The Labyrinth of Ayahuasca

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By

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From the unnamable we come and into the unnamable we go,
In the meantime, we are trapped within the name.

To the intrepid builders of bridges between being and non-being.

To Don Patricio Pineda (Mazatec Indian),
Juan Flores (Asháninka Indian),
Mamerto Yawarcani (Cocama Indian),
and Emerson Jackson (Navajo Indian),
for their vital transmissions.

To Doctors Rosa Giove, Jacques Mabit and Eduardo Gastelumendi
for their perseverance in these worlds.

To my daughter Blanca for my absences and to Teresa
for her presence.

And to Esther Zaccagnini for her laborious editing in English.

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PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

I am one of those inquirers of the mind, who, since our youth, have explored the worlds of Zen and Traditional Indigenous Medicine, seeking how to expand the various fields of psychologies so as to make sense of human suffering. This book is the fruit of this yearning and research.

While following this calling, the shadows appeared. After gathering views on people's concerns around the world, I came to the conclusion that the source of all problems might be that humanity denies the meaning of life. That is, humanity has forgotten to keep wondering what we are here for. The meaning of life has faded into our robotic actions that fill our daily lives, leaving consciousness aside. As a consequence, the dual mind, when locked in ego in a destructive duality, acts upon the others and Nature in a predatory way to exploit them to its own end. It is fear hiding behind a heartless rationale while living an outward life that has laid the foundations of the mechanical modernity that today is coming to an end.

Throughout more than two thousand years, there have been many messages: those of the Buddha, Jesus, the Sufis, the Vedanta-Advaita, the shamanic identification with Nature, and so many others. Yet the message of life as an elevation toward luminous goodness, based on the fact that THE TRUTH is within us, does not seem to have permeated the vast majority of us. The mystery rises way beyond the mental void and a dull solitary nirvana. It rises in a *passive* and *receptive action* to allow for the descent of whatever is beyond our *action* and our mental comprehension. The great silence opens the door of life and allows the descent of light-energy that pushes matter, unfolding the great mystery: humankind´s longing to opens the doors of death. It takes our conscious and continuous alertness for this to happen. In this way, when accepting being *acted upon*, the human being reaches the maturity of oneness. This is a FACT—do not get lost in concepts—that we either experience or we do not. These words emanate from these wisdom traditions.

Currently, science cannot verify the experiences of the high states of meditation or the high shamanic states, accessible from the personal, non-transferable, and ineffable experience. These experiences penetrate the

mystery of a reality beyond time, space, and matter. If we are fortunate enough, a critical mass of people will have access to it, and there will be hope for true peace in the world.

M.A.

FOREWORD

STANLEY KRIPPNER. PH.D.

Something Has Gone Wrong

Over the years, Dr. Manuel Almendro has been charting the history of shamanism as well as its association with psychedelic substances. Now he has brought these two fields together in a remarkable book that is destined to become a classic. *The Labyrinth of Ayahuasca* contains translations of Spanish material not hitherto available to English language readers.

This book is of special interest to me because of my long history regarding ayahuasca. When I was a doctoral student at Northwestern University, my anthropology professor, William McGovern, told me about his encounter with a shaman in Peru. Professor McGovern watched in awe as the shaman drank yagé (another term for ayahuasca) and described a memorial service for another shaman who had just died a few hundred miles away. A while later, Professor McGovern reached that tribe, discovering that the shaman had died unexpectedly, and that all the details of the other shaman's account were completely accurate. All of this is recorded in his book, *Jungle Paths and Inca Ruins,* which I have cited many times over the years.

More recently, the Institute of Noetic Sciences asked me to take a few study groups to Brazil, where we encountered the religious groups that use ayahuasca as a sacrament, namely, Santo Daime, União de Vegetal, and Barquinha. When our group was invited to attend an ayahuasca ceremony, we eagerly accepted the offer, which allowed me to have my first ayahuasca session, a remarkable event. A student of mine, Joseph Sulla, and I collected first-person reports from people describing their ayahuasca sessions, publishing the results in the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* in 2000.

Thus, I was delighted to read Manuel's book, because he has an impressive history, having spent considerable time with Indigenous groups in the rainforests and then reflecting on the profound discoveries he made. He vividly describes the symbiosis of plants, humans, and other animals, and

how practitioners of Traditional Indigenous Medicine (TIM) have placed their empirical findings within a framework that seems ineffable, combining objective and subjective experiences. He has contrasted the humility of TIM practitioners with the arrogance of Western interlopers, who make proud declarations of what they have discovered, typically ignoring the centuries of groundwork that preceded them.

Central to TIM is the belief that extra-human forces, the so-called "spirits"–both benign and malevolent—are constantly interacting with humans. It is upon the benevolent spirits that the shamans and master *ayahuasceiros* call to help community members face the mystery, the terror, and the delights that are not only a part of the sacred sessions, but also appear as the challenges, opportunities, and traumas that arise in daily living. From the perspective of Western psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy, TIM facilitates work on what can be referred to as the world of subjective reality (WSR), as well as the collective world of objective reality (WOR).

Like Manuel, I have listened to the *Icaros,* the songs that accompany ayahuasca sessions, but have never had the opportunity to let them seep into my awareness to the extent that they evoke the very soul of their natural ambience. Manuel, on the other hand, describes their emergence and the way that they permeate the Amazon rainforest and its inhabitants, those that crawl, those that fly, those that sink their roots into the earth, and those that extend into the cosmos itself, addressing the mysteries of life.

Bridges

Manuel uses the term *bridges* in the sense that he and those like him can help practitioners of TIM to pass from one side to the other. Years ago, when I was working with the intertribal medicine man Rolling Thunder, he used the same word, telling me that I could best serve Indigenous people by creating bridges, so that their wisdom could be passed on to my contemporaries, and that they, in turn, could provide avenues that would enhance and support the needs of his compatriots and those of other "First Nation" peoples.

I also served as a *bridge* when I attended a meeting of the Rainforest Action Network, where I heard that young people in the Amazon rainforest were hanging themselves in protest of the deforestation that had been running rampant. I told them that Rolling Thunder had faced the same problem when bulldozers were flouting the law by destroying the pine nut trees upon which his community depended for food. He and his crew videotaped the bulldozers

and, at night, poured sand into their gas tanks so that they would no longer operate. He sent a delegation to Washington, DC, with the videotapes, playing them to a number of senators, some of whom took action to stop the destruction of the pine nut trees.

Veladas

Manuel's discussion of shamanism cites the celebrated article in a 1957 issue of *Life* magazine in which R. Gordon Wasson described his encounter with a Mazatec shaman in central Mexico, who allowed him to participate in one of her mushroom *veladas.* I never forgot that article, and in 1980 I joined a Mexican psychiatrist and his entourage in a hazardous journey to the hamlet where María Sabina lived. Doña María, who was a friend of the psychiatrist, enabled our group to participate in a *velada* with one of her students, Doña Cleotilde. It was the dry season, leading Doña Cleotilde to lament that she did not have enough mushrooms for the entire group, so I volunteered to abstain, as I had already experienced *los hongitos, "*the little ones.*"* She said that I could be her assistant; as it turned out, I learned more in that capacity than I would have as an active participant.

Our group appreciated the two visits we had with Doña Maria, but her face was lined with sadness. A prior revelation had triggered the murder of her son and the destruction of her home and store. Manuel was correct in pointing out that there was no automatic protection granted to her and others, simply because they sing eloquent songs during the *veladas.*

Ecopiratism

One of the many contributions that Manuel has made is his acknowledgment of the complexities of the Indigenous universe, including the intricacies of TIM that cannot easily be explained away by Western anthropologists. I have witnessed this myself, when I have seen practitioners "incorporate" spirits, converse with them, and expunge them when they seemed to become malevolent. Manuel pointed out that the basis of this bias is Westerners' "mechanical-causal rationalism." Hence, Western society fails to understand the "immaterial" processes of TIM.

But Manuel also establishes a link between Western rationalism and its commercial implications. I had an opportunity to witness this first-hand at the International Holistic University, or UNIPAZ, in Brasilia in April 1988, at a time that coincided with the National Encounter of *Pajé*s, which was

being held at the City of Peace. *Pajés,* or shamans, from some forty tribal nations in Brazil, had assembled to combat "ecopiratism," the theft by outsiders of their resources and tribal knowledge. This encounter was sponsored by *O Fundação Nacional de Indias,* the National Foundation of Indians. I was able to interact with many of the *paj*és during mealtimes, as we all ate at the same restaurant at the City of Peace. I was also allowed to visit the encampment of the *pajés*, which was located near a beautiful waterfall on the UNIPAZ property.

The *paj*é with whom I had the most frequent contact was Itambe Pataxo, a representative of the Pataxo Nation and well-known activist. Together, we rang the Peace Bell, a gift to the City of Peace from a Japanese foundation in honor of the university's work in the area of conflict resolution. A few years earlier, I had represented the United States when the Peace Bell was first dedicated. Itambe told me that, in 1996, an American company, Coriel Cell Repositories, and a Brazilian physician had launched a clandestine commercial operation in a village inhabited by the Karitiana tribe in northwestern Brazil. Although they had obtained permission from the National Foundation of Indians to study an animal that was native to the region, they had instead drawn blood samples from members of the Karitiana, who naively trusted the outsiders. A similar procedure was followed to obtain blood samples from the neighboring Surui tribe. Each village was a small enclave of a few hundred Indigenous who live a poor but peaceful life as subsistence farmers, growing rice, beans, and corn. When the fraud was uncovered, a special commission of Brazil's House of Deputies denounced the scheme, but no punitive action was taken.

According to the shaman Cizino Karitiana, the most outrageous aspect of the incident was that the "researchers" were accompanied by a representative of the National Foundation of Indians, who did nothing to stop the abuse. On the fateful day, the shaman was asked to guide eight researchers to the rainforest to look for wildlife and medicinal herbs. In the meantime, two "researchers" stayed in the Karitiana village and drew blood from everyone, including elders and babies. The "researchers" told the Indigenous that they had all been infected and that their blood needed to be examined for diagnostic purposes. When Cizino returned, he was told that he would endanger the entire village unless he also gave blood.

The information gleaned from these incursions was in great demand from biotechnology companies, intrigued by the fact that Indigenous could function in extreme tropical heat and, moreover, appeared to be immune to many tropical illnesses. The "researchers" were reportedly trying to produce

medicines to help soldiers resist such illnesses and weather conditions during combat in tropical regions. The researchers had also visited Domingos Kaingague, a well-known *pajé* in the state of Para. He had given them some prescriptions for various illnesses, ranging from cancer to the common cold. A brief time later, these prescriptions were published in a book, without the village's authorization or any kind of financial compensation.

At the end of the week-long encounter, the *pajé*s produced a Charter of the Principles of Indigenous Knowledge, which was publicized throughout the country. I was given a copy of this Charter, and I promised them that I would have it translated and would distribute it once I returned to the United States. The document ended by stating:

> The Earth is our Great Mother. Nature is the largest pharmacy that exists in the world. Without nature, our traditional knowledge will not be useful to our people or to the rest of humanity. The invaders' greed has resulted in the transformation of our natural resources into money. This greed has brought sickness, starvation, and death to our people. During the fires in the northern state of Roraima, many animals, herbs, and vines that we used in our medicines perished, and they no longer exist. Our Great Mother Earth is mortally wounded, and if she dies, we will die as well. If she dies, the invaders will have no future. Therefore, we demand protection of our lands. We demand the guarantee, through demarcation, of the space that is necessary for our physical and cultural survival.

I sent this declaration to several magazines and journals for publication, most notably *Shaman's Drum*, where it attracted considerable attention. A friend of mine put it on the Internet, and it must have had some impact, because one of my colleagues returned from Brazil telling me that his photographic equipment was thoroughly inspected, with the Customs agent stating, "We want to make sure that you are not going to take blood from our Indigenous."

There are exceptions among Western scholars; indeed, Manuel cites the cultural mythologists as examples. The mythologist Joseph Campbell cogently presented a vast variety of ancient and contemporary mythologies that stand in stark contrast to the Western materialistic paradigm. For Campbell, myths are collections of symbols and images that are metaphorical in nature, as they attempt to explain and guide human conduct. Many mythologies of Eastern Asia are replete with gods, goddesses, demigods, spirits, and the like. When Westerners try to erase references to these entities, they also eliminate metaphors that have been useful for human survival over the eons.

But Manuel is also correct when he sees some hopeful signs of change, especially from those who realize that the interaction between physics and materialistic psychology shows that not all reality can be reduced to mechanical principles. Among those examples are recent books alleging that consciousness is primary, not merely the *result* of brain activity. In their book *Transcendent Mind: Rethinking the Science of Consciousness*, Imant Barušs and Julia Mossbridge present a model that contradicts the prevailing view that mental activity originates in the brain. To the contrary, they draw upon studies of mediumship, out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, and their interpretation of quantum physics to maintain that consciousness is primary. Their perspective unleashed a variety of criticisms; in addition, their publisher, the American Psychological Association, was attacked as having lost its moorings. However, I felt that the book, and those like it, heralded a growing awareness that the prevailing paradigm has been found wanting and needs to be modified or replaced.

Top/Bottom and Bottom/Top

In another departure from conventional thinking, Manuel observed that medical diagnosis is based on what he calls *cognocentric prejudice*, which is strongly engrained in Western culture and extended to other cultures. Ethan Watters, in his book, *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the American Psyche,* shows how *colonial psychiatry* has permeated other cultures. For example, Watters notes that, when a tsunami hit Sri Lanka in 2004, well-meaning "experts" rushed to treat the populace for "trauma," when the money could have been better used to rebuild the devastated buildings.

Shamans and other practitioners of TIM have constructed non-cognocentric models of thinking, using a different type of logic, one that encompasses synchronicity, symbolism, spirality, fluidity, and reverse causality. These dynamic systems can experiment, evaluate, draw conclusions, and propose new perspectives. Had they not been able to do so, these systems would not have become a part of humanity's evolutionary heritage.

Western scientists strive to be "objective," understanding the world by detaching themselves from what they are studying. Practitioners of TIM, in contrast, understand their world by immersing themselves in it. There are exceptions, but most Western scientists take what I would call a "top/bottom" approach, viewing the "bottom" from the "top," and producing explanations that will help them navigate their way through the "bottom." Shamans and other practitioners of TIM take a "bottom/top" approach, becoming a part

of their world and then moving to the "top," generalizing from what they have learned.

Archetypes

Carl Gustav Jung wrote about *archetypes*, the themes and images that reside in what he called the "collective unconscious," that part of the psyche that has been biologically derived over the millennia. TIM is rooted in these archetypes, while most Western scientists ignore them. Nonetheless, they surface in dreams and in such artistic productions as rock art, literature, music, paintings, and the like. They also serve as the foundation for religious sects, but typically become ossified as dogma – in sharp contrast to TIM, which discards a schema that is no longer useful, replacing it with a more pragmatic one.

Archetypal themes take the form of images, either symbols (that are static) or metaphors (that are constantly in motion). The "hero" archetype is a symbol, but the "hero's journey" is a metaphor. The "Star Wars" films were successful because they were replete with archetypal material, and this was deliberate, as their creator, George Lucas, read books by Joseph Campbell and other mythologists when creating his stories. Once he began his second trilogy, I was invited to address his staff on the topic of mythology and to suggest colleagues who could do the same. My talk was very well received, and I was shown the "museum" that contained the original light sabers as well as the small models for planets that seemed immense on screen.

Manuel notes that the "hero's quest," described eloquently by Campbell, exists in all religions, mythologies, and human belief systems that are armed with a heightened perception of reality. I would add that this thematic account, among others, had survival value in the lives of early humans.

Survival Skills

Early humans and their antecedents needed to survive and to pass on those skills to future generations. The brains and bodies of early humans were adapted to survive and reproduce, not to design scientific experiments. But some attempts to survive outlive their usefulness, as time goes on. Recent studies of holocausts, famines, natural disasters, and their survivors demonstrate how the effects of these traumas can be passed on to their children (and, quite possibly, their grandchildren). These mechanisms are dubbed *epigenetics*, the modification of gene expression (but not the genes

themselves). In a 2019 article in the *Journal of Mind and Behavior*, Deirdre Barrett and I described *epigenetics* as the study of cellular variations that are caused by external, environmental factors that "switch" genes "on" and "off," making changes in the phenotype of genetic expression without concomitant changes in the DNA sequence or genotype.

There is a growing body of research with humans and other animals seeming to inherit a predisposition for fear from their ancestors, presumably mediated by the DNA itself, and then a more specific fear conditioning through epigenetics. Primates' brains are uniquely tuned to recognize spiders and snakes. Human infants are not afraid of these creatures at birth, but learn to fear them more quickly than they learn to fear other stimuli such as rabbits. Another study found that unborn crickets whose mothers were stalked by wolf spiders demonstrated a greater fear of those spiders after they were born than crickets whose mothers had not been exposed. In his own age, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck was reviled for his notion that acquired characteristics could be inherited. Today he is being hailed as ahead of his time. In reflection, I might suggest that this process, or something like it, may account for the creation of archetypes. The prevalence of snakes and spiders in various mythologies may be archetypal in nature.

I am not an expert on genetics, but will hazard some conjectures. The exodus of modern humans from Africa has been dated to 60,000 years ago, but students of *genomics*, the study of genes, have detected traces of modern human genes going back far earlier. Genes of Neanderthals can still be detected in the genes of modern humans, but the genes of the latter also sometimes show up in the genes of the former, suggesting migrations that occurred more than 60,000 years ago. Furthermore, Neanderthal genes contain traces of Denisovans, an even earlier group of so-called "proto-humans." The data get even more complex when genomic researchers report genes from yet earlier groups, as evidenced by studies in Indonesia. *Homo sapiens* are the sole survivors of the genus *Homo*, but their descent was not linear; there were multiple exchanges of genes among the various groups along the way. The survival of *Homo sapiens* was probably due to an increase in cortical capacity, the size and complexity of the brain, with the latter more important than the former.

The production of artistic objects has been thought to characterize only *Homo sapiens*, a species that emerged some 300,000 years ago; yet there are archaeological discoveries in Europe that date back even earlier, notably a female figure with an estimated date of about 400,000 years ago, suggesting that artistic productions had a far earlier beginning. This predates

the famous "Venus of Willendorf" (which I was fortunate to view when I was in Vienna) with an estimated date of only 30,000 years ago. Depending on how the term *art* is defined, there are non-human species that demonstrate that capacity. A species of birds makes attractive constructions to lure mates; and various primates create tools, some of which seem to be esthetically pleasing.

Furthermore, the notion that human artistic productions are due to "cultural transmission" was abandoned when similar productions were observed in various parts of the world. Jung insisted that *archetypes* are biological in nature: contemporary scholars might use different terms to describe the plethora of artistic or artistic-like productions by *Homo sapiens*, "proto-humans," and non-human species, but their bases are still biological in origin. Human ancestry dates back millions of years, and the evolutionary chain was clearly convoluted, rather than direct.

In his 1992 book, *Food of the Gods*, Terrence McKenna argued that the ingestion of psychedelic mushrooms played a vital role in human evolution. This hypothesis has not been favorably received by the academic community – in my opinion, rightfully so. I am more impressed by McKenna's emphasis on how the tenets of shamanism are crucial in today's world, as he sees various cultural phenomena as evidence, including abstract art, "raves," rock and roll, tattoos, and other such, also noted by Manuel. McKenna uses the term *sick* to describe Western culture, in alignment with Manuel's suggestion that "something has gone wrong." Manuel's phrase resounds throughout his book, forcing his readers to examine their culture and their lives to detect their inherent flaws.

Shamans and Shamanism

Manuel points out that the word *shamans* is not a synonym for *shamanism*, and I agree, because shamans are practitioners and shamanism is a practice. From my perspective, all shamans, regardless of the name a society gives them, shift their awareness in order to obtain information that is not ordinarily available to members of their community. I often write about the "Five Ds of Shamanism" (in the English language), namely, dance, diet, dreams, drumming, and deprivation (abstaining from sleep, food, sex, etc.). Information that can be obtained through drugs can also be accessed in other ways, including such reputed behaviors as physical "transformation." When shamans "transform" themselves into their "power animals," they are contacting their biological roots, perhaps what Jungians refer to as "archetypes."

Taking a "top-down" perspective, Western scientists and medical practitioners have ignored these valuable assets. When Manuel writes about the importance of "exchanging energy with the environment," he is describing the shamans' "bottom/top" approach to their practice. Manuel suggests that the proclivity of many young people in the West to engage in "extreme experiences" and "risk-taking" may be their attempt to make connections with the knowledge that their culture has failed to provide. The psychologist Frank Farley has documented many of these pastimes; when they result in disaster, they demonstrate the lack of context that TIM has always provided. This is especially true in the case of experimentation with mind-altering substances, taken without the wisdom that shamans have provided for themselves and their communities.

Manuel calls for the establishment of "safe spaces" for these adventures, with "maestros" available to guide those who are interested in these worlds of non-ordinary states of consciousness. I recall Timothy Leary advocating such centers half a century ago, but his own attempts to construct them were not grounded in shamanic wisdom. Instead, he advocated the use of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which is a classic document but too obtuse and verbal to be of much help to someone in the middle of a "trip." Far more useful is James Fadiman's 2011 book, *The Psychedelic Explorer's Guide: Safe Therapeutic and Sacred Journeys.* Fadiman's book is quite well written, as it presents practices for safe and successful psychedelic voyages, including the benefits of having a guide and instructions on how to become a guide. Even so, it does not take a shamanic perspective, which would probably have puzzled most of his readers. However, Fadiman does distinguish between the clinical and cultural uses of psychedelics, which is what Manuel advises. Luc Sala's 2019 book, *Sacred Journeys,* takes a similar approach and also contains a section for first-time "trippers." But Sala digs much deeper and puts much of his material in a shamanic context.

Manuel provides advice of his own within the context of how psychedelics can serve the purpose of self-knowledge, an endeavor that is especially helpful in facing one's "demons," especially those rooted in family dysfunctions. Self-knowledge can help people prepare for a psychedelic "trip," because it involves being aware of one's own history, especially traumas. He also advises that people engage in inner work without the use of substances, in the course of which they may discover that there is a part of their psyche that cannot be grasped in their ordinary state of consciousness, thus needing further exploration. He advocates caution, noting that, while accessing shamanic knowledge through substances may occur, it is "better to climb the mountain if one is well-equipped." But he

also warns against "pseudo-shamans" and the suspicious substances that they offer, some of them hoping to entrap a naive neophyte. I would add that there are also well-meaning "pseudo-shamans" who have little understanding of the shamanic tradition. When someone claims to be a shaman, I advise asking, "What and where is your community?" Without a community that has conferred shaman status on a person, one cannot claim to be a shaman, or any of the equivalent terms in other languages. Manuel makes the final suggestion that "expanding one's consciousness" is useful only for those with a felt need for such an experience.

Research into psychedelics, from Manuel's perspective, demands a methodology involving both first- and third-person descriptions; he describes *biosemiotics* as such an approach. I have been familiar with *semiotics*, the study of signs and symbols used in communication, including those that do not include language (such as brands, gestures, computer emojis, logos, traffic signs). Since I once served on the doctoral committee of a student at Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo who used semiotics to study Brazilian mediums and their clients, I can see the value of this approach. "Biosemiotics" expands the range to sign processes in all of Nature, from signaling behavior that identifies the location of game to display behavior that attracts mates. Once again, it comes down to survival and reproduction and how they can be serviced.

Awe

Shamanism and its equivalent in other languages is the word utilized for expressing a primordial way of understanding the world, that is, the understanding that originated when humans were first astonished by the powerful natural phenomena they were witnessing. In recent years, the psychologist Kirk Schneider has written about the "psychology of awe," an emotion that has been too often neglected by other psychologists. When people experience awe, they are transported away from their customary ways of being, confronting the vastness of what they are experiencing, giving it meaning that can be described as "sacred," "sublime," or "divine." The experience of *awe* also acts as a buffer, keeping people from being overwhelmed by natural forces that are difficult to comprehend. Manuel describes the "premises of existential transpersonalism: a relentless struggle with mystery; the constant presence of death; existence seen as lightning striking the void; despair at impermanence; a call to plenitude; terror of the abyss; vital renewal; consciousness as participatory knowledge; and the

elevation of the individual to universal consciousness." All these observations are examples of *awe*.

Early humans experienced *awe* when viewing a sunset, an eclipse, the Northern Lights, the eruption of a volcano, the birth of an albino animal, and various other natural wonders, not all of which were positive in nature. Early humans coped with earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, epidemics, and attacks by wild animals by creating myths that provided a rationale for them. Sometimes they sacrificed humans or other animals to appease a perceived deity. At other times, they built shrines and temples to honor these unseen forces, or established codes of conduct and taboos. These rationales were expounded by tribal members whom contemporary psychologists describe as *fantasy-prone*, and it is likely that those who possessed this trait were the early shamans.

However, it was not only *fantasy proneness* that was important; the stories that the leaders created had to have explanatory power of some sort. The early shamans were also keen observers of nature, noting what plants animals ate to counteract sickness, observing the best places for hunters to locate prey, and identifying the most suitable location for gatherers to find food. But if early shamans did not have a "track record," they were probably deposed, exiled, or killed. One can understand why even today the role of shaman is not often eagerly pursued. As the Brazilian shaman Mae Menininha de Gantois told me, "When the spirits knock on your door, you must let them in. If you refuse their call, you will suffer unhappy consequences."

Mae Menininha was the granddaughter of the first enslaved couple to be liberated, and her temple in Salvador de Bahia was a rallying point for adherents of Candomblé, an African-Brazilian religion, for which she succeeded in her efforts to obtain legal status. On one of my trips to Brazil, I was honored to become an honorary member of Candomblé, and was told that Obatala, the *orixa* (deity) of wisdom, was my patron. Mae Menininha's patron was Oxum, the *orixa* of fertility. When Mae Menininha died, the state declared a three-day period of mourning, and her temple was declared a national monument.

Because I am in the lineage of Obatala, I was allowed to participate in the initiation of Yeye Luisah Teish, in Oakland, California. This remarkable event incorporated rituals that had their roots in West Africa. She often officiates at weddings and baptisms and is a ritualist and keynote speaker.

Properly known as Chief Iyanifa Fajembola Fatunmise, she has studied and chronicled events relating to many of Africa's spiritual cultures.

Colonialism

Manuel observes that shamanism kept evolving, and the evolution took its own path in different societies. Sometimes an unusual birthmark was the sign of a future shaman, and the child was given special training. Sometimes people recovered from a near-fatal illness, which event propelled them into the shamanic role. At other times, there was a lineage of shamans, meaning that one was "born" into the role. Shamanism is ubiquitous for the basic reason that its presence was necessary for the survival of a society.

Manuel observes that shamans were initially looked down upon by most of the colonizers, wherever they were encountered. In 2002 the *American Psychologist* published my article, "Conflicting perspectives on shamans and shamanism: Points and counterpoints," in which I documented this hostility. The European states that sent explorers to the Western Hemisphere were, for the most part, those that were executing tens of thousands of alleged witches. Torture yielded confessions that they had made pacts with the Devil, had desecrated sacred Christian ceremonies, or had consorted with evil spirits. Hence, many early chroniclers were Christian clergy who described shamans as "Devil-worshippers."

A 16th-century account by the Spanish navigator and historian, Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, describes "revered" old men who used tobacco in order to "worship the Devil." The first person to introduce tobacco to France was a French priest, André Thevet, who described a group of Brazilian practitioners called ***pajés***, describing them as "witches" who "adore the Devil." The ***pajés,*** he wrote, "use certain ceremonies and diabolical invocations" and "invoke the evil spirit" in order to "cure fevers."

Another French priest, Antoine Biet observed that the rigors of a decade-long apprenticeship provided the ***pajés*** with the "power of curing illness," but only by becoming "true penitents of the Demon." Avvakum Petrovich, a 17th-century Russian clergyman, was the first person to use the word "shaman" in a published text, describing one Siberian shaman as "a villain" who "calls upon demons." It should be noted that these early chroniclers admitted the therapeutic skills of shamans, while attributing their success to "demonic" forces.

I obtained much of this information from a valuable book, *Shamans Through Time: 500 Years on the Path to Knowledge,* by Jeremy Narby and Frances Huxley. Narby, an anthropologist, had earlier written *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and the Origins of Knowledge*, in which he suggested that the double helix shows up in ancient art forms because that image had become hard-wired into human brains and bodies. At the time, most conventional anthropologists did not take this contention seriously, but that was before the advent of epigenetics and evolutionary psychology.

Changing Times

It was only in the 19th century that some social scientists began to stop characterizing shamans through the lens of religion. But a new set of allegations arose. The French ethnopsychiatrist George Devereux concluded that shamans were mentally "deranged," and should be considered as severely neurotic or even psychotic. In the 1960s, the American psychiatrist Julian Silverman postulated that shamanism is a form of "acute schizophrenia," because the two conditions have in common "grossly non-reality-oriented ideation, abnormal perceptual experiences, profound emotional upheavals, and bizarre mannerisms." According to Silverman, the only difference between shamanic states and contemporary schizophrenia in Western industrialized societies was "the degree of cultural acceptance of the individual's psychological resolution of a life crisis." When shamans appeared in films, they were referred to as "witch doctors" and portrayed as eccentrics at best and villains at worst.

As Manuel noted, the shamanic explosion occurred in the second half of the 20th century through information reported by the media, articles in popular magazines, and—I might add—creditable books and articles in academic journals. It has taken several centuries for shamans to attain their rightful status, but they are now increasingly portrayed favorably both in academic and popular literature, a sign of changing times.

Manuel cites Mircea Eliade, who posited that humans developed religious forms in times prior to the Stone Age, which were later spread around the world through continuous flows of migration. I disagree with this great scholar on this point, even though he pioneered the academic interest in shamanism. I hold that these "religious forms" were innate to the human condition, and their adoption, occurring in the earliest of societies, had survival value.

I also disagree with Eliade's statement that the introduction of mind-altering drugs represented a corruption and "degeneration" of pristine shamanism. To the contrary, the use of psychedelic plants was endemic to shamanism from the very beginning of the practice, as noted in what has survived in artistic depictions as well as oral traditions. Manuel is correct when he states that the shamanic way of life emerged spontaneously as an innate human tendency for confronting the world and struggling to overcome disease.

Seekers

Fast forward to the present. Manuel points out that contemporary "seekers" do not have adequate frames of reference for the visions induced by the ingestion of these plants, nor do they have the behavioral or philosophical wherewithal to place the experiences within a sacred context.

As a result, Western self-proclaimed "shamans" have set up centers for ayahuasca and plant therapy in the Amazon and elsewhere to the detriment of the traditional practitioners and their clients, plus the diminishment of accessibility to the plants, due to over-harvesting. Some traditional shamans have exploited the unrealistic expectations of Western seekers, resulting in the deaths and permanent psychoses of some of them. While there has been some movement toward finding a way to integrate Traditional Indigenous Medicine (TIM) within the Western context, this is still in the very early stages. Manuel notes that the government of Nicaragua is taking steps to safeguard the sacred plants and traditions, while at the same time identifying another hazard: that evangelical Christians have murdered numerous shamanic practitioners, reverting to the colonists' accusation that shamans are demonic and must be punished.

I am a member of an international Ayahuasca Researchers listserv, one originated by the Brazilian-American anthropologist Bia Labate. Our members not only publish scholarly articles about ayahuasca, but document the all-too-prevalent accounts of faux shamanic centers, the exploitation and trivialization of ayahuasca rituals, and the attacks on the practice by powerful religious and governmental authorities. Bia's co-authored book, *Ayahuasca, Ritual, and Religion in Brazil*, explores the formation of religious communities in the Brazilian Amazon that base their rituals, myths, and guiding principles on the consumption of ayahuasca. The book summarizes the historical growth of this area of study, particularly from the standpoint of research methods in the human sciences.

One of my own research projects involved personal accounts of some 200 contemporary artists and musicians who had charted the impact of psychedelic substances (including ayahuasca) on their creative processes and products. My findings were in accord with Manuel's conclusion that, only if a person has previous creative potential, will it be further developed. Arlene Sklar-Weinstein, for example, considered her earlier work to be "competent but derivative." A single LSD session opened her art to include novel images and modes of expression that continued to develop over the following years.

Not all the participants in my study had psychedelic experiences that were totally pleasant, but they incorporated the negative images into their work. Manuel points out that some dangers come from an unknown, immaterial world that Westerners neither understand nor respect. And few Western researchers take the time or the effort that marks every chapter of Manuel's book. Without the requisite learning, one descends into the underworld of the unconscious and is unable to integrate experiences with what I would call archetypal forces. Manuel adds that the troubling experiences are toxified by the lens of declining Western culture. Indeed, something has gone terribly wrong.

In 2019, a team of researchers from Brazil and England published the first study of the use of ayahuasca on suicidality that used a control group. Their 30 participants, all Brazilians, were deeply depressed people for whom treatment had been ineffective, despite the use of a variety of anti-depressant medications. They had been recruited from out-patient clinics and from advertisements. To be eligible, the participants needed to have had no previous experience with psychedelics, no current medical diagnosis, no neurological disorder, no history of substance abuse, no family history of schizophrenia, and no diagnosis of bipolar affective disorder or mania. The participants needed to be between the ages of 18 and 60; pregnant women were excluded from the study. All participants underwent psychiatric interviews and took a psychological test to assure that they met the criteria of major depressive disorder but were not at imminent suicidal risk. All participants were told to discontinue their medications an average of two weeks prior to the experiment and for at least a week following the experiment. Daily use of benzodiazepines was permitted, except during the acute phases of the intervention.

On the morning of the intervention, participants were reminded of how to deal with their experiences and offered strategies for coping with those that seemed to be difficult. They were told to pay special attention to their bodily