

AYAHUASCA MEDICINE



The Shamanic World of Amazonian
Sacred Plant Healing

ALAN
SHOEMAKER

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Amazonian Sacred Plant Healing

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Park Street Press
Rochester, Vermont • Toronto, Canada

For my children, Liam and Claire Shoemaker, and to the spirits of the plants

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“Alan Shoemaker has seen it all, and done it all. In this book he narrates his life story with humor and passion. A read sure to be of interest!”

DENNIS MCKENNA, PH.D., ETHNOPHARMACOLOGIST AND AUTHOR OF
BROTHERHOOD OF THE SCREAMING ABYSS AND COAUTHOR OF *THE INVISIBLE
LANDSCAPE*

“*Ayahuasca Medicine* is a revealing journey on the Western shamanic path with one of the most preeminent gringos on the Iquitos frontier. Alan Shoemaker’s apprenticeship with the medicine ayahuasca is rich in wonder, frank in detail, and embodies the cultural metamorphosis those of us who connect with the power plants must undergo. And as a new generation of Western seekers comes to the jungle in search of the mystery, Alan’s greatest wisdom may be his understanding that true healing comes from within. As well as the plants and the curanderos, Westerners are being groomed to be their own teachers, and Alan Shoemaker stands foremost among them.”

RAK RAZAM, AUTHOR OF *AYA AWAKENING: A SHAMANIC ODYSSEY*

“Alan Shoemaker has had more adventures than most people can even dream of, and he has written a fascinating book of both stories and ideas. The stories are brash, revelatory, and filled with self-deprecating humor; the ideas come from an immense knowledge of ayahuasca shamanism. This is a memoir of twenty years of experience with shamans and seekers and rogues of all kinds —an honest and deeply personal take on Amazonian shamanic practices and beliefs.”

STEPHAN V. BEYER, AUTHOR OF *SINGING TO THE PLANTS: A GUIDE TO
MESTIZO SHAMANISM IN THE UPPER AMAZON*

“*Ayahuasca Medicine* is a highly readable collection of incredible stories about miraculous healings and life with indigenous healers sure to entice anyone with an interest in ayahuasca and other psychoactive plants used in Latin America. Cautionary advice admixes with infectious enthusiasm for the topic, and provides a valuable contribution to the literature on practical applications of psychedelic plants’ effects.”

RICK STRASSMAN, M.D., AUTHOR OF *DMT: THE SPIRIT MOLECULE* AND
COAUTHOR OF *INNER PATHS TO OUTER SPACE*

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FOREWORD

BY PETER GORMAN

Alan Shoemaker first arrived in Iquitos, Peru, in 1993, and he arrived with a bang, coming down the Putumayo with several friends in a fifteen-meter-long dugout canoe with a forty-horsepower Yamaha motor. He'd come from Washington State via Ecuador, where he had studied with Dr. Valentin Hampjes, the noted medical doctor and curandero/shaman who was as familiar with San Pedro cactus and ayahuasca as he was with antibiotics.

I didn't intend to spend a lot of time thinking about Alan Shoemaker when he first arrived in Iquitos. I'd been using this water-bound city for nine years as a staging point for my work in the jungle before he'd ever set foot there. I'd already met two dozen Shoemakers who always showed up in town, thought it was an easy place to get by, and then discovered, three months later, that they were calling family and friends for money to get home. But this gringo turned out to be different from most of the other dreamers I'd met. It turned out, as Alan later explained to me, that while wondering where to go for a break from his teacher, Valentin, he'd picked up a copy of *Shaman's Drum*, a wonderful magazine produced by Timothy White that deals with all things shamanistic. This particular issue included an article on ayahuasca written by me. And that led Alan to Iquitos, my haunt.

Now, for better or worse, I'd written the first nationally published article about ayahuasca, for *High Times* magazine, in 1986. Yes, Burroughs and Ginsberg had written about it previously in *The Yage Letters*, published in 1963 by San Francisco-based City Lights, but that collection of correspondence and other writings had not quite captured national attention like my article did more than twenty years later. My piece on ayahuasca resounded in those pre-Internet times and was passed around from person to person, until probably more than a million people had read it. As a result, several thousand people decided to seek out the medicine.

The article Alan had read still had influence. And so he showed up at my second home. But that is an understatement. He showed up, and within a month or two he launched the first modern English-language newspaper in Iquitos. A few months after that, he was making large batches of ayahuasca in the street in front of his residence—to the delight of the locals.

He worked with several curanderos, but seemed to focus on Juan Tangoa, whom we affectionately called Airport Juan, because his home is on a block in a barrio very close to the Iquitos airport. But Alan didn't just work with Don Juan: he became the first gringo to take a Peruvian curandero on a public tour of the United States and Europe. And while others might have done that previously, Alan did it with flair, introducing the concept of the traveling curandero to the world.

As with that particular tour, everything else Alan did, he did with great flair.

Certainly everything you might know about Iquitos and ayahuasca has been influenced—some say for better, others say for worse, but still, the influence is not disputed—by Alan. Within a couple of years of landing in Iquitos, Alan set up a small souvenir shop just off what is now “the boulevard.” Not long afterward a young woman came to town looking to drink ayahuasca. She wound up going with Alan to drink the medicine with Francisco Montes, at a place Don Francisco’s family had bought him out on the then-uncompleted road to Nauta, at kilometer 18. The young woman had such a transformative experience that she tried to give Alan a \$500 bonus for his work, but Alan refused, suggesting instead that she give the money to Don “Poncho” Francisco as seed money to create the first ethnobotanical garden in Iquitos, starting with identifying and marking all the medicinal plants on his property. She did so, and from that first \$500, Sachamama Ethnobotanical Garden, the first ayahuasca center, was born in 1990. Every other center that has been founded since then owes a debt of gratitude not only to Sachamama, but to Alan as well.

For me, the first hint that something extraordinary was happening occurred around 1995. During the late 1980s, whenever I flew into Iquitos from Miami on the now-defunct Faucett Airlines, there were always two, three, or four wheelchair-bound end-stage AIDS patients aboard. When we reached Iquitos they were whisked off the plane and into cars, quickly disappearing into the night. After perhaps the third time I observed this, my curiosity was so piqued that I managed to slip off the plane with a group of them, got a taxi, and followed them. They wound up at the river’s edge and were loaded onto a fairly small boat, which took off and disappeared from view.

Something was up. These were end-stage patients. There was no going home unless there was a miracle. So I began asking around town about them. I got word here and there about some strange, near-blind bear of a doctor who was doing experimental work on them, but I could never pin it down. I just could not find out what was what, though I knew that something was up. Then around 1995, when I came down to Iquitos for a few months, Alan told me he had taken what I’d said and had actually located the doctor doing the work with the AIDS patients. His name was Dr. Roberto Inchaustegui, and he was treating those dying people with a mixture of an Upper Amazonian medicinal plant and other things. And while most of those people still died, some survived, and a few even thrived. It was Alan who had found the doctor I could not find.

A year or so later it was Alan who introduced me to the idea of ayahuasca healing in a way I’d never considered. Remember, there were a few books on the subject, but the Internet did not exist then so there was no way of doing research—just the experiential knowledge of a few who had taken the medicine. Alan came to me one day and told me his mother was dying and asked me to drink ayahuasca with him at Airport Juan’s house to see if we might not see what was killing his mom and what might help her to stay alive. I reluctantly agreed, sure I could not help.

That night, during the ceremony, I saw her issue, up close and personal, and saw that *uña de gato* would help her. I wrote a note when I saw that, and the next morning I showed my note to Alan, sure that I was crazy. Alan had written a note as well, which also said “*uña de gato*,” as well as “*jergón sachá*.” He sent or brought the medicines to his mom—I forget which—and some months later, his mother, who was supposed to

die within weeks, was told by her doctors that they could not find any cancer, and that they might have misdiagnosed her to begin with. Alan and I knew better.

Several years later Alan came with me and my mother-in-law, Lydia, a Peruvian woman two generations out of jungle tribal life, to Airport Juan's to help heal Lydia's cancer. It worked. She got several more good years, just like Alan's mom did.

Alan's biggest drawback was that he loved being the tallest rose in the garden. And he often was. He was the first gringo to set up an official plant export company in Iquitos. Large companies had done it earlier, but no one had done it on a personal level like Alan did. To do it, he had to learn how Peruvian corporations were set up, what papers and permits were needed, and how to satisfy both U.S. and United Nations bureaucracies. It took years of painstaking work. It was done in part with the help of my family's "paper man," Jorge "Flaco" Panduro Perea, the best man at moving paper in all of Iquitos. He never missed or misses a trick. He set up Alan and his then-wife, Mariella, as a unique company capable of moving plant material legally from Peru to anywhere in the world.

Life, somehow, seems to intervene at the most awkward moments. I had a bar in Iquitos, the Cold Beer Blues Bar, across the street from the Puerto Mastranza, on the toughest block in town. Tourists were terrified of going there; my clients included expatriates, locals, U.S. Special Forces, and every CIA/DEA/NSA personnel in Iquitos at any given time—that and every drug dealer, arms dealer, and any other person the CIA/DEA/NSA was interested in. Well, as luck would have it, some of those young bucks from the United States would get drunk and cry into their beers to the bartender—who was often me. Now, everybody knew I was a journalist, and I told everybody that whatever they told me at the bar was likely to be published if I thought it newsworthy, so we didn't do any sneak attacks. Still, over the course of the couple of years I had the bar, at least two or three black ops were stopped in their tracks when I published stories about them on Al Giordano's seminal NarcoNews.com website.

And, as luck would have it, a couple of former Navy Seals who were working for the CIA as mercenaries were at my bar one night, at a party we were having for some guests I was taking to the jungle. Well, one of the guests took a photo of me behind the bar. One of the ex-Seals thought she might have captured his image via the mirrors behind the bar, so he walked over to her, ripped her camera from her neck, and stepped on it, breaking it. His lieutenant called him on the infraction, and the drunk mercenary then ate a bar glass. That's right, simply ate an entire six ounces of glass, out of shame. But before he did that he told me what he and the other former Seals were in town to do: they were planning to head up the Putumayo River to slaughter any and all persons trying to escape a pincer movement planned by U.S. and U.S.-trained Colombian forces for the following month. There would be bonuses of \$1,000 for every confirmed kill, whether combatant or civilian man, woman, or child, he said.

I wrote up the story and the op was canceled.

A couple of days later I was in my friend Jim's Gringo Bar. At one table was the lieutenant with a local girl. I sat with them while Alan stayed at the bar. The fellow told me I was in serious trouble for mucking up the operation. I told him I respected the military, but not the idea of trying to force civilians to flee a U.S.-paid onslaught on the Colombian rebels in a thirty-year-old civil war that would result in him and his

fellows making money on killing fleeing civilians. Then, for some reason that seemed to make sense to me at the time, I decided to “soplar,” the fellow. *Soplar*, is a blessing wherein you take magic liquid into your mouth and spray a fine mist over someone’s head and body to cleanse their aura. I didn’t have any sacred liquid, so I used beer. The lieutenant didn’t see it as a blessing—he thought I had spit at him, and in an instant he had his finger around my thorax and told me he might kill me. I told Alan to explain that I was blessing him to not kill noncombatants, not spitting at him. Alan, the tallest rose in the garden, seized the moment and hurled a hailstorm of shit on the fellow’s head, making it clear that not only was his position finished, but that he would likely wind up doing hard time for attacking a journalist such as Peter Gorman.

The fellow took it seriously. He let go of me but told Alan that he would pay for the incident.

And pay he did. A few months later, Alan, with all the proper paperwork in the world, sent a huge shipment of *Banisteriopsis caapi*—ayahuasca vine, maybe 700 pounds of it—along with chacruna (*Psychotria viridis*) and chaliponga (*Diplopterys cabrerana*, also known as huambisa after the tribe of the same name) the admixture plants used to make ayahuasca, the black tobacco (*Nicotiana rustica*, known also as mapacho) native to Peru, and some other things to the Atlanta address of his ex-wife, who was an attorney for the EPA, for delivery to his son. Now, what Alan did was perfectly legal. And if U.S. Customs had not wanted to receive the shipment they had two options: they could say the plant material was not wanted in the United States, and they could either destroy it or return it to the sender on the sender’s dime. Of course, if the material had been mislabeled it would have been smuggling. But as all the material was labeled properly in both English and Spanish, with local and Latin names, that was not the case. Nonetheless, U.S. Customs permitted the shipment to go through . . . and then arrested Alan’s grown son for picking it up off his front lawn.

Despite this outlandishly illegal move by the U.S. Attorney’s office, which it turned out was instigated by the former Seal lieutenant who said to “get Shoemaker and Gorman” (a fact that was stated to me on the record by the DEA), when Alan tried to go through Atlanta to get to his mother’s bedside just before her death he was picked up, put on a bus, and delivered to prison for thirty days. His mother died two days after his arrest. Thereafter Alan was given house arrest and was not permitted to leave the States or even go farther than a block or two from the home of his deceased mom. That lasted just under one year, the limit the U.S. federal prosecutors had to either prosecute him for a crime or let him go. Well, they had no crime to prosecute him for; the only crime committed was done by U.S. Customs in allowing legal plants to go through and then arresting Alan and his son.

So after 360 days, and I might be off by one or two, but just shy of the limit, the U.S. Attorney returned Alan’s suitcase, which contained his passport. Alan was originally arrested on April 1st. One year to the day later he received a letter stating he no longer had travel restrictions and so was free to leave the country. Alan came to my home in Texas, where he stayed for a couple of weeks, overseeing a study run by a doctor to determine if the medicinal plants he had been successfully using in Iquitos to put high blood sugar into remission would stand up to the rigors of a formal test. During that time I called the judge, a U.S. attorney, and everyone else and got it

confirmed that Alan was free to travel, so long as he'd be available should they ever decide to prosecute. At that point, Alan, who had not seen his wife or kids for a year, bought a ticket to Lima and on to Iquitos. I double-checked with the judge and prosecutor. And finally, knowing I had everyone on tape saying he could leave, I drove my friend to the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport and sent him on his way.

Less than a week later the prosecuting attorney in Atlanta charged Alan with flight to avoid prosecution—a ridiculous lie considering she was on tape suggesting he should visit his wife in Peru. Unfortunately for Alan, if he ever returns to the States he'll have to answer to that charge before any ayahuasca charges can be addressed—which means that unless he's got a quarter of a million dollars in legal fees put away, he's sunk.

But none of that sunk him.

He went back to Iquitos to discover that his family had had a hard time without him. He countered by coming up with the idea of a shamanistic conference. He brought in some inspiring speakers, collected several good curanderos to offer medicine to the participants, and began what has now become an annual event. And out of those conferences, the thriving business of ayahuasca tourism in Iquitos and Pucallpa was born.

So Alan's fingerprints, more than anyone else's, have been on all things ayahuasca in Iquitos. Even the beautiful *mantas*, or weavings, done by the indigenous Shipibo that are sold in Iquitos and Pucallpa bear his influence: at the very first shaman conference the weavers incorporated the Vine of the Soul (Soga del Alma) logo, a stylized cross section of an ayahuasca vine—imagined by Alan and later drawn by Johan Fremin—into their weavings, and now depictions of ayahuasca appear on nearly all of the mantas the Shipibo sell. The Bora tribe is now also painting his logo as well.

Alan is loved by many. He's also been called every name in the book, by people of all stripes. But few of those people have ever walked a mile in his shoes. Few of those people have had the courage he has shown. I am not always his biggest fan. I wish he had not set Sachamama and all of the subsequent ayahuasca retreats in motion. I wish it could all have been kept secret and slowly let out over the next fifty years, rather than just taking it to the streets. But that doesn't mean I am right. History will tell.

What needs to be known is this: That he's my brother—good, bad, or in-between. And I fight for his right to be the tallest rose in the garden.

Enjoy his story. Enjoy this book.

PETER GORMAN is an award-winning investigative journalist who has spent more than twenty-five years tracking down stories, from the streets of Manhattan, to the slums of Bombay, to the jungles of Peru. Gorman worked for *High Times* magazine for fourteen years as a senior editor, executive editor, and as editor-in-chief. His feature writing and editorials have appeared in dozens of major national and international magazines, he has consulted for both National Geographic's *Explorer* series and the BBC's *Natural World*, and he has appeared in several documentaries and hundreds of radio programs. He is the author of *Ayahuasca in My Blood: 25 Years of Medicine Dreaming*.

INTRODUCTION

Shamanic healing has been around for thousands of years and will remain for thousands more. During the Eurocentric age of reason, the birth of empiricism and materialism, we were led away from believing in things we could not see and hear, that we could not place in our hands and feel and weigh. This contrived reality found its way to the Americas a little over 500 years ago, and through force of arms, unknown viruses, and the Spanish Inquisition, it ravaged cultures and humiliated the medicine men, taking away their gods and forcing them into submission. There remained, however, a few daring souls who continued to practice their magic, hidden from the death threats of the conquistadors.

At the National University of Peru in Iquitos can be found a scientist hard at work in his test tube–laden lab, processing one of the Sacred Power Plants, ayahuasca, into powdered form. Ayahuasca is an *entheogen*, meaning “generating the Divine within”; it is a medicinal plant that has been used for thousands of years by Amazonian shamans (see [appendix 1](#)). For years this scientist has been busy trying to decipher the secrets of this ancient medicine, with few new insights. The efforts to determine the alkaloid constituents that produce ayahuasca’s celebrated visions and hallucinations were easily accomplished, but, says the scientist, “We still cannot figure out how a group of five people all drinking the same ayahuasca at the same time can have the same hallucination at the same moment.” Such is the pity in being a scientist.

“What you are trying to measure or weigh cannot be done,” I told him. “Whatever intricacies of this medicine you are trying to intellectually discover will always leave you one short. No matter what you do, how many tests you make, or how numerous the compounds you find, your scientific method will never get you to the bottom of this mystery. Why? Because you cannot measure God, you cannot weigh the Divine.”

“Yes, I know that,” he replied. “But I am a scientist. This is what I must search for, what I have to do.”

What a thankless task, looking for the Light in a test tube! How do you factor the Divine in a scientific formula?

Within the field of quantum physics, science has come upon an interesting phenomenon: the outcome of an event can be influenced by its viewers. It has taken scientists until now to figure out what shamans have known forever.

The shaman, the “maker of myths” who classically keeps one foot in this world and the other in the spirit world, is not to be confused with the *brujo*, or witch, who dances with evil. Both are powerful. But the shaman holds hands with the Divine, working as a medium between this world’s reality and the spiritual realm. He or she charms the Divine into rituals by prayer and song. The shaman’s world is of visions and hallucinations, a world of grace and madness.

In Tarapoto, one of the primary cities in Peru for the manufacture and distribution of cocaine, a Frenchman, Dr. Jacques Mabit, began his vision quest by seeking out

healers and ayahuasca rituals, looking for a teacher. During his search, a voice spoke to him announcing his future. After six years of research in the Peruvian Upper Amazon, the world's largest coca leaf producing zone, which is also one of the prime consumers of cocaine base, Jacques set up a clinic in Tarapoto in 1992 for research on traditional medicines and for curing cocaine addicts and other drug abusers through ayahuasca shamanism. He called his center Takiwasi.

These days there is an incredible need to keep your immune system strong. Allopathic medicine has confirmed that ayahuasca and other Sacred Power Plants can do just that. According to some healers in Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru, these Sacred Power Plants might even effect a cure for AIDS.

Within the mythologies handed down to us from the mountains of the Andes to the jungles of the Amazon is the same prognostication: we have come full circle. We are now witnessing a move back to the magic and etherealness of our ancestors and the rebirth of shamanism. It is in this realm that we shall ultimately heal all our wounds, for it is here that the soul, the body, and the mind are one and can be cured as a whole, rather than in parts.

In the last five hundred years our focus on industrialization, technology, and "progress" has moved us away from our source. As for me, I have taken a giant step backward, together with the knowledge of the present, to the almost-forgotten medicine and curative powers of the plants and to the healers who work through nature to cleanse the body and who, by divining the plant spirits and the gods, help us connect with the universal life force carried within each of us and so purify the soul. The more each and every one of us, throughout the world, understands this principle, and the sooner we realize that any sickness of the body, mind, or spirit is within the ether that we all share, the more likely the human race will begin to live in health, peace, and harmony.

THE QUEST

Twenty-one years ago, under a rain-swept shop canopy on Amazonas Street in downtown Quito, a wet gringo shouldered into some shelter. “Tourist?” I asked. We were standing so close it would have been uncomfortable to stand there much longer in silence. He studied me for a few seconds before deciding to speak.

“No, I’ve been comin’ here to Quito a couple months a year for the last twelve years.” He explained that he was by profession a Louisiana schoolteacher, but three months out of the year he came to Ecuador to search for gold in the Andes.

“How’s it going?” I asked.

“It’s been gettin’ better every year. Last year I was really close—almost found it,” he said exuberantly.

What a strange statement, I thought. “Almost? How do you know when you’ve almost found it?” I asked him.

“I’ve got a map!” he proudly stated.

I wish I had a map, I thought.

“What brings you here?” he asked me.

Why I would go into the details of my quest I do not know, but I found myself explaining to this gold-hunting Louisiana schoolteacher that I had come looking for a shaman. I felt silly using the vernacular *shaman*, but *curandero*, the correct term for a healer in South America, is way too confusing for the ordinary tourist. Besides, gringos have been telling the curanderos that they are shamans for so long now that many refer to themselves that way.

“I came down by land three months ago, through Mexico and Central America to Colombia, and finally to Quito. I’ve been traveling with Roberto here, from Venice, California.” I turned to my friend. “Roberto, this is—what did you say your name was?”

“I didn’t, but it’s Joe,” the schoolteacher said, extending his hand.

I had met Roberto back in Tucson a couple of months earlier, when his name was still Robert. I was to be the photographer for an expedition to the Amazon that Robert had organized. Of the six people who were supposed to be in his party, I was the only one who showed up. My first meeting with Robert came with a knock on my hotel room door; I opened it to a man with long, platinum-blond hair, a chest puffed out like a strutting rooster, and eyes the size of chicken eggs: “You must be Robert.”

He reached up high with his right hand, pulling an imaginary train whistle, and yelled, “Whewwwwwww!” After quick introductions, he changed my name: “Dude,” he said, holding his palm up looking to slap mine in a high-five salute. Roberto and I decided to continue with the expedition despite the absence of the rest of our party. During the next two months that we traveled together I heard my name, Alan, only enough times to jog my memory. And when we walked across the border into Mexico,

he changed his name, too. From that point on he was Roberto. “When in Spain,” he shrugged.

Joe the schoolteacher reached into his back pocket, pulling a business card from his billfold. “I don’t know who this is,” he drawled. “I got it several months ago and still have it. Don’t know why I even kept it. Maybe I’m supposed to give it to you. Anyway, here it is.”

I liked the way he considered there must be some reason why he saved the card, especially since this was 1992, a year before publication of *The Celestine Prophecy*, the New Age cult classic that popularized the term *synchronicity*. The card was printed in color with a busy logo in the upper left-hand corner that depicted a bird in a heart outline and an eye with a lit candle in the pupil. It was the calling card of Dr. Valentin Hampjes, “Scientific Investigator of Medicinal Plants, Psychiatrist, and Neuro-Medicine.”

“Must be a subtle way of saying he’s a shaman,” I said. We chuckled about the card, which I stuck in my shirt pocket. As the rain tapered away, Joe and I bid adieu.

I had not considered that the healer I would be led to would have a business card. Maybe this was a “map” meant for me. Enough odd synchronicities had occurred to me on this journey already that I couldn’t shrug this off.

SYNCHRONICITIES

During my travels with Roberto, I began to discern a pattern of synchronicity, a concept that describes meaningful coincidences, first described by Jung, running throughout my life. These synchronicities could manifest in mundane as well as significant ways.

Two months earlier, as Roberto and I waited in a large and overcrowded Guatemala City bus station, a handsome couple entered the moment my turn came to purchase a ticket that would take me onward in my journey. An unusual energy zinged through me when I noticed them there, thirty meters away. “Roberto, I don’t know why, but, for some reason I am supposed to connect with those two people.” I walked across the room to the bench where they were seated.

The woman’s beauty and regal posture took my breath away. Only then did I realize that perhaps they would not understand English. Taking a chance, I said, “Excuse me, but for some reason I am to speak with you. Maybe you know why?” The man translated my English to his partner, and we continued conversing as she surveyed me. They were brother and sister, from Mexico, on their way home, he told me.

The woman finally spoke. “What do you do?”

“I’m headed to the Amazon to study shamanism.”

She smiled, then explained, “I study sorcery in San Louis Potosi, in Mexico. When you have finished your studies in the Amazon, I invite you to come stay with us to learn sorcery. We have a large ranch.” She wrote the address down for me. “Of course, you know you cannot have sex for five years when you take this path. It has been three years for me now. Can you do this?”

I was impressed, embarrassed, bewitched, and probably blushing from that statement. She had read my mind.

“It has been two years for me,” I lied. It had been only eighteen months, but rounding up to two years nudged me nearer to her bed.

In Calle, Colombia, I watched a man release a guinea pig at a betting pool. It ran down a lane and into a tiny door cut into an upside-down plastic dog-food bowl. There were about fifty of these bowls forming a horseshoe pattern at the end of a twenty-meter-long guinea pig drag strip. The object of the game was to place your money on the bowl you believe the guinea pig would enter. An odd sensation came over me as I played this game. I felt what I call a “knowing,” in which I was shown exactly which bowl the animal would choose. Holding my hand out in front of me, I allowed it to be guided to the correct bowl and then placed the change on top. The pig was released and, quite matter-of-factly, sauntered into my chosen bowl.

Roberto saw me yelling, “Yes! Yes!” and collecting the money. “What’s happening, Dude?”

I explained how I had received this information.

“It’s just coincidence, Dude.”

“No, Roberto. It happened just as I told you.”

He still refused to accept it, so I told him I would do it again. I held my hand out like a divining rod. Nothing came. I waited. Nothing. It was sort of embarrassing, and so I became a bit agitated. There I was, angry and frustrated, my hand full of change stretched out in front of me, waiting for some otherworldly guidance so I could place a bet. This was ridiculous. Worse, however, was seeing Roberto smirking in the background. The very idea of getting a message this way had to be absurd. But there I was with my arm stretched out, looking like something from *The Return of the Mummy*, hoping something would happen.

I realized that not only was this the first time I had ever called this energy to me but that I had even asked something of it. I quieted my mind and centered myself. Sure enough, after only two or three minutes, it came. Or at least I thought it did. I followed the sensation and moved toward the left side of the lineup of fifty bowls, allowing my hand to place the change on top of the specific one I was guided to. The guinea pig was released. It scurried down the lane to the opposite side of where I had placed my money, stuck its head in the door, then stopped, turned around and marched straight across to the other side, directly into my bowl.

“Yes! Yes!” I yelled, and turned to see Roberto covering his gaping mouth with his hand. Still, I was shocked and stunned. What this experience signified to me was that the energies, spirits, angels, or whatever it was coming to me could be called in. I had never considered that possibility. And it also meant that these same energies were also communicating with the animals.

Glancing back over my life I now see that even during my childhood similar odd events occurred, and at the time I had no realization they contained any significance. Now, with sixty years of experience and being a grandfather, I see things a little more clearly. The years have brought more to me than just perspective; the Light is better.

Remembering my childhood in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, I see a child onto which much magic was bestowed. At nine years of age, I was sauntering down Central Street when I was rained on by baby frogs. I looked around and quickly noticed that it was only within my fifty-foot radius that this was happening. I was alone.

A few years later, when my sister was sick, I crept downstairs late at night because something told me to go to her. As I neared her bed, she opened her eyes.

“Alan, what are you doing?” she quietly asked me.

“I don’t know, Carla, but I just feel that if I could put my hands near you, move them over your body for a few minutes, I could make you feel better. Is that okay?”

“Yeah, okay.”

“Where does it hurt?” I remember asking her.

As she placed her hands on her stomach to indicate where her pain was located, I began moving my hands lightly over the area and thinking about taking away her hurt. I remember having the feeling that I was watching myself do this from a distance—

seeing a little boy healing her and watching the healing energy radiate in his hands. After only five minutes I asked her, “Do you feel better?” And in that rich southeastern Kentucky twang of hers she replied, “Why, yes, I do. Thank you, Alan. I do feel better now. I do. You made it go away.” In the innocence of youth, she wasn’t amazed, and neither was I.

One day, coming home from playing on the mountain, as I stopped to allow my brother to catch up, a strange feeling came over me that I must look under my left foot. Beneath my foot was a rock buried in the ground. I had to dig it up, as only the surface of the rock was exposed. I dug it out with my foot, kicked it over, and it was hollow but full of minerals and crystals—a geode. I was awed by the magical way it was delivered to me.

DR. VALENTIN HAMPJES

The complicated imagery on the calling card of Dr. Valentin Hampjes that the Louisiana schoolteacher had given me remained fixed in my mind, so I decided to phone him. He invited Roberto and me to his home in Tumbaco, a small community twenty miles outside of Quito. We arrived at the home of the good doctor, a cottage nestled at the end of a dirt and cobblestone alley, on a Friday morning. Surrounding the whitewashed brick home were dozens of columnar San Pedro cactus plants, some over six feet tall with several branches. In the center of his front yard was a heart carved out of grass two meters in diameter, rimmed by flowers, and in the center was a huge cactus. We knocked on the door and were greeted by a bearded man of about fifty-five with silver hair and laughing, mischievous eyes. He invited us in.

Valentin spoke fluent Spanish as well as his native German, and intoned his English somewhat like an East European count. His eyes and mouth were constantly smiling in that Freudian “I perceive everything” way, especially when he was puffing on his tobacco pipe, that mannerism perhaps coming from his having received a doctorate in psychiatry and neurology in Vienna, Austria. On the south wall of his home was an altar covered in fresh and dried flowers, with every deity imaginable represented by statuettes, photos, and postcards. He even had a living enlightened master, Sai Baba, contained there in a frame on the altar. To the right of the altar, above the door to his private medical and massage room, was a poster of the Virgin Mary in blissful repose. From the look of all these icons it was clear that Valentin was not the type of shaman to leave anything to chance.

We spent the morning discussing his perceptions of healing through curanderismo. Valentin primarily works with San Pedro, the columnar, psychotropic, mescaline-containing cactus that grows in the Andes. He believes it to be a superior medicine to ayahuasca, a boiled cocktail of a vine and leaf growing in the jungles of the Amazon and also very psychotropic. However, Valentin lives in the Andes, where ayahuasca is not easily available. In my twenty years of apprenticing to the Sacred Power Plants it has been interesting to note that every healer I have ever met has professed that the plant they have the most access to is always the one holding the most power.

Dr. Valentin Hampjes was a very wise and spiritual man, although a bit overly religious in a somewhat exaggerated way. He recognized the healing potentials inherent in allopathic medicine as well as shamanism and would choose one form of medicine over the other to produce the desired results depending on the situation. Lying on the coffee table in front of him was a hardbound copy of a book he had written, *Shamanismo—Extasis of Shamanic Consciousness*. This had been written to justify his having being given a license by the Ecuadorian government to administer entheogens, the sacred plants that engender a psychotropic effect and assist you in realizing the “Divine within,” and more importantly, to pass along the knowledge of the use of these plants. A quick glance through the book showed that his roots were also firmly entrenched in Krishna consciousness, of which he was a devotee.

He spoke to me of activating the healer within through the use of the Sacred Power Plants. The wisdom held within these plants can locate the specific malady of a person, whether it be spiritual, emotional, physical, or some combination thereof. If the illness is physical, the body's response or immune system gets activated. If the illness is psychological or spiritual in origin, the patient can be shown, through visions and hallucinations while under the influence of San Pedro or any of the other Sacred Power Plants, when and where the errors were made. In many cases the manifestation of an illness is based in unhealed traumas to the soul; these can lead to psychological imbalances that can ultimately manifest as physical symptoms. If we allow the spirit of the plants to show us why the disturbances exist or where they come from, we can begin to heal ourselves. "You can feel the psychotropic medicines moving through your body, lingering in areas that need attention, activating the immune system to rectify the problem," he explained. "Occidental medicine treats the symptoms, and so our immune system is not activated, it remains asleep."

In speaking with Valentin I learned that it is essential to get the ego out of the way so that healing can take place. One method of accomplishing this is by ingesting the Sacred Power Plants. Sometimes we are granted a vision, which Valentin considers a gift of grace and not to be confused with the many hallucinations coming to you during your journey. However, the mind can manufacture projections of events you have refused to take lessons from or have given little significance to. "This is a hallucination of great value," Valentin explained. "It may come in metaphorical form, so it is essential to pay attention. Visions render knowledge directly from the spirit world and are quite rare."

At the end of our visit, Valentin invited us to return the next day at noon for his weekly San Pedro ritual. His pre-ceremonial advice was to fast upon awakening Saturday morning. Additionally, he gave us a long list of herbs we were to purchase in the Quito market, including several herbs that he would steep in a fifty-gallon container all night long. He asked us to bring fresh-cut flowers for the altar, as well.

Roberto and I arrived on Saturday afternoon, having fasted according to Valentin's instructions. As a result of my conversations with various people in Quito about the upcoming San Pedro ceremony, seven other curious, adventure-seeking tourists from various parts of the globe decided to join us. Upon our arrival we found candles burning on the altar and the smell of incense filled the room. It was early in the afternoon, and Valentin used this time for personality checks, determining the variety of profiles he would have to take into consideration during the evening's ingestion of San Pedro. Each person was asked about their drug history, religious beliefs, what medications they may be on and for how long, what they hoped to gain from participating in the ritual, were there any major physical conditions to be taken into account, and had anyone a history of mental illness and how it had been classified. In general, he was searching for any clues as to possible abnormal behaviors, whether emotional, physical, or spiritual, that might surface while under the influence of the San Pedro medicine. He was especially interested in anyone who had long-term psychiatric problems. Someone who is not balanced in waking reality could certainly have problems with an entheogen. When he questioned me, my responses centered on the energies and synchronicities I had been receiving. I told him that as far as I could