of the main products to avoid:

☑ legumes (including soy sauce), sauerkraut, and beet-root;

☑ avocado, olives, bananas, and any overripe fruits;

☑ raisins and canned figs;

☑ chicken, beef, and pork liver;

☑ fried domestic and wild poultry;

- ☑ meat broth;
- ☑ sausages and frankfurters (especially smoked and long-stored);
- ☑ caviar, oysters, and shrimp;
- ☑ dried, smoked, marinated, dried, and salted fish;
- ☑ all cheeses, except for fresh homemade cottage cheese;
- ☑ milk, kefir, cream, and sour cream;
- ☑ eggs;
- ☑ mushrooms;
- ☑ red wine;
- ☑ unfiltered beer.

In Conclusion

The diet before the Ayahuasca ceremony is essential, and even official science confirms it. But remember that preparing for the main ritual in your life is not just about gastronomic restrictions. To fully unlock the brew's potential from chacruna and the "Vine of Spirits," it is necessary to prepare both the body and the spirit.

Death by Happiness: The Dangers of Serotonin Syndrome and Its Connection to Ayahuasca

The deficiency of the "happiness hormone" can lead to depression and severe forms of migraine, but an excess of it is even more dangerous. If there is too much serotonin in the central nervous system (CNS), you are guaranteed an extremely rare but deadly disease called serotonin syndrome. Ayahuasca itself cannot cause it; but if you ignore the recommendations and do not stop taking certain medications two weeks before the ceremony, you will ruin your trip. The severe course of this disease sometimes even ends fatally. So, read carefully!

Why Does This Happen?

As you remember, the main active substances in Ayahuasca are DMT and the alkaloids harmine and harmaline. The latter two are monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), so they enhance and prolong the action of the “spirit molecule.” Inhibition means slowing down. In this case, they slow down the breakdown and elimination of DMT from the body, allowing it to enter the bloodstream and the brain. But this also applies to serotonin. MAOIs prevent its destruction, so the serotonin levels in the CNS increase. This effect, among other things, is how medical professionals explain the feeling of lightness after taking Ayahuasca. That is also why MAOIs are used as antidepressants.

The “happiness hormone” increase—caused by the brew from the “Vine of Spirits”—is safe, provided that at least seven days (preferably fourteen) before the ceremony, you do not consume SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors). They are prescribed for the treatment of depression and anxiety disorders. The most famous drug in this group is Prozac. Combining these drugs with MAOIs leads to a sudden increase in serotonin, and, consequently, the rapid development of serotonin syndrome.

What Are the Symptoms and Consequences?

This disease strikes indiscriminately, which is why it is difficult to diagnose: too many symptoms lead doctors to false positives. Serotonin syndrome immediately manifests itself in the body in three ways: mental, vegetative, and neuromuscular. The list of symptoms for each group is more than extensive, and many contradict each other.

Mental Disturbances:

- unreasonable feelings of anxiety;
- euphoria;

- ☑ dysphoria (pathologically low mood with frequent outbursts of aggression);
- ☑ agitation (excessive restlessness against a background of anxiety and fear);
- ☑ hallucinations;
- ☑ hypomania (mildly expressed mania) and manic syndrome;
- ☑ lethargy (painful fatigue, sluggishness, and slowness);
- ☑ delirium (visual hallucinations and delusions with subsequent amnesia);
- ☑ confusion;
- ☑ mutism (lack of responsive and spontaneous speech);
- ☑ coma (autonomic disturbances).

Vegetative Disturbances:

- ☑ fever (from mild to 42°C and above);
- ☑ hypertension (high blood pressure);
- ☑ tachycardia (rapid heartbeat);
- ☑ tachypnea (rapid shallow breathing);
- ☑ headache;
- ☑ nausea and vomiting;
- ☑ chills;
- ☑ abdominal pain;
- ☑ bloating;
- ☑ diarrhea;
- ☑ mydriasis (dilated pupils);
- ☑ increased sweating;
- ☑ drooling;
- ☑ flushing (frequent reddening and feeling of heat in the skin of the face, neck, and chest).

Neuromuscular Disturbances:

- ☑ hyperreflexia (enhanced reflexive muscle contractions);
- ☑ akathisia (compulsive urge to move and change position);

- ☑ clonus (rapid and rhythmic muscle contractions in response to stretching);
- ☑ muscle rigidity (increased tension, stiffness);
- ☑ paresthesia (spontaneous sensations of burning, tingling, prickling);
- ☑ nystagmus (very frequent involuntary eye oscillations);
- ☑ coordination problems;
- ☑ opisthotonos (a state in which a person “freezes” in a position with an arched back, a thrown-back head, straightened legs, and bent joints of the hands, wrists, and feet due to spasms);
- ☑ trismus (spasm of the masticatory muscles) and dysarthria (speech impairment).

Of course, all these only happen sometimes. Depending on the course (mild, moderate, or severe), different numbers of symptoms manifest. It is common in situations that only one type of disturbance predominates. In a mild form, serotonin syndrome may be limited to tachycardia and sweating, meaning it can go relatively unnoticed. The problem is that the combination of SSRIs and MAOIs almost always causes moderate or severe progression of this disease.

Oftentimes, stopping the intake of conflicting medications is enough; and then, everything gradually returns to normal within a week. According to statistics, about eighty percent of serotonin syndrome cases pass without complications; and according to various data, mortality ranges from 0.1 to twelve percent. The cause of death is usually: renal and liver failure; hypoxia (caused by rigidity of the respiratory muscles); stroke; DIC syndrome (massive thrombus formation); and internal bleeding provoked by serotonin syndrome.

In Conclusion

How to protect yourself? It's simple: strictly follow the recommendations for preparing for the ceremony. Do not

try to hide what you are taking, or have recently been taking regarding SSRI or any other incompatible medications with Ayahuasca (familiarize yourself with the complete list). If at least seven days have passed since the last intake (but fourteen is better), the risk of serotonin syndrome is minimal. And that means nothing will interfere with the main ceremony of your life.

Tune in for Results: How to Form the Right Mindset Before the Ceremony

I have repeated many times: according to the model of Timothy Leary (the greatest psychedelic researcher, who is nicknamed the LSD-guru) the quality of your psychedelic trip depends primarily on mindset and setting. Don't worry about the latter: the setting on our retreats is already fine-tuned to the smallest detail.

But to ensure the right mindset is primarily your task. How to do this? Is it enough to follow the shamanic diet, lead a balanced lifestyle, and abstain from sex? How to know if you are mentally ready for the ceremony? You can find the answers to these and many other questions below.

Why Do You Need Ayahuasca?

Surprisingly, many who apply to participate in the retreat do not know the answer to this question. They are ready to spend the annual income of an ordinary person, fly to the other side of the world, and trust a shaman who doesn't even speak English. What is all this for? My example may inspire some: Paul Healingod is a millionaire and drinks Ayahuasca, so I should drink it to become a millionaire. Yes, the brew from the "Vine of the Spirits" can make a person rich. More precisely, it grants insight, interpretation, and integration, which

changes peoples' mindsets, as they start noticing previously hidden opportunities. But a certain mindset is required. The cargo cult will not work.

Here are some answers as to why you would want to partake in the ceremony:

☑ “I want to heal”: Ayahuasca is effective against therapy-resistant depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, Alzheimer's disease, addictions, and some forms of cancer—and this has been confirmed by scientific research alone. Shamans are convinced that the “Vine of Spirits” can rid a person of disease. But it's important not to lose faith, which is not easy—as those who have tried everything without success usually come to the ceremony to heal.

☑ “I seek harmony”: Sometimes a person doesn't even understand what's bothering them. The reason may be childhood traumas, relationships with loved ones, and harmful behavioral patterns (so-called info-viruses). A person has nothing to complain about, but they don't feel happy. They don't find meaning in their lives, and live as though they are waiting for the rain to pass. They say that one Ayahuasca ceremony replaces ten years of psychotherapy. Falling in love with yourself and the world around you, normalizing relationships with loved ones, and learning to appreciate every living moment is what the “Vine of Spirits” can teach us.

☑ “I want to reach a new level”: This primarily refers to business and financial well-being. At first glance, it may seem strange to seek wealth from the impoverished Quechua or hope that the spirit of an Amazonian plant-teacher can replace an MBA. Ayahuasca usually doesn't give lectures, but it can help you: see already-known information in a new light; notice non-obvious connections; and clearly understand where to go next. This is what happened to me. Everything seemed to be laid out on shelves—and all I did was wonder how I couldn't have understood it all before the ceremony.

☑ “I want Ayahuasca to decide what I need”: In my opinion, this is not a very constructive position. But it’s acceptable. Often, a participant says one thing but receives something completely different during the ceremony, and only afterward do they realize that it was precisely what they needed. Such a passive mindset also requires working on oneself. Don’t expect Mother Earth to do everything for you.

Of course, the intention can sound more precise (and it is much better if it does). For example: “I feel that my relationship with my parents during adolescence left a deep traumatic mark on my life, and now it affects my behavior and prevents me from feeling happy. I want to free myself from this old burden.” Only people with a clear mindset can formulate such a clear intention, while others may need help understanding the cause of their problems. In that case, a session with a psychologist, regression therapist, or hypnotherapist can help.

I recommend limiting yourself to one intention per ceremony. This is an optimal strategy when you want to make significant progress in solving a problem. If everything goes well and Ayahuasca grants you thematic insights, your interpretation and integration will require tremendous effort. There is no need to complicate this process by having to sort insights related to different intentions.

How to Form a Mindset?

There’s no secret here. You need to focus on the upcoming ceremony and minimize the number of irritating factors. Control your passions. To some extent, this is the purpose of the five types of restrictions that you need to observe for two weeks before the ceremony:

- ☑ avoid elaborate, spicy, and frankly, tasty food;
- ☑ abstain from alcohol and drugs;
- ☑ refrain from sex and masturbation;
- ☑ discontinue many medications;

☑ avoid conflicts and intense emotional experiences.

Yes, much of the above is due to other reasons as well. For example, adhering to a shamanic diet prevents the occurrence of tyramine, while refraining from SSRI antidepressants prevents serotonin syndrome. Preparing for the ceremony generally works on the same principle as Christian fasting. It is unlikely that God cares whether you eat meat. Christian teachings were formed when it was much easier to convey the concept of dietary restrictions to the masses, than to abstain from destructive emotions and meditative humility—ensuring harmony with oneself and the world around. However, since then, almost everything has stayed the same.

Withdraw into yourself. Don't answer phone calls; don't check email; and forget about the news. Think only about yourself, feel yourself, and calmly contemplate reality. Do not allow extraneous thoughts to disturb your inner balance. If you practice meditation, now is the time to engage in it. When one morning you wake up and feel no burden of responsibility, but calm; when you wake up and feel no anxiety before the upcoming ceremony, but an irreversible greatness of the moment; when you are not restless, but see the indifference of the world as gentle—know: you are ready!

In Conclusion

Forming a mindset is like tuning a radio receiver. If you catch the right wave, you won't be able to detach from what Ayahuasca will convey to you during the ceremony. If you decide you have more important things to do, you will listen to meaningless noise and pride yourself only on the number of completed rituals. Have you heard of those who drank Ayahuasca over a thousand times but kept everything the same? Don't follow their example.

Four Long Weeks: Why Ayahuasca Is Incompatible With Sex

Abstinence is one of the most debated topics in the preparatory program for the ceremony. Most participants easily give up salty, sweet, spicy, fatty, and tyramine-containing food; but two weeks without sex, masturbation, pornography, and even sexual fantasies is an entirely different matter—especially after the ceremony, when it is necessary to continue abstaining for another two weeks. That’s where thoughts arise that not all Indigenous traditions are equally helpful, and there are no strict scientific reasons to live like a monk for a month. So, can sex interfere with enlightenment; and if so, why?

The Scientific Approach

The influence of sexual intercourse on the depth of psychedelic experiences is almost unexplored. But the fact that sex and psychoactive substances are compatible is not only a scientific, but also a historical fact. In the 1960s, the sexual revolution and the cult of LSD were proclaimed in the United States by the same people. It doesn’t seem that these phenomena hindered each other. There are no scientific grounds for abstaining from sex and masturbation before a psychedelic trip, and even more so after it. But should you rely on official science if you participate in an ancient Indigenous ritual? There is still no answer as to why the experience of taking Ayahuasca is not identical to the experience of taking DMT mixed with MAOIs.

Abstinence itself, and its effect on the body, is much better studied. Prolonged absence of sex causes stagnation in the organs of the small pelvis; and, as a result can cause: prostatitis, menstrual cycle disorders, infertility, impotence, and hemorrhoids. But we are certainly not talking about four weeks. Such abstinence is safe. But is it necessary? From a

psychological point of view, a long refusal of sex leads to sublimation—redirecting energy to achieve other goals (often related to creativity). Long before Freud described this phenomenon, abstinence for productivity was practiced by Spinoza, Aristotle, Newton, Da Vinci, and Nietzsche.

Great athletes like Muhammad Ali have advocated abstaining from sex before important competitions. Many still follow their example—even though science has proven that sex does not reduce physical productivity; and, in most cases, sex has a positive or neutral effect on psychological disposition.

Religious Perspective

The Amazonian cult of Pachamama (Mother Earth), part of the Ayahuasca ceremony, is not an institutionalized religion but a collection of disparate beliefs. However, it is quite possible that the practice of many religions—that see a connection between abstinence and spiritual development—will help understand the motivation of the Quechua people. In Hinduism, for example, *brahmacharya* (abstaining from sex) is one of the conditions for: self-realization, acquiring transcendent knowledge, and the ability to control desires. In Buddhism, monks take a vow of celibacy, while laypeople are not required to limit their sexual lives—though it is encouraged, because the basis of this religion is the complete renunciation of desires as a source of suffering.

Christianity interprets abstinence in two ways. On the one hand, in the First Letter to the Corinthians, it is unambiguously said that “it is good for a man not to touch a woman.” But there, Apostle Paul advises spouses: “Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” In Orthodox religions, priests are allowed

to have sex, but only with their wives—as abstinence “may offend the God-established and blessed marriage by Him in His coming” (VI Ecumenical Council). In Catholicism, celibacy is mandatory for the clergy, and its violation is considered sacrilege.

Most modern religions condemn sex outside of marriage, including Islam and Judaism, which do not establish a direct connection between abstinence and righteousness. This is why there is no institution of monasticism in Islam. In Judaism, an unmarried man is considered incomplete. Therefore, he cannot hold many social and religious positions, including being the high priest (as explicitly stated in the Book of Leviticus, 21:13). Nevertheless, abstinence during fasting (for example, during Yom Kippur and the daylight hours of Ramadan) is mandatory, as believers demonstrate their respect for God and their willingness to self-restrict for His sake.

The Quechua requirement to abstain from sex before and after the Ayahuasca ceremony is partly similar. Participants must demonstrate the seriousness of their intentions. If you are not ready to forget about your sex life for healing and true enlightenment for just a month, then Ayahuasca is probably not yet for you. Shamans also explain why sexual activity interferes with interacting with the “Vine of Spirits. According to the Quechua beliefs, sex depletes vital energy reserves that are useful to the spirit of teacher-plants. Moreover, the exchange of energies during sexual intercourse spoils the purity of the trip: your partner’s experiences become mixed with your own.

There is also a more prosaic explanation for such requirements. Indigenous people are convinced that the spirit of the liana *Banisteriopsis caapi* is highly jealous. If it detects the scent of sex during the ceremony, it will be offended. Then the insights of all participants will not be as constructive as possible; and the “violation of peace” may face punishment in the form of a bad trip.

In Conclusion

Like any spiritual practice, Ayahuasca requires respect for traditions. You either play by the rules of the people who gave the world this truly magical drink, or you stay home. If two weeks of celibacy before the ceremony, and another two weeks after, is too high a price for the knowledge of the universe's secrets, then you should ask yourself: are you ready for the experience that Ayahuasca offers, or are you just looking for exoticism?

Shit Happens: How to Avoid Diarrhea During an Ayahuasca Ceremony and Why You Shouldn't Be Afraid of It

Surprisingly, many who are considering to try Ayahuasca are stopped in their tracks by the risk of sudden diarrhea during a psychedelic trip. I wouldn't believe it if I didn't constantly read such questions on my Instagram. Think about it! A potential ceremonial participant doesn't fear having a bad trip, or from tyramine and serotonin syndrome, or even the decoction not working. Instead, he fears defecating in front of five to ten quasi-familiar people, who, at that moment, have more important things to do than care about errant bodily functions. It's time to talk about this delicate subject openly.

There's No Reason to Be Embarrassed about Cleansing

Unlike the lab-created pharmahuasca, Ayahuasca almost always causes vomiting during ceremonies. Participants are given special containers (sometimes simple buckets) to avoid making a mess. Curanderos claim that vomiting is a natural way of physiological and mental cleansing. I've often noticed that the more negativity a person has accumulated, the

stronger and longer they vomit. Urges to defecate are also part of “la purge,” but they occur much less frequently. I’ve heard stories about participants simultaneously defecating and vomiting, but I’ve never witnessed it.

But even if it happens to you, it’s not a big deal. Seriously! When you immerse yourself in the fantastic world of the Ayahuasca trip, you will also understand how insignificant this is. The psychedelic interaction with the “Vine of Spirits” is such a large-scale religious and mystical experience that such inconveniences cannot spoil it. I assure you, there will be no one in the maloca to judge or laugh at you. Everyone, including the curanderos, will have more important things to focus on.

Another important point: during a psychedelic trip, a person does not lose control over their body. Movements will become more complex, but once you feel the urge, you can get up and go to the bathroom. This is why I recommended bringing a headlamp with you.

Experienced ceremonial participants advise against trying to find a compromise with your body by holding in gas. In an altered state of consciousness, this will almost certainly result in the very thing you fear. Simply put: get up and go if you want to use the bathroom.

How to Ensure Your Bowel Doesn’t Let You Down?

The paths of Ayahuasca are inscrutable. If diarrhea helps you to cleanse and gain valuable insights, so be it. However, here are two simple tips to minimize the likelihood of bowel issues:

☑ Follow the Shamanic Diet—especially when abstaining from fatty foods, salt, and other spices: From the reviews, those who overindulged in spicy foods (especially chili pepper) more often suffer from multiple urges to defecate during the ceremony. And, if you have a weak stomach or chronic bowel disease, it’s better not to overeat on the day of the ritual.

☑ **Choose an Experienced Curandero:** There are as many shamans as there are Ayahuasca recipes. Some are carefully passed down from generation to generation, while others are tested on “gringos” trying to save money—like those traveling in the Amazon as freeloaders. Remember that everyone in Latin America is trying to cash in on the Ayahuasca tourism boom, and those waving their hands at you may not be experienced curanderos. It could be that the person in front of you is not a Quechua shaman.

I have also encountered harmful advice like wearing adult diapers to the ceremony or taking anti-diarrhea pills in advance. The most desperate suggestion is to do enemas until clear water comes out, so there’s no trace of fecal matter left in the intestines. Don’t engage in such nonsense! Before the ritual, you need to: calm down, focus on your “I,” and open your heart to a new experience—rather than sit on the toilet.

Don’t forget the importance of the mindset. If your mind is preoccupied with thoughts of soiling yourself during the ceremony, that’s precisely what you’ll get. I once heard about a trip where the person was convinced that the mishap had already occurred and tried in every way to hide it from those around them. But when the effect of the psychedelic substances subsided, it turned out that it was all just a hallucination. Ayahuasca played a cruel joke on that person.

In Conclusion

Ironically, great wisdom is given to a person not with a glass of wine, but with a bucket for vomiting in their hands—and in sporadic cases, with something unattractive in their pants. Indeed, nature has a sense of humor. But I can repeat for those who are overly worried about the cleanliness of their reputation: diarrhea at an Ayahuasca ceremony is extremely rare; and almost always, the participant can calmly walk to the toilet. The opposite has yet to happen in my practice. And if it

does happen, it will be a small price to pay for what the “Vine of Spirits” will teach you. After all, it’s better to mess up once than to flush your entire life down the toilet, right?

Preparing for Ayahuasca: Seven Simple Things to Bring to the Ceremony

What determines the effectiveness of the Ayahuasca ritual? I can’t list everything but here are some essentials: the shaman’s skill; the participant’s preparation (strict adherence to all five aspects); an openness to new experiences and mindset before the ritual; the atmosphere in the maloca; an accurate memory and interpretation of insights; the integration of the gained knowledge—neglecting even one of these components can quickly derail the process. The things I’m about to talk about are not affected by this. You can go through the ceremony without them. But it’s much more comfortable with them.

Nº1. Poncho

This traditional South American outerwear combines two essential qualities: its warmth and its ease of wear. If you don’t have a poncho, no worries. Just bring something that meets the criteria. It gets cold in the jungle at night (in the middle of summer, the temperature drops to +5°C); and during the trip (which lasts up to six hours), you’re likely to feel hot and cold. Under the influence of psychedelics, it’s not easy to deal with zippers, buttons, and inside-out sleeves. But a poncho doesn’t have any of these.

Nº2. Comfortable Shoes without Laces

The reason is the same: in a state of altered consciousness, sometimes you don’t have the time or patience to deal

with laces. Don't count on finding a shoehorn in the maloca. I think the best footwear for the ceremony is flip-flops or sandals. However, you'll have to wear them with warm socks to avoid freezing on a cold Ecuadorian night. It's not fashionable, but it's practical. However, one should not always disregard appearance for the sake of functionality.

Nº3. Favorite Clothes

The path to the right mindset lies in the feeling of coziness. If you are annoyed, for example, by wearing socks with sandals, don't force yourself. This will lead to internal discomfort, which may interfere with focusing on your psychedelic experience. Choose clothes in which you feel confident and like yourself. If you are a woman who can't live without jewelry, wear it at the ceremony. But remember practicality: high-heeled shoes, even if you are used to them, will likely cause problems.

Nº4. Flashlight

I recommend a headlamp: it's harder to lose. A flashlight will be handy if you suddenly need to go to the toilet at night. Just don't bring expensive models that emit 1,000 lumens. Bright light can disrupt the integrity of the trip for other participants. A dim flashlight (preferably not with an eye-cutting white light, but with a red one) will suffice.

Nº5. Towel

It's necessary to wipe sweat from your face. Also, remember the peculiar way the "Vine of Spirits" cleanses your body. After vomiting, a towel or tissues will be necessary. You can bring more hygiene products, but they can easily get tangled during the trip; and you can wipe your face with a towel in any situation.

Nº6. Water Bottle

Water is always handy, and after six hours of unparalleled mystical experiences, sweating, and vomiting, you'll start to feel thirsty. Taking a sports bottle that opens and closes with a single click is better. Some recommend choosing medicinal (salty) water, saying that the body loses too many electrolytes during the ceremony. But, in my experience, regular water is just fine. Moreover, it's needed not only for drinking but also for wiping your face.

Nº7. Sleeping Mat

Discomfort can lead to a loss of concentration during psychedelic experiences. So, bring a tourist mat to the ceremony. In principle, an ordinary foam one will suffice. But an inflatable one is even more comfortable and doesn't require too much effort to prepare. The sleeping mat will not only save you from discomfort but also protect you from the cold.

In Conclusion

Understanding what you'll need at the ceremony and what you can do without comes with experience. So, please don't take these suggestions as a set of instructions: it's entirely possible that you can easily do without most of the items on the list or, conversely, supplement it with your own. Remember, the most necessary things at the ritual are mindset and a heart open to new experiences.

I do want to warn you against using earplugs and a sleep mask during the ceremony. This harmful advice can often be found online. You will at least destroy the setting by shielding yourself from the icaro and contemplating nature. Shamans, however, believe that a "blind" and "deaf" participant is easy prey for evil spirits. Therefore, enjoy all aspects of the ceremony.

CHAPTER 3.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT AYAHUASCA CEREMONIES

You Can't Change the Meeting Place: Why the Ayahuasca Ceremony Should Take Place in the Amazon

If you perceive Ayahuasca the way Western journalists do, then flying to the other side of the world only to drink a cup of “psychedelic tea” does seem foolish. Modern people are not concerned with the origin of the products they consume. We drink coffee every day, but we have never been to coffee plantations. So why fly to a retreat in Ecuador, Brazil, Peru, or Costa Rica? If it's just a matter of Ayahuasca's legal status, what's wrong with the Netherlands or Italy? In these countries, the brew made from the “Vine of Spirits” is also legal.

To understand why thousands of people choose a dilapidated hut in the Amazon jungle over a comfortable retreat center in a bustling city, you first need to realize what an Ayahuasca ceremony is. It's not just the consumption of the brew but a centuries-old ritual in which no detail is insignificant: the skill and knowledge of the shaman; the recipe of the drink; the location of the ceremony; adherence to the diet; and integration—each of these aspects is critically important for enlightenment.

Scientists explain Ayahuasca's effects by its high content of DMT—the “spirit molecule.” However, a trip after consuming pure *dimethyltryptamine* is not identical to the Ayahuasca experience, and traditional science cannot explain this. We are dealing with the unknown by drinking the brew made from *Banisteriopsis caapi*. Shamans claim that the plant's spirit helps people look beyond their consciousness and use the information gained for their own benefit. But this does not always happen.

The story of Tatiana Plaksina, daughter of Lyubov Uspenskaya, made a lot of noise in the CIS. After going through an Ayahuasca ceremony with a man who posed as a shaman

and thus profited from “gringos,” she first shaved her head because “it contains impurity and harm” and ended up in a psychiatric hospital. Unknowingly, Tatiana showed disrespect both to the centuries-old traditions of the Kichwa people and to the teacher-plant itself. It, presumably, did not remain indebted to her.

Many retreat centers in Europe claim their ceremonies are conducted by “hereditary shamans from Peru.” It sounds convincing, but experienced (let alone hereditary) shamans enjoy such tremendous respect in indigenous tribes; also their social status is so high that it is impossible to imagine a shaman giving up everything to become a lackey for some European dealer. Most likely, these are either curanderos, expelled from their tribe, or impostors who try to act like people from the tribe to trick foreigners out of their money. Going through a ceremony accompanied by such a guide is a considerable risk.

It is better to be safe than sorry when dealing with the unknown. For successful integration, it is necessary to be away from the hustle and bustle, away from civilization before, during, and after the ritual. But is it so important to be surrounded by the Amazon jungle specifically? One might think that an ordinary forest or a country cottage will do. There are no exact answers to these questions. But common sense suggests that it is better to refrain from bargaining with forces we cannot comprehend. And it is certainly not worth making them play by our rules.

Which is scarier: a ten-hour flight to a country with a high crime rate where white people are disliked or the risk of getting a severe mental illness instead of enlightenment? Everyone must answer this for himself.



Enlightenment on the Cheap: Five Reasons Not to Attend an Ayahuasca Ceremony “Wildly”

People don't drink the brew from the “Vine of Spirits” with the last of their money. For a CIS resident, just the round-trip airfare to Ecuador will cost several thousand dollars. And the total cost of the retreat is comparable to the price of a not-so-terrible used car. A small price for a new life, correct? Nevertheless, nobody would mind saving money. When people find out that many locals drink Ayahuasca out of boredom, paying only \$10 to \$20 for the ceremony, they wonder: why not travel to South America “wildly,” bypassing retreat centers, and not pay the “crafty dealers” who profit from Ayahuasca tourists? I'll explain why this is a bad idea.

Nº1. Who Will Take Care of Your Safety at the Ceremony?

For four to six hours after taking the decoction from the “Vine of Spirits,” you are mentally and physically vulnerable. I don’t want to spread horror stories from the media about how tourists have their throats cut for a few hundred dollars or are harvested for organs. But don’t forget: even in relatively peaceful Ecuador, by Latin American standards, the annual rate of intentional homicides is 15.2 per a 100,000 people (or per 100,000 population). Although this is two times lower than in Colombia, it is 1.6 times higher than in Russia, 3.6 times higher than in the United States, and 12.7 times higher than in the United Kingdom. Minor crimes like mugging flourish even more. I would not advise using psychedelic substances in the company of strangers. Not here.

Nº2. You Are Not a Local

In South America, outsiders are not liked. Even if you speak fluent Spanish or Portuguese, be prepared for adults to look at you sideways, children to point their fingers and aggressively yell “gringo,” and be cheated by everyone you decide to buy something from. The rich are also affected, but to a lesser extent. If you have only a return ticket and a hundred dollars in your pocket, don’t even hope to make friends with the locals, or go with them to a cheap ceremony. They will fleece you, humiliate you, and eventually lead you to a madman who will give you some garbage instead of Ayahuasca. And by the way, don’t forget about the language barrier. Most locals do not speak English. Do you want to ingratiate yourself with them through sign language?

Nº3. How to Find an Authentic Shaman?

A shaman is not just part of the local color. Yes, I once thought that Ayahuasca was an exotic way to try the “spirit

molecule” DMT. But interacting with the teacher-plant is not just tales. The curandero establishes and directs this interaction thanks to the icaro, mapacho smoking, and through Ayahuasca, itself. Remember that each shaman has their own recipe for this drink. The “Vine of Spirits” and chacruna are present in any of them, but the number of auxiliary components can easily exceed a dozen. I spent a lot of time and money before I found the real curanderos from the Quechua tribe, and I’m sure it is impossible to do the same in a couple of days and with a limited budget.

Nº4. Is One Ceremony Enough?

Sometimes—yes. For example, in the 1920s, a dark-skinned Brazilian, who later called himself Master Irineu, had only one ritual to understand his calling and establish a successful religion. But for most participants, the first Ayahuasca ceremony is more of an introductory experience. Our retreat program includes four vegetalista rituals: three Ayahuasca and one Huachuma (San Pedro). Based on my experience, this number of ceremonies provides optimal insights—not too many to get confused or too little for a radical transformation. But, such a tight schedule requires careful planning. Naturally, it is not available to those who seek enlightenment in the “wild.”

Nº5. Are You Sure You Don’t Need an Integration Specialist?

The most important part of the ceremony takes place outside the maloca and often not even in South America. Ayahuasca grants a person a series of revelations, but how to interpret them? And how to incorporate the gained experience into one’s own life? Integration specialists help find answers to these questions. In a \$20 ceremony led by someone claiming to be a curandero from the Shipibo-Conibo tribe, such a specialist is absent. Neglecting to integrate yourself culturally

turns Ayahuasca consumption into watching psychedelic cartoons—and trusting false interpretations can quickly derail your entire life.

In Conclusion

They say the stingy pay twice. When it comes to economy-class Ayahuasca, you also expose yourself to mortal danger and the risk of not getting anything from the ritual but unpleasant memories. I think a journey that will divide your life into a “before” and an “after” is not something to skimp on. If you can’t afford a full-fledged retreat, try to earn more money. Making \$10,000 a month is entirely possible without vegetal-ist ceremonies, as hundreds of my students can attest to it.

There Is Such a Profession—Healing People: How to Become a Shaman

The shaman is a crucial figure in the Ayahuasca ceremony. Without them, the ritual is no longer sacred—merely a dubious play with hallucinogenic tea. Shamans are the guardians of centuries-old traditions. They prepare Ayahuasca according to an authentic recipe, guide their wards, maintain a connection with spirits of teacher-plants, and set the tone for the whole event. This person bears great responsibility. Therefore, it is unsurprising that one cannot become a shaman on a whim. Only the chosen ones are honored with this title after many years of training.

Here and in other chapters, I often use the word “shaman.” On the one hand, it is a universal name for anyone who performs mystical rituals in any culture from all corners of the globe—from cold Yakutia to hot Africa. On the other hand, it is customary for the indigenous people to call these people “curanderos.” The word “maestro” is also relevant; we use it to

honor outstanding figures in the arts, while the inhabitants of the Amazon use it to honor spiritual leaders.

School of Mental Transformation

As a rule, the path to their esteemed status, future curanderos, begins at a relatively young age. Often, initiation takes place at the age of ten to thirteen. Typically, those who become shamans have fathers, grandfathers, and more distant ancestors who were also shamans. Of course, not every respected curandero represents a professional dynasty, but its presence is considered a plus. What this means is that they lived in the right atmosphere from an early age and learned the appropriate wisdom.

In most cases, the secret knowledge of shamans—including the recipe for Ayahuasca—is passed down from generation to generation. Only some children can continue the work of their ancestors. The shaman chooses who among the descendants will become their successor. As a rule, there are enough candidates because the adherents of ancient indigenous traditions usually have large families.

As in school, everything starts with the basics. The right to work with Ayahuasca is granted to future shamans at the end of their education. In the first years, they work with less powerful teacher-plants, mastering the principles of herbal dieting and learning the rules for creating a proper atmosphere. Many future curanderos study under several mentors at once. It is not uncommon for a young man to start his training with his father; then, for example, his uncle might join the process; and closer to the end, he has one or even a couple of mentors from among the strangers.

The training can last for a very long time—about two decades. If a ten-to-thirteen-year-old boy starts learning the art of being a curandero, the process ends when the man is thirty to thirty-five years old. Becoming a shaman takes more time

than to become a doctor: twenty years under the guidance of a shaman versus ten years in school and five to seven years in a medical university.

After many years, the apprentice becomes a full-fledged curandero. He is ready to interact with any of the teacher-plants and to perform his first icaro at his first ceremony. He is ready to create his first brew from the “Vine of Spirits,” according to his mentors’ recipe. Then he begins his own practice in which he will always be perfecting his skills.



Mythical Requirements for Curanderos

The Quechua traditions put forth many requirements for a shaman. But this seems insufficient for the uninitiated, and they add to them even non-existent restrictions. Let’s deal with the three most popular myths about curanderos:

☑ Only Men: I confess that before, I deliberately spoke about shamans only in the masculine gender to only later destroy this stereotype. In fact, it would be strange if a nation worshiping Mother Earth (Pachamama) manifested cave sexism in such an essential aspect of their life. Yes, there are significantly fewer representatives of the fair sex among curanderos.

But they exist. And female shamans are not called "maestros" but "maestras."

☑ **Seventy and Older:** Many sources on the internet emphasize this number. Supposedly, only by age seventy can a shaman become a true curandero. Until then, they are just "maturing." Nonsense! Yes, the experience is terrific. But being a maestro/a is a calling, and a lot depends on one's commitment to beliefs, the experience of mentors, and the talent of the person themselves. I personally participated in ceremonies led by an elderly man and a relatively young woman. Both were true masters of their craft, and the results were astonishing in both cases.

☑ **Heredity Above All:** Yes, "from grandfather to father and father to son" is the rule. But there are also exceptions. A shaman may not have any heirs, and their student may be an outsider who sometimes surpasses their teacher if they put in a lot of effort. It also happens the other way around: if a familial curandero is expelled from the tribe for bad behavior. And contrary to their "authenticity," such a shaman will not offer you anything good, especially if they have joined the ranks of the *brujo*—the indigenous equivalent of dark wizards.

In Conclusion

A true maestro/a goes through a long and thorny path to lead you to a new life in the shortest way possible.

Old Songs About the Main Things: Everything You Need to Know About the Magic of Icaros

I made this mistake, too: I thought that the ritual songs of icaros were just decorations, and simply one of the components of the indigenous experience. They contribute to forming the proper mindset and setting, but that's all. Stories

about healing with icaros alone seemed like beautiful legends to me. But then, I learned where these songs come from and what they represent—and my opinion changed dramatically.

If Teacher-Plants Could Sing...

Icaros are ritual chants that curanderos perform at vegetalista ceremonies (Ayahuasca, San Pedro, rapé). On the internet, you can find full-fledged musical works called "icaros," but curanderos do not play musical instruments—except perhaps a ritual drum—and do not invite orchestras to ceremonies. They usually only have their voice and a *chakapa*—a bundle of dry leaves (usually grass plants of the Pariana family), which, when shaken, emit a soothing crackle. Icaros are also accompanied by burning mapacho—but smoldering cigars do not make sounds.

We usually hear icaros in the Quechua or Shipibo-Conibo languages, but it is perfectly acceptable to sing them in Spanish, English, and even in theory, in Russian (you will understand why later). Sometimes there is no text in them—just a set of disjointed sounds that create a motive. Indigenous people do not record icaros. There is a set of standard chants that are passed down orally. During the preparation, the curandero memorizes more than a hundred such compositions. The rest are revealed during their interactions with the teacher-plants. The diet takes place in isolation and can last for several years.

I asked a shaman how the enlightenment of the icaro happens, and he explained that he began to hear a voice as if coming from the back of his head. The voice performed the chant, and the curandero felt the need to repeat it. When the icaro were learned, the voice subsided. Sometimes the song comes spontaneously, right at the ceremony. The shaman explained that in rare cases, icaros are revealed to ordinary people who have not practiced long months of asceticism, but

have just undergone preparation before Ayahuasca. At the moment of enlightenment, the participant, without realizing it, begins to hum sounds or even might even sing in their native language. Most often, they cannot repeat it after the ceremony.

Curanderos protect icaros from people with bad intentions. I have heard stories of *brujos* (evil shamans) who made a long journey and pretended to be ordinary participants in the ceremony to hear and memorize the chants of an experienced curandero. *Brujos* have no revelations because teacher-plants reveal icaros only to those with pure thoughts. Mother Earth favors those who bring good.

Chants for All Occasions

Icaros are not just an addition to the vegetalista ceremony, but a tool for the curanderos. They serve at least nine different functions:

☑ **Protect:** Shamans are convinced that when energy channels are open during the ceremony, a person is especially vulnerable to evil spirits. Their shield becomes special icaros. With their help, curanderos repel dark forces and establish a protective dome over the maloca. Indigenous people believe that in such cases, good spirits of the forest come to their aid.

☑ **Add Meaning to Visions:** Icaros establish a mental connection between the ceremony participants and the spirit of the teacher-plant, turning the psychedelic trip from just a bright impression into a series of insights. Indigenous people believe that the power contained in ritual songs delivers the souls of participants in the *mareacion* (what they call the ayahuasca trip) on boats and anacondas.

☑ **Stabilize Visions:** According to the Quechua people, a bad trip occurs when the soul slips into a dark realm. It may not find its way back, and the person may not regain consciousness or might even die. Icaros serve as a beacon, pointing the

way back to the light. When a participant hears such a song, nightmares dissipate.

☑ Purify Consciousness and the Subconscious—It seems that such icaros cause discomfort, anxiety, fear, and even nausea. They are unpleasant to listen to. But behind these sensations hides an energetic storm that separates negative energy and foreign entities, and expels them from the body. When the song subsides, the patient feels relief.

☑ Heal Diseases: On the contrary, such icaros provide a sense of harmony and inspiration. They are beautiful and melodic. A person feels stars illuminate their heart, flowers bloom in ailing organs, and snakes repair broken DNA chains. Curanderos call for the help of teacher-plants' spirits, animals, and even deities.

☑ Reflect Attacks from *Brujos*: The curandero may sense if an evil shaman infiltrates the ceremony. In this case, they will perform a battle icaro, attracting the spirits of powerful beings to them. An energetic battle unfolds between the good and evil shamans. Curanderos also perform battle icaros when their patients have fallen victim to dark magic.

☑ Manipulate Consciousness: These songs are a double-edged sword. On one hand, they are used to eradicate destructive thought patterns and behaviors, thus working for the better. On the other hand, the “wormy-icaros” are widely known as a shamanic analog of a love potion, essentially causing an infringement on someone else’s will.

☑ Open Portals to Other Worlds: Indigenous people believe that special icaros can initiate astral journeys, not only in space but also in time. Curanderos’ guides become the summoned spirits of teacher-plants and animals.

☑ Close Energy Channels: The action of such icaros resembles ice used to narrow pores after cosmetic procedures. Curanderos do the same but with mental entry points. This is part of energetic hygiene. Moreover, they apply arcanas,

which are energetic shields that protect participants beyond the maloca.

In Conclusion

Unlike Ayahuasca—which can plunge a person into a psychedelic trip even against his will—the magic of ritual songs is easily broken. Shamans admit that most icaros (except perhaps battle and love potion ones) only work on those who have opened their minds and hearts. Fatigue, emotional disturbances, overeating, hunger, and loud external noises can weaken the effects of the songs. Your enlightenment is in your hands. I advise you to cast aside skepticism and embrace the magic of indigenous songs. Personally, I took the plunge and have never regretted it.

Colors of Enlightenment: How to Apply Ritual Symbols to the Face and Why It's Necessary

The photos from our retreats show that the participants' faces are adorned with some ethnic ornament. I am often asked how this helps in the ceremony and whether there is any sacrilege in a white person applying the traditional facial paint of indigenous peoples. The short answer is that everything we do at the retreat is result-oriented and does not violate the traditions of the Quechua people. To understand how, why, and in which cases a participant coming from afar should “apply makeup” to their face, one must delve into the traditions of the Amazonian tribes and contemporary scientific views on psychedelic trips.

The Second Skin of Indigenous Peoples

Applying tattoos and facial paint (sometimes permanent) is one of the oldest traditions of indigenous groups from the

Amazon. Such “makeup” almost always encompasses various elements that serve a number of purposes. First and foremost, symbols and colors indicate the following: affiliation to a particular tribe; intentions (whether the tribe is in a state of war); and the social status of the person wearing it. You must take responsibility for your paint: anyone trying to raise their status undeservedly will be severely punished. Therefore, do not attempt to apply “makeup” on your own. The Quechua people will perceive your mistakes as an attempt to deceive them and their hospitality.

The Matsés or Mayoruna tribe believe that paint gives them superpowers. For example, the image of a jaguar or its spotted color is believed to provide speed and courage, and the image of a deity offers wisdom. In the same tribe, facial paint with large red-black strokes instills fear in strangers. In the Mundurucu (Waiapi) and Ashaninka (Kampa) tribes, “makeup” is exclusively peaceful. The former pay tribute to the beauty of nature by trying to replicate its natural ornaments, and the latter use paint to convey their mood.

In the Tukuna tribe, special black markings on the face indicate that a girl is ready to start a family and has undergone the appropriate initiation ritual into womanhood. And the Quechua and Shipibo-Conibo peoples use facial paint primarily for religious purposes: to glorify Mother Earth and the maestro, and to protect themselves from evil spirits and *brujos* (dark shamans). Of course, all indigenous people apply “makeup” for trivial purposes—one example is to camouflage themselves while hunting. The source of the paint used unites different tribes. The red-orange pigment is obtained from the fruits of the annatto (*Bixa orellana*); the dark blue, close to black paint, comes from the American genipa (*Genipa americana*).

Going through the Ceremony Means Becoming Part of the Tribe

In South America, people are not always friendly to “gringos,” but the Quechua people are far from racist. They believe that everyone is equal before Mother Earth—regardless of skin color, gender, religion, and the language they speak. Still, centuries-old traditions require that Ayahuasca be protected from strangers so that they, having gained secret knowledge, do not harm the indigenous people and the jungle. Therefore, before the ceremony, you must become part of the tribe. Applying facial paint is one of the main elements of this ritual.



Participants are not asked for anything in return. With these new rights, new responsibilities will not be imposed on you. There are, however, two that will be expected of you: do not harm the Quechua people, and treat their traditions and the culture of Mother Earth with respect. This ritual is reminiscent of being awarded the title of honorary citizen, which is why shamans may consider a person unworthy of joining the tribe—one such example is if they see malicious intent

arising from a decoction from the “Vine of Spirits.” However, if your intentions are pure and your soul is open to new experiences, women will apply a unique ornament to your face (men are forbidden to do this)—and you will become one of the Quechua.

An Important Quality of Mindset and Setting

I have mentioned Timothy Leary’s model more than once—according to which the intensity of a psychedelic trip directly depends on mood and surroundings. Even if we discard the “magical” arguments about evil spirits, the ritual of applying “makeup” gives significance to what is happening and forms the correct setting. The deeper you immerse yourself in the atmosphere of Native American traditions, you will approach your upcoming psychedelic experience with greater concentration, and the expectations on your experience can be more accurate from your interaction with the “Vine of Spirits.”

Other participants in the ceremony—dressed in traditional Quechua clothing and with Native American ornaments on their faces—are also one of the factors of success. After all, they contribute to the authentic setting—an environment where nothing stands out from the general canvas: the maloca; sounds of the icaros and the jungle; the smell of mapacho; and facial paintings on all ceremonial participants. Each of these details contributes to the richness of visions that await you after taking Ayahuasca.

In Conclusion

It is essential to realize the seriousness of what is happening. The face paint differs from a lei (flower necklace) that Hawaiians like putting on every tourist. It is an element of a full-fledged initiation. Those worthy of wearing Amazonian ornaments are considered equal by the Quechua and are entrusted with their most important value—Ayahuasca.

According to the natives, the painting protects one from evil spirits and glorifies Mother Earth. According to scientists, the more authentic the details, the more intense the psychedelic trip. It turns out that there is no reason to refuse the “makeup.”

The History of Agua de Florida: How a Cheap Eau de Cologne Became a Tool for Curanderos

We are used to thinking that shamanic rituals are not from this world—that there should be no threads connecting them to modern civilization. I have noticed several times how participants in the ceremony are subconsciously annoyed, for example, by the denim shorts on the curandero. This insignificant detail adds falsehood to what is happening. After all, the word “shaman” is associated with something ancient, sacred, and mysterious. Can a shaman drive a car? Argue with someone on Facebook? In the imagination of a layperson—no. Can cheap eau de cologne be an integral part of the Ayahuasca ceremony? Strangely enough, yes.

The Second Life of “Florida Water”

We are used to calling any men’s perfume, “eau de cologne.” We call adhesive tape, “Scotch tape,” and a vacuum cleaner, a Hoover. Nevertheless, all these words were originally brands. So, Eau de Cologne (in French) or Kölnisch Wasser (in German) is a specific perfume created in 1709 in Cologne by an Italian expatriate, Johann Maria Farina. The name translates as “water from Cologne.” In 1808, a perfumer from New York, Robert Murray, introduced his version of this fragrance. Just as citrusy, it differed from the original: it had notes of lavender and cloves, as well as orange instead of lemon. Murray named it *Agua de Florida*—“water from Florida.” In his opinion, the source of eternal youth described by Herodotus was there.

Florida Water gained considerable popularity. Men and women used it as a body lotion and aftershave. In the nineteenth century, no self-respecting barber could do without “Florida Water.” In the 1890s, its advertising claimed that it was the most popular perfume in the world. Advertisers might have exaggerated this point, but in South America, the fragrant *Agua de Florida* (that’s how the localized name sounded) was also known and loved by everyone—including representatives of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon. Curanderos believe the spirits of the forest are attracted to sweet smells and that sour ones repel them. Unsurprisingly, the sweetish and refreshing *Agua de Florida* was to their liking.

Another indisputable advantage of this eau de cologne was its accessibility. By the end of the nineteenth century, the recognizable yellow bottle with foil on the neck and a colorful label (the design has stayed the same) could be obtained for pennies from almost any merchant in any remote area. Even now, *Agua de Florida* is more than just perfume sold in esoteric shops as a magical shamanic essence: a 270 ml bottle will cost at most \$27. If you don’t buy it online but in stores in Ecuador or Peru, you can easily find it for \$8 or \$9.

Do You Want to See Some “Florida” Magic?

The shamanic use of *Agua de Florida* is much more mundane than what is written on the Internet. Indigenous people choose this perfume as a tribute to a roughly 150-year-old tradition because it is cheap, repels evil, and attracts good spirits. Before an Ayahuasca ceremony, the curandero takes a small amount of cologne in their mouth and then sprays it on the participant. According to indigenous beliefs, this fragrant cloud is a mental detoxifier, cleansing negative energy and surrounding it with a protective aura. Fumigating with mapacho works on the same principle. However, unlike the mass-produced cologne, the “Aztec tobacco” is a fully realized

teacher-plant with many healing properties—and “Florida Water” is just an auxiliary tool.

Some internet specialists do not agree with this. I have come across amusing recommendations for “dieting with cologne-teacher.” A person who called himself a shaman advised smoking mapacho, drinking perfume (at least 70% alcohol), and washing it down with water. This way, they say, one can get acquainted with the spirit of *Agua de Florida*, who appears to the person in the image of a dandy gentleman from the Victorian era. Of course, all of this is nonsense, and the “shaman” who recommends such rituals has likely never been to South America and has not communicated with real curanderos. I wonder if there are “shamans” from the CIS who believe alcoholics drinking hawthorn tinctures are respectable vegetarians.

In Conclusion

The story of *Agua de Florida* is amusing but instructive. It shows that anything—even something as trivial as cologne—can become a healer’s tool. They say beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The fantastic properties of nature (or, as the curanderos would call it, the magic of Mother Earth) also work in the same way. It’s right beside us; we need to take a closer look. The “Vine of Spirits” seems exotic to us—but, indigenous people encountered it constantly, just as inhabitants of Russia encountered birch and pine. They encountered it and did not notice it until the first real curandero saw the foremost “maestro” in it. Thus, a spiritual practice was born that changed hundreds of thousands of people’s lives worldwide, including mine.

Enough Already: Everything You Wanted to Know about the Necessary Number of Ceremonies

If Ayahuasca is so powerful that one ritual replaces ten years of psychotherapy, why do we perform three in one program at our retreat? And if this brew does not cause addiction, why is the Internet full of stories of people who have undergone over a hundred and even a thousand ceremonies? And why aren't these people on the Forbes list? After all, I have repeatedly claimed that Ayahuasca will make you rich, haven't I? In general, it's time to answer some questions that seem uncomfortable if you are unfamiliar with the topic.

The Magic Word Is Integration

How many ceremonies must you go through for your life to change? It depends on how carefully you are ready to do your homework: this means interpreting insights and integrating the acquired experience. The "Vine of Spirits" metaphorically (sometimes even directly) points the way and grants an exceptional understanding of life. The one who takes advantage of its advice will achieve everything they desire: inner peace; the ability to enjoy the world; harmonious relationships with relatives and friends; fame; wealth; and even success with the opposite sex. For this, just one ceremony may be enough. The same person who drinks Ayahuasca only for hallucinations and ignores insights will remain a loser even after a hundred of them.

Why are there three ceremonies in our retreats program? Many of my students have never tried the brew from the "Vine of Spirits." For this reason, the first ritual often takes place with the tea at half-strength. Shamans explain that the spirit of the teacher-plant watches over the newcomer and decides whether they are ready for genuinely stunning revelations.

This ceremony is introductory. Transcendent experiences of a different power usually accompany the following ones. I came to three Ayahuasca ceremonies (and a fourth in San Pedro) through personal experience. They give the student the optimal number of insights to noticeably change their life—neither too few nor too many, so as not to get confused and fail the integration.

How Not to Become an “Ayahuasca Addict”

The brew from the “Vine of Spirits” does not cause addiction or withdrawal syndrome, and the ceremony provides a unique, valuable, but not always pleasant experience. Therefore, the chances of getting addicted to tea or coffee are much higher. And yet, many people participate in ceremonies regularly. The people are not just the residents of Peru or Ecuador, who consume Ayahuasca for lack of other entertainment or simply for company. Thousands of people live from retreat to retreat and consider the number of ceremonies completed as a measure of enlightenment. What’s wrong with them?

The natural desire to be better than others can sometimes take on pathological forms. People can develop a distorted worldview through a warped lens of success that only seems precious to them. For example, bookworms are convinced that their life’s goal is to conquer Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and everyone who is not interested in this pursuit is second-rate. Gym enthusiasts divide people into those who can bench hundreds and those who can’t. And victims of the phony self-help industry perceive Ayahuasca as a way to attain “enlightenment” just to maintain their elitism.

Measuring one’s degree of self-development is almost impossible. More precisely, it is accurately reflected by the amount in a bank account. But those I’m talking about need help understanding this. Counting the number of ceremonies is easier than easy. The one with more of them is the most

enlightened in their circle. Of course, there can be no talk of integration: it takes too long and needs to be simplified. These people don't even remember the details of the psychedelic trip—and why should they? Their goal is to draw another star on the fuselage of their self-development, and to appear to themselves and others as an esoteric ace.

You want to avoid becoming one of them, do you? Then treat Ayahuasca correctly—as a means, not an end. The spirit of this teacher-plant reveals the universe's secrets and helps you to understand how to achieve the desired. But even such knowledge is useless if not backed up by action. Enlightenment cannot be brewed in a pot. Enlightenment is the result of the lengthy and painstaking work that one does on oneself.

In Conclusion

Ayahuasca ceremonies are not a case of quantity necessarily meaning quality. A new trip can provide the key to interpreting the previous one, and can result in more effective integration. But don't just look for it there. Shamans warn us: the spirit of *Banisteriopsis caapi* does not favor the lazy. I recommend starting the next ceremony once you have assimilated the lessons of the previous one. But don't try to get by with just one ritual at all costs. Listen to your feelings and the spirit of the teacher-plant. They will tell you when to continue or stop.

Bad Trip: Who's to Blame and What to Do?

In scientific literature, a bad trip is described as something relatively harmless: unreasonable anxiety, fear, and panic attacks—it's not very pleasant, but those are about the same feelings a middle manager experiences when the monthly mortgage payment deadline approaches. So, what is a bad trip? It's when you're convinced someone has skinned you

alive and left you to die. It's unimaginable pain that—you're decisively sure—will never end. It's a space heated to red-hot: you touch the wall, and your hand is charred to the bone.

Sometimes Ayahuasca offers such an experience. It can even be helpful if this is the torturous way to work through a traumatic experience. But a bad trip is often a punishment for mistakes made before or during the ceremony. How do you avoid it, and what do you do when things go wrong? Read below.

How Not to Fall into the Clutches of Nightmares?

Scientists claim that at least twenty-five of psychedelics users occasionally encounter a bad trip. There don't seem to be separate statistics for Ayahuasca. However, the experience of students, along with my own observations, suggest that in a ceremony conducted by an experienced shaman, this rarely happens. Those who suffer from bad trips are victims of self-proclaimed shamans and "self-employed" consumers of pharmahuasca. Here are the leading causes of a bad trip:

☑ **Overdose:** It's better not to argue with a shaman. If he is convinced that the measured portion of the brew is enough, then it is. Pharmahuasca enthusiasts often encounter bad trips because they swallow pills without outside control. A person drinks the recommended dose, waits, thinks nothing is happening, and decides to take more, and then some more—until they realize their world has become a nightmare.

☑ **Unpreparedness:** You cannot drink Ayahuasca in between tasks. You must carefully prepare for the ceremony, dividing your life into a "before" and "after." This includes following the shamanic diet and forming the right mindset and setting. You should be relaxed, carefree, and open to new experiences. Ayahuasca doesn't tolerate haste. That's why the "weekend retreat" format is unacceptable. Our retreats are effective as they are, precisely because they last for eight days.

☑ **Incorrect Setting:** During the ceremony, a person is particularly vulnerable to external irritants. What seems insignificant in a normal state (e.g., city noises or noisy neighbors) can spoil the psychedelic trip. I'm skeptical about retreat centers renting several rooms in an office building. A suitable setting is only possible away from civilization, in solitude with nature, preferably in the Amazon jungle, where Ayahuasca ceremonies originated.

☑ **Insulting the "Vine of Spirits":** This may seem funny, but shamans believe that the main reason for a bad trip is a disrespectful attitude towards the spirit of this teacher-plant. According to the beliefs of the Quechua people, the spirit of the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* is infinitely wise but jealous and touchy. It can be offended when: one does not adhere to the proper diet; when one has a disdainful attitude towards the Quechua people; when one exhibits disbelief in the healing properties of the maestro; or if one takes on the smell of sex (it is recommended to abstain from sex, masturbation, watching porn, and sexual fantasies two weeks before taking Ayahuasca and two weeks after).

To avoid a bad trip, follow the shaman's instruction—the real one, not one of those people trying to “rip off” naive “gringos.” Respect the ritual you decided to participate in and the people who introduced it to the world. Don't rush; and don't fuss. There is no such thing as being late to the maestro, and enlightenment happens when the seeker is physically and mentally ready.

How to Find a Way out of Hell?

This is not just a figure of speech. A bad trip feels like hell. The brain realistically embodies everything you fear in ordinary life, elevating it to a phantasmagoric degree. Afraid of spiders? Prepare your entire body to be covered in spiders and familiar objects to appear like thousands of aggressive

arthropods. Afraid of confined spaces? You'll experience a room that pulsates and narrows until it wraps around your body and squeezes it so tightly that it's about to burst. During a bad trip, a novice is convinced that this will last forever and may even harm themselves: an end to the nightmare is better than a never-ending nightmare. But even in such a situation, the main thing is not to panic.

In biochemical and psychological terms, a psychedelic trip is like a dream. The only difference is that a prepared "sleeper" can realize that everything happening does not exist: visions are created by the brain, devoid of familiar mental barriers. The spirit of Ayahuasca teaches—that is, it conveys information. But the form in which it is clothed results from the work of consciousness and the subconscious. In simpler terms, it is the fruit of your imagination. Learn this well and use it to block nightmares when caught in a bad trip. You are not only an object but also a subject who controls the visions.

If an external irritant provokes a bad trip, it is necessary to minimize its action. Neutralize external sounds with earplugs. Hide from light that is too bright, or conversely, illuminate the room. When the bad trip's mechanism is activated, it will not stop. You can, however, reduce the intensity of the nightmares. The same applies to external activities. Try to distract yourself. You can count objects and rearrange them. You can also try to read a book or newspaper, and scroll through social media feeds. The more focused you are on hallucinations, the more realistic and intense they become.

The main thing is to remain in touch with reality. The most effective method available is talking to another person. If it's an experienced trip-sitter, they will strengthen your understanding that the visions are ephemeral and that you need to wait for the effects of psychedelic substances to begin to weaken. But even a simple conversation on unrelated topics

will reduce the intensity of the bad trip, disrupting the focus on the visions.

In Conclusion

Ayahuasca is cunning but fair. Responsible and disciplined students are healed and endowed with a unique knowledge of the world and themselves. For those who consider it just a psychedelic attraction with shamans as uneducated savages in funny costumes, the “Vine of Spirits” mercilessly punishes. Is it worth provoking its wrath? You decide.

CHAPTER 4.
**THE HEALING
PROPERTIES
OF AYAHUASCA**

Goodbye, Addiction: Is Ayahuasca Effective against Alcoholism, Smoking, and Drug Addiction?

The answer is an immediate yes. This is confirmed by scientific research, which we will examine below. Appreciate the irony here! A brew that does not cause addiction or harm health becomes classified as a drug, and then is prohibited almost everywhere in the world. Later, it was found to be effective in treating cocaine addiction and significantly reducing cravings for legalized drugs: alcohol and tobacco. Do you think the legal status of Ayahuasca has changed after such discoveries? No. This is an excellent moment to think about who, and for what reason, is putting so much effort into preventing you from attending a ceremony.

Gerald Thomas's Research

Canadian scientists—supported by MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies)—conducted an experiment involving twelve people who abused alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, and opiates. They all belonged to indigenous Canadian communities—a social group statistically more prone to destructive addictions than others. Each participant had already tried to “quit” but failed. The experiment involved a four-day retreat with two Ayahuasca ceremonies and subsequent group discussions of the experiences gained.

The results, published in 2013 in *Current Drug Abuse Reviews*, shocked the scientific community. Ayahuasca effectively treated chronic cocaine addiction and significantly reduced alcohol and tobacco consumption but proved useless in combating opiate addiction and cannabis abuse. Scientists also confirmed the safety of Ayahuasca once again: no side effects were noted.

Anja Loizaga-Velder's Research

In this long-term experiment conducted in Mexico, ten drug addicts participated in an Ayahuasca ceremony. Half of them reported a significant reduction in drug cravings (primarily cocaine) after the ceremony. The effect lasted at least two years, during which participants either remained utterly “clean” or used drugs less frequently and in smaller doses. All subjects noted that Ayahuasca helped them understand the hidden nature of their addiction and reduce incidents of destructive behavior due to drugs. Researchers also noted a significant reduction in alcohol and cigarette cravings in all participants.

The results of this experiment were published in 2014 in the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*. Skeptics argue that their sensationalism may be because the beliefs of all subjects were somehow related to the Pachamama cult (Mother Earth), of which vegetalista ceremonies are a part. But other studies show that Ayahuasca is effective regardless of the environment in which the ritual participant grew up.

Rachel Harris's Research

Scientists investigated the overall impact of Ayahuasca on the quality of life and interviewed 131 people from different parts of North America. Each participant in the study had attended a ceremony at least once. The results, published in the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* in 2012, showed that Ayahuasca pronounced the following long-term effects: improved mood; harmonization of their relationship with their partner; self-acceptance; commitment to healthy eating; and reduced alcohol consumption. Researchers concluded that the shamanic ritual helps people feel happier and healthier. Meanwhile, seventy-four percent of participants reported feeling the influence of this teacher-plant's spirit during the ceremony, and attributed the improvement in their quality of life specifically to this experience.

In Conclusion

Scientists still cannot explain the nature of Ayahuasca's anti-addictive properties and why *dimethyltryptamine* (considered its main active ingredient) is much less effective in combating addictions. However, the reduction in withdrawal syndrome intensity (so-called withdrawal) and the improvement in the psychological state after taking Ayahuasca is already a scientifically proven fact. Official medicine, however, pretends not to notice the sensational results of research published in authoritative scientific journals. Is this due to the inertia of modern science or a malicious intent? This question remains open.

Bitter Medicine for a Bitter Disease: How Ayahuasca Treats Depression

Many people underestimate the seriousness of this disease due to those who like to diagnose it in themselves at the slightest deterioration of mood. Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) states that more than three hundred million people have encountered this problem. Worse, nearly a hundred million are resistant to at least three types of antidepressants. Against this backdrop, the results of a study by Brazilian scientists seem surprising and encouraging. They based their research at a university hospital in Natal—of course, this happened after the approval of the research by the relevant committee of the medical institution.

Experimental Conditions

Seventeen people between the ages of eighteen and sixty participated in this study.

Each had signs of unipolar major depressive disorder and a lack of response to at least two types of antidepressants.

They got into the project through referrals from their psychiatrists or by responding to advertisements. They had previously signed an informed consent form. Organizers did not allow those who:

- ☑ had already experienced Ayahuasca;
- ☑ were pregnant;
- ☑ suffered from schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorder, or hypomania;
- ☑ used substances causing addiction;
- ☑ were prone to suicide.

Participants were divided into two groups. One received Ayahuasca, and the other received a placebo. For objectivity, the scientists conducted a double-blind, randomized study. That is: neither the patients nor the doctors knew who received the “Vine of Spirits” decoction and who received its imitation, devoid of active substances. This information was only available to pharmacists. The fact that the patients had not tried Ayahuasca before, and could not recognize it based on their experience, simplified the task. Still, the placebo liquid was carefully prepared. A sour-bitter taste and brown color were provided by combining several components, including water, yeast, citric acid, caramel coloring, and zinc sulfate. The latter also provoked characteristic gastrointestinal disorders.

Naturally, for the purity of the experiment, all its participants underwent a procedure to cleanse the body of previous antidepressants for two weeks before taking the decoction. And they started taking new drugs only a week after the study. The only exception was benzodiazepines as anxiolytics (tranquilizers) and hypnotics—and this was only in cases of extreme necessity. Thus, doctors could observe the pure effect after taking Ayahuasca or a placebo. Since the ceremony’s success depended not only on the quality of the decoction but also on the environment, the patients’ most comfortable conditions were created: a cozy room with a bed and an armchair;

dimmed lighting; the absence of extraneous sounds; and an optimal temperature. In addition, they were warned that those who took Ayahuasca might not feel anything, and those who took a placebo might feel the opposite. This was another guarantee of the purity of the experiment.

During the study, Ayahuasca from a single batch was manufactured and provided free of charge by members of the Barquinha church from a branch in Ji-Paraná. The dose was calculated, and each participant received a portion containing 0.36 mg of DMT per one kilogram of body weight. This was enough for the trip to last four hours during an authentic shamanic ceremony.

Results

At the beginning of the ceremony, almost all participants of the experiment felt a significant improvement. Moreover, those who took the placebo experienced results not weaker, but in some cases even more robust, than those who consumed Ayahuasca. This is quite natural. The placebo effect reaches thirty percent when testing most pharmaceutical antidepressants.

In this case, the indicator reached almost forty percent, but only at first. A week later, the situation changed dramatically. Only twenty-seven percent of those who took the placebo continued to feel any changes, while sixty-four percent of those who consumed Ayahuasca felt significantly better than their initial state. Of course, the researchers did not settle for abstract results. They noted at least a two-fold improvement in indicators. The dissociative states scale helped them. Thus, Ayahuasca outperformed most modern antidepressants by a hundred points—after all, they have a cumulative effect and usually change the patient's well-being after two weeks of treatment. At the same time, Ayahuasca immediately improved the state of the participants in the

experiment, and the effect turned out to be long-lasting. Most importantly, this is the key to treating patients who have demonstrated insensitivity to known antidepressants.

In Conclusion

Scientists are cautious with conclusions, even if the results look promising. These seventeen people are not the most representative sample. Repeated studies, with a much larger number of participants, will be required to replicate these results and to observe subjects over a longer period. In addition, doctors still need to carefully understand the mechanisms of Ayahuasca's impact on patients with depression. However, Ayahuasca has shaken the scientific community again and will continue to do so for a long time.

Letting Go of the Past: How Ayahuasca Treats Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

At one of my first ceremonies, I met two former soldiers. They had been in Iraq, returned to the US, but their minds failed to come back from the war. In Ayahuasca, the two hoped to find a way to reconcile their experiences. I was surprised by how it could be possible for a person to vomit non-stop for several hours. The shaman explained that this is how the "Vine of the Spirits" was cleansing them on a physiological and mental level. After the ceremony, the soldiers felt relief; and I became convinced that Ayahuasca helps to cope with traumatic experiences. I remembered this episode because I recently came across scientific research confirming the effectiveness of *dimethyltryptamine* in the treatment of PTSD.

Closer Than It Seems: A Disease That Has Already Affected One-in-Ten

According to a study by Pascal Brillon, seven to ten percent of the world's population suffers from PTSD symptoms. Murray Stein found that forty to sixty percent of people experienced at least one traumatic experience that could provoke a deeper disorder. In seven to twelve percent of cases, it caused moderate and severe forms of PTSD, accompanied by: depression, panic attacks, aggression, psychopathological re-experiencing (flashbacks), nightmares, impaired interpersonal connections, and even suicidal behavior. Combatants are considered the leading risk group. According to a study by Professor Holly Prigerson, the proportion of PTSD patients to those who have experienced the horrors of war is twenty-two to thirty-one percent.

From 2001 to 2008, the US Veterans Committee conducted a study involving 4,800 servicemen and servicewomen (the number was divided equally between men and women) who had been to Iraq or Afghanistan at least once. They did not necessarily participate in heavy battles—they served their regular duties. By 2008, 6.1% of men and 6.7% of women among the study participants suffered from PTSD. By 2014, twenty-two American veterans committed suicide every day (hence the flash mob with twenty-two push-ups for twenty-two days). However, combatants are just one of the many risk groups:

- ☑ victims of natural and anthropogenic disasters, accidents, and traffic accidents;
- ☑ victims of sexual and domestic violence;
- ☑ victims of bullying (including online);
- ☑ those who have lost loved ones;
- ☑ those who have experienced a bad trip;
- ☑ those who have undergone medical procedures (especially abortion);

☑ those who have long struggled with severe illnesses that cause high body temperature.

The main thing that unites all the causes of PTSD is a sense of helplessness and the feeling of powerlessness in the face of danger. These also characterize modern methods of treating this disorder. Medicine relies on psychotherapy, and pharmacologically fights only the consequences of this disease through antidepressants and tranquilizers. Psychedelics (primarily *dimethyltryptamine*) can eradicate the psychological causes of PTSD.

New Hope: Ayahuasca and the Colorado Toad

In 2020, Alan Davis, Lynette Averill, and a group of other researchers published the results of a study involving fifty-one veterans of the US Special Operations Forces. All of them suffered from PTSD and agreed to travel to Mexico to undergo treatment with *5-methoxydimethyltryptamine* (a close relative to DMT), derived from the skin of the Colorado toad. The treatment lasted three days, during which time each participant received at least three doses of the psychedelic substance (the dosage increased each time). Six months later, the veterans completed a survey, the results of which shocked the researchers.

Ninety-two percent of the respondents said they would recommend this program to others; ninety-six percent said it was much more effective than all the previous PTSD treatments they had used. Most participants noted persistent psychological effects:

- ☑ 77% reported a sense of satisfaction with life;
- ☑ 73% improved relationships with others;
- ☑ 56% experienced the disappearance of suicidal thoughts;
- ☑ 59% had an improved mood;
- ☑ 73% found a sense of purpose in life.

At the same time, eighty-four percent of participants included the treatment course among the top five most significant events in their lives. Approximately the same patterns were observed by Jessica Nielson in 2014 when analyzing the feedback of veterans after the Ayahuasca ceremony at the Erowid database. The overwhelming majority of participants reported a significant improvement in their condition after taking the decoction from the “Vine of Spirits.” Scientists suggest that the secret of its effectiveness lies in that DMT activates the frontal lobes of the brain, the meso-cortex, and the parahippocampal gyrus. These areas play an essential role in memory formation and emotional defense.

Simply put, Ayahuasca helps to relive the traumatic experience, change one’s attitude, and let go of the past.

In Conclusion

The truth cannot be hidden. Ayahuasca and other DMT-containing products are listed as narcotic substances. Officials from the scientific community advise young scientists to stay away from this topic. Yet, research proving the effectiveness of this indigenous decoction, against serious diseases, continues to emerge. The moment when a critical mass of evidence accumulates is inevitable—and then, I believe, modern medicine will finally have to put patients’ health above silly prejudices. It’s about time, isn’t it?

Remembering Everything: How Ayahuasca Helps to Overcome Alzheimer’s

It is considered one of the diseases that weigh heavily on the finances of modern developed countries. As of 2006, over 25.5 million people worldwide suffered from this Alzheimer’s. In 2050, that number will be one hundred million.

Think about it: one hundred million people with this disability burdening society, their loved ones, and most importantly, themselves.

More Dangerous Than You Thought

This neurodegenerative disease—also known as senile dementia of the Alzheimer's type—was first described by German psychiatrist Alois Alzheimer in 1907. In most cases, it affects patients aged sixty-five and older. However, a rarer form of the disease may appear even in young people. Today, Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia. This disease is dangerous because of its insidiousness, as the first symptoms do not raise much suspicion. Unfortunately, our loved ones raise alarms only when both their short-term and long-term memory is affected. A person fades before your eyes: speech and cognitive functions become impaired, and the ability to navigate a familiar environment and take care of oneself is lost. The logical outcome of the gradual loss of bodily functions is death.

On average, patients live for about seven years after being diagnosed with the disease. This period is extended to fourteen years in rare cases (about three percent of total cases). However, can one call this living? These figures are somewhat arbitrary because each case is individual, and the disease is usually not detected immediately.

The worst part is that scientists are still at a loss. They have not yet developed effective medication, let alone adequately understood the causes of Alzheimer's disease. Modern medicine can only slightly alleviate symptoms. There is no talk of slowing down destructive processes, let alone stopping them.

Hundreds of studies involving thousands of talented scientists have led to nothing. Many pharmaceutical companies eventually stop developing drugs after spending money on yet another seemingly promising option. Even giants like Johnson

& Johnson and Pfizer are among them. The effect of experimental drugs so far is indistinguishable from a placebo.

Chance for Healing

As scientists worldwide are giving up, their Spanish colleagues presented the public with the results of an important experiment. As part of the Interdisciplinary Conference on Psychoactive Substance Research, Professor Jordi Riba suggested saying goodbye to the stereotype that elderly people—who have lost many nerve cells and suffer from impaired neuronal connections—have no chance of restoring damaged structures.

Experiments under the auspices of the Spanish National Research Council have confirmed what Dr. Riba has been working towards during his fifteen-year career: that the alkaloids *harmine* and *tetrahydroharmine*, which are found in Ayahuasca at relatively high concentrations, promote the formation and maturation of new neurons and cells.

These substances positively effect the neocortex and hippocampus. The former is responsible for: sensory perception; the ability to perform motor commands; and conscious thinking. The latter is responsible for: the formation of emotions; the transition of data from short-term to long-term memory; and spatial memory. These areas are most susceptible to destructive changes due to Alzheimer's disease.

Experiments on mice have already shown that *harmine* and *tetrahydroharmine* promote the formation of several types of cells—including astrocytes and oligodendrocytes. The former can become neurons under certain conditions. The latter perform supportive and protective functions. Experiments on other animals are up next.

By the way, the hippocampus is responsible for forming new neurons. It produces about 1,400 such cells daily. However, in a human brain over the age of twenty-five, about 85,000

neurons die every day. Even in its “best years,” the hippocampus cannot keep up with the losses. Neurogenesis gradually slows down and disappears with age. But thanks to the alkaloids contained in Ayahuasca, scientists hope to learn how to effectively stimulate its work, regardless of a person’s age.

In Conclusion

On the one hand, scientists, who have failed several times, do not want to rush to conclusions. On the other hand, they assume that, if successful, they will obtain an effective tool to fight against not only Alzheimer’s disease but also many other mental and neurological disorders—all this, thanks to Ayahuasca.

Life without Cancer: Is It True That Ayahuasca Can Save Us from Oncological Diseases?

I want to warn you that no large-scale studies have confirmed that Ayahuasca heals any forms of cancer—and they are unlikely to appear in the coming years, as the authorities do not favor the “Vine of Spirits” brew. Evidence shows that Ayahuasca is effective against depression, addictions, and Alzheimer’s disease—but state machines prefer not to notice them. We have to be content with individual cases described in scientific publications. Most of the information I gathered came from Eduardo Schenberg’s article “Ayahuasca and Cancer Treatment” (*SAGE Open Medicine*, 2013).

Donald Topping’s Story

In 1988, Donald Toppinngs was diagnosed with a terrifying disease: colon cancer. Donald was fifty-eight years old. Despite having a degree—he was a linguistics professor at the University of Hawaii—he did not trust conventional medicine

very much. Instead of surgery, he chose a four-month course of traditional treatment. At that time, Donald had not heard of Ayahuasca. He took some “herbal preparations,” adhered to a vegetarian diet, performed physical exercises, and rested a lot. After completing the course, the biopsy did not detect cancer cells. However, the result turned out to be false. Two weeks later, another biopsy confirmed that Topping still had cancer and had to undergo surgery.

Everything went well, and the Professor was convinced that he would not experience oncopathology again in his lifetime. However, in 1996, doctors diagnosed him with hepatocellular carcinoma, or simply liver cancer. According to doctors' estimates, the tumor had already metastasized, so the chances of surviving—after its removal and a year of mandatory chemotherapy—were fifteen to twenty-five percent. Topping had half of his liver removed, but he refused chemotherapy. Instead, he underwent four Ayahuasca ceremonies: two in the Santo Daime church in Hawaii and two more in Peru. Upon returning home, he underwent tests and found his cancer marker CEA was below normal. This indicated remission.

The cancer retreated for seven years. Professor Topping died in 2003 at the age of seventy-three.

April Blake's Story

In 2008, doctors told April Blake that an inoperable tumor in the pituitary gland had gotten too close to the optic nerves and her brainstem, meaning that only blindness and death lay ahead in her future. The life of the thirty-four-year-old anthropologist had been difficult even before that. Since adolescence, she had suffered from: acromegaly—a rare pituitary dysfunction accompanied by enlargement and thickening of the bones of the feet, hands, and skull; frequent headaches; fatigue; reduced visual acuity; weakened mental abilities; and cessation of the menstrual cycle.

April had long been interested in holistic and folk medicine—she had no prejudice against “strange” methods. She was grasping at straws: she practiced traditional Chinese medicine and turned to a famous Brazilian medium, João de Deus. Nothing helped.

Eventually, this woman decided to go to Peru, to the shamans of the Shipibo-Conibo tribe for an Ayahuasca ceremony. After the “Vine of Spirits” brew, her condition noticeably improved; and in 2011, after undergoing not just one but dozens of such rituals, April reported that she had completely recovered from cancer and acromegaly.

Unfortunately, it was not quite all that. Examination showed that the tumor had not disappeared, but its growth had stopped. April no longer suffered from headaches, fatigue, and other symptoms of acromegaly. Most importantly, she remains alive. Thirteen years ago, doctors told her there was no hope; but in 2021 she still feels great, all thanks to Ayahuasca.

Margaret De Wys's Story

Margaret De Wys chose not to tell anyone about her diagnosis of breast cancer. Instead of having her breast removed and undergoing lengthy chemotherapy courses, she went to Ecuador to see a curandero from the Shuar tribe. Margaret told him she wanted to undergo an Ayahuasca ceremony for self-development. But the shaman immediately said she was in danger, as her chest was filled with black smoke. She later titled the book she wrote about her miraculous healing as *Black Smoke*. The treatment course lasted three years, from 2000 to 2003, and included eleven trips to Ecuador. Margaret drank Ayahuasca, interacted with other teacher-plants, and adhered to a shamanic diet: only boiled products without salt and oil.

Today, she is a successful composer, writer, and popularizer of traditional Amazonian medicine. She is alive, completely healthy, and has never undergone surgery. In 2003, when the

curandero announced that the black smoke had dissipated, Margaret turned to doctors. No examination could ever confirm breast cancer. It was as if it had never existed.

Robert Forte's Experiment Participants

Many stories exist about how Ayahuasca heals incurable diseases, especially among those interested in Amazonian shamanism. But which are true, and how much has the “game of telephone” distorted the truth? Robert Forte—Professor of Psychology and the History of Religions at the California Institute of Integral Studies—also asked this question. And he found an answer. He decided to accompany two cancer patients to an Ayahuasca ceremony and conduct clinical research. The first was a sixty-six-year-old psychiatrist with prostate cancer. Ten years before the experiment, he had already undergone treatment and was confident that the cancer would not return. But his PSA oncology markers went up. The second patient was a fifty-year-old schoolteacher with ovarian carcinoma that had already metastasized.

The volunteers went to Peru for an Ayahuasca ceremony conducted by a curandero from the Ashaninka (Campa) tribe. Forte measured oncology markers before and after the ritual. It turned out that they had significantly decreased. The ovarian cancer marker CA-125 in the cancer-stricken woman dropped from 4000 to 600 units—6.7 times! This did not yet indicate stable remission, but Ayahuasca was more effective for these patients than chemotherapy. Having obtained sensational results, Robert Forte delved deeper into the study of shamanic practices and is now known as a popularizer and advocate for the legalization of psychedelic substances.

Participants in the Experiment by Janine Schmid

In 2010, a group of scientists led by Janine Schmid from the Institute of Medical Psychology at Heidelberg University

published the results of observations of four cancer patients who underwent an Ayahuasca ceremony. These were: a fifteen-nine-year-old man with prostate cancer; a forty-year-old woman with endometrial carcinoma (uterine cancer); a thirty-six-year-old woman with uterine fibroids (a benign tumor); and a forty-three-year-old woman with stomach cancer. All of them claimed that Ayahuasca changed their lives and positively impacted their health, but the final word was left to the doctors.

The condition of the man with prostate cancer—according to medical expertise—did not change. The woman with uterine fibroids worsened, and the patient with stomach cancer reported remission but refused to undergo a final examination. The actual sensation was the condition of the woman with endometrial carcinoma. The tumor seemed to dissolve, and doctors declared her completely healthy.

What Ingredients in Ayahuasca Treat Cancer?

Scientists have several possible answers, but most only consider the physiological effects of the critical components of the brew: *dimethyltryptamine* and *monoamine oxidase* inhibitors. Evidence shows that in ancient times, β -carbolines (mainly harmine and harmaline, contained in the liana *Banisteriopsis caapi*) were successfully used to treat cancer. According to some studies, these alkaloids can reduce the blood supply to the tumor, and DMT can activate the apoptosis (programmed death) of cancer cells. In addition, *dimethyltryptamine* can slow the growth of malignant tumors, smoothing the Warburg effect—the tendency of cancer cells to activate glycolysis with the subsequent formation of lactic acid, rather than slow with the use of oxygen.

There are other hypotheses, like: remission is caused by visual images that the ceremonial participant observes during a psychedelic trip—or by the sounds of icaro. Unfortunately,

what all these assumptions have in common is a lack of factual material. Those who stand behind official science do not approve of Ayahuasca research for some inexplicable reason. There are clearly enough documented cases of complete healing from cancer or achieving persistent remission to start large-scale research, but someone benefits from not noticing the elephant in the room.

In Conclusion

Ayahuasca is not a miracle pill. Even among the nine cases I described, sadly, not all of them ended with a successful conclusion. What do we know for sure about treating cancer with shamanic rituals? Under unclear conditions, Ayahuasca ceremonies can rid a person of some malignant tumors or stop their growth. Everything else requires detailed studies and clinical research. I won't be surprised if the scientist, who overcomes the resistance imposed by global policies and researches this someday, wins a Nobel Prize. But most importantly, they will save the lives of hundreds of millions of people for whom a terrible diagnosis has become a verdict without the right to appeal.

Forget about Prejudices: How Ayahuasca Affects Memory

The brew made from the “Vine of the Spirits” has fallen victim to many stereotypes, including the widespread misconception that its consumption has a negative effect on a person's cognitive and logical abilities. The uninformed still associate Ayahuasca with the drawbacks of narcotic substances—a category it does not belong to. So how does the primary tool of Amazonian shamans affect human memory? Scientists have already found some answers.

Research by Jordi Riba

Jordi Riba is a Spanish pharmacologist and one of the popularizers of Ayahuasca as a remedy for brain disorders. He has been conducting specialized research at the Hospital de Sant Pau in Barcelona for more than fifteen years. In Spain, no legislation prohibits the use of Ayahuasca, so it was easy for scientists to approve the protocol in the Ministry of Health.

Jordi Riba carefully studies how this beverage works in the human body. He has already obtained interesting results. Among other things, he confirms that Ayahuasca triggers organic changes in the brain, positively affecting mental abilities and the correct perception of the surrounding world.

These structural changes mainly concern the cerebral cortex. In those patients who have consumed Ayahuasca for longer period of time, the cerebral cortex becomes thinner in the occipital lobe—the area responsible for brain activity in passive mode. In contrast, the frontal lobes, which control attention, have thickened.

The research also included a series of experiments involving the participants' logical thinking and short-term memory. Those who took Ayahuasca demonstrated better results than patients in the control group. And the longer a person consumed the brew from the "Vine of Spirits," the more accessible these tasks became for them.

The participants themselves also noted several positive changes. They reported: clarity of mind; the ability to see the true essence of things; being quicker at solving everyday tasks; and improved memory.

Other Theories

Even before Riba's research, a group of American neurophysiologists led by Professor Marcus Raichle discovered a network of neurons in different parts of the human brain.

This is called the default mode network (DMN), and it is responsible for the very passive mode of mental activity—hence the name.

This network consists of: the ventromedial and dorsomedial prefrontal cortex; lateral temporal cortex; the posterior part of the cingulate cortex; and its parts belonging to the precuneus and the entorhinal cortex. The DMN is directly involved in: self-analysis; the formation of the emotional background of mental activity; and, of course, working with memories.

Scientists suggest that it is through this network that Ayahuasca positively affects the brain. However, they still need more statistical material. Despite this, they still note that the brew from the “Vine of Spirits” frees a person from psycho-trauma by extracting blocked memories and tuning them into positive thinking. This is possible with multiple drink consumption in small doses (three to ten times, and up to 2.2 ml per kg of body weight).

In addition, Ayahuasca promotes the formation of new neural connections, and thus, new behavioral scenarios. By increasing the plasticity of the cingulate cortex, the “Vine of Spirits” eliminates the loop of choice imposed by the DMN. At the same time, Ayahuasca restores broken chains of actual events in the memory but never imposes false memories, as some drugs do.

The fact that Ayahuasca activates areas of the brain responsible for emotions and memory has been confirmed by tomography. Moreover, this brew effects perception and information processing. After all, we interpret any data—images, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations—based on experience. Over time, the brain even develops patterns, and we react automatically.

Ayahuasca forms new neural connections and allows one to move away from the “only correct” interpretation of events,

including those left in the distant past. It's as if it conducts a regression session, immersing a person in the critical events of their life, helping them relive them again, but looking at everything differently and reacting correctly. The "Vine of Spirits" carries out very delicate work with memory, leaving the events in their original form but changing the person's attitude towards them. Therefore, in similar situations later, they see problems and opportunities.

In the future, researchers hope to use the influence of Ayahuasca on the construction of new neural pathways to eliminate obsessive ideas, pathological patterns, addictions, and phobias. This delicate work with memory is not yet available to any psychotherapist.

In Conclusion

Ayahuasca demonstrates an exceptionally comprehensive approach. On the one hand, it helps us to better remember everything that is necessary. On the other hand, it helps cope with past experiences to find harmony in the present and the future—and this is just one part of its beneficial influence on the human brain.

CHAPTER 5.
**FUNDAMENTALS
OF VEGETALISM
AND TEACHER-PLANTS**

The School of Life: Learn from the Greatest Mentors!

The indigenous people of the Amazon have never had pharmacies. Their medicines grow in the jungle. But shamans underwent a long process of trial and error before discovering which of these plants heal wounds, which ones strengthen the immune system, and which are deadly. Over millennia, they discovered that many plants have medicinal effects: some bestow new knowledge, some help oneself see the world differently, some promote mental liberation, and some fill us with energy.

Such plants were called “maestros.” They teach at a cellular level, expanding consciousness. Insights come in dreams and visions. Interacting with teacher-plants takes work. One must observe ancient rituals, follow a special diet, and strictly adhere to the recommendations of an experienced shaman—only then will the “maestros” grant you access to their ancient and secret knowledge.

How do teacher-plants work? The key to success is physical and mental detoxification. Interaction with them is described in detail in what we call “vegetalism”—the system of ancient Amazonian beliefs. “Maestros” cleanse not only the body but also the soul. Shamans believe that teacher-plants—when interacted with within the framework of canonical rituals—can erase entire levels of karma, purify and protect the body from negative energy, and even expel evil spirits. The subtleties of the ceremonies are known only to curanderos and are passed down from generation to generation.

It is the healer who, depending on your goals (healing or learning), decides which teacher-plants are best to interact with and what diet to follow before the ceremony. Contrary to stereotypes, it is not only Ayahuasca that requires special preparation. To receive knowledge and strength from plants, one must respect the traditions of the Amazon.

The Three Commandments of Vegetalism: A Brief Overview of the Quechua Beliefs for Those Preparing for Ayahuasca

The Quechua people see the world differently. They believe in what seems absurd to most: communication with forest spirits, astral journeys, and the power of ritual chants. In “civilized” countries, such beliefs are called “vegetalism” (a form of animism) and shamanism. They are not taken seriously. However, unlike representatives of other religions, the Quechua are ready to provide evidence of the truth of their worldview during an Ayahuasca ceremony. I will tell you about the critical nuances of their worldview. It would have been much more productive if I had known all of this before my first ceremony.

Nº1. The Main Thing Is to Find Harmony with Nature and Oneself

The Quechua are not born guilty and do not fear divine punishment after death. They are driven not by fear, but by a sincere desire to live in harmony with themselves and Pachamama—Mother Earth, the goddess of fertility and the progenitor of all humanity. For many centuries, colonizers imposed Catholicism on these indigenous people through fire and their sword. This is why now Pachamama is often depicted in the image of the Virgin Mary, and the cult of worshiping Mother Earth peacefully coexists among many ordinary indigenous people (not shamans) with Roman Catholic postulates. Let me remind you that Pope John Paul II, in his sermons in Peru and Bolivia, repeatedly noted that the cult of Mother Earth is nothing more than an acknowledgment of God’s grace.

I am unsure that Catholicism (or any institutionalized religion) can give a person as much wisdom as a single Ayahuasca ceremony. But there is no doubt that the beliefs of these seeming “savages” are relevant today and even surprisingly

progressive. While humanity has only recently begun to seriously consider electric cars and giving up plastic bags, the Quechua advocated a careful attitude toward nature even before Columbus. While “civilized” people, due to psychotherapy and hypnotherapy, only recently have equated happiness and inner harmony, Amazonian shamans did it long before Liebreault and Bernheim.

Nº2. Intelligent Life Is Not Limited to the Forms We Are Familiar With

Considering humans to be the only truly intelligent beings in the entire infinite Universe is like denying the existence of, for example, Asians. If you have never seen people of another race because you have never left your provincial town, it only speaks of the narrowness of your worldview. Quechua believe in spirits and communicate with them, expanding their consciousness (mental horizons) with the help of Ayahuasca and by dieting with other teacher-plants. This “magic” is available to anyone open to new experiences and willing to show respect for centuries-old Amazonian traditions.

Indigenous people look into other worlds and see wisdom around them. Modern science confirms that the first plants appeared on Earth about 450 million years ago. The first humans did this much later—about 2.8 million years ago. It turns out that plants are hundreds of times older than humanity and have successfully survived many more upheavals, but we still believe that they lack intelligence and are only suitable for food, decoration, and oxygen production. The Quechua people have a different opinion. According to their beliefs, many plants have their own spirit and genius, that has accumulated wisdom over millions of years.

Nº3. Teacher-Plants Provide Answers to Any Questions

This is why the Quechua beliefs are called "vegetalism." In essence, their religion is the jungle. The Amazon rainforest has become a source of everything for them: food; medicine; knowledge about themselves and the surrounding world; as well as the wisdom of Mother Earth. Interaction with plant spirits heals them from diseases, strengthens the body and character, and even provides information about other teacher-plants, helping to unravel the tangle of natural wisdom. Indigenous people are skeptical about the achievements of the modern world. Therefore, acquiring much knowledge and opportunities through Ayahuasca, they use them in their own way. For example, they immerse themselves in astral journeys; they learn to heal ailments, or they ask for luck before an upcoming hunt.

But this does not mean that interaction with teacher-plants is only suitable for this. The Ayahuasca ceremony, which essentially represents communication with the spirit of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine, answers the questions that concern you personally. I was worried about understanding life and developing my business. In both aspects, the ceremony became a real springboard for me.

In Conclusion

I value what works. Even if someone considers it ridiculous. Ignoring the possibilities that nature itself provides is genuinely ridiculous. So don't hesitate to call yourself a vegetarian. It's better to be ashamed than remain a failure.

Getting to Know Pachamama: We Are All Children of Mother Earth

Pachamama is one of the most revered goddesses in Amazonian mythology. The patroness of the harvest, she embodies

life itself. Usually, she is depicted as a mature woman carrying coca leaves and potatoes. Although we call her Mother Earth, there is also a literal translation—Mother of the World.

Although Pachamama also commands earthquakes and can punish crop failure, her image in indigenous culture is exclusively positive. She is especially revered by the highlanders who inhabit the Andean region. After all, according to legends, the goddess herself lives in the mountains. The Quechua and other indigenous tribes consider themselves indebted to her for everything they have.

Worship Customs

The cult of Pachamama is widespread throughout the territory of the former Inca Empire: in Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile. No significant feast takes place without a toast in honor to the fertility goddess. There is even a special ritual associated with the consumption of alcohol. For this, the mildly alcoholic drink called “chicha” is often used: a little is spilled on the floor, as if treating Mother Earth, and then the rest is drunk. However, the goddess is not only treated with alcohol. As part of the Challa ceremony, indigenous people bury unique dishes, cigars, and even coca leaves in the ground. The preparations for the ritual begin the night before in a family setting. In some regions, these celebrations are held on the first Friday of each month. But the most attention is paid to Mother Earth in August.

In the southern Andean region, August is the coldest month. The local residents not only feel uncomfortable but also feel particularly vulnerable to diseases. During this challenging period, they make maximum efforts to maintain good relations with nature. Whether the year will be successful or not can be easily determined at this time. On August 1st, the head of the community digs a hole in the ground. If the soil is pliable, a good harvest is expected.

Indigenous people perform various purification rituals to maintain good health and ensure that crops grow and live-stock reproduce. According to their beliefs, burning plants and wood helps to ward off evil spirits. But first, it is necessary to win the favor of Mother Earth with sincere offerings.

Pachamama's Day

Pachamama's Day is a holiday that is celebrated on August 1st, but not by chance. The Incas believed that by the day of the solstice (June 21)—when the collection of the harvest is over—Mother Earth would become completely tired and need a break to regain her strength. Such rest lasted forty days, just like for local women after giving birth. On August 1, Pachamama was considered ready for “conception” again.

Indigenous people clean their fields and homes. In temples, they offer an animal sacrifice (often a llama). At noon, when the sun reaches its zenith, they ask one other for forgiveness and forget their grudges. Yes, this custom indeed resembles Eastern Slavic Maslenitsa (Butter week) in many aspects.

Depending on the region, traditions vary. In some places, Pachamama's Day is also celebrated in February. In others, it is celebrated for a whole week after the harvest, where a real carnival is organized. In some areas, offerings are not buried in the ground but burned. All festival versions are united by mass celebrations, generously set tables, and an optimistic attitude toward the future.

Apacheta and Illa

Another way to worship Pachamama is by building altars. There are two types:

☑ **Illa:** Represents a pile of logs. Everyone living nearby should participate in its creation. Touching or taking the logs is forbidden: they belong to Mother Earth. There is only one

exception to the rule: if there is not even a splinter to start a fire in the house, and it's cold and snowy outside, you can take a few logs after asking the goddess for permission.

☑ **Apacheta (*apachiqta*):** This ceremonial pyramid is built from stones. Travelers take part in its construction, each leaving a stone to gain the favor of Pachamama on their journey. The bottom stone contains an offering. Often, such altars can be seen on the slopes of the mountains. This way, the indigenous people thank the goddess in advance for the safety of their journey: both for themselves and their pack animals.

Of course, gifts are left on these altars for Mother Earth. Mostly these are balls of chewed coca (*akuyku*) or alcohol, which are sprinkled on the apacheta or illa in a thin stream. And the land where offerings are left for Pachamama is always considered sacred.

Pachamama Cult and Christianity

On the one hand, European colonizers, trying to eradicate pagan beliefs, never achieved their goal. On the other hand, the cult of Mother Earth in many regions adopted external Christian attributes, and in some places, it was even partially reinterpreted under the influence of Catholic missionaries. Moreover, you will surely meet people in the Amazon who combine their belief in the Christian God with worshipping Pachamama. Rituals, in such cases, intertwine in the most bizarre ways.

Catholic Church representatives have also contributed to this trend. Although belatedly, they remembered the saying, "If you can't beat them, lead them." Priests began actively promoting the idea that the cult of Pachamama is an exotic modification of faith in the Christian God. After all, Mother Earth is none other than the Mother of God. And that means that the indigenous people have always worshiped her in their own way.

Pachamama Cult and the State

The era of colonial oppression is in the past, and today the indigenous peoples of the Amazon are actively reviving and strengthening their identity. It is not surprising that traditional beliefs receive support at the state level.

For example, former Bolivian President Evo Morales often mentioned Pachamama in his speeches and appealed to a symbolism that was close to the indigenous people. Most importantly, under his administration, the constitution included a clause on state support for the Pachamama cult.

Peru also has something to boast about. Their former president, Alejandro Toledo, shortly after his election in 2001, participated in a traditional ceremony of worshipping the old gods at the top of Machu Picchu—a sacred place for all indigenous Peruvian people.

In Conclusion

Such is Pachamama: possessing boundless power, generous, and just. It is not surprising that she is the favorite of many of the inhabitants of the Amazon. I believe that you also found her image appealing.

Hanaq Pacha, Ukhu Pacha, and Kay Pacha: The Trinity of the Indigenous World

The Quechua, like some of their neighbors, inherited the model of the universe from the Incas. They believe that the universe is divided into three worlds or realms (pacha): Hanaq Pacha (Hanak/Hanan Pacha), Ukhu Pacha (Uku Pacha), and Kay Pacha (Kai Pacha). The first represents the realm of the highest gods; the second represents the kingdom of the after-life; and the third represents our world.

Yes, this model resembles Christian divisions of heaven, hell, and the earth. This obvious parallel turns out to be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it was easier for Christian missionaries to introduce the indigenous people to their religion. On the other hand, the natives successfully imitated the observance of Catholic rites while not actually parting with the beliefs of their ancestors.

This cosmological model vividly demonstrates the dualism of indigenous beliefs. All three pachas are closely related, both on the physical and spiritual levels. At the same time, they are separated by space and time, meaning they can exist in different periods.

Hanaq Pacha

According to Inca mythology, Hanaq Pacha is where the highest gods reside: Inti (god of the sun); Mama Killa (goddess of the moon); Mama Cocha (goddess of the sea and fish); Viracocha (the original supreme god); Illapa (god of thunder and lightning); and Pacha Kamaq (creator of the earth). The upper realm consists of the sun, sky, moon, planets, stars, and constellations—among these the Milky Way holds a special place. It was in Hanaq Pacha that the Incas hoped to enter, leading a righteous way of life.

The gods connected the heavenly Hanan Pacha and the earthly Kay Pacha. Mediators “from the other side” included, for example, Illapa and Chaska (goddess of dawn and dusk), manifesting as lightning and the planet Venus, respectively. Among other things, the mountain spirits Apu acted as intermediaries on our side. That is why mountains in the Inca culture were considered sacred places for ritual sacrifices.

Ukhu Pacha

In the afterlife, hidden underground and underwater, are the dead and unborn people and some gods. First is Supay—the

god of death and leader of demons. Caves and faults in the earth's crust have always been passageways between Uku Pacha and Kay Pacha. This realm is also called the lower world, the inner world, and even the devil's house, the latter clearly inspired by missionaries.

After death, those unworthy of joining the higher gods in Hanan Pacha, end up in Uku Pacha. However, it would be a mistake to consider this realm a complete analogy to the Christian hell. The indigenous people do not perceive the afterlife as something purely negative. In this, their views coincide with the opinions of ancient Greeks or Romans. Thus, the Quechua associate the lower world with Pachamama as well. They believe it is no coincidence that water springs gush from under the ground.

At the same time, these same indigenous tribes are very cautious—even at the slightest possibility—of violating the boundaries of Uku Pacha. For this reason, even ordinary field plowing involves a series of sacred rituals to appease the spirits of ancestors and other underworld inhabitants—not to mention such serious intrusions, like mining work! Christian missionaries fought against such offerings “to the devil and his associates” for a long time, but they couldn't eradicate the tradition.

Kay Pacha

The Quechua people call everything accessible to human perception the middle world: other people, animals, plants, air, water, and sunlight. This is the world in which our physical shells are born, die, and turn to dust. Kay Pacha is everything that surrounds you every minute of your existence.

According to indigenous beliefs, our world is a horizontal area between Hanan Pacha and Uku Pacha. How it looks and develops directly depends on the struggle between the upper and lower realms. This ongoing battle continues with varying

success. That is why history has often developed so dramatically.

The Incas also believed that humanity has witnessed many phases of destruction and recreation of civilization. Such cycles of near-total annihilation and subsequent rebirth result from the gods' desire to create a perfect version of humanity in every respect.

Traveling between Worlds

As I mentioned, the boundaries between these three realms are open for those who want to maintain contact. This happens both on a physical and spiritual level. Moreover, this concept has many communication paths between the present, past, and future.

According to indigenous beliefs, while mountains actively stretch from Kay Pacha to Hanan Pacha, lightning, rain, rainbows, and sunlight move in the opposite direction. Caves, in turn, can function as two-way portals between our world and the afterlife. And water sources act as a one-way train—from the underground realm to ours. For the gods, of course, there are no barriers at all. A striking example is the original supreme god Viracocha. According to legends, he emerged from the waters of Lake Titicaca. He then wandered through the heavens, where he created the sun and the moon. And when he wanted to, he actively traveled our world, appearing as an unremarkable beggar.

For people, things are more complex. Yet there are exceptions. For example, the deceased's spirit may remain in Kay Pacha until it completes earthly affairs. It will move on to the heavenly or underground realm only after accomplishing this. Curanderos, however, can allow themselves such journeys while they are still alive. To visit Uku Pacha, they use the juice of Toe (*Brugmansia suaveolens*)—the most powerful and even dangerous teacher-plant.

In Conclusion

Why should you—a devout Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jew, or atheist—know about the intricacies of indigenous beliefs? It isn't about believing; it is about better understanding those you turn to for help to fully immerse yourself in the ritual process.

Ajo Sacha (*Mansoa Alliacea*): There Is a Teacher!



Mansoa alliacea is unrelated to garlic, which adds a piquant flavor to familiar dishes. However, due to its characteristic taste and smell, the Quechua Indians nicknamed it “wild garlic” (this is how Ajo Sacha translates). The English name “garlic vine” also reflects this feature. But of course, shamans value it not for its taste and aroma. They primarily revere this plant as a maestro.

Botany with Geography

Mansoa alliacea is an evergreen woody vine of the *Bignoniaceae* family, growing in the upper Amazon. It reaches two meters in length, while its paired leaves, divided into two ovals, grow up to twelve centimeters. Ajo Sacha blooms twice

a year, in spring and autumn, abundantly covered with large lavender tubular flowers with a five-petal bend.

The plant is often used as a decorative feature for its striking characteristics. The lavender petals fade and then eventually become white. This metamorphosis occurs in just three days. However, not all clusters change color simultaneously, so the vine is often adorned with petals of three shades. After pollination, flat seed pods 15–25 centimeters long appear on it.

Mansoa loves the sun but feels confident in the shade as well. It can also withstand low temperatures up to -1°C , although it grows in warm latitudes. It reproduces by seeds, cuttings, and in extreme cases—root shoots. This teacher-plant sets a great example of resilience and adaptability for its students.

As for its “garlic” properties, whichever part of the plant you damage—stem, root, leaf—the characteristic pungent odor will transfer to your hands.

Traditional Medicinal Use

Like many teacher-plants, *Mansoa alliacea* is a universal remedy. Over the centuries of “collaboration,” curanderos have fully uncovered its potential and now use it to combat a whole range of ailments:

- ☑ colds and other throat and respiratory diseases;
- ☑ fever;
- ☑ high temperature;
- ☑ arthritis and rheumatism;
- ☑ epileptic seizures;
- ☑ digestive tract disorders;
- ☑ intestinal parasites;
- ☑ fungus;
- ☑ uterine diseases;
- ☑ inflammation and pain in the body.

In addition, *Mansoa* is considered an effective means of general body cleansing.

Role in Shamanic Rituals

Some curanderos use Ajo Sacha for preparing Ayahuasca. But primarily, the garlic vine plays a preparatory role on the eve of ceremonies. It opens spiritual channels and thus allows other teacher-plants to work with the student more effectively. Some shamans do not count *Mansoa* among the foremost maestros. A diet using wild garlic is the mildest of plant-based diets. It doesn't even require isolation from the outside world. However, I still recommend respecting this maestro and conversing with him away from the hustle and bustle in a quiet and comfortable environment. This way, it will be much easier for the plant to cleanse you from the influence of evil spirits.

The main component of the diet is a tincture made from Ajo Sacha roots, cut at noon, and soaked in water overnight. This beverage is consumed at 6 am. Two more essential rituals supplement the diet: the first is a bath with the addition of finely chopped *Mansoa* leaves soon after the "tea-drinking"; the second is sleeping on a bed under which the cleaned roots of the plant are placed. You need to live in this mode for three days.

Traditional icaro songs often accompany the ritual of consuming Ajo Sacha by curanderos. Shamanic tobacco mapacho smoking is also practiced on the eve of getting acquainted with *Mansoa*. This duo of teacher-plants seems logical due to their unobtrusive impact. They also both often immerse their students in lucid dreams.

This is one of the few plants whose taste is easy to describe to the uninitiated. It's as if you're tasting raw garlic in liquid form. This taste is quite strong, and the tincture often warms you up from the inside. And, of course, after consuming Ajo Sacha, you may feel nauseous. Rare is the maestro who disregards this unpleasant but cleansing effect.

In Conclusion

The garlic vine is the best mentor during heavy life upheavals and on the eve of complex, fateful decisions. It instills confidence, strengthens will, and sharpens mental abilities. And if it doesn't show the way itself, it does everything necessary for you to find it on your own.

Ayahuma (*Couroupita Guianensis*): A Maestro That Connects Vegetarianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism



They say there's no prophet in his own homeland. The “cannonball tree”—also known as Ayahuma, Sala, Boskalebas, Lingam, Kailash Pati, Nagalinga Ful, Kouroupitoumou, and about a dozen other names—disproves this thesis. *Couroupita guianensis* has become a sacred tree both in its homeland, the Amazon jungles, and across Asia: in India, as well as in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and other countries of Theravada (one of the oldest schools of Buddhism). So why is it so loved by everyone

seeking enlightenment, and what rewards does this maestro give to his faithful students?

Getting to Know Couroupita Guianensis

Ayahuma got its “cannonball” name due to its spherical fruits, reaching up to 25 centimeters in diameter. An adult tree can hold up to 150 such “cannonballs” simultaneously, maturing for up to a year and sometimes even up to a year and a half. Covered with a woody shell, they crack open when they fall, revealing the white flesh. The flesh quickly oxidizes and turns bluish.

Rodents (such as pacas) and peccaries (hoofed animals similar to wild boars) feast on the flesh, while farmers collect the fruits to feed domestic chickens and pigs.

A single “cannonball” contains between sixty-five and 550 seeds, covered with trichomes—hairs that protect them from digestion. This is how *Couroupita guianensis* spreads its seeds—through the droppings of animals.

People rarely eat the flesh due to its specific smell, but the flowers—which can be up to 6 cm in diameter and cover the entire trunk (up to 1,000 on a single tree)—are valued for their beauty and delicate fragrance. Petals are usually pink or red at the base and yellowish at the tips. They smell most pungent at night and early in the morning. Due to the shape of the flowers, Ayahuma has become a sacred tree for Hindus and Buddhists. They see a resemblance to nagas (mythical snake-like creatures) and grow such trees in Jyotirlingas (Shiva shrines).

The flowers usually cover only the trunk, and at the ends of the branches, there are groups of large leaves (from eight to fifty-seven centimeters in length). The evergreen tree itself can reach thirty-five meters in height. The tree was first described scientifically only in 1775, when French botanist Jean Baptiste Christian Fusée-Aublet described it. It was he who gave Ayahuma its official name—*Couroupita guianensis*.

Healing Potential

The “cannonball tree” shoots at many diseases like a cannon, hitting its target accurately. Indigenous people have long used the fruit’s flesh and juice from the large leaves to disinfect wounds and treat skin diseases. Young leaves are chewed for toothaches, and dried bark is used for hypertension, colds, and stomach problems. It is also believed by some healers to have antifungal and antibiotic properties.

However, you can rely not only on the opinions of indigenous people in this matter. Unlike many other Amazonian maestros, the healing properties of *Couroupita guianensis* have been studied and confirmed by modern science:

☑ **Antibacterial and Healing Agent:** An alcohol extract from this tree’s leaves, bark, flowers, and fruits has proven effective against *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Klebsiella*, and other gram-negative bacteria. It also significantly reduced the time of wound epithelialization and scar area.

☑ **Antihelminthic Agent:** As it turned out, the alcoholic extract of this tree’s flowers has such properties. Scientists found its effectiveness comparable to piperazine (a popular antihelminthic drug).

☑ **Immunomodulator:** Experiments on humans do not seem to have been conducted, but in rats, a dose of one hundred to two hundred milligrams of the active substance per kilogram of body weight significantly increased the body’s immunological reactivity.

☑ **Pain Relief:** Alcohol extract of *Ayahuma* leaves at a hundred milligrams of active substance per kilogram of body weight increased the pain threshold, proving it to be an effective painkiller. The experiment was again conducted on rats.

Scientists attribute the healing properties of the “cannonball tree” to its high content of ketosteroids, glycosides, phenols, indirubin, isatin, and essential oils.

Use in Shamanic Practices

In the pantheon of Amazonian maestros, Ayahuma does not occupy as prominent a place as, for example, Uchu Sanango, Toe, or Bobinsana. Nevertheless, curanderos recommend dieting with *Couroupita guianensis* only to those who have already undergone several Ayahuasca ceremonies. According to Indigenous beliefs, the spirit of this maestro: heals the soul and body; teaches empathy; helps to see the world through different eyes; and helps to understand one's place in the tangled web of life.

The bark of this tree is sometimes added to Ayahuasca, especially in cases where the participant suffers from *susto*. Curanderos are convinced that this disease, which resembles post-traumatic stress disorder, is the result of possession by evil spirits. Symptoms of *susto* include: depression, panic attacks, lethargy, insomnia, fever, anorexia, and diarrhea. Ayahuma also helps establish arcanas—a powerful personal protection from evil spirits.

In Conclusion

Couroupita guianensis is a vivid example of Mother Earth rewarding those who can see deeper into things. European colonizers' knowledge of Ayahuma was limited to the fact that its flowers smelled nice and its fruits resembled cannonballs. However, vegetalists, Hindus, and Buddhists saw a sacred meaning in this maestro and received rewarding healing from various ailments and the wisdom of nature.

Bobinsana (*Calliandra Angustifolia*): Flexibility, Wisdom, and the Love of Life

Bobinsana has four variations in its name: Bobinsana, Bobinzana, Bubinsana, and Bobensana. And there are also:

Bushiglla, Shawi, Cigana, Koprupi, Yacu Yutzu, Capabo, Chiperero, Kori-sacha, Quinilla Blanca, Newei, Semein, Kuantu, and Yopoyo. Fortunately, its botanical name is only one—*Calliandra angustifolia*, which translates into “narrow-leaved Calliandra.”



Botanical Characteristics

Bobinsana is a shrub that grows in the Amazonian forests, specifically in Ecuador, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia.

This plant loves moisture, and the local climate suits it perfectly. In favorable conditions, it can grow up to six meters in height. During the flowering period, it is adorned with pink or purple flowers, characteristic of the mimosa family, to which Calliandra belongs.

Bobinsana has a unique and, most importantly, symbolic property. Both its branches and roots combine elasticity with extraordinary strength. For example, breaking or tearing off even a small branch is very difficult, so people usually harvest this raw material with a knife.

Calliandra demonstrates an exemplary love for life. After heavy rains, its branches can bend to the ground, but after a few

hours, they rise again and reach for the sun. Bobinsana behaves the way a person should act in any problematic situation.

Healing Properties

All parts of this plant possess healing properties without exception. However, each part “specializes” in specific ailments. The healer decides what to prepare a decoction or alcohol tincture, and this depends on the specific problem:

☑ **Bark:** Medicines based on it are used to combat inflammatory processes, bone pain, arthritis, and rheumatism. The diuretic effect helps eliminate general edemas and edemas in individual organs, such as the lungs.

☑ **Root:** Decoctions and tinctures from this part of the plant are effective means for blood purification and detoxification of the body as a whole. Active substances in the root composition fight the multiplication of cancer cells, especially in cases of uterine oncological diseases. Traditionally, such drugs are also used as contraceptives. In addition, they increase vitality.

☑ **Branches, Leaves, and Flowers:** Tinctures and decoctions from the above-ground parts of the plant also give life energy and strengthen the immune system. They can also serve as mild aphrodisiacs. They possess analgesic and anti-inflammatory effects. They fight against the prolapse of internal organs, especially those in the pelvic area. Moreover, they are effective in treating colds and lung ailments.

Bobinsana provides not only internal but also external use. Most often, we are talking about herbal baths to which the powder from the bark of this plant is added. Such procedures provide a general strengthening effect and make it easier to tolerate cold and heat.

Role in Shamanic Practices

I have mentioned this for every maestro. And I will say it again: curanderos sometimes use this plant to prepare Ayahuasca. After all, as you may remember, each of them has its own recipe, tested over the years and maybe even decades. But much more often, bobinsana teaches people independently or helps them prepare for the Ayahuasca ceremony.

During ritual dieting, *Calliandra* promotes a transition to a new, more subtle level of perception of the surrounding world. After all, we interact with Mother Earth not with our minds but our hearts. The energy of this plant, which represents the air element, allows for establishing the proper connection. When the work of bobinsana is completed, the spirit of Ayahuasca can tell and show its new student much more.

By the way, about the spirits: this maestro, like some of its colleagues, communicates with a person in the image of a wise old man, full of inner strength, confidence, and knowledge. According to those who have interacted with this spirit, you feel remarkably tranquil in its presence. However, bobinsana also has a dynamism that perfectly complements the teaching of matters higher than traditional intellectual knowledge.

Although *Calliandra* is not considered a hallucinogenic plant, among its active substances are harmala alkaloids. From a scientific point of view, these alkaloids provide vivid and saturated dreams, enhancing mental clarity and concentration and teaching to feel and empathize.

In Conclusion

Of course, bobinsana finds its approach to each student, giving them individual experiences. But there are lessons it teaches everyone: an inexhaustible love of life; finding harmony with nature; and the ability to see everything in its true light.

Chiric Sanango (*Brunfelsia Grandiflora*): A Good Old Teacher



Brunfelsia grandiflora is the plant's name, which the Quechua Indians call Chiric Sanango. Like many other maestros, it can be a component of Ayahuasca—at the discretion of the curandero. But more often, people converse with this teacher-plant one-on-one. Moreover, it effectively heals not only the soul but also the body. Thanks to the image of its spirit and gentle influence, Chiric Sanango could compete for the title of “gentle grandfather” with the San Pedro cactus, which has already become associated with it.

Botanical Characteristics and Distribution Area

The genus *Brunfelsia* belongs to the Solanaceae family and includes about fifty species of plants. Despite their kinship, its representatives can vary greatly. Among them are both shrubs and trees, albeit not very large. They all grow in the Amazon region. More specifically, in those parts of the jungle that are not prone to flooding even during prolonged heavy rains.

Chiric Sanango is a shrub that can reach up to five meters in height. It grows not just in the Amazon basin but at no more than two hundred meters above sea level. Its leaves are fifteen to twenty centimeters long and five to eight centimeters wide. Flowering lasts almost all year round. The petals are usually violet or white.

Generally, one bush can be adorned with three different shades of flowers. This feature, combined with its intense aroma, has made *Brunfelsia* popular as an ornamental plant. This includes outside its historical homeland. Additionally, perfumers who use it to produce various products could address such a refined aroma.

The chief admirers of this plant, the Quechua Indians, have given it many names. Along with Chiric Sanango, they also call *Brunfelsia*: Chiricaspi and Manaka. However, they gave it several names and found many ways to use it.

Healing Properties

Scientists became seriously interested in *Brunfelsia* in the 1970s and soon found an explanation for its medicinal properties. Along with ibogaine, voacangine, saponins, and brunfelsamidine, the following alkaloids were found in its roots:

☑ manacine and manaceine: stimulants of the lymphatic system;

☑ sculetin: an antipyretic, analgesic and hepatoprotective substance;

☑ scopoletin: a psychopharmacological agent that helps to overcome dependence on alcohol, tobacco, and narcotic substances.

Of course, this is a simplified description of their properties. Each of these alkaloids has several other useful effects, and their combination results in a whole list. That is why the Quechua people use Chiric Sanango to solve many health problems:

☑ To lower blood pressure: scopoletin endows this plant with hypotensive properties. Therefore, *Brunfelsia* can be used as a standalone agent or in combination with other drugs to normalize blood pressure.

☑ For the treatment of liver diseases: powerful hepatoprotectors in Chiric Sanango protect cells from destruction and prevent the onset and exacerbation of diseases.

☑ To combat bacteria: *Brunfelsia* inhibits the reproduction of pathogenic organisms, causing mild forms of acute respiratory infections and bronchitis, pneumonia, cystitis, gastritis, and other dangerous ailments.

☑ For pain relief: the active substances of this plant not only reduce sensitivity but also have antispasmodic and relaxing effects.

☑ For the treatment of joints: Chiric Sanango successfully combats both arthritis and rheumatism, affecting the periarticular soft tissues.

Quechua people also use the power of this plant to cope with various venereal diseases, yellow fever, snake venom poisoning, and even oncological complaints.

Chiric Sanango as a Teacher-Plant

Brunfelsia is used to prepare Ayahuasca the day before the ceremony and separately. It acts so delicately that sometimes its influence is barely noticeable.

This maestro often becomes the first teacher for those who want to learn about indigenous medicine. It strengthens the spirit and body, opens the heart, frees one from negative emotions, and shows the way.

Grandfather Sanango is what the spirit of this plant is called, appearing in the image of a wise old man with a long gray beard. He is careful but patient and persistent. He penetrates the depths of the psyche, removing all obstacles in his student's transformation path. He provides suggestions

to help us realize our problems and opens up to the world around us.

Chiric Sanango represents not only white medicine but also the element of fire. It warms the body from the inside—to maintain balance, curanderos advise taking showers as often as possible, and to even fully immerse oneself in water.

Brunfelsia has a sharp spicy taste reminiscent of both ginger and garlic. For ceremonial use, a decoction of its roots is used. During the first half-hour, a person may experience nausea and increased salivation. This decoction is taken several nights in a row. Although the effect after taking *Brunfelsia* can be almost imperceptible, it sometimes surprises the next day. There may be problems with coordination of movements and focusing of gaze. As a rule, such a state lasts only a few hours. Now, relax and let the maestro do everything.

In Conclusion

In the school of life, Chiric Sanango successfully plays the role of a junior teacher. It teaches the basics but changes your entire life. It nurtures but offers manageable challenges. It acts gently but requires obedience. Trust it—and you will be able to discover your true self, overcome fears, find answers to crucial questions, and achieve true wholeness.

Mapacho (*Nicotiana Rustica*): A New Old Acquaintance

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” wrote Margarat Wolfe Hungerford. And the possibility of self-development is in the mind of the learner. This is perfectly illustrated by *Nicotiana rustica*, or as the Quechua Indians call it, “mapacho.”

Unlike most teacher-plants, sacred tobacco is not so exotic to our culture, especially when discussing our ancestors.

After all, mapacho is the old good shag tobacco that replaced common tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*) for centuries for the less wealthy—including across the former Soviet Union.



But that's the difference: outside its historical homeland, *Nicotiana rustica* remained shag tobacco—tobacco for the poor. However, in the Amazon, it is primarily a maestro: a teacher-plant that allows you to know yourself and the surrounding world.

A Bit of Geography, History, Botany, and Chemistry

Modern researchers agree that the homeland of mapacho is the Andes—specifically, the highland part is in present-day Peru and Bolivia. From there, it spread throughout the continent. This exotic plant was brought to Europe by Columbus, after he came upon America.

An absolute craze began among Europeans at that time. People massively turned to this new medicinal product. However, over time, this interest degenerated into banal smoking. Both shag tobacco (*Nicotiana rustica*) and common tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*), which gained much more popularity, were smoked. Its highly addictive nature and the harm caused from frequent smoking ended its healthy initiative. In the civilized world, mapacho, due to its relative, turned from a healing teacher-plant into tobacco for the poor.

Nicotiana rustica contains up to nine percent nicotine. It is accompanied by nicotine, nornicotine, and anabasine. But what interests us most are harmine, harmaline, and tetrahydroharmine, monoamine oxidase inhibitors capable of enhancing the action of entheogens—primarily *dimethyltryptamine*, the critical component in Ayahuasca.

The taste of mapacho depends on a range of factors, starting from the place of growth and harvest time and ending with the quality of fermentation and humidity level. Due to these circumstances, the taste sensations can vary greatly.

Household Use

It would be an exaggeration to say that mapacho is exclusively used for rituals tool by the inhabitants of the Amazon. Many of them also smoke it for the most trivial purposes. That is why “mapacho” in South America also refers to simple, unfiltered cigarettes.

In addition, “Aztec tobacco” is actively used in the traditional medicine of the Quechua people. For example, a decoction of its leaves is used to treat:

- ☑ bruises and sprains;
- ☑ tendon problems;
- ☑ skin infections;
- ☑ colds;
- ☑ general malaise;

- ☑ hair loss;
- ☑ bleeding wounds and related infections;
- ☑ snake bite aftermaths.

As a snuff, mapacho serves as a means of relaxation and provides relief from the symptoms of respiratory ailments. From European colonizers, the Indians borrowed the rectal treatment method using enemas. Moreover, this maestro, combined with other medicinal plants, can enhance their healing effect.

In the modern world, shag tobacco is a valuable crop. From it, citric and nicotine acids are extracted. Additionally, nicotine produces nicotine sulfate, an effective remedy for combating agricultural pests, including aphids, leaf miners, and young codling moth larvae.

Mapacho as an Independent Tool for Knowledge

For centuries, the Quechua people have practiced various ways of ritual use of sacred tobacco: they smoked it, sniffed it, and drank its decoction. The reasons could be numerous:

- ☑ initiation of a young man;
- ☑ preparation for battle;
- ☑ predicting the future;
- ☑ wedding ritual.

Of course, mapacho was smoked often. When Europeans came upon the Americas, they first noticed ceremonies, which ended when the participants fell into a state of complete relaxation and even a trance. Originally, tobacco smoking outside of rituals was seldom practiced. This tradition arose during the colonial period.

Some Amazonian shamans specialize in rituals using mapacho alone. Tabasqueros (as they are called) consider it the critical teacher-plant and therefore interact only with its spirit. This practice is especially popular in Brazil, but ritual tobacco smoking is found throughout the Amazon.

Like most maestros, mapacho is a strict teacher. It doesn't pamper its students, and it can act quite harshly during the cleansing process. If a person has accumulated mental dirt, they will face a session (maybe even two) of purgative vomiting. How soon it will start and how long it will last depends on the dose of "shamanic tobacco" and the participant's readiness to let go of this dirt. When the student cleanses, mapacho envelops them in a deep, restorative sleep. In fifty percent of cases, a person does not remember their dreams—meaning the plant spirit has conveyed everything necessary during the ritual.

In the remaining fifty percent of cases, something more interesting happens. This maestro continues its work, immersing the person in a lucid dream where they are not a passive observer but an active participant. This is a very rich experience; of course, it is different for everyone. Some may feel mapacho redistributing energy flows in their body, while others may find themselves outside of time and space. Some may observe their life from the sidelines, and others may fulfill a dream and learn to fly. Regardless, they wake up as a renewed person.

I have touched on unscrupulous shamans using Ayahuasca rituals to steal other people's energy. Mapacho, like any powerful tool, is also sometimes used for harm. A striking example is the Huichol tribe, where "shamanic tobacco" is also used for casting curses.

Mapacho, Ayahuasca, and Rapé

Some shamans add "Aztec tobacco" directly to the decoction from the "Vine of Spirits." More often, however, it cleanses participants the day before the ceremony. By fumigating a person, the shaman drives out painful energy and evil spirits and provides the necessary psychological mindset. This process is accompanied by sacred chants called "icaros."

Shamans use mapacho for a powerful cleansing of participants from heavy energies due to their "civilized" life in big cities. This burden can hinder a fully transcendental experience. To get rid of it, shamans serve their wards a shot of strongly brewed tobacco and a large amount of warm water. This is followed by several vomiting sessions, which relieve physical and emotional tension.

Additionally, "shamanic tobacco" is a vital component of the rapé powder, alongside the ashes of Arikury palm (*Syagrus schizophyllum*) and Buriti (*Mauritia flexuosa*). This traditional snuff also acts as a potent means of physical and mental detoxification. By stimulating brain activity, those who use rapé gain clarity of thought, see the world in all its colors and hear what was previously inaccessible.

In Conclusion

Mapacho is the most amazing of all teacher plants. It has always been close, but its potential was hidden from the uninitiated for centuries. At the same time, sacred tobacco has given followers of shamanic traditions invaluable experience. It's up to you to decide which path to follow!

Mucura (*Petiveria Alliacea*): Another Complex "Garlic"

Petiveria alliacea is also called Anamu, Apacin, and Guine. In general, Mucura, like many other maestros, has received many names from its followers—around thirty. Due to its characteristic smell, it is also called "Colombian garlic," and sometimes "Cuban garlic" Traditionally, a plant with many names boasts many uses.



Botanical Characteristics

Unlike many of its colleagues, mucura is not only native to the Amazon region. Alongside the South American continent, it has conquered North America as well. It then spread to many African countries and India. This plant can be found along roadsides, riverbanks, moist forest edges, pastures, and gardens.

Mucura is an herbaceous shrub with erect stems reaching one meter in height. The leaves are large, with some being pinnate and others netted. *Petiveria alliacea* retains its ability to reproduce throughout the year, but the peak of reproductive activity depends on the local climate. This plant is most active in the Amazon region from July to January.

Due to its remarkable ability to survive and adapt to its environment, it has been classified as a weed in some countries. However, even those unfamiliar with its healing potential have found a use for it in agriculture.

Mucura is an effective insecticide, having proven itself in the fight against ticks, weevils, beetles, grasshoppers, and many other pests. However, it is not advisable to feed it to domestic animals and birds—their meat, milk, and eggs acquire a garlicky smell.

Healing Properties

The experience of the Quechua has shown that *Petiveria alliacea* is a medicine with such a broad spectrum of action that many modern drugs would be envious. After all, this plant helps to combat:

☑ Pain, Headache, Muscle Pain, Toothache: Any type can be controlled with a decoction or infusion of mucura. Along with its analgesic effect, it also has antispasmodic and anti-inflammatory properties.

☑ Respiratory Diseases: Mucura can cope not only with a common cold but also with more severe ailments like the flu.

☑ Bacteria and Viruses: The unrefined water extracts of this plant have as strong antiseptic properties as alcoholic tinctures. Almost all harmful microorganisms, from protozoa to tuberculosis bacteria, are in their "competence."

☑ Diabetes: Due to its ability to normalize blood glucose levels, Apacin has proven to be an effective natural hypoglycemic agent.

☑ Cancer: The active substances in mucura can slow down and stop the growth of some types of cancer cells. This is primarily due to the bioactive compounds coumarin and benzaldehyde.

Petiveria alliacea helps to ease childbirth, strengthen the immune system, combat rheumatism, cure syphilis, prevent tooth decay and acts as a diuretic. In addition, along with cinnamon, agave, cissus, basil, and honey, it is an ingredient in the traditional alcoholic drink known as "mamajuana," which gives vitality, calms the nervous system, improves digestion, and acts as an aphrodisiac.

Use in Shamanic Rituals

Like many other maestros, mucura regularly participates in Ayahuasca ceremonies. Curanderos use it the day before the ritual to protect participants from evil spirits—although it is

also often added to the drink itself. But in most cases, it is used as an independent means—as a decoction or smoking blend.

Petiveria alliacea is one of the most scientifically studied teacher plants. Scientists have found that it contains many biologically active components, including benzaldehyde, benzoic acid, polyphenols, coumarin, tannins, petiveriin, and four types of thiosulfinates. However, spiritual processes prevail over chemical ones in this case.

Curanderos respect the spirit of this maestro for its abilities. It relieves anxiety and brings tranquility. It helps one cope with depression and restores the desire to live. Moreover, it allows one to gain self-confidence and unobtrusively instills a sense of self-worth.

Most often, the diet using mucura lasts five days, and the decoction is taken in the mornings and evenings. The portions are small: only a couple or three sips in a cup. The drink not only warms you from the inside, but also, we can say, hits you on top of your head. The taste is quite spicy: along with garlic, you can taste “notes” of onion, radish, and even wasabi. However, the menu should be devoid of solid flavors: no salt or spices and only a few types of vegetables and fruits.

The primary function of this maestro is to help with dreaming. It provides vivid, detailed dreams, full of experiences and reflections to those who sleep. Often, *Petiveria alliacea* acts as a skilled regression therapist. Solving accumulated problems takes a person back to situations from the past and suggests acting differently to shed the heavy burden.

In Conclusion

This diet is where you lose not so much weight but mental clutter. In return, you gain an unbreakable will to live and valuable knowledge about yourself. You should get acquainted with mucura.

Renaquilla (*Clusia Rosea*): Maestro of Harmonious Relationships

Along with a slightly modified name—Renaquillo—this maestro has plenty of different names: Cupey, Matapalo, Game Huasca, Renaco, Runtu Mullaca, Sacha Huaca, Sacha Indano, and Carne. Of course, such a versatile plant has found its place in folk medicine recipes, shamanic practices, and home greenhouses.



Botanical Characteristics

Clusia rosea is a classic epiphyte, a plant that lives on other plants. Instead of taking nutrients from their neighbor, epiphytes are content with the products of their own photosynthesis and moisture from precipitation and the atmosphere. At night, Renaquilla stores carbon dioxide in the form of organic acids and breaks them down only during the day. This unusual photosynthesis is called “acid metabolism.”

This plant from the Clusiaceae family resembles a ficus. Usually, it wraps around a tree and eventually becomes one with it. This feature has long confused scientists who

considered it a tree. Unlike *Ficus insipida*, which inevitably kills its plant companion, *Clusia rosea* can live peacefully with its host. However, the opposite often happens as well. After killing the tree, *Clusia* continues to grow alone.

Renaquilla is an evergreen plant with a dense crown, capable of reaching eighteen meters in height. Like all representatives of the Clusiaceae family, it contains a resinous sap. The branches can grow very thick. Large fruits are inedible for humans, but bats are happy to eat them. The leaves are almost the same as those of a ficus: ovate, leathery, shiny, with inconspicuous veins.

Matapalo blooms and bears fruit almost all year round in its natural habitat. But in indoor conditions, it only happens sometimes. However, florists appreciate it for its beautiful fragrant flowers reminiscent of camellias. Many gardeners who never see it bloom consider Renaquilla a decorative foliage plant.

The homeland of *Clusia rosea* is South America. But today, this plant can be found not only in Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela but also in Mexico, the Bahamas, and the southern United States—of course, only in wild nature. Florists have spread the exotic “ficus” all over the globe.

Use in Folk Medicine

Spanish conquistadors found the most exciting use of Renaquilla after the conquest of the South American continent. They used the broad leaves to make homemade playing cards. But the indigenous people did not indulge in such nonsense and fully revealed the plant’s medicinal potential.

First, *Clusia rosea* helps to overcome:

☑ **Problems with the Musculoskeletal System:** Medicines from this plant strengthen bones and speed up their recovery after fractures. They also strengthen muscles and increase their endurance.

☑ **Inflammatory Processes:** This refers to external ones caused by bruises and other injuries and internal ones caused by toxic substances and pathogenic organisms.

☑ **Hernias:** Such medicines prevent the protrusion of internal organs into cavities, under the skin, and into the muscle space.

☑ **Diseases of the Genitourinary System:** Renaquilla cares about restoring the body's reproductive capabilities and treats infertility.

In addition, this plant also has an analgesic effect.

Use in Shamanic Rituals

Like many maestros, the lifestyle of Renaquilla is quite symbolic. *Clusia*, which cannot exist without another plant, helps its students find harmony in relationships in three aspects: physical, spiritual, and mental. Of course, it keeps its dangerous inclinations to itself, teaching only the art of unity with a loved one.

But it's not just about love or family relationships. *Clusia rosea* restores all broken connections and creates new ones—both with the people around you and with nature. And yet, most people turn to this maestro when they have trouble with their close relationships. The main tools of *Clusia* are forgiveness and understanding.

This teacher-plant has such a powerful effect that it reprograms a person's neural network, expanding their understanding of the world around them and themselves. It endows them with a subtle intuition that aids them in anticipating problems. After all, it is always easier to prevent problems than to solve them.

In Conclusion

Renaquilla is beauty that doesn't require sacrifices. On the contrary, this striking plant is a wise mentor, teaching

you a life without conflicts, annoying misunderstandings, and resentment. Trust its experience and open up entirely new horizons for yourself.

Toe (*Brugmansia Suaveolens*): From Danger to Enlightenment—One Step



Brugmansia has many names. Most of them are owed to the inhabitants of the Amazon, who have used it in everyday life and mystical rituals since time immemorial. Toe, Canachiari, and Frolipondio are just the most famous of them. Moreover, this plant has been awarded two diametrically opposed names: “angel’s trumpets” and “devil’s tree.” Notably, both are justified.

Botanical Characteristics

At one time, scientists also called *Brugmansia* “*datura*,” but then they figured it out and attributed this plant to its branch of the Solanaceae family.

Frolipondio is a semi-woody plant with a multi-branched trunk. The height can reach three and sometimes even five meters. The length of the oval leaves can be twenty-five centimeters, and the width is fifteen centimeters. The tubular flowers are even more significant—up to thirty-two centimeters long. They are usually white, but pink and yellow can also be found. Thanks to its delicate fragrance, the plant received the characteristic *suaveolens*, which means “fragrant.”

Originally, *Brugmansia* actively grew in the southeast of Brazil along riverbanks and moist forest edges. But it can be found in almost any part of South America today and in North America and even some European countries. In the Amazon jungle alone, there are seven species of *Brugmansia*, each of which curanderos have found applications for in their rituals:

- ☑ fragrant (*suaveolens*), mostly found in Brazilian forests;
- ☑ multicolored (*versicolor*) native to Ecuador;
- ☑ bloody, or scarlet (*sanguinea*), inhabiting the Peruvian jungle;
- ☑ notable (*insignis*), settled in the foothills in the territories of Peru and Ecuador;
- ☑ golden (*aurea*), growing in the lowlands of Colombia;
- ☑ volcanic (*vulcanicola*), conquering the highlands of Colombia;
- ☑ arboreal (*arborea*), spread almost throughout the entire South American continent.

Medicine and Poison

It's not that *Brugmansia* is a cure-it-all, but it has many applications. Decoctions, infusions, ointments, and poultices based on them are used to combat pain, spasms, inflammations, burns, arthritis, rheumatism, dermatitis, coughs, and asthma.

However, *Canachiari* is also an example of a medicine that, when handled carelessly, turns into poison. That's why I

strongly advise against interacting with this plant alone—only under the supervision of an experienced curandero. After all, overdosing often leads to severe consequences, even death.

Those who slightly exceed the dose also have a hard time. *Brugmansia* punishes them for carelessness with dry mouth, tachycardia, confusion, inability to focus their gaze, and muscle paralysis. That's why not every shaman is willing to interact with this maestro. They resort to its help when other means are powerless against severe illness.

Ritual Use

Shamans themselves are sometimes forced to interact with this plant. Despite the danger, it is among the top five maestros used to transition curanderos to their next professional development level. In addition, the sap of *Brugmansia* allows them to travel to the so-called lower world of Uku Pacha, where according to Native American beliefs, demons dwell. *Brugmansia* is also used to communicate with the spirits of ancestors, gain sacred knowledge, predict the future, delve deep within oneself, and realize and solve problems. Shamans occasionally add it to Ayahuasca, but it is often combined with mapacho to achieve vivid and clear dreams. Indigenous people are convinced that communicating with such a vigorous plant benefits weak spirits.

The peoples of the Amazon associate the spirit of Toe with representatives of the animal world. Somewhere it appears to shamans as an eagle, somewhere as an anaconda, and somewhere as a jaguar. All animals are very dangerous—just like the plant itself. Indigenous people are sure that they pass on their knowledge and power to the participants of the ceremonies—but only to the worthiest.

Consumption of *Brugmansia* requires careful preparation, including adherence to a strict diet. As a rule, only those with experience interacting teacher-plants can get acquainted with

it. After all, a ceremony participant enters an uncharted world and returns from their journey as a different person.

The main task of the shaman in such a ritual is to use their spiritual power to guide the vision in the right direction, minimizing negative moments and enhancing positive ones. Under the influence of Canachiari, a person may experience fear, and the curandero helps to control it. Along with complex techniques, there are also quite simple ones. For example, those who have consumed it are not allowed to look at their body because instead, they might see a skeleton and interpret it as an omen of death.

At the peak of *Brugmansia*'s effect, a person often observes the spirits of rivers and jungles. However, they are not just observing—they find themselves in the epicenter of the events. And these visions are so realistic that even phantasmagoric phenomena do not surprise the participants in the ceremony but seem to be a logical part of a new fantastic world.

Another way to “consume” *Brugmansia suaveolens* involves light contact with the plant. Considering the danger of *Brugmansia*, many will appreciate this method. Before sleeping, the Quechua place a few freshly picked leaves under their head. This not only allows them to see vivid dreams but also to control them.

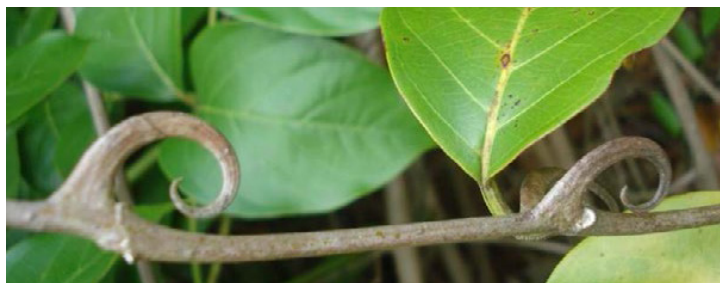
There is another Native American belief: some curanderos believe you cannot drink Toe juice once and then break away from this maestro forever. For such audacity, the “devil” might “take” them. Therefore, it is recommended to repeat this experience periodically, but not too often—once every two to three months. But only a tiny percentage of curanderos adhere to this version.

In Conclusion

Let's be honest: the likelihood of your acquaintance with Toe is small. Among the maestros, there are less severe and,

most importantly, safer mentors. But if you still decide to learn from this plant specifically, you will have another solid reason to respect yourself. And still, be careful!

Uña de Gato (*Uncaria Tormentosa*): Maestro with a Feline Character



Uncaria tormentosa, also known as woolly or “cat’s claw,” is a woody vine from the Rubiaceae family that got its nickname due to its characteristic spikes used to cling to trees. Sharp and curved, they indeed resemble a cat’s claw. According to some studies, inhabitants of the Amazon have been using this plant for about two thousand years.

Botanical Characteristics

Uña de Gato grows in South and Central America, primarily in the tropical rainforests of the Amazon. To reach its maximum size, the vine needs at least twenty years. Over this period, it grows up to thirty or even fifty meters in length. The diameter can be up to twenty centimeters. The bark is covered with longitudinal cracks. The opposite, oval leaves, in turn, reach seven to seventeen centimeters in length and four to twelve centimeters in width. The underside is covered with fine short hairs, which give the plant its “woolly” name. The

inflorescences consist of bisexual flowers seven to seventeen centimeters long. The claw-like spikes are initially soft but harden over time, turning into reliable hooks.

Moreover, *Uncaria tormentosa* belongs to a genus that includes many medicinal plants, primarily *Uncaria guianensis*, *Uncaria rhynchophylla*, and *Uncaria sinensis*.

Use in Medicine

I deliberately didn't write "in traditional medicine" because science has long been interested in the properties of this plant, and today you can easily find capsules with its extracts. Nevertheless, indigenous Amazonian peoples were the first to reveal the potential of *Uncaria*. They identify eight main healing effects of Uña de Gato:

☑ Immunostimulant: Active substances in the vine's composition accelerate the production of interleukins 1 and 6. In addition, they increase the number of monocytes and stimulate the phagocytic activity of macrophages and neutrophil granulocytes. All this allows for more effective fighting against bacteria and viruses and strengthens the immune system overall.

☑ Anti-inflammatory: This can be attributed to the glycosides of quinic acid. However, research has shown that they are less effective on their own than as part of an extract from the plant. Presumably, they interact synergistically with other components.

☑ Antitumor: *Uncaria tormentosa* can increase the level of immunoglobulins in cancer patients. Oxindole alkaloids inhibit the growth of leukemia cells U-937 and HL-60. Scientists believe this is due to the activation of T-lymphocytes and macrophages. Epicatechin and procyanidins also possess cytostatic and antimutagenic effects.

☑ Cardioprotective: *Uncaria* takes a comprehensive approach to care for the cardiovascular system: it normalizes

arterial pressure, prevents the formation of blood clots and plaques, and purifies the blood.

☑ **Anti-ulcer:** This plant prevents the appearance of stomach and duodenal ulcers, and if the problem already exists, it accelerates scarring. Moreover, it helps eliminate colitis, diverticulitis, diarrhea, bloating, constipation, and hemorrhoids.

☑ **Detoxification:** Substances in *Uncaria*'s composition help the liver eliminate toxic metabolic products. They accelerate oxidation, reduction, and hydrolysis reactions. They also promote conjugation (attachment of corresponding substances) and increase the area of agranular endoplasmic reticulum, where toxins are neutralized.

☑ **Antiviral:** Triterpene heterosides and quinic acid derivatives eliminate encapsulated RNA viruses. By blocking their reproduction inside cells, they interrupt the chain reaction. By the way, this plant also successfully fights parasites, including destroying their larvae.

☑ **Analgesic:** Active substances in *Uncaria tormentosa* help to relieve various types of pain: due to rheumatism, inflammatory processes, muscle fatigue, and chronic ailments.

In addition, this plant improves memory, helps cure colds, alleviates symptoms of gout, rheumatism, and arthritis, restores potency, and can serve as a contraceptive in large doses.

Use in Shamanic Practices

Uña de Gato is another teacher plant not foreign to mystical symbolism. The shape or lifestyle of a maestro often reflects its teaching methods. So, the “cat’s claw” teaches its students cat-like techniques, to put it simply.

Uncaria tormentosa uses the example of not a domestic cat or some lynx but the king of the Amazon jungle—the jaguar—for imitation. With the strength of a seasoned spotted predator, this plant endows those who turn to it for help.

Of course, this is primarily about spiritual strength. Those who have undergone training under the guidance of Uña de Gato gain unwavering self-confidence and an iron will, allowing them to achieve their goal, like a jaguar during a hunt. But not only spiritual strength: *Uncaria* eliminates imbalance not only on the physical but also on the mental level.

In Conclusion

If you dream of saying goodbye to a dog's life, the "cat's claw" will help you. Stop being prey and finally become a predator. This is the only way to survive in the harsh urban jungles.

Wachuma (*Echinopsis Pachanoi*): Wise Grandfather San Pedro



This teacher-plant has accompanied and instructed South American civilization for almost three thousand years. During this time, it has received many names from its grateful students: giganton, el remedio, pachanoi, aguacolla, “cactus of the four winds,” and even “Wise Grandfather.” Scientists call it *Echinopsis pachanoi*.

Getting to Know Wachuma

This columnar cactus grows on the slopes of the Andes in Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile. It reaches five to six meters in height and produces numerous shoots. Periodically, this giant is covered with fragrant white tubular flowers up to twenty-three centimeters long. In short, nature has done everything for students to notice one of their primary teachers.

The Quechua gave it a meaningful name—Wachuma. Waqcha means “in the absence,” and Uma means “head.” This teacher-plant appeals not to the brain but to the heart. “Headless” implies the disconnection of rational thinking, which serves only as an obstacle to spiritual harmony.

The name “San Pedro,” given to this cactus by Europeans, is also noteworthy. According to legend—a Franciscan monk, whose name history has not preserved—dared to try Wachuma. The spirit of the teacher-plant appeared before him in the image of Saint Peter and endowed him with many valuable revelations. Impressed, the monk named the ceremony after this apostle—San Pedro.

The two equal names of *Echinopsis pachanoi* vividly demonstrate how closely traditional beliefs have intertwined with Christian customs in the culture of the Amazon peoples.

Active Ingredients

San Pedro contains a whole group of active components, including:

- ☑ anhalanine;
- ☑ anhalonidine;
- ☑ hordenine;
- ☑ tyramine;
- ☑ 3-methoxytyramine;
- ☑ 3,4-dimethoxyphenethylamine;
- ☑ 3,5-dimethoxy-4-hydroxy-B-phenethylamine;
- ☑ 3-4-dimethoxy-4-hydroxy-B-phenetidine.

But the main active ingredient is, of course, mescaline. It is found in many members of the Echinopsis genus. This well-known hallucinogen provides vivid visions and other effects during the ceremony. In terms of its effects, it is like MDMA. However, when it comes to shamanic rituals, it's not just about the chemistry.

To feel the effects of mescaline, a dose of 100 milligrams is enough. But full-fledged communication with the teacher-plant begins with 350 milligrams. By the way, the content of the active substance in the cactus can vary greatly. For example, 50 grams of dried San Pedro may contain anywhere from 150 milligrams to 1,150 milligrams of mescaline. To avoid overdose, it is essential to choose an experienced shaman. They are called wachumeros.

How Does the Ceremony Take Place?

Methods of consumption vary greatly. Wachuma is even eaten raw, but only by those not afraid of its bitter taste. Some people cut the cactus into pieces, dry it in an oven, and then eat it. Some recipes involve boiling thin slices in water for several hours and mixing this drink with pineapple juice.

But the traditional shamanic recipe involves preparing a special decoction for twelve hours. During the ceremony, the participant drinks a cup of the beverage. Depending on their susceptibility, the wachumero may not limit them to one serving and may give their charge two, three, or even four.

The decoction starts to work after about forty minutes. Primarily, it induces a meditative state and immersion in one's thoughts and emotions. Visual hallucinations are also likely. Keep in mind that San Pedro works in waves. The effect may seem to be subsiding at certain moments, but then the decoction starts working again, sometimes even more potent.

The trip lasts six to eight hours and sometimes up to twelve. The effects of San Pedro peak two to four hours after ingestion. This maestro acts more gently than Ayahuasca and other well-known cactus teachers like peyote. It opens the eyes but does not overwhelm them. If Ayahuasca, for example, is a high school teacher, then wachuma is a primary school teacher.

As for the physical effects, few San Pedro ceremonies are without nausea and vomiting. This is due to the substances contained in the cactus and even its specific taste. The Quechua Indians consider vomiting an essential aspect of physical cleansing, without which spiritual cleansing is impossible.

How Does San Pedro Affect a Person?

The “wise grandfather” opens the heart. It helps the student overcome obstacles to actual knowledge, which are placed by their own ego. Wachuma heals the soul and reveals the truth about the surrounding world and the person themselves. It shows how diverse life is and how the edges of reality interact. But above all, wachuma teaches sincere love.

Thanks to San Pedro, you will be able to:

☑ **Overcome Phobias:** Their causes are always hidden in the past. Wachuma is a very talented regression therapist. The “maestro” will take you back to key events, demonstrate why fears and doubts plague you, and then help you say goodbye to them for good.

☑ **Improve Relationships:** With family, friends, colleagues, or everyone who plays a vital role in your life. San

Pedro teaches not only to open your heart but also to win over others. Understanding human nature, which this teacher plant provides, makes it very easy to win people over.

☑ **Get Rid of Diseases:** San Pedro heals on both physical and mental levels. Redirecting energy flows, it fixes everything that is broken. Wachuma teaches the body to mobilize all its forces to fight and cope with ailments.

☑ **Find Your Calling:** Through this, you can bypass the programs ingrained in you, break through blocks, and look inside your true self, and this is the only way to understand your place in this world and how you can make a statement. Only by finding harmony with your inner “I” can you begin to live, not just exist.

In Conclusion

A teacher who will treat you with understanding. One who will not give you a failing grade but patiently explain the critical material. One who will not burden you with information overload but will provide a ticket to a happy life. Isn't that the kind of mentor you've always dreamed of? The bell has long since rung, and San Pedro is waiting for you at the lesson of love, sincerity, and enlightenment.

Lucid Dreams: You've Never Dreamed of This!

In this Chapter, I often used this term. After all, lucid dreams are the primary tool for many teacher-plants, including Toe (*Brugmansia suaveolens*), Mucura (*Petiveria alliacea*), Ajo Sacha (*Mansoa alliacea*), and of course, “shamanic tobacco” Mapacho (*Nicotiana rustica*). So, what is this phenomenon? Let's figure it out.

Not Just a Dream

A lucid dream is arguably the most famous type of altered consciousness. In this borderline state between wakefulness and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, a person observes what is happening and controls the events.

The term “lucid dreams” was proposed in 1913 by Dutch psychiatrist Frederik van Eeden. They are also called “lucid” from the Dutch *lucide droom*. He kept a dream diary for years, eventually allowing him to achieve lucidity in his dreams. He described his experience in the article “A Study of Dreams.”

However, the author of the first truly scientific theory is American neurophysiologist Nathaniel Kleitman. In the 1950s, he described polyphasic sleep—sleep divided into several parts, such as day and night sleep. He also made it possible to study sleep with polysomnography and create visual charts of sleep structure.

American psychophysiological Stephen LaBerge actively engaged in lucid dreaming research. In the 1970s, he was one of the first to prove the existence of this phenomenon: participants in his experiments gave signals by moving their eyes while devices showed they were indeed asleep. In 1987, LaBerge even founded a specialized institute.

Scientists from the Max Planck Society for Scientific Research also contributed to the study. They connected dream content and brain activity using electroencephalography and MRI. Volunteers prone to lucid dreaming participated in the experiment. They had to imagine clenching their fists in a specific sequence during sleep. The devices showed activity in the sensorimotor area of the brain cortex responsible for planning movements.

Summing up the scientific findings with the conclusions of science popularizer Michio Kaku, human sleep involves two phases: slow-wave and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. They alternate every 90-110 minutes. Lucid dreams are associated

with REM. The visual part of the brain cortex is activated in the sleeping person, while the orbitofrontal cortex and the dorsolateral part of the prefrontal cortex, on the contrary, are inactive. These areas are responsible for self-control and thought filtering. Preserving the activity in the dorsolateral part of the cortex primarily allows for transforming the ordinary REM into a lucid dream.

Lucid Dreams as Out-of-Body Experiences

Representatives of various spiritual practices—from esotericists and shamans to occultists of all kinds—interpret this phenomenon in their own way. What unites them is that they associate lucid dreams not with the peculiarities of brain function but with astral projections and other out-of-body experiences. Some consider such dreams communication with spirits, while others see them as journeys to parallel worlds.

However, it would be wrong to fully equate lucid dreaming with out-of-body experiences. This is because the latter occurs not only in sleep but also in many other circumstances:

- ☑ hypnotic trance;
- ☑ childbirth;
- ☑ clinical death;
- ☑ sensory deprivation;
- ☑ severe dehydration;
- ☑ intake of psychoactive substances;
- ☑ electrical stimulation of specific brain areas;
- ☑ severe stress;
- ☑ psychiatric and neurological disorders.

Thus, a lucid dream can always be considered an out-of-body experience, but not vice versa.

There is another important prerequisite for out-of-body experiences. A person must lose the sense of their location in space. This is possible when visual, tactile, and proprioceptive (regarding the position of body parts relative to each

other and in space) data cease to be received by the brain, or when their amount is minimal. If the clarity of consciousness is maintained, an “exit beyond the physical body” is almost guaranteed.

What Are Lucid Dreams Used For?

Even though a person understands that what is happening is unreal, lucid dreams provide powerful impressions due to their plausibility. Therefore, the limited knowledge of scientists about the nature of this phenomenon has not become an obstacle to using it for good purposes. These include:

☑ **Fighting Nightmares:** Lucid dreams help solve problems in ordinary ones. Nightmares can be overcome in two ways: completely changing the plot to a more favorable one or intentionally remaining in a scary dream but using one’s limitless power to defeat the monster or other danger.

☑ **Regression:** A lucid dream is a potent analog of a hypnotherapy session when you need to return to past events and relive them again but differently. Complete control over what is happening allows for efficiently implementing the correct course of events and changing the person’s attitude toward the past.

☑ **Physical Rehabilitation:** Holistic therapy methods are fully revealed when the body’s healing processes using its own internal resources are visualized. This way, it is much easier for a person to redirect energy flows and see the changes taking place.

☑ **Shamanic Practices:** Teacher-plants intentionally immerse their wards in lucid dreams. This is their way of maximally influencing a person, guaranteeing insights, and improving life.

And, of course, this tool is also used for entertainment purposes. Who would refuse to chat with Leonardo da Vinci or Winston Churchill or even embark on a journey through the galaxy?

How to Achieve Lucid Dreams?

There are still no guaranteed universal recipes. Moreover, talent plays a significant role here. However, scientists do point out several main ways to achieve the desired:

☑ **Methodology and Proper Mindset:** The lucid dream diary, which the first discoverer of this phenomenon kept, remains a sought-after tool. Documenting your experiences, analyzing the principles of their operation, and refreshing past dreams in memory is the key to repeating lucid dreams for many people.

☑ **Reality Check:** The sleeper does not realize they are asleep, which must be corrected. That's why various checks were invented. Not just the old good "pinch yourself" but also assessing the density of surrounding objects, finding out what time it is, recalling recent past events, or reading a text two or more times.

☑ **Gadgets:** More specifically, there are unique masks that read characteristic eye movements and give the sleeper light signals. This way, they should realize that they are in a dream. But it's not that simple, and often the cunning brain integrates these signals into the dream plot, as it happens, for example, with an alarm clock.

☑ **Electromagnetic Stimulation:** Researchers from Harvard Medical School tested this method on twenty-seven participants. During the rapid sleep phase, their brain was stimulated at frequencies corresponding to wakefulness (25–40 Hz). At these moments, regular sleep evolved into a lucid one.

☑ **Psychoactive Substances:** Scientists do not reveal their cards, but we can confidently say it is about the components in teacher plants. If we consider their effect on students from a scientific point of view, this is the only explanation. But there is also another mystical version, referring to the spiritual world.

In Conclusion

It would be an understatement to say that lucid dreams are more than sleep. When used with knowledge for good purposes, they are more than life itself since they can fundamentally change a person's destiny. If you can, try and be sure to do it! And you'll still have time to get a good night's sleep.

CHAPTER 6.
WHAT'S NEXT?

Integration of the Ayahuasca Experience: The Psychedelic Trip Is Just the Beginning of Comprehensive Self-Work

Some of the long-term effects of Ayahuasca manifest themselves automatically. Many people, for example, find that after the ceremony, they rid themselves of tobacco, alcohol, and even drug addictions. Almost everyone gains a deeper understanding of the world and themselves. The condition of patients with treatment-resistant depression significantly improves, and this is even confirmed by official science. However, considerable effort is required to fully unlock the potential of teacher plants.

The psychedelic trip contains insights that need to be understood and independently implemented into life. Ayahuasca will not do this for you. Repeated ceremonies will not help either: this is not a case where quantity turns into quality. If you start ignoring the integration of the acquired experience, psychedelics will turn from a powerful tool for true self-development into a mystical attraction for you. Spectacular and engaging but practically useless.

The Essence of Integration

Integration is the comprehension of experiences gained in the psychedelic trip, their interpretation, and then changing one's life for the better. From such a definition, integration should begin after the ceremony. This is not entirely true. Forming the right mindset even before the ceremony is an extremely important stage.

Ayahuasca and teacher-plants provide more qualitative, constructive insights for those who have opened their minds and hearts to new experiences, rid themselves of skepticism, and focused on their feelings. Moreover, the right mindset significantly reduces the likelihood of a bad trip.

Stage Nº 1. Comprehending Psychedelic Experiences

Have you ever noticed how our brain suppresses memories of dreams? At the moment of awakening, a person could describe in detail what they dreamed about. But a couple of moments pass—and this information slips away. The same happens with the psychedelic experience. If you don't intentionally try to preserve the memory of mystical experiences, many constructive insights will be forgotten, and there will be nothing to integrate.

Here are the main techniques for remembering the trip:

☑ **Repetition:** When the effects of Ayahuasca weaken at the end of the ceremony, you will be repositioned. The trip is fading, and you gradually return to the material world, but this process is incomplete. At such moments, it is extremely important to use your willpower to repeatedly “replay” the memories of the trip. This is a way to transfer them to another level of consciousness, where the brain's suppression mechanisms are less active.

☑ **Verbalization:** Speak aloud what you see and feel during the ceremony. This technique is based on the same principle as repetition. The brain will suppress memories of the trip, but you will remember much of what you said aloud. And if your listener is an experienced researcher or integration specialist, they will guide your story in the right direction and help you focus on essential details.

☑ **Self-focus:** When the ceremony is over, many participants are eager to discuss their experience with colleagues as soon as possible. Avoid such conversations. Focus on remembering and comprehending only your own experiences. Don't allow them to mix.

Stage Nº2. Interpretation of Insights

Usually, teacher-plants' spirits do not provide clear recommendations. Their messages are allegorical. Your task is deciphering the images, symbols, allegories, and references. It is desirable to consult with the shaman and more experienced colleagues. Sometimes one ceremony is not enough, and it is necessary to form an appropriate mindset to get the key to deciphering the previous trip in the next one. The ability to understand your experiences comes with experience.

If, according to your interpretation, Ayahuasca encourages radical decisions, do not make them immediately. Sometimes time reveals new layers of interpretations. Interpretation can take from a week to several months.

Stage Nº3. Implementing the Interpreted Experience

Psychedelics should be a way for you not to escape reality into another world but to change your reality for the better. Otherwise, trips will become curious entertainment. This is the problem with many Ayahuasca adepts.

They fly to ceremonies to “watch psychedelic cartoons” but do not interpret insights. Even if they come to some conclusions, they need more strength, patience, and determination to implement the messages of teacher-plants into their own lives. Refrain from repeating their mistakes!

A Few More Recommendations

☑ Don't Try to Cover Everything at Once: Determine your essential tasks. Healing from mental ailments, getting rid of addiction, understanding the actual structure of the world, harmonizing relationships, and achieving financial success—in each of these cases, form the corresponding mindset even before the ceremony. It is proven that the mindset affects the theme and quality of insights.

☑ **Don't Try to Cope on Your Own:** If this is your first ceremony, you need an integration specialist. They will teach you to read the signs through which the teacher-plants advise humans. They will help you not to make a mess in your own life but to get the most benefit from the psychedelic experience.

☑ **Don't Try to Rush Things:** Integration requires time and space and does not tolerate hustle. Therefore, avoid weekend psychedelic tours. A quality retreat takes at least a week; another week is needed to return to everyday life and begin the transformation smoothly.

☑ **Don't Try to Keep Everything in Your Head:** Start a journal where you will record the content of trips, your impressions, and interpretations of insights and plans for their implementation. It doesn't necessarily have to be on paper; notes on your smartphone will also work. The main thing is the methodical approach with which you pursue your goal. And this goal is to become the best version of yourself.

In Conclusion

Transcendent experiences are valuable in themselves, as they allow you to glimpse behind the scenes of the universe. But without proper integration, much of the knowledge will almost certainly result in many sorrows. Avoid turning a deaf ear to the lessons of teacher-plants. You should assimilate them. That is, to carry out a comprehensive transformation of the personality in accordance with the correctly interpreted messages.

These messages are always aimed at healing from mental ailments, achieving well-being, and attaining success. Their interpretation with subsequent implementation is true self-development. It does not come quickly. Ayahuasca does nothing for you. It only points in the direction and gives advice—perhaps the most valuable advice in your life. Learn to understand it, and you will succeed in everything you desire.

A FEW PARTING WORDS

That's it. Now you know as much about Ayahuasca as I do. And that means you can drastically change your life for the better and get everything you could possibly wish for. I'm serious. This book is the key to the four main things in our vast sandbox: health, wealth, love, and happiness. This key is now in your hands, and the lock it opens is in the Amazon jungle. Anyone who has the courage to attend a ceremony and the intelligence to follow the instructions in this book will be generously rewarded. "The Vine of Spirits" and the other maestros appreciate diligent students.

Writing a book seems like a kind of retreat as well. I started it with a burning heart and a fervent intention to share with the world the discovery that amazing, true magic is nearby, within reach of commercial aviation. I was overwhelmed with emotions. Like the ancient Pheidippides, who rushed to the Athenians to report the victory in the Battle of Marathon, I hurried to bring you good news. But, I admit, I lacked systematization. My knowledge of Ayahuasca was extensive but scattered. As I wrote this book, everything fell into place on its own, just like after a ceremony.

I will say without false modesty: this book is unique. There is no other publication that so fully reveals every aspect of Ayahuasca. Such a book does not exist in English or, even more so, in Russian. Read this book carefully and pass it on to others: relatives, close friends, acquaintances, and coworkers. The more people learn about the miraculous effects of the brew from the "Vine of Spirits," the happier we will become, the world will be a better place, and my destiny will be more fully fulfilled. The last page has been turned. It's time to start a new chapter, not of the book, but of your life. Get acquainted with Her Majesty Ayahuasca and other teacher-plants, not remotely but in person. Heal your body and soul, achieve success in every sense, and find out what happiness really is. They say

the teacher comes when the student is ready. But in this case, you'll have to visit the maestro yourself.

Let's live!

