

The background of the entire page is a vertical photograph of a sky. A bright, diagonal streak of light or smoke, possibly from a rocket or a meteor, cuts across the sky from the bottom left towards the top right. The sky is a deep blue, and the streak is a bright, hazy white with some internal structure.

A call from the unknown

Experiencing Ayahuasca

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To us

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Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	5
 <u>Part I</u>	
A call from the unknown	7
What is Ayahuasca?	16
Getting ready	19
 <u>Part II</u>	
Friday night	33
Daydreaming	46
Welcome to the present!	55
 <u>Part III</u>	
Waking up	83
Being in love	89
We are nature	95
 <u>Reflections</u>	
What has changed?	97
Messages from the jungle	103
How to describe an orgasm?	112

Any identifying details (names, places, nationalities, etc.) have been changed. Everything else has happened as described.

Introduction

“If we wish to die well, we must learn how to live well.”

The Dalai Lama

This book is about the space that lies in between life and death. It's a magical space which is ignored most of the time, but which is always there. Every single moment we are a part of it.

A CALL FROM THE UNKNOWN is the story of a man who is given the opportunity to step outside his comfort zone. It's an adventurous ride to a different reality, an encounter with terrifying darkness and blissful light. Full of laughter, fear and intense vomiting; full of love, peace and infinite gratitude. Here it is:

A personal experience of an Ayahuasca journey.

Mystifying, wild and divine!

Part I

A call from the unknown

When was the last time you did something that you've never done before? It could be anything – trying some new food for example or taking a different way home; exploring a new country, jumping out of a plane or giving a hug to a stranger. Fortunately there's an abundance of possibilities, for hardly a moment passes by without there being a chance to take a different route. To change the perspective.

Doing something you've never done before can feel very daunting, maybe even scary, but it will always make you feel excited. The prospect of entering new frontiers triggers a wild river of adrenalin rushing to your head, providing you with extra energy to face what lies ahead. Rather than watching others live their lives, you are suddenly right in the middle of living your own. And that's what it's all about – experiencing life first hand! Trying something new makes you feel alive.

June 2012, Estepona, Spain. I had just finished writing a new book and was enjoying a few weeks of Andalusian summer. June is a really good time to be along the Mediterranean coast

because the weather is great and there are only few tourists. Come July, it seems that the whole of Northern Europe migrates south to catch a bit of sun. Beaches are packed, parking becomes impossible and bar staff are terribly stressed. So if you want to relax and have guaranteed sunshine, it's got to be June or September.

Who am I? My name is Claus; I'm German and I'd say I am just a normal guy in his mid-thirties. I like football, poker and rum & coke. I earn my living with photography and I have a daughter who lives in Spain. Hence my regular visits there. I think the world is crazy but also incredibly beautiful, I don't like suffering and I want to be as happy as possible. That's the 'normal' me. The more alternative me is represented by such things as having studied homeopathy for four years, having spent a year in India and being a writer of philosophical books. So I guess I am doing a few things which are regarded by some as 'weird', but I wouldn't classify myself as a weirdo. At times I might seem a little bit strange, but all in all I'm pretty normal.

Back to the summer: I had about a month without any major plans, a blank page of time that I could fill with whatever I wanted. Swimming, reading, cooking, going to small gigs, hanging out, that kind of stuff. I had also been invited to join a friend for a week on the

beautiful white beaches of Cadiz – good surfing, amazing sunsets and more hanging out.

Pleasant times.

Then, one sunny afternoon, I bumped into Dave.

“There will be a ceremony in July, in case you are interested.”

“What ceremony?”

“The medicine.”

I stared at him, trying to figure out what he was talking about.

“What medicine?”

“Ayahuasca.”

“Aaah...” Suddenly it clicked and I was staring even more.

The moment I found out about the upcoming ceremony, I couldn’t get it out of my head again. Mother Ayahuasca was calling me for the second time. Once before I had been invited but for some reason it just hadn’t felt right. Now it was different. Although it was a slightly spooky sensation, it felt right.

I spent a few days contemplating and rationally comparing pros and cons. To be honest, I didn’t know much about Ayahuasca. I knew it was a hallucinogenic brew from the Amazon and that it was used for all sorts of healing rituals. I had heard that you get very sick and spend half the night vomiting like hell. More than once I have asked myself why on Earth anybody would pay money to throw up? Seemed

like a stupid idea. Tequila does the same and is much cheaper. But then I also remembered the blissfully shining eyes of those who had told me about their experiences. A few friends of mine had done it and whenever Ayahuasca has come up in a conversation they've always had this intriguing look on their faces, partially insane and partially divine. As if they had seen something from a different world.

About a week before the ceremony I was on the phone to a friend from England and I mentioned my temptation of taking Ayahuasca. He had never done it and knew even less about it than me.

"So basically it's a drug", he summarized my attempt of explaining it.

"No, not really", I answered. "Well yes, it's a drug, but it's...it's different."

"What makes it different?"

"It's a healing ceremony."

"Come on Claus, you just want an excuse to get high."

"No, it's not that, seriously. I'm just curious. You know, it's a proper ritual, with a proper Shaman."

"And? What's the Shaman gonna do?"

"I don't know."

"See, you just wanna get high. It's a drug. Full stop!"

Since I didn't have any personal experience or detailed knowledge of Ayahuasca, I didn't know

what else to say and changed the subject. Soon after the conversation ended.

According to Wikipedia, *‘a drug is a substance which may have medicinal, intoxicating, performance enhancing or other effects when taken or put into a human body and is not considered a food.’* In other words – if a substance has an effect on you and it’s not food, it’s a drug. Aspirin, tobacco, heroin, etc. Interestingly, while all drugs can become addictive, some are legal and others are not. One wonders why...

I have already mentioned my weakness for rum & coke. What else am I guilty of? Let’s see: I like the occasional spliff, especially around twilight. It may be illegal, but it doesn’t really feel like it. Just a plant you grow and smoke. I’ve also tried magic mushrooms a few times and in India I ate some opium. It was interesting, but I have no desire to repeat it. Ah, and another time in India I took some MDMA, that was fun but the hangover lasted a whole day and I don’t like hangovers. That’s why I prefer rum – beer and wine give me headaches. Apart from that, I have stayed away from other drugs such as cocaine or LSD. I’ve had plenty of opportunities to try any of them, but I have never really felt like it and I also have a lot of respect for these substances. I’ve never been keen on chemicals. In the case of cocaine, which has been used heavily around me

for the last decade, I simply feel it's not my drug – I'm already restless without any stimulants, a couple of weak coffees make me wobble around all day. So I don't even want to imagine what I would be like if I put that white powder up my nose. A nicely rolled joint suits me much better. Or nothing for that matter.

Sadly, in our society drugs are totally overused and it's this abuse which leads to trouble; problems are not caused by the drug itself but by its user. In a way it seems that we like being addicted to something – take all edible and injectable drugs away and we get hooked on sex or cleaning or running or eating or anything else that keeps us distracted. Distracted from our problems, from facing the challenges of life and also distracted from our deep feelings. From that which lies inside of us.

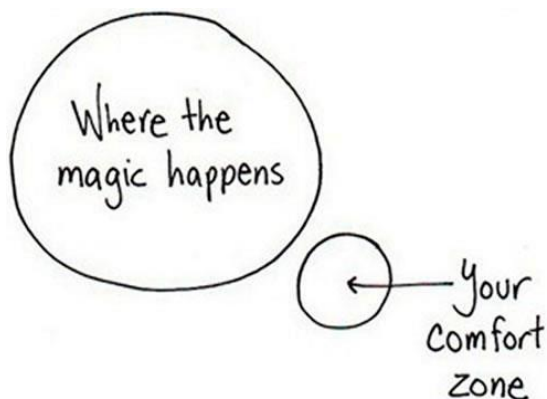
A few times when I've talked to friends about recreational drugs, I've said that the only other thing I'd be tempted to try would be some kind of tribal and ritualistic experience involving a drug – like Peyote or Ayahuasca. Why? Because I felt that it might be a totally different experience of taking a drug. It would be a sacred voyage rather than merely getting high or stoned. Not celebrating a party but a ceremony, with the main focus on healing and learning. I also liked the idea of a Shaman being present, someone who has more experience with that sort of stuff, someone who'd be able to teach me and

hopefully guide me into calmer waters in case I have a really bad trip. You never know. I wouldn't have done it with just any Shaman either. It had to be someone I could trust easily, someone who transmitted a feeling of calmness and confidence.

That someone was Janus. Two friends of mine have done Ayahuasca with him and both have spoken very well about him. And it was Janus who was going to hold the ceremony the following week. Perhaps this was another sign that it was the right moment to take a step into the unknown and find out what all those shiny eyes have seen?

I was given an opportunity to try something new, something I have never done before. It was one of those situations that suddenly appear out of nothing and you don't know when and if there will be another chance. Considering that Ayahuasca is an illegal substance in Europe, the opportunity was even more special and rare – there are no flyers lying around in bars, no TV ads nor public invitations on Facebook. Either you know someone who tells you about the ceremony, ie word of mouth, or you have to get on a plane to South America and do it in Peru, Ecuador or Brazil where Ayahuasca is a legally recognized medicine. The chance to do it in Europe was now and my temptation was growing bigger with every passing day.

Ironically, the week leading up to the ceremony was the same week that I wanted to spend with my friend in Cadiz. I had to choose – either chilling on the beach or vomiting in the hills? It was a weird choice but nevertheless a really difficult one. The whole situation reminded me of an image I'd seen various times on the internet:



Cadiz was my comfort zone, the Ayahuasca ceremony was the place for the magic. That's exactly how it felt! My comfortable sofa was seducing me to stay where I was and at the same time the big wild world was calling me to come out and have an adventure. What to do? Generally it's so easy to stay in that comfort zone, to stick with the familiar. And it's so

difficult to jump over one's own shadow and face something new, something unfamiliar. Often it's just one decision, one little step that changes everything. Comfort or magic? Left or right? Yes or no? One word that has the power to decide over how you experience life. Neither of the two choices was better or worse. Both were just very different from one another.

I was going back and forth for a while, but deep down I had already made a decision. Finally I gathered all the courage I could find and on the first Monday of July I called Dave and reserved a place. The ceremony was to take place the following Saturday. I had five days to get ready.

What is Ayahuasca?

Ayahuasca is the name of a brew which has been used in the Amazonian rainforest for thousands of years. The indigenous people ingest it for healing purposes and to induce visions. Other names for it include Yagé and Nantem. Often it is referred to as *Abuelita* (grandmother), Mother Ayahuasca or simply the Medicine.

The brew consists of two plants: *Banisteriopsis Caapi* (Ayahuasca) and *Psychotria viridis* (Chacrana). Interestingly, taking either of these two plants by themselves wouldn't have any effect whatsoever. The main substance which provokes the hallucinogenic visions is called dimethyltryptamine (DMT), a neurotransmitter which is also known as the Spirit molecule. The leaves of the Chacrana plant contain DMT. However, if you ingested only Chacrana, the monoamine oxidase (MAO) which is present in the stomach lining would block the action of the DMT. Here's where the Ayahuasca plant comes in – it contains harmala alkaloids which act as an MAO inhibitor. Only when DMT is combined with an MAO inhibitor will visions occur. So the two plants have to work together to unfold their psychoactive powers. Considering the vast diversity of flora in the Amazonian jungle, it is astonishing that the local people managed to combine exactly these two plants. Nobody really knows how they found out about it. The people

from the Amazon say that the spirits told them what to do. From a scientific point of view it remains puzzling.

Ayahuasca is a vine that climbs up tree branches in search of light. It is associated with the Anaconda, the great serpent from the Amazon. The word Ayahuasca comes from the language of the Quechua Indians in Peru, meaning spirit (Aya) rope (huasca). Another name for the plant, Nantem, comes from the Shuar tribe in Ecuador and means Birth-Death-Rebirth. Like the snake which sheds her skin to be totally renewed. Many people who take Ayahuasca talk about experiences with death during the ceremony, having died and being reborn again.

To make the brew, leaves from the Chacrana bush and sections from the Ayahuasca vine are put in a big pot with water and boiled for up to 24 hours. During this process a Shaman usually prays and sings to feed the brew with good intentions. Once the original ten litres have been reduced to a small bottle, the liquid can be drunk while still warm or stored to be taken at a later time. Ceremonies are held by Shamans who guide the participants to different levels of consciousness.

What are the likely effects if you take it? On a physical level, a deep cleansing takes place which often results in severe vomiting, diarrhoea and general nausea. On a mental level, pretty

much anything can happen – visions of past and future events, out-of-body experiences, hallucinations of all senses, you name it! The emotional state can range from extreme panic to extreme happiness. Deep healing processes can be triggered and many people report extraordinary spiritual experiences. One common description is that an Ayahuasca journey equals ten years of psychotherapy boiled down to a few hours. Sounds pretty intense, doesn't it?

When I decided to do the ceremony I didn't know about any of this. I had read one article and talked to a few friends, that was it. No videos, no books, no hours spent researching on the internet. It was just my intuition telling me that it was something really big. Something which intrigued me enough to make me leave my comfort zone.

Getting ready

The preparation for an Ayahuasca journey consists of two main parts – diet and intention. In theory you don't have to prepare at all, but it's highly recommended. One reason is that, since it's a cleansing ritual, you try to support your body as well as you can, eliminating anything that puts stress on your organism. Another reason for preparing is that in doing so you take it more seriously. It's not like taking any odd drug, going to a party and getting high with some mates. It's a ceremony which deserves respect. By preparing for it, both physically and mentally, you already leave the field of recreational drug use and enter the realm of a ritual.

Janus, the Shaman, had sent me a short list of things he recommended doing. Regarding the diet, this includes the following: at least three days before the ceremony you should abstain from meat (especially red meat), onions, garlic, fatty food and, most importantly, salt. When I had read that I shouldn't eat any garlic I thought for a moment that we all might turn into vampires and since garlic is used to fend off vampires, well, that might be the reason why it should be avoided. Of course that was only my paranoid self at work, but when you step into the unknown, well, who knows... What else? No alcohol and no other drugs; no sugar; no spicy food, no coffee or other stimulants. Instead, lots

of vegetables and fruit should be eaten, along with light food such as rice, millet and quinoa. Personally I am not the biggest fan of eating only vegetables, so the days before the ceremony I mainly ate fruit, some rice and I drank lots of water and fresh juices.

As I have said before, all these are just recommendations. But considering the prospect of spending part of the night vomiting, it makes sense to arrive at the ceremony with as clean a body as possible. Eating a big kebab or pizza the day before – not a good idea! Chances are high that you would really regret it once you've taken the medicine and started purging.

Another thing on the list is that you are supposed to abstain from sexual activity at least five days prior to the ceremony. The idea behind this is to keep your vital energy as high as possible. Since I didn't have a girlfriend at the time, not having sex was the least of my problems. Sticking to the diet was initially a bit boring, but once I got into it the fasting actually felt really good. It's always good to travel light!

The other part of the preparation process has to do with intention. What is your reason for doing the ceremony? Is there any physical problem you need help with? Any trauma you haven't overcome yet, any emotional pain? Or maybe you want to change something in your life and need some guidance. Maybe it's just curiosity that motivates you, maybe you want to explore a

different dimension of consciousness or maybe you are seeking answers to spiritual questions. Whatever it is you are looking for, giving a purpose to the ceremony will keep you focused and increase clarity.

During the build up to Saturday I spent a lot of time thinking about my reasons for doing it. Not that I was brooding over it constantly, but every now and then I became aware of what was lying ahead. The ritual was coming closer and closer and with each passing day my knees started to wobble a little bit more. Yes, I was looking forward to it and of course it was my free choice, but there was also this feeling of uncertainty, doubts that were whispering to me, 'what if...' I didn't know much about Ayahuasca, but I knew that anything could happen. Apprehension grew and I was wondering whether I was ready for it. A few times I thought about the peaceful white beaches of Cadiz – 'I could just call it a day and head to the Atlantic ocean', chilling out, having a good time, not worrying about anything. I could have done it, easily. But I didn't. Despite all fears of the unknown, I felt the time had come to be courageous and try something I'd never done before.

My only experience with psychedelic drugs had been with magic mushrooms, but from what I had heard about Ayahuasca, the mushrooms seemed like comparing the joys of a glass of wine with drinking a bottle of whiskey. I've

always had a good time when I've eaten magic mushrooms. There had been some light hallucinations and a very nice connection with nature. I suppose LSD would be more in the whiskey league, but I've never tried that. Various friends had told me about some really bad horror trips they've had on LSD and I think these stories were part of the reason why I've never taken it. I was scared of it, I was scared of getting stuck on a bad trip with no way back. The closer the day of the ceremony came, the more this fear of getting stuck on a bad trip grew. But luckily there were two things that provided some relief: one was the thought of a Shaman being present during the ceremony and the other was the need to come up with a clear intention that I could focus on.

Thursday night, with two days to go, I sat down with a piece of paper and started to gather a few thoughts regarding my reason for doing it – what did I want to work with during the ceremony? Physically I was feeling pretty well, so there was nothing which required immediate healing. I wrote down the following:

- Homeopathy – clearing doubts
- My voice – something feels blocked
- Separation – I want to feel more connected with others

I will briefly explain the reason for these three.

1) Homeopathy – I've studied homeopathy for four years and have been working with it on and off for the last ten years. While I've seen some incredible results, I am still sceptical as to how it works. Scientifically there is no clear explanation for it and although I know that there doesn't have to be a scientific explanation for it to work, I still get doubts because it doesn't work all of the time. So maybe Mother Ayahuasca could help to clarify things. 2) My voice – I play the guitar sometimes and like singing along with it. But as soon as there are more than two people in the room, I start feeling very blocked. Kind of embarrassed, I have no idea why. And it's the same with speaking in public, if I have to say something in front of a big group I get nervous and find it difficult to communicate well. I really hate that! 3) Separation – I can be quite critical of other people, judging the silly things they say and do. Whether I am right or wrong doesn't matter – being judgemental makes me feel separated from the rest. There is a lack of connection.

In a nutshell, that's what I had come up with. Looking at the three points, I suddenly thought that this might be a bit greedy. Like writing a letter to Santa Claus and asking for twenty different toys. Maybe I ought to focus on only one purpose for the ceremony, keeping it simple.

I checked my notes again and decided to go with the voice issue. I took a postcard of a palm leaf and on the back I wrote three words: FREE MY VOICE. That was it, that was what I was going to work on.

Friday morning I got up, finished some work I had to do and around midday I phoned Dave. I've known him for a few years. He is a crazy guy from Austria who lives in a wooden house up in the mountains, about an hour's drive away. Dave has taken Ayahuasca over thirty times already and together with his girlfriend, they were more than happy to provide the space to do the ceremony. I was glad that we were going to do it out in beautiful nature. The thought of meeting *Abuelita* somewhere inside surrounded by concrete walls wasn't very appealing. I called Dave to check what time he wanted me to come up the next day.

"Whenever you want", he said. "The ceremony will start at eleven. We are also going to do one tonight, so if you want to join us, you're welcome."

'Tonight?' I felt my heart sink to the bottom of my toes.

"I thought it's tomorrow?"

"Yes, but today too. Maybe we'll even do another one on Sunday. You can do all three if you want."

'What? Why on Earth would I want to do this more than once?'

“Three times? Are you serious?”

“Sure, it will give you deeper healing.”

No, one session was enough, thank you very much! But I suddenly thought about the possibility of doing it indeed that same night.

“How many people are going to be there tonight?”

“Not many, four or five, maybe a couple more.”

“And tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow there will be more, I think fifteen or so.”

“Ok, let me think about it. I’ll send you a text later to confirm.”

I had to sit down. Doing it with fewer people seemed far less threatening to me. The more people there are, the more things could go wrong I thought. Also, I felt more comfortable when I imagined vomiting my guts out in front of three others rather than having a huge audience. But then I guess the number of people didn’t really matter, everyone would probably be busy dealing with their own vomit!

While I was contemplating the two options, my friend Marc called. Marc is an anthropologist who specialises on the indigenous people of Ecuador and on several occasions he has taken the medicine himself, deep in the Amazonian rainforest.

“So I hear you are going to meet Mother Ayahuasca tomorrow?”

“Yep. Maybe even today.”

“Wow, that’s fantastic! I wish you a really good journey!”

“Thank you!”

I felt grateful, but at the same time it sounded a bit weird. ‘Have a good journey...’ I was just going forty kilometres up the mountains. Not far enough to be called a journey, was it?

“So how was it when you did it?”, I wanted to know.

“Every time it was different. I had a couple of bad experiences, but especially this one time it was just amazing. An incredible out-of-body experience!”

“What were the bad experiences?”

I knew I shouldn’t have asked that, but it was too late...

“Well, the first time I was looking for it too much. You know, they say Ayahuasca has to find you, not the other way round. But I was really curious and so when I was in Ecuador I kept asking my indigenous friends where I could do it. After a few days I finally found someone who was able to help. We went into the jungle, took the Ayahuasca and then nothing happened for a while. After about half an hour I got up and walked a few metres towards some trees. Then I stopped all of a sudden – there was a huge poisonous snake right in front of my feet. I didn’t move and shouted as carefully as possible for my friend. When he saw the snake he turned around,

went to the hut and half a minute later he came back with a big machete and cut off the snake's head. Zack! Right in that moment the Ayahuasca started to kick in and I had a really bad time. All night I felt that it had been my fault that the snake had to die. Because if I hadn't insisted on doing the ceremony the snake would have been still alive."

"That sounds shit."

"Yes, it wasn't good. Another time I was attacked by these enormous insects, that wasn't fun either. But you know, I'd do it again. It's hard to explain, you'll see. Ah, and here's some good advice – take an extra set of underwear!"

"Why?"

"Just in case. Some people have difficulties controlling certain muscles..."

Great! It had been exactly the type of conversation I didn't want to have shortly before embarking on my first ever Ayahuasca journey. My pulse went up and I felt sick even before having taken anything. What the hell was I getting into? Cadiz, maybe I should just go to Cadiz.

I ate an avocado and drank some orange juice. It was three o'clock in the afternoon and soon I had to make a decision: Taking the mysterious brew the same night or the following day or abandoning the whole idea and escaping to the beautiful comfort zone on the beach. What to do? I made some more orange juice, went outside

and looked towards the mountains. Maybe I should just get it over and done with? If I didn't do it now, having come so close, I'd really give myself a hard time afterwards. I hadn't heard of anybody yet who has died from taking Ayahuasca and if the trip was going to be bad, well, so be it! I had to do it, I was far too curious by now. And despite all worries and paranoia, it still felt right.

Twenty-five minutes past three I grabbed my phone and sent a message to Dave.

'I am coming tonight. Count me in.'

The rest of the afternoon I spent reading and getting my stuff together. Sleeping bag, mattress, jumper, a blanket, some fruit to share, a big water bottle and, just in case, a second pair of underpants. I put on some shorts, a clean white t-shirt and flip-flops – the usual summer outfit. Then I was wondering about the white t-shirt, maybe it would get dirty too easily. I changed to a black one, but that didn't feel right either. Maybe green? Yes, green seemed better. Not that it really mattered what I was wearing... By the time I was done with everything most of the fear had fortunately eased off. Instead, I felt excited and ready to go. I remember comparing the feeling to a mixture between travelling far away, having a date and going bungee jumping – nervous apprehension blended with a strong sense of being alive. Although I didn't know

much about Ayahuasca at that point, I was convinced that it would be a fascinating ride. I didn't know exactly what I would encounter but I expected nothing less than a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

At half past seven I got in the car to embark on the journey. Just as I was driving off, my phone rang. It was Janus. He asked me if I could pick up a friend of his from the bus station. He was going to get there at eight o'clock. 'Sure', I said, 'no problem.' So instead of heading straight to the mountains I made a detour into town and went to the bus station. I got there a bit early and sat down on a bench to wait. Ten minutes passed, then twenty. There was still no bus in sight and so I went to the counter and asked for the next one to arrive from Málaga. Ten past nine I was told. I wondered whether Janus's friend had maybe taken another form of transport to get here. I called him to check but Janus was sure that his friend would arrive on the bus from Málaga. He asked if I would mind waiting, the ceremony wouldn't start until eleven anyway. I agreed to hang around – it seemed a good idea to start on good terms with the Shaman. Later in the night he surely would get a chance to return the favour. Nevertheless I felt slightly annoyed having to wait, I hate waiting! But there I was and so rather than staying at the bus station I decided to go down to the sea. I walked past a few restaurants, got to the beach and headed for

some rocks near the port. It's actually one of my favourite places in Estepona, I love going there to get away from everything and to have a few beautiful moments by myself. While the daylight was slowly fading away I spent half an hour meditating. Calmness started to penetrate me and all of a sudden I felt grateful that Janus's friend was arriving late. Sitting alone and at peace by the sea had been the perfect final part of my preparation. The journey could commence!

When I got back to the bus station, Janus's friend was already waiting for me. His name was Alexsey, he was from Slovenia and looked a bit like a Sadhu from India – a travelling nomad who had a bright aura of madness around him. We jumped into the car, left the town centre and drove up a small and windy road into the mountains. After some introductory small talk we soon started to speak about the upcoming ceremony.

“Have you done Ayahuasca before?”

“Yes, a few times. What about you?”

I shook my head while concentrating on the road.

“First time.”

From the corner of my eye I could see a smile on Alexsey's face. ‘What's he smiling for?’, I wondered.

“It will be a good experience for you. And Janus is a great Shaman.”

“Yes, that’s what I’ve heard. I actually think I know him because he used to live around here, but I can’t remember his face.”

“Now he’s living in South America. Hopefully I will visit him there soon.”

“To do more Ayahuasca?”

“Of course!”

He smiled again. I don’t know what it was, but there was something weird about him. Something I couldn’t really grasp, something slightly insane which made me feel a little bit uncomfortable.

We continued driving up the mountains and finally reached our destination – Dave’s wooden house in the middle of nowhere. Surrounded by trees, mountains and gliding eagles, it was the perfect spot to lose the mind! We parked the car, got our stuff out and walked a couple of hundred metres to the house. When we got there, seven people were sitting on the terrace and we introduced ourselves. To my surprise I already knew more than half of them – there was Dave and his girlfriend, Sarah; a Scottish guy with his wife, both of whom I had met a few times before at local festivals; and then an English guy who lives in a small village where I used to spend quite some time a few years ago. The group was completed by two more women who I didn’t know, plus Alexsey and me.

“Where’s Janus?”, I asked.

“He’s down by the big tree preparing everything”, Dave said. “Let’s go and say hello.”

Dave, Alexsey and I left the others on the terrace and walked down some steps to a clearing about thirty metres from the house. Janus stood next to the tree and greeted us with a smile. He was from Poland but had spent almost ten years in Andalucía before he moved to South America the previous year. I had expected that I would remember him as soon as I saw him but I had been wrong. It was the first time that we met.

“I really thought I knew you, but no...”

“Not to worry”, he said with a gentle and calm voice, “we’ll get to know each other soon enough.”

It seemed as if his blue and clear eyes were looking right through me. I felt a spooky shiver going along my spine. ‘We’ll get to know each other soon enough...’ – whatever that meant, it wasn’t long now before I’d find out.

I had prepared myself, I had followed a recommended diet and had brought the card with my intention. I had decided to give Cadiz a miss and to step outside my comfort zone, right into the unknown. I had left home and arrived in the mountains. Nothing more I could do. It was time to let go.

Part II

Friday night

We were sitting on the terrace when the last rays of daylight disappeared behind the mountains. Apart from me there was only one other Ayahuasca virgin. Everyone else had done it several times before. I felt a bit nervous and kept quiet while listening to the others talking about some of their experiences with the sacred medicine. All had survived their journeys and, most importantly, they all had returned to participate yet another time. It was comforting to hear that people were repeating the journey voluntarily.

Around half past ten Janus called us to come down, the ceremony was about to begin. I took a deep breath, got off my chair and walked the short distance to the space next to the big tree. In the centre of the clearing Janus had erected a beautiful shrine in the shape of a half moon, made from earth and decorated with stones and flowers. A long spear with some feathers attached to it was standing in the middle, overlooking the whole scene like a guard. On the ground next to the shrine, facing the open side of the half moon, a small hole had been dug out and Alexsey was in the process of starting a fire with

coals. Usually a proper campfire is lit for the ceremonies, but during the dry Andalusian summers any open fire was far too dangerous – a little bit of wind from the wrong direction and the whole forest could easily go up in flames. On the other side of the shrine Janus had put a colourful blanket which was covered with all sorts of stuff – crystals, some bottles with dark liquid, a wooden flute, a fan made from palm leaves, more feathers and a couple of small bags. Once we arrived all the others started to put more things onto the blanket – necklaces, cards, stones, rings, a few books. I remembered that Janus had said in an email that we could bring personal items so that they would be charged with the medicine's energy. I had totally forgotten about it, but I didn't really care. I was just glad that I had managed to bring myself.

The mattresses were placed in a wide circle around the shrine and everyone started to get comfortable. It was a beautiful warm summer night with clear skies and a light breeze. Both Janus and Alexsey lit some incense and Sarah walked around and provided everyone with a few tissue papers and a small plastic bag. I gave her a questioning look.

"In case you don't have time to go to the toilet."

"Just like on a plane, right?"

"Yes, almost", she smiled at me.

"By the way: Where are the toilets?"

She pointed to a curtain that was hanging from a branch of the big tree.

“There’s a hole behind the curtain and twenty metres further along there’s another hole with a candle next to it. You can also use the bush next to you, whichever you prefer.”

I stared at the bag in my hand, then I turned around to look at the bush and in the distance I saw the candlelight next to the hole. It was a pretty strange situation but I guess it was good to have a choice.

Once we’d all settled down there was a moment of silence, then Janus started to talk. He welcomed us and gave thanks to Dave and Sarah for providing the space for the ceremony. He wished everyone a good ceremony and then he took some of the burning incense and proceeded with the opening ritual. One at a time, he faced towards all four directions – North, South, East and West – and asked the spirits for guidance, healing and general support. I can’t remember his exact words but he mentioned a few different animals from the jungle. I think it was the anaconda, hummingbird, condor and panther. Everybody was sitting quietly and listened to him. When he finished he went back to his place next to the shrine and picked up one of the bottles that was standing on the blanket.

“We will first take some tobacco, it helps to clear the sinuses and open the mind for better

visions. It might come back down your throat in which case you can spit it out again.”

Tobacco? Up my nose? Really?

‘Ah well’, I thought, ‘I better do as I’m told.’

The first person sitting next to him was Alexsey. Janus poured a bit of the liquid on his palms and then Alexsey sniffed it high up his nose. Immediately he shook his head and made some funny noises which didn’t sound very pleasant. One after the other we all had to do the same, I was the last to go. I opened my hands, received a small puddle onto my palms and without giving it any further thought I snorted the liquid up my nose. It was disgusting! Worst of all, my whole sinuses were burning really badly for about a minute. Once the discomfort eased off it felt quite good though and I could breathe really well. I had passed the first part, so far so good.

“Now I want to ask you to come up one by one and I will give you the medicine. While you take it, please focus on your intention for the ceremony.”

I had heard that the sacred Ayahuasca brew tastes absolutely horrible, like some old putrefied vegetable juice. Another thing to look forward to! I waited patiently and when it was my turn I went round the shrine and stopped in front of Janus. He poured liquid from another bottle into a small shot glass, then he looked me in the eyes, smiled and handed the glass over to me.

“I wish you a beautiful journey Claus!”

“Thank you!”

I took the glass with both hands and while looking at the dark brown liquid I concentrated on my intention. ‘I want to free my voice’, I whispered as quietly as I could and then I emptied the contents of the small glass into my mouth. I had expected the worst but it wasn’t really that bad. A bit like a shot of Jägermeister. I swallowed it, ate a piece of ginger that was offered by Janus to counteract the bad taste and then I went slowly back to my mattress. Done! Now there was definitely no chance of going back. Whatever would happen next, it was going to happen.

I sat down with crossed legs, closed my eyes and waited. Nobody said a word, even the wind had stopped blowing. After a few minutes I opened my eyes again and looked around. Apart from Janus and Sarah who were sitting as well, everyone else was lying on their back. It was totally dark, only the silhouettes of the people and the trees and the stars above were to be seen. I felt calm and in a way quite pleased with myself for having come up with the courage to take the medicine. With a happy smile I closed my eyes again and tried to meditate a bit. About fifteen to twenty minutes later I started to get a slight sensation of pins and needles, first in my hands, then in my whole upper body. Nothing major, just a feeling that something was working.

I kept meditating and waited curiously for more to happen. Not long after it was the sound of someone getting up which made me open my eyes again. It was Alexsey who was lying opposite me on the other side of the shrine and who had gotten up to spit into woods. Then I suddenly heard the sound of vomiting. It didn't come from him but from one of the women who was lying close to him. She was too far away for me to see her properly in the darkness, but she definitely wasn't using one of the holes or the sick bag. Instead, she had opted to turn around and throw up right behind her. The purging lasted for a couple of minutes. Just when she had lied back down again, more vomiting sounds penetrated the peaceful night. This time it was Alexsey emptying his stomach next to a tree. Before he finished, Sarah started as well. She too had chosen the space right behind her. I started to wonder why they had bothered digging the holes if everybody was throwing up all over the place anyway. After a few minutes things calmed down again and silence returned to the circle. I took a few deep breaths and checked how I felt. The pins and needles were still coming and going and by now I could hear my stomach making some strange noises. But I didn't feel any nausea. 'Maybe I am lucky and I won't get sick', I thought to myself. I had hardly eaten anything the previous three days, there wasn't much which could have been left in my stomach to come out.

Maybe those who had already vomited hadn't followed the recommended diet. I smiled again with contentment and kept breathing calmly. Soon there were two more people vomiting, it actually sounded so bizarre that it made me laugh. Friday night in the hills, listening to people all around me purging – what a weird situation!

After another five minutes or so I felt warmth spreading through my body, but there was still no nausea. I decided to get up and go for a piss. Slowly I walked round the shrine and headed for one of the trees. I emptied my bladder and was just about to go back when I started to feel that something was wrong. All of a sudden I wasn't that sure anymore if I could avoid being sick. I didn't fancy vomiting next to my mattress and so as a precaution I kneeled down on the ground and waited. At first nothing happened, but then I had a few abrupt cramps in my stomach and threw up whatever was left inside of me – mainly orange juice and a bit of rice. It lasted less than a minute and then I was fine again. 'Good', time to go back to the circle. Rather than sitting down again I lay down on my back and closed my eyes. Just when I wanted to get comfortable, I saw some lights flickering, like lots of little spots dancing in front of me. Immediately I opened my eyes again and the light went. 'What was that?' I hesitated a moment, then I closed my eyes again. This time there were even more spots of light

and they quickly turned into rectangular shaped bars. Lots of them, first flying around randomly and then they suddenly started to align themselves. Like individual fragments of different colours that quickly formed a straight line. A bit like an osteopath clicking my spine into place, just horizontally and without it being my spine. This continued for a while until I was distracted by more vomiting going on around me. Then Janus started to speak, slowly and with a calm voice, and with a lot of clarity and power in his words.

“Remember to trust. Whatever happens, trust! The medicine knows what you need and will help you find it. Trust!”

The wind picked up again and shortly after Janus began to play a string instrument, it sounded like a mixture of a guitar and a harp. He also started to sing Icaros, which are sacred chants from the Amazon. It was beautiful! I moved around on the mattress and then I realized that I was feeling cold. Suddenly it dawned on me – I had left my sleeping bag in the car. Shit! For a moment I considered getting it, but it was too far. I didn't fancy walking around in the wilderness all by myself, not now. I got up and saw a folded blanket lying next to Dave's mattress. I looked at Dave – his eyes were closed and he seemed comfortable in his sleeping bag, so I grabbed the blanket and lay down again. Soon I felt warmer but unfortunately a nauseous

feeling had arrived with the warmth. It wasn't sickening but very unpleasant. I closed my eyes and concentrated on breathing deeply. Lots of flashes appeared in my vision, everything was illuminated. Then, from one moment to the next, an army of tiny snakes started to float in the space around me. Cold shivers went through my body. The images changed, light turned into darkness and ugly creatures came running towards me, like in a scene from Lord of the Rings. I tried to get distracted by focusing on my breathing again but the threatening visions stayed. The images changed at high speed, one sequence, another one, another one and another one. Snakes, lights, weird fantasy creatures attacking me, squares, Zack!, darkness. Then a banner appeared, displaying letters one after the other, all in shiny blue – T, TR, TRU, TRUS, TRUST. I opened my eyes. Janus was leaning over me and was spraying some water with a flower essence over me. Sarah started to purge again and Janus went over to her. I stared at the night sky and watched the stars for a bit. All seemed normal and the nausea had gotten better too. Then I suddenly had stomach cramps again but I wasn't sick. I closed my eyes and immediately the visions were back. They weren't very strong, I hadn't fully entered a different dimension or anything like that. But they were definitely there and I wasn't able to control their high paced movements. A huge snake appeared

inside my stomach, around the area of my navel, and it slowly proceeded down into my intestines. Again, I could clearly see it but it wasn't like it was really happening. More like a daydream with very vivid images. The snake continued to travel through my intestines and then the blue banner reappeared, T-R-U-S-T. Then another cramp in my stomach. Cold shivers. Then a rushing sound. I opened my eyes and saw Janus walking around the circle with the fan of palm leaves in his hand, shaking it rapidly. That's where the rushing sound had come from. I closed my eyes again and the visions came straight back. This time lights in lots of different shapes, geometrical forms rotating in front of my eyes, moving around through dark space. I felt nauseous again but not enough to get up and vomit. It went on like this for a bit longer, maybe half an hour or so. It's very difficult to say exactly how long it was, the sense of time had become very blurry.

Then it suddenly stopped. Apart from a little bit of nausea and the occasional cramp, I felt totally normal again. No visions or exceptional sensations. Every now and then I heard someone vomiting and Janus was singing the Icaros, but other than that nothing else was happening. After a while I got up, went for another piss and sat down in front of the fire, wrapped in my blanket. I watched the moon rise behind Dave's house, listened to Janus's singing and enjoyed the peaceful night.

After what must have been about an hour like that, I started to get a little bit bored. Apart from Janus and myself everyone else was on their mattresses, motionless. It looked as if they were sleeping. I was tired but didn't feel like lying down and so I stayed by the fire a bit longer. Some of the visions had been interesting and the vomiting had been very real but so far it hadn't been any big revelation or crazy experience. Was there more to come? It didn't really seem like it. I must admit I felt a bit disappointed. That was it? That was the great Ayahuasca journey people talked about? I looked at Janus – maybe the medicine hadn't been fresh enough? Or maybe I hadn't taken enough of it? For a short moment I felt a tiny bit of resentment towards Janus as if it was his fault that my expectations hadn't been met. In reality, it was me being silly and greedy. Yes, I had paid sixty Euros, but I had received a beautiful ceremony, some unusual visions and a cleansing purge. I had more reasons to be grateful than to complain.

I started to think about my practice as a homeopath. Patients also pay sixty Euros to come and see me and for an hour I give them all my attention. Afterwards I recommend a remedy and that's all I can do. Some people get better, others don't. It can be frustrating not being able to help everyone but that's just the way it is. So many different factors influence the healing process, a good chat and a few pills aren't always

enough. Sometimes my problem is that I feel responsible when I don't manage to help a patient. Of course it can happen that I select the wrong remedy but often it's the patient who is not willing to make certain changes in his or her life. For example, if someone has chronic bronchitis but stays living in a damp house, well, there is no remedy in the world which will heal the bronchitis. Or if someone suffers from anxiety due to an abusive partner, there's little hope of improvement if that person stays in the same relationship. A while ago I read that 'doctor' originally means teacher and I believe that this is exactly what a doctor or any health professional should be doing – teaching better ways of living. In this way any proper healing becomes the responsibility of each individual. After all, it's *your* life so you are the one who is responsible for it. Any changes have to be made by you. With the Shaman, in this case Janus, it's similar: His job is to provide the medicine, to guide and to help if help is needed, but he's not responsible for my experience and what I make of it.

My back started to hurt from sitting cross legged all the time and so I decided to return to my mattress and lie down. Soon I fell in a dreamlike state, somewhere between sleeping and meditating. I was neither awake nor asleep. A few visions came back but they weren't as vivid as before. The only one I remember was

when hundreds of small snakes covered me from head to toe. It wasn't really threatening but it wasn't a nice feeling either. I should mention that my general relationship with snakes is a bit two-sided – on one hand I am fascinated by them and on the other hand I am scared of them. I don't have a problem holding a snake, I have done it several times, but if I walk through high grass the possibility that I might step on one by accident frightens me. So snakes appearing in front of my eyes all of a sudden was not something I was enjoying much, to say the least. Going back to that vision, while all the little serpents were covering my whole body more and more I suddenly turned into some kind of green Hulk. At once I contracted all my muscles and made the snakes fly off. It was a liberating feeling, a sensation of relief.

I have no idea how long I was lying there but I was glad when I noticed that it was getting light again. The night was over and a new day was about to begin. I opened my eyes and sat up. Slowly all the others did the same – it almost seemed as if everyone had been waiting for the morning to arrive.

Daydreaming

Just before the sun rose from behind the mountains, we had a little closing ceremony. Janus took the bottle with the liquid tobacco and proceeded to give everyone a little bit more—putting that burning stuff up my nose again wasn't what I'd had in mind for breakfast but apparently it was beneficial. I quickly got it over and done with and stayed sitting on my mattress. Then Janus lit a funny looking cigar from the jungle and gave thanks to Mother Ayahuasca for her presence. After a few minutes he passed the cigar on to the next one in the circle, Alexsey. There the peace pipe got stuck – Alexsey must have talked for about twenty minutes, smoking half of the cigar all by himself. What he said was important and made sense, but it was a bit repetitive and most of us got impatient after a while. Finally he passed the cigar on and its journey around the circle continued. People were sharing some of their experiences from the previous night and everyone expressed their gratitude for having been given the opportunity to participate in the ceremony. When it was my turn I said that I had expected something more intense but that it had been an interesting experience and that I thought it was good that life keeps surprising us. It's not necessary that all of our expectations are always fulfilled, sometimes life answers our questions in ways

which are different to what we expected. Like the others I also gave thanks to the medicine for having travelled all the way to Andalucía to be with us. I think it's partially this gratitude which makes a ceremonial drug use very different from a recreational one. If you get high on dope or coke or ecstasy, all you do is take, without giving anything back. Expressing gratitude makes you value the experience on a completely different level. Rather than consuming a substance in a materialistic way, the whole experience becomes a spiritual one.

I passed the remaining bit of the cigar back to Janus and after saying a few closing words he wished us all a good day. People started talking with each other and just when I thought there wasn't anything else to come a new bottle appeared. This time it didn't come from Janus but from Alan, the Scottish guy. The liquid was green instead of brown. Alan poured himself a big cup and drank it. Afterwards Alexsey and Janus took some too and then the cup was suddenly right in front of me.

"What is it?"

"San Pedro."

"What's San Pedro?", I asked, clueless.

"It's another teacher plant. Similar to Peyote, both contain mescaline."

I had read about Peyote in some of Carlos Castaneda books but I couldn't really remember much of it.

“What does it do?”

“It makes you more alert, especially nature is perceived much more intensely. It also helps you to stay awake.”

Alan moved the cup a bit closer to me, giving me a questioning look.

“It works really well with Ayahuasca, both are plants which support each other”, Janus added with his calm voice. “It’s also very good for the digestion.”

‘Ah well’, I thought to myself, ‘why not? Now that I’ve started experimenting I might as well continue’. I took the cup and had a small sip to try it. It was really awful! Not so much the taste but the consistency – very thick with lots of slimy pieces of something in it. Alan was standing in front of me, waiting for the cup to be returned. I took a deep breath and downed everything in one go. Yuk!

After everyone had drunk San Pedro we continued to talk for a while, still gathered in the circle around the shrine. Then Sarah asked the question we’d all been waiting for anxiously:

“Breakfast anybody?”

Food! Finally! After several days of strict diet and after the vomiting during the previous night I felt as if my digestive system was filled with nothing but warm air. I was so hungry! Twenty minutes later we were all sitting on the terrace with a bowl of porridge, topped with fruits and nuts and a cup of tea on the side. Every spoonful

tasted simply divine and I tried to make it last as long as I could. It was the best breakfast I've had in a very long time!

During the rest of the morning most people retreated to a sofa, mattress or other quiet spot in order to rest and reflect. It was already really hot outside and so shade was the main criteria for selecting a good place. I went round the house and discovered a couple of hammocks hanging between some trees. Physically I was really tired since I hadn't slept all night, mentally I was quite awake though. Maybe that had to do with the San Pedro, but I wasn't sure, I didn't feel any other direct effects from it. I climbed into the hammock, closed my eyes and spent a couple of hours doing nothing. Just lying there, swinging lightly from right to left and letting my thoughts wander slowly through my head. Peaceful times.

Around two o'clock we sat down for lunch. Sarah had prepared some rice, vegetables and salad. I grabbed a plate, loaded it with food and started eating. Dave was sitting next to me.

"So are you going to stay tonight too?", he asked.

"I haven't thought about it yet. What is everybody else doing?"

"I think most will stay. And there will be some new people coming too."

Another ceremony? Another night of vomiting and not sleeping? I must say I wasn't very keen at that point. Also, as I have said already the

experience had been interesting but it had lacked something truly exciting.

“I will see, maybe, maybe not. I’ll hang around for now and let you know later.”

There was no need for an immediate decision.

After lunch I went inside the house and got comfortable on one of the sofas. I really wanted to sleep but although I felt very relaxed I couldn’t get beyond daydreaming. Eventually it got quite frustrating, maybe the San Pedro hadn’t been such a good idea after all? I got up and tried the hammock again but still didn’t succeed in falling asleep. Eventually I gave up, made myself a cup of herbal tea and sat down on the terrace. Alan was there as well. I knew he had taken Ayahuasca many times and I also remembered hearing that he apparently had overcome a severe disease with it.

“So what’s your story with the medicine?”, I wanted to know.

“It basically saved my life. A few years ago I was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer and the doctors had given me two months to live. They put me under chemotherapy and did surgery on me but the cancer kept spreading. After taking Ayahuasca three times I went back to the clinic and they couldn’t believe what they were seeing – the tumour had almost disappeared and my whole body was healing quickly.”

“And you’re sure that it was because of the Ayahuasca?”

“Pretty sure. Nothing else worked, it was only when I started with the ceremonies that I got better. When you talk to Janus or read about other people’s experiences with the medicine you’ll see that it’s quite common that seemingly incurable illnesses are healed.”

Alan went on to tell me more details of his own journey with Ayahuasca and how he overcame the cancer. From my study and practice of homeopathy I knew that illnesses could be cured in lots of different ways, even cases which had been given up by allopathic doctors. The human body isn’t a machine, it’s a living organism that requires more than a few pills and surgical adjustments. I totally thought it possible for an ancient medicine from the rainforest to help people in getting their health back. How? I don’t know. There are many things we don’t fully understand but which still happen. There are many mysteries. Death for example.

“How was your experience last night?”, I wondered.

“It was nice, but very mild. I think for everyone it was like that yesterday. Sometimes it’s mild, sometimes it’s wild. You never know... Are you going to stay tonight?”

“Maybe.”

“You should.”

“Why?”

“Because you can continue working in a deeper way with the medicine. Last night your

body got to know it, now you are prepared for more.”

“Ah yes?”

It sounded spooky.

“Of course. Who knows, maybe it will be mild again tonight but you always get something out of it. I’d stay if I were you. What do you have to lose?”

I didn’t answer and the space where we were sitting fell into silence. Alan picked up a book that was lying on a table next to the sofa and started flicking through it, leaving me alone with my thoughts. Did I really want to stay for another ceremony? I could, yes, but was it a good idea? I repeated his question to myself, ‘what did I have to lose?’ Another sixty Euros and possibly my mind, but other than that? After the experience from the previous night I wasn’t really scared anymore of anything bad happening. More than anything else I felt very tired and I wasn’t sure if I was strong enough to last until the next morning.

“Alan, do you know what the time is?”

“Half past six.”

“Thanks!”

I had a few more hours to make a decision.

For a moment I was considering to return to the hammock but then I remembered that I had seen a guitar standing in the lounge. I went and got it and climbed a little hill at the side of the house. A few metres above ground level I sat

down and started to play. It was actually a bit annoying because the strings on the guitar were very old and got out of tune every few minutes but I was glad to have something to focus on. While I was sitting there I watched some more people arriving – a Spanish couple in their forties, a Swiss woman I had met before and another woman I didn't know. The place was filling up for the next ceremony.

After playing around with the guitar for about an hour or so I went back down and had more tea. I talked to some of the others and everyone said they were staying for another night. At that point I was still undecided – should I stay or should I go? Going home seemed like the more attractive option: I'd save money and could settle down for a quiet evening. If I wanted to do another ceremony one day surely there'd be another opportunity. But then, since I was here already, why not stay? I was curious to find out how a second time with the medicine would affect me. More of the same? Or would I have a totally different experience?

I was hungry again and heard my stomach grumbling. I checked the time, it was almost eight by now. 'Perhaps I ought to make a decision soon', I thought. The heat of the day was slowly losing its intensity and the mountains were getting ready for nightfall. I went to my bag, got my car keys out and walked to the parking area. If I had known then what was

going to come, I don't know what I would have decided. But I didn't know what was lying ahead and so I closed my eyes for a minute and started to look for an answer inside. Going home or another night with the medicine? What felt right? Which one was the better option to choose?

They say that Mother Ayahuasca comes to find you, that she will call you when your time has come to meet her. I had met her the previous night but it almost seemed as if she didn't want me to go just yet. Maybe I should give her a second chance? Maybe my journey hadn't been completed yet? I was really tired and almost felt like a zombie, but there was something trying to convince me to stay. So in the end, I did. I got my sleeping bag out of the car and walked back to the house.

"Dave, I'm in again."

"Great! I think it will be a good one tonight."

Maybe, maybe not. Soon we'd find out...

Welcome to the present!

At half past ten Janus calls us. We walk down to the shrine, form a circle and get comfortable on our mattresses. In total there are thirteen participants plus the Shaman. A nice group of people who are all crazy enough to spend another night with Mother Ayahuasca in the mountains. Alexsey lights a coal fire and Sarah comes round to hand out the complimentary sick bag that no-one would be using anyway. A few jokes are exchanged and then everyone starts to be silent. The night is mild – no wind, no clouds, no disturbing sounds. Only stars and dark space.

Time to let go again.

Just like the night before Janus welcomes everyone and does a small opening ritual. Then he returns to his place by the fire and most of us know what's coming next – clearing the mind and sinuses by inhaling liquid tobacco. Lovely! Once that's done the medicine is administered. I have my mattress in the same place as the previous night, only this time I have some neighbours on my left. Alexsey is again the first to go, then everyone follows in a clockwise direction until it is my turn.

Earlier on I've thought about my intention for the second night. I felt that the first time I arrived with too many expectations and so for this

ceremony I've decided to not expect anything at all. My intention is to be totally open.

I walk up to the shrine, with silent faces following me. Janus pours the brown liquid into the small shot glass and gives it to me. For a moment I stare at the sacred brew, then I drink it in one go. 'Surprise me', is all I ask for.

Back on my mattress I sit down and wait. As before, at first nothing happens. After about fifteen or twenty minutes I feel a light tingling again which slowly penetrates my whole body. It only lasts for a few minutes though and then everything is back to normal. I decide to lie down and close my eyes. Soon after, the first person starts to purge. Then another, and another. I can't help but laugh again, not out loud but to myself. It's just so bizarre being surrounded by a bunch of vomiting people, in the middle of the mountains.

I hear my stomach making a couple of funny sounds, then I notice a different urge – once again I have forgotten to empty my bladder before the ceremony. I get up, leave the circle and piss somewhere in the dark, near the big tree. Just when I am about to return, I feel nausea rising from deep inside. I kneel on the ground and a few moments later I am throwing up my whole lunch. It's more than during the first ceremony but I have also eaten more today. I continue retching a few more times, then I feel sufficiently emptied and slowly walk back. I

unpack my sleeping bag and make myself comfortable. It all seems exactly like the night before. Just more people around, otherwise all the same. I close my eyes and relax.

For a couple of minutes or so everything is peaceful, but then things change. All of a sudden I feel a heat wave going through my body. I think that it must be because of the sleeping bag and so I get rid of it. But instead of feeling cooler the heat wave continues, first with the same intensity and then it quickly gets stronger and stronger. I start to sweat all over, like during a very high fever. Then I hear Sarah vomiting. Once, twice, and then suddenly it sounds as if she is going to die. She is purging so much and so deeply that she has difficulty breathing. It's a dreadful noise, as if the devil was stuck in her guts. Again and again she throws up, desperately trying to find relief. The wind picks up and I can hear someone on the other side of the circle vomiting with the same agony as Sarah. I open my eyes and see Janus walking around, waving his fan. Tension is cutting through the air and when I start to feel my heartbeat speeding up I know that it is going to be a very different session to the night before. The atmosphere is intensely chaotic, like hitting a storm on a boat trip and quickly losing control over the situation. It feels threatening! I try to breathe deeply in order to calm down but my heart keeps on racing like crazy. It seems that Mother Ayahuasca has

taken on the challenge to surprise me... And the worrying bit is that there's no return, there is no switch to stop the experience. I've jumped off the bridge and find myself in free fall.

Clouds have arrived on the night sky and I am trying to find some comfort in watching them roll by. Lots of pieces of cotton wool moving slowly between me and the stars, it's an amazing sight. Then, out of nothing, a thin white line appears, like a glowing electricity wire a few metres above my head. I close my eyes for a moment and open them again – the line is still there. Then another one pops up, parallel to the other one. Then another one and before I know it the whole sky is covered by a massive grid of white lines. Their distribution is totally random but at the same time they form perfectly shaped squares. A strange blend of chaos and order. I move my eyes, up and down and from left to right – the grid is everywhere and no matter what I try, it doesn't go away. As if it was always there.

I am tired, it has been forty hours since I have slept. While staring in awe at the cosmic lines, my eyelids become weaker and weaker until I give in and let them close. I hear more violent vomiting sounds coming from different directions and soon I begin to feel nauseous again myself. The heat waves increase even more and my heart is pounding. I wonder if I am going to be sick again, but before I can make a decision

my attention is drawn to my solar plexus. It's burning! Not literally, there are no flames and it's not painful, but it's scary! It's so intense that I can hardly breathe, all the energy of the world seems to be concentrated between my chest and my navel. Worst of all, the intensity keeps increasing! It feels as if my solar plexus is about to explode with a loud bang, I see visions of a light column shooting from the centre of my body towards heaven and sucking me up into the dark space above. I am shaking wildly. There is no control whatsoever, as if some force has taken over my body. 'Why?', I keep asking myself, 'Why the fuck didn't I go home? Why did I have to do something so stupid? Why?' I don't get it. Instead of lying peacefully in bed I am living a total nightmare, and I can't get out of it. I feel trapped and scared and I am worried that I might lose the plot. By now, my solar plexus is pulsating beyond imagination and my whole body is drowned in tingling energy. It feels like my body is dissolving into small particles that move rapidly around. In a way it feels really good, but at the same time I am scared like shit because I don't know what is going on. I am about to open my mouth to shout for help, but then another wave of energy hits me and I can't even control my lips. I start to groan, first quietly, then a bit louder. More violent purging is happening close to me and I can hear someone sobbing. I manage to lift my head up a bit and

just when I turn to my left I see Sarah jumping up. She falls over straight away and crawls a couple of metres towards a bush where she collapses into the most agonising vomiting I have ever heard in my life. It's absolutely dreadful, as if she's fighting desperately for survival. Evil energies are all around and I begin to wonder if Janus is able to control the situation. I roll back onto the mattress. Maybe he has lost control already? What if we all go insane now? I feel a cold shiver. Panic! 'Home, why didn't I go home? Or to Cadiz, I could be in Cadiz now. Shit! What a fucking idiot you are Claus!'

Once I had a dream that I was jumping out of a plane and remembered half way down that I had forgotten to put the parachute on. It's that kind of panic that I am now feeling. I'm not enjoying anything of this trip, in fact, I hate it! I swear that I will never ever take Ayahuasca again. Never! It's hell, or if not hell, something very similar. My solar plexus is hit by another energy explosion and all of my muscles contract at once, like an epileptic fit. While I am about to go into some kind of delirium, thinking that I am about to blow up into space, I suddenly feel a warm hand touching the lower part of my chest. It's Janus.

"Claus."

I want to answer but can't get a word out.

"Claus", Janus whispers, "all you need to know is that you are not alone in this."

Zack! Suddenly everything calms down, the horror film has been switched off. I start to breathe normally again and relax a bit, still completely out of it though. I feel like I have entered a different dimension of being, it's difficult to describe. Like all boundaries have disappeared, all boundaries between me and everything else. I feel like a drop of water that has been catapulted back into the ocean.

Janus takes his hand away and starts to move the fan over my head and chest, then he sprays some flower essences over me. Finally I am able to speak again.

"Thank you. Thank you Janus!"

Never before have I felt so much gratitude, I almost cry. It's as if he has saved my life. I grab his hand and want to hold onto him but Janus takes a step back.

"Do you want some water?", he asks.

Water? Now? Yes. No!

"Maybe later."

Without saying anything else Janus touches my forehead and then he gets up. More violent vomiting sounds are coming from all directions – others need him too. I close my eyes and I'm enjoying a tiny moment of peace. Then the rollercoaster ride continues. A million different thoughts fly through my mind. I start to think about my voice, then I think about how sceptical I have been towards Mother Ayahuasca, doubting her powers. Next, I feel like an arrogant

prick. Lots of ugly feelings are pouring out. A wave of cold air comes over me, more thoughts, more ugly feelings, and then I feel a volcano exploding inside of me. Without thinking I rocket upwards, jump towards the bushes and start vomiting half way through the air. After landing on my front the purging continues. Everything is coming out, and I mean literally everything. It's insane! Suddenly I am producing the same violent sounds I heard from Sarah earlier. I feel exhausted and delirious but I am throwing up like there's no tomorrow. So much force, it's unbelievable. As if I'm being exorcised!

Some parts of the vomiting are actually fun. Well, fun is probably the wrong word. More like a relief. A deep cleansing taking place on all levels, eliminating physical, mental and emotional shit that has accumulated. While I am lying there, headfirst down a small slope, I suddenly hear hissing sounds. Sssss, sssss, sssss.... I turn my head and expect to see a snake right next to me, but there is none. Then more hissing sounds are coming from the other side, then from above and then somehow from within. My body starts to move automatically in snake-like rhythms, I am so scared that I actually feel like shitting myself. Then I purge again. Then more snake movements and hissing sounds. Then again the urge to shit. But where? The toilet? No, too far! Right here? No! Or maybe yes? Not that

anybody would care. The urge shifts again to vomiting, I retch like hell but can't get any more out. Then the sounds are back, sssss, sssss, sssss... This time the hissing is coming out of my own mouth. Am I turning into a snake? And not just any snake, a bloody huge Anaconda! Fuck! I am horrified. Stop! Help! Get me out of here! Now! What the fuck Claus, why did you come, why didn't you go home? Idiot! I groan and roll around on the floor, totally delirious. Maybe I have died already with that light beam shooting upwards from my solar plexus, maybe this is now my physical death. Or maybe I am just going insane. Whatever it is, surely death can't be worse than this!

I have no idea how much time passes, but eventually I gather all the strength I have left and crawl back up to my mattress. Other people keep vomiting their evil spirits out, suffering is all around me. The whole space is filled with fear and dark forces. I close my eyes. Blackness. Then dizziness and flashing light. Eyes open again! And then a sudden shift of attention – sounds appear.

“E-e-e-e-e-e....u-u-u-u...”

What the fuck?

“Peuuup. Peuuup.”

It takes me quite a while to figure out what it is: Janus has switched on a little music device and is playing recordings from the jungle. My sense of hearing has totally changed – everything

I hear sounds a hundred times fuller and more intense than what I'm used to. Instinctively I open my mouth:

"Click, clack", I say out loud.

And it isn't just a normal click clack. It's as if both click and clack are echoed in the whole universe! All sound has suddenly so many different levels, it's like...like seeing everything in black and white and suddenly the world has turned into colours.

"Click, clack."

It's amazing. Absolutely amazing!

I try a bunch of different sounds, then I get distracted. A strong breeze hits the clearing and everyone starts to move. Two or three people are actually walking in the circle, the others are lying on their mattresses and are moving from side to side. I look down my legs – they are standing up at an angle and my knees are going from left to right and right to left. Sounds come in from all corners.

"Sssss...ssssss...ssssss"

Once more I don't know what is going on. I have no idea how everyone else is perceiving the situation but to me it's like a collective snake experience. Very scary, very weird and in a strange way very magical. All united by Mother Ayahuasca, the great serpent from the rainforest. A cold shiver runs along my spine and I grab the sleeping bag. It's all tangled up and so I start looking for the opening. While doing so the long

bag slowly takes on the features of a snake. It's mad, everything seems to turn into snakes! I push the sleeping bag to the side and stare into the sky. The grid is still there.

To distract myself from all the snake stuff going on, I go back to playing with sounds. I do a few Om's, more click clacks and then I start humming. First quietly, then louder and louder. Every single cell of my body is vibrating and the cold and terrifying feeling is quickly replaced by a wave of comfortable warmth. I get more and more excited and keep humming. Then, all of a sudden, Alexsey appears with his head right over mine.

"I am here to tell you something: You need to know that, when you sing, you don't sing for yourself. Your voice is for everybody, you sing to serve and to share."

I can't believe what he has just said. Out of nothing he has come up and has told me the words that I needed to hear in this very moment – the answer to my voice issue! The blockage I feel when speaking or singing in public has to do with my ego, with me wanting to impress others. Once the focus is put on sharing, the ego is taken out of the equation. It isn't about me, it's about feeling connected with everyone and everything! I'm shaking, this time not because of the cold or fear but because I am touched so deeply. I get up on my knees, turn around and stare at Alexsey. Then we give each other a massive hug.

“Thank you”, I stutter, “thank you so much!”

I have tears in my eyes.

“This is just so...so incredible! It’s so beautiful, I can’t believe it.”

Alexsey takes me by my shoulders.

“Bienvenidos Claus. Welcome!”

I know that he understands perfectly what I am going through. For a moment I feel embarrassed and ashamed because I have judged him as some kind of weirdo before. Then I realize that it doesn’t matter. Suddenly I understand too. Instead of alienation I feel union – with Alexsey, with my voice, the wind, the trees, stars and even with the stones on the ground. I feel connected to the whole world! In fact, I feel as if I AM the whole world! Everything becomes One. No boundaries, no separation, no ego; just one big cosmic pool. It’s by far the most blissful feeling I’ve ever experienced. When people talk about heaven, they must be referring to something like this. Or maybe it’s more like an awakening, a return to feeling united with everyone and everything rather than experiencing life as an individual soul trying to survive. Like having been reborn into life, awoken from the deep sleep that we call reality. The illusion of duality.

Alexsey leaves and goes back to the fire. I begin to smile with astonishment, I feel like a child who has tasted chocolate for the first time – WOW! So that’s what it’s all about. All that crap of feeling lonely and struggling to find a place in

the world, it's such a big delusion! With total clarity I see and feel that we are ultimately all the same energy. Billions of different people and animals and plants and rocks and galaxies, all being expressions of the same life force. All being God together. All dissolving into One.

"This is so good", I start to whisper, "this is soooo good. So good. So incredibly good!"

I am happy beyond words and feel totally amazed at how beautiful it is to be alive. There are no doubts, no fears, no worries. Just a blissful state of being. A feeling of boundless love, of peace and perfect harmony.

"This is fantastic! It's sooooo good! Wowww...!"

I start to giggle, then I'm laughing out loud. On and on. At some point I get up and almost fall over straight away. My feet and legs are like rubber, I have difficulties controlling them. It's like being really drunk but without any loss of clarity. I continue giggling and laughing.

"He-he-he-he-he...Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha..."

There's no way I can stop. I am pretty sure that any outsiders would think that I have lost the plot and would probably ship me off to the nearest mental institution. But I don't care what others might think or say. I laugh and laugh and laugh and am having the greatest time ever!

"He-he-he... Click, clack....Plop. Plup. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha..."

Then other sounds appear. I look around and see Janus playing the small string instrument. It's like an acoustic orgasm! I stare at him and then suddenly I see notes coming towards me. Lots of them, all in different colours, clear and bright, dancing in the air. Like a visible cloud of music that surrounds me and slowly penetrates my whole body, my mind and my heart. Then Janus starts singing the sacred chants from the Amazonian jungle. I smile like I have never smiled before, filled with pure happiness. While trying to not fall over I start to dance around, shaking my head in amazement.

"Life is so clever. It's so clever, so clever... So simple. So beautiful."

Apart from Janus and Alexsey everyone else is lying down. I don't know what they are experiencing but I'm convinced that it's a big night for all of us. It must be! There's so much energy around, it's impossible that someone wouldn't be affected by it. Maybe it's all in my head, who knows, but right now, in this very moment, it feels real. It's actually too far out to be unreal – it's way beyond my own fantasy!

After a while I begin to feel a bit nauseous again and sit down by the fire, breathing deeply. Alexsey is in a squatting position, cleaning the area around the fire with a little brush made of twigs. He asks me to move away a bit so that he has enough space to do his work. I turn to the other side and above the wooden house I can see

white light shimmering on the horizon – the moon is about to rise. While looking towards the sky, something touches me on my back. Then again, and again, as if something is bumping into me. I look carefully to the side and I am startled: A big round snake head with no eyes is right in front of me! Arrrggghhh! Then I realize that it's Alexsey's bottom... I sigh with relief and turn back to the night sky. But shortly after the same thing happens again, I think a snake is touching me when really it's Alexsey's bum moving around while he's cleaning. I don't like all these snake hallucinations whatsoever, they are freaking me out! Another strong breeze hits the clearing and with it comes a feeling of darkness. I notice that Janus has started to sing louder and Alexsey has put the brush to the side and is fanning the fire vigorously, wanting to make sure that it doesn't go out. More wind arrives and Janus gets up, still singing the Icaros. People begin to roll around with restlessness and some are groaning. The situation is getting spooky, I feel fear rising inside of me. 'No, please not again...' I don't want to go back to hell. The fanning and singing and blowing of the wind intensify until the first rays of the white moon appear. With the arrival of light, everything calms down at once. The moon has scared the demons away! I relax and smile and the wonderful sensation of total connectedness returns. For a little while it is peaceful again.

Then clouds come rolling in, rapidly. The wind picks up and straight away Janus starts to sing louder while Alexsey fans the fire as much as he can. Tension fills the air and before I know it the clouds have covered the moon and darkness has taken over again. I can hear terrifying sounds coming closer from all around, as if something is going to attack us. Looking up to the sky I see a huge dark cloud, getting bigger and bigger. It reminds me of the final part of Lord of the Rings, when Frodo is looking towards Mount Doom. By now, Janus is not only singing the Icaros, he is also waving the fan at high speed, as if he's trying to push the clouds away. Alexsey is doing his part by giving as much oxygen to the fire as he possibly can. It's a battle between light and darkness and I am right in the middle of it! I close my eyes. Ghost-like silhouettes are filling my vision, the atmosphere is tense and I feel like I am about to faint from fear. What on Earth have I gotten myself into? Then a familiar light appears. It's the blue banner I had seen the night before: T-R-U-S-T... Suddenly I start to feel a protective strength rising from within, something telling me that I'm not powerless against the dark forces.

"We always have a choice", I hear Janus saying, "whatever situation we are in, we can choose what we do with it."

That's it! Choice! We can choose to trust.

Many times I have thought and written about this, about the gift of having a choice. In any given moment we can decide which side of the coin to look at. There are always two sides – light and darkness, positive and negative, problem and opportunity. Ying and Yang. But although I have often thought about it, it's only now that I feel that I've fully understood it.

I open my eyes and instinctively spread my arms out. A couple of deep breaths later words begin to stream out of my mouth.

“We can choose to trust...trust...always...we can choose light over darkness. Choose...”

I am whispering the words in all directions, slowly, as if in trance but I am fully awake. I feel as if I can guide the energy around us with my hands, with my words and with the conviction I am carrying in my mind and heart. A deep understanding that choice makes all the difference to how we experience life. It gives us the power to create our own reality!

“Trust...we can choose to trust.”

While repeating the same words over and over I get up, still with my arms spread out. Janus and Alexsey are standing by the fire, but they look somehow different. I walk closer to them and then everything happens all by itself... All three of us take on the posture of eagles, like...we are literally becoming eagles. It is weird and bizarre but totally real. Next we are rising up in the air and gliding in circles above the clearing. Believe

it or not, I am actually having the perspective of a flying bird! A moment of endless beauty, unity and freedom. It's magical!

I see some rays of light and find myself back on the ground. The big black cloud is disappearing fast and the moon is returning to its place. At once, everything becomes peaceful. I close my eyes and am drenched in an ocean of white light. I turn away from the moon but to my surprise the light gets even brighter, it's incredible. As if I have fallen into a light bulb! Janus starts to speak again:

"We have to take responsibility... responsibility to share what we know, to share what we've seen. We have to look after *Pachamama*, Mother Earth. She is kind, but we are not being kind. We have to love her again, connect with her. Connect with everyone..."

I nod, he's so right.

"Yes..."

"Speaking with the heart", Alexsey continues, "and acting with the heart."

"Having compassion for everyone. Everyone suffers."

"We all need love."

"We ARE love."

"We are the same."

"United."

"One."

The three of us are talking, one after the other but ultimately together. It goes on like that for

God knows how long, sitting around the fire and sharing wisdoms. Sometimes we actually speak the words, sometimes they are just thoughts. It's as if we are reading a beautiful poem, changing the narrator with every line, every word even. Yet there's no script! I think about something funny and the other two start laughing; I think about a question and someone answers out loud. It's the most perfect form of communication I have ever experienced, everything fits perfectly together. The thoughts and words, the moments of silence, our moves, everything! We are connected, and I mean really connected. There's no division, no different language or different thinking. We are all consciously linked to the same source, to the same grid.

"Now I understand", I whisper while nodding my head, "I finally understand..."

It's immense! I have no idea what time it is and I couldn't care less either. Maybe two hours have passed since taking the medicine but that's just a wild guess. Time has become irrelevant.

At some point Janus starts to sing again and for a while I am absorbed by the beautiful sound and the messages of the Icaros. Then the next wave of nausea arrives and I get dizzy. My head is spinning and I sit down close by the fire. Suddenly a vision appears which I used to have as a young child – I am a small ball, floating through space and being threatened by a number of much bigger balls that are all around me. It's a

feeling of being overwhelmed, of being lost. I keep my eyes closed and let go... Soon the feeling of threat turns into a feeling of humility. I am still small, a tiny ball drifting in infinite space, but I know that I'm part of something bigger. Respect, love and more humbleness penetrate my emotions and I feel eternally grateful for being alive.

After a while I look up – the nausea has gone. With shaky legs I get up and walk around for a bit. I am thirsty so I pour myself a cup of water from a big canister which is standing next to the shrine. Just when I want to put the cup down I see one of the other guys having a really bad time, rolling around on his mattress. I take the canister and go over to offer him some water, which he downs immediately. Then I go to Dave who has just returned from vomiting his guts out and give him something to drink too. It feels good to focus on others for a bit, to offer a helping hand. Doing this, I realize that no matter how good I feel myself, as long as others are suffering, on a certain level I am suffering too. It's the bloody downside of the whole 'we are all one' feeling – sitting in the same boat, we discover new lands together, but we also drown together...

I walk back to the fireplace and wrap my blanket around me. I am tired but I know I won't be able to sleep. I stare at the moon for a while and then I close my eyes. Visions of people I

know pop up. First my mum – I give her a big warm hug. Then an old friend who has become a drug addict – I have always felt that maybe I could have done more to help him. He smiles at me with forgiveness. Some more people appear, then I am suddenly in Kathmandu, in a small hotel room where I suffered from a high fever a decade ago. One by one I am revisiting situations that have left a scar on me. I can literally feel these scars closing! I can see the wounds, there's raw flesh around my heart and other body parts and I watch how the broken skin heals within seconds. It's truly amazing!

"If you want, you can have a second cup of medicine", Janus says.

"What the fuck would I want another dose for? To fly to the moon?"

"No thanks, I'm fine."

I get up and stretch. Then I take a deep breath and close my eyes again. I am so tired, I can hardly stand straight. My thoughts are drifting slowly through my head and lead me to visualize a sunrise. A new day has started, it is light. I feel the energy of the fresh morning filling my sleepy cells and then I open my eyes. It is dark but I am fully awake again. Magic!

I begin to make some Tai chi moves and can hardly believe what I am doing. Even though I have only taken a couple of classes in my whole life I feel like a grandmaster. Perfect movements, clarity and focus, it's so easy! I remember in

class the teacher used to say that ‘you’ve got to feel the Chi, the energy, moving it around and going through it’. At the time it sounded like a nice idea, but nothing more – there had been nothing tangible, just thin air and my wishful thinking. But now, with the help of Mother Ayahuasca, I am gracefully dancing with the mysterious Chi! I am literally feeling it – how couldn’t I? It’s just there, everywhere, a thick soup of energy all around. Tai Chi has suddenly become a totally natural activity, like walking.

“The moment is all there is”, Janus says, “nothing else matters.”

“And nothing else is needed”, I add.

Another one of those wise statements that are so easy to talk about and so difficult to put into practice. But under the influence of Ayahuasca it has become effortless to live fully in the moment. It is the most obvious thing to do, like breathing. Right here, right now. The moment is all that exists, and once again it’s a choice – rather than worrying about the future or the past, I choose to live in the moment. Quite simple really.

After my perfect Tai Chi session I end up walking around the circle for ages and when I finally stop I kneel down close to the fire. I look over to Alexsey who is sitting a couple of metres away. This time he doesn’t turn into a snake but instead into the main character of one of the books I have written. It’s mind-blowing! One

crazy experience after the other, relentlessly! The book is called *The Little Buddha* and over the last five years it has played a huge part in my life – from the actual writing to getting it published plus all the joys and struggles in between. I guess with his Sadhu-like appearance it isn't that hard to imagine Alexsey as a little Buddha, but nevertheless it's really far out. The book character which I have created is sitting right in front of me, as if it's the most normal thing in the world! We share a smile and then I suddenly realise where the inspiration for the book has come from – I've received it directly from the vast energy pool that we're all part of. Sure, I am the one who has written it, but the words of wisdom haven't come from me, they've come through me! Several times it has happened that I've read a passage of *The Little Buddha* and found an answer to a problem in my life. I've always wondered how it was possible to read my own book and actually understand the messages for the first time. The most obvious explanation is exactly this: I have simply acted as a typewriter, putting on paper the messages of the universe! There are no doubts – I definitely haven't written the book all by myself.

I look up to the stars and the moon and let my eyes drift until I see Janus. He is sitting on the other side of the circle, chanting. While watching him from a distance his face slowly starts to take on a different form and then I suddenly recognize

who he has turned into: Jim Morrison! I start to laugh – sitting by the fire with Jim Morrison, can it get any cooler than that? No way!

“Hey Jim, wazz up?”

He looks at me, smiling. We exchange a few thoughts and then I ask him what it’s like to be Jim Morrison. He doesn’t answer – he doesn’t have to. Talking to him is like talking to myself in the mirror, about an experience I once had. Not that I am Jim Morrison, we all are! Being Jim Morrison is simply one experience made by the collective consciousness. Just another part of the whole!

I feel a cold breeze touching my neck and turn around – the fire is almost out. Where’s Alexsey? I hear a rushing sound coming from the direction of the big tree, someone is having very bad diarrhoea. ‘That must be him!’ I take the little fan and do my best to revive the fire, but I struggle to keep it going. I try harder but still don’t have much success. Then Alexsey appears next to me.

“Can I tell you something?”

“Sure.”

“When you work with the fire, don’t blow from the top. It’s not good to put yourself above the fire because the fire has been around for much longer than we have. It’s sacred and deserves our respect. Always blow from the side.”

He picks up the fan and shows me what he meant, then he passes the fan back to me. I follow his advice and soon the coals are covered in flames. It works!

“How do you know that stuff?”

“I’ve been working with fire for quite a while and the fire is teaching me. It has ancient powers, if you listen carefully it shares its wisdom with you.”

I start to think about other times when I sat next to a campfire or in front of a chimney – fire has such a hypnotizing effect on me, producing some kind of trance state when I stare at it for long enough. And I know that many others feel the same. So even without being on a hallucinogenic trip it’s easy to see that fire indeed has magical powers.

After a while I give the fan back to Alexsey and get up. It’s a peaceful atmosphere. Apart from Janus, Alexsey and I everyone else is lying on their mattresses, travelling through different dimensions. I feel a deep bonding with the other two, having spent most of the night together around the fire. Each one of us plays a different role: Janus is the Shaman, guiding the group to new levels of consciousness; Alexsey is the guardian of light, looking after the fire and thus making sure that there is always a counterpart to the darkness surrounding us. And me? I guess I’m the observer, the storyteller. Already now I know for sure that I will write about my

experience, share it with others and spread the word about this special place I have encountered. Even though I have met them both only two days before, I feel we are like brothers who are working together to support the family. Doing what we can to help ourselves and others to wake up. There has been so much talk about 2012 being the end of the world – yet what it really means is the end of our long sleep. The time has come for the big Awakening! That's what it's all about, waking up to what we really are: one big family!

During the whole night the cycles of light and darkness continued. I felt blissful for a while, then nausea would come in and with it fears and dark creatures. Every time I struggled, there was some kind of lesson to be learnt. To choose wisely, to live in the moment, to feel connected. Simple lessons which aren't taught in school but which are essential for leading a happy life.

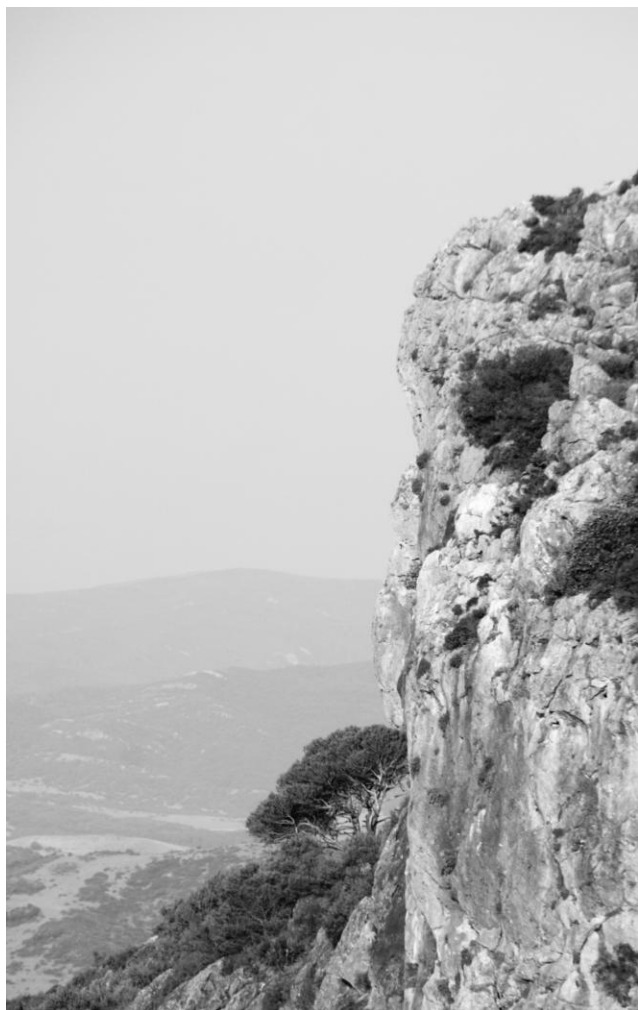
The intense part of the trip lasted for about four to five hours. So much happened, it was ridiculous! I remember picking up a stone and feeling how the stone was alive and how it was made from the same energy that I was made of. It was beautiful and amazing and magical and everything at once! By touching the stone I felt like I was embracing the whole world. I was so grateful, to Janus, Alexsey, the stars, trees, rocks. To life! Images of films were appearing – from

the Matrix, Lord of the Rings and Avatar. Surely the authors and producers must have had some kind of similar experience like the one I had that night. They were talking about the same stuff: the battle between good and bad, the power of choice, the connectedness with everything.

At some point the intensity started to wear off and I decided to lie down. I walked to my mattress and crawled into the sleeping bag. I was totally exhausted and just wanted to go to sleep but I somehow sensed that this wasn't going to happen. Instead, more visions arrived as soon as I closed my eyes. It was like having very vivid dreams but being completely conscious. It went on and on and on...

Looking back, my second Ayahuasca experience was a night-long journey through the space between life and death. For a few hours I was plugged into the all-encompassing cosmic grid where everything is connected and where all that matters is the moment. It was the scariest thing I've done in my whole life and at the same time it was the most divine experience I've ever had.

When dawn finally arrived I opened my eyes and smiled – I had survived the trip into the unknown!



Part III

Waking up

I was lying on my mattress, eyes wide open. Everything around me was still quiet. While watching the sky getting ready for sunrise I let my thoughts wander through the memories of the previous night. I was in complete shock! Never ever would I have imagined that it's possible to experience something like that. I was like...WHAT THE FUCK?! I kept shaking my head in disbelief but at the same time I knew that it hadn't been a dream. There was no doubt about it, none. It was so unreal, it had to be real!

The first birds started singing and I turned to my left. Dave was staring me.

"How are you?", he asked.

I stared back at him, unable to speak.

"A tsunami of information and experience, right?", he said after a little silence.

"Yes. That's a good way of putting it. A tsunami..."

He smiled.

"That was quite a different Claus last night."

"Yeah, I guess..."

"Well, I am glad you had an interesting time."

"Dave, it was AMAZING! I mean... I just can't believe it, I don't know what to say."

He smiled again, with a look on his face that showed that he understood perfectly how I felt.

“It was just so incredibly...insane! A totally different dimension! So much darkness and so much light...”

“Sounds like you’ve met Mother Ayahuasca properly this time.”

I nodded, then I shook my head again.

“It was by far the most intense experience I’ve had in my whole life. Seriously, it was immense! Like an explosion...of everything!”

They say you ought to be careful what you wish for – I had asked for a surprise and that was exactly what I got. Little did I know how huge this surprise was going to be. In the space of a few hours I’ve experienced the wildest rollercoaster ride of my life. It’s been an absolutely epic voyage – a deep drop into hell followed by a spiritual orgasm!

Slowly the others started to get up too. Soon we were all sitting on our mattresses and Janus began with the closing ritual. One more time we had to endure the liquid tobacco and then the final jungle cigar was lit. Everyone gave thanks to the medicine and to Janus, our humble guide who had led us through the unknown. Listening to the others, my feeling was confirmed that it had been a big night for all us. Full of evil vomiting, crazy visions and blissful moments.

When it was Alan's turn to talk, he looked at me and smiled.

"Thanks for entertaining us Claus!"

Everybody laughed.

"Did I entertain you?", I asked innocently.

"Oh yes! You were so funny! You didn't stop laughing for ages and you were making these bizarre sounds. And at some point I actually thought you were going to fall onto me because you couldn't walk straight. It was hilarious! Must have been a good trip..."

The peace pipe continued its way around the circle. Sarah was next, then Dave and then it was my turn. I took a few puffs and thought about what I wanted to say.

"Wow... What an experience! Thank you all for sharing the night!"

I kept silent for a few moments, contemplating and enjoying the holy smoke.

"Thank you, *Abuelita*! Thank you, Janus! Thank you, life! Thank you for all the healing! We need more of it, much more! We need to heal our wounds, our hearts and minds. We have to go back to feeling One... Thank you!"

I took another puff and passed the cigar to my left. I felt so much gratitude for everything, I could have easily said thank you another hundred times. I was overwhelmed by humbleness and a deep feeling of being connected to the entire cosmos. Life was beautiful. So beautiful and so special!

After a few more stops the cigar landed back in Janus's hand.

"The medicine helps us to wake up. It's her greatest gift for us – opening our eyes so we can see what life is really about. There is far too much destruction happening today – we are destroying Mother Nature, we're cutting trees for profit and going to war over land that belongs to none of us. And then we take drugs to ignore it all."

Silence.

"We have to stop destroying and start creating. We have to become creators! Like artists who paint a better world. Most importantly, we have to make peace – first with ourselves, then with our neighbours and with the whole planet. And we have to start soon, before it's too late. That's why the time is now – now is the moment to wake up!"

Janus paused and then he smiled.

"I wish you all a happy life. May the medicine always be with you!"

He got up, put the cigar next to the fire and began to give everyone a big hug. It didn't take long and we were all hugging each other. The journey with Mother Ayahuasca had been very personal for everyone, but we had shared the same space, the same night and the same medicine. Plus we had done some pretty impressive vomiting together! All of this made it

a very bonding experience which left a big mark in our hearts.

We exchanged some more hugs and words, then it was time for breakfast. Thank God for porridge and bananas! Once my hunger was stilled I packed my stuff and took it to the car. It was nice to walk a bit and to spend some time alone. I felt really light after all the cleansing and my mind was as clear as ever. Thinking about my journey with Mother Ayahuasca, I felt that it had been like a rite of passage, a transformation of my Self. In some indigenous cultures, rituals are held where a boy is sent into the forest for a whole night. When (and if) he comes back the next morning, he's a man. My experience with the sacred medicine felt a bit similar – I had returned from the dark woods and was filled with strength and confidence. A part of me had died and a new part had been born. The snake was still the same snake but her skin was new, ready for another chapter of life!

I went back to the house and wanted to say goodbye to everyone but then I wondered why I should go home already. I stayed and got caught up talking. For hours and hours we were telling each other about our experiences. After lunch I sat down on the sofa inside the house, took a pen and piece of paper and wrote down as many notes as I could come up with. When the page was full I suddenly realized how tired I was – I had been awake for almost sixty hours, with two

Ayahuasca ceremonies and a few cups of San Pedro in between! I put pen and paper to the side, lay down and closed my eyes.

A few minutes later I finally fell asleep.

Being in love

I arrived home late on Sunday evening. It felt as if I had been travelling a long time in distant lands when really I had only been a couple of days in the mountains, forty kilometres away. I briefly talked to one of my housemates, had some food and then I went to bed. There was still plenty of sleep I had to catch up on.

The following morning I got up early and did a really nice meditation for sunrise. It was the best way to start the new week – moving gradually from one reality to another; from the world of Ayahuasca to the challenges of daily life. Later on I met up with a few friends and spent the day telling them about my sacred journey. I'm pretty sure that most of those who I spoke to thought that I was some kind of hippie who had just come back from India, totally out of it. Who could blame them? There I was, sitting cross-legged with my eyes wide open and telling everyone about my encounters with Jim Morrison and the little Buddha. When I talked about the vomiting and all the snake visions I could see disgust and fear rising in the faces of my listeners. They didn't understand why anybody would pay money to be sick and lose the plot. Again, who could blame them? But when I began to talk about all the laughing, the sensation of oneness and the blissful feelings, their faces changed. Suddenly I noticed how their

curiosity grew and how they were slowly pulled away from their own comfort zones. It was the deeply spiritual experience they were attracted to. They too wanted to feel One.

In the afternoon I received a text message from Sarah.

'May your days still buzz with good jungle vibes!'

I smiled and wrote back straight away:

'Haha, buzzing is just the right word! Thank you so much for everything! I feel like I have discovered a treasure. A treasure which I always knew was there, but which had been hidden deep inside.'

A treasure, that's what I had found!

Later in the evening I was playing guitar for a while. At some point I went to my desk to get some song sheets. While looking for them, I stumbled over the intention card that I had written before the ceremony. I sat down and started reading.

'Homeopathy; my voice; separation.'

Slowly I began to realize that all these issues had come up during the ceremony. The first night I had only taken the card saying 'Free my voice', the second night I had asked for a surprise – yet in the end, all my original intentions had received some attention. Not that the problems have disappeared since taking the medicine, but they were brought to the surface and solutions were suggested. Mother Ayahuasca

is often referred to as a 'plant teacher' and that's exactly what she is – a teacher who teaches. She shares her wisdoms about life and death, she shows how to make changes and points you in the right direction. But you are the one who has to do the walking. Nobody will make the changes for you.

The next day I sent an email to a friend.

'I am not sure what is meant by enlightenment, but the way I understand it, the Ayahuasca experience was pretty close to that. Like waking up, seeing light outshining darkness. Dying and being born again. The death part wasn't very funny, to say the least, but part of the process. And the light, man, the light was bright! So fucking bright! I watched some videos on youtube of people talking about their Ayahuasca experience. One of them was Sting, he said: "I was wired to the whole cosmos." That's damn accurate!'

I kept buzzing, on and on.

A couple of days later I wrote a blog. Once a month I write one, about random things regarding the changes we are going through (www.clausmikosch.com). This one I called THE CHOICE IS OURS:

Life can be very depressing these days. The economy is accelerating into a downward spiral towards disaster; banks continue to invest in weapon companies, causing violent wars for

many and 10% returns for a few; food is becoming more and more toxic and clean water a privilege of the rich. Rainforests are being destroyed in the name of progress, politicians keep lying and diversity is dying. Greed, fear and polluted minds. Dark times.

Is there light at the end of the tunnel? Well, it depends on what direction you are looking at... Despite all bad news – we are being given a real chance to create a better system, a better life. Something truly beautiful! There is a growing revolution of local and organic food; there are factories which run on renewable energy, businessmen who invest in trees and enemies who talk about peace. We can choose ethical banking, fair trade, alternative healing and holistic schools. We could be heroes, instead of fools.

I feel that the on-going battle between light and darkness has entered the last round. And it's us who will decide the outcome. Will we keep sleeping or will we wake up? Will we choose to trust in our own powers and the power of the good? Will we take on the responsibility to create a better world for us and those to come? The choice is ours. The time is now.

*It's so easy to lose hope,
To say 'I don't care',
To let life turn into a nightmare.
But what if we gathered together?*

*Joining our forces, willing to share.
Holding on tight, to love, peace and light,
To keep the faith that, as Bob said,
Everything's gonna be alright.
To wake up and follow the sun.
Becoming ONE.*

I stayed on a constant high, for weeks! Through the process of letting go I had jumped into the river and was now floating downstream, picking up treasures along the way. Everything had become effortless! There was total harmony and life was falling perfectly into place. For example, during the days after the ceremony, I kept listening to the latest album from the Australian songwriter Xavier Rudd, called SPIRIT BIRD. It was the best music for the state I was in – with beautiful melodies, tribal rhythms and profound messages of love and unity. At the end of July I went to Germany and travelled up to Berlin. The day I got there I found out that Xavier Rudd was playing the following night in a club three stations away from where I was staying... Magic! Needless to say, I got a ticket and witnessed one of the best concerts I had seen in a very long time.

There were many more similar examples; synchronicities that gave me a feeling of flowing effortlessly down the river whilst being connected to everyone and everything. I felt grateful and happy, every single moment!

Looking back, I think I have never felt that good without a woman having something to do with it... I was totally in love with life itself!

We are nature

A few months before the ceremony, I had done a little photo collage and posted it on Facebook. I didn't think much of it at first – it had been the result of a Saturday morning without anything else to do. However, the image became very popular, very quickly, with thousands of people sharing it and even more liking it. Here's what I put up:



The photo on the left is a close-up of a leaf outside my room, in the middle you can see the blood vessels of a human heart and on the right there's a river network of the Amazon. The striking similarity of the structure of the three images is a good reminder that our connection to nature is a lot closer than we think.

A week or so after the ceremony, I was online and suddenly the image came up on my newsfeed, posted by a site that I had only recently started following. Amazed by the coincidence, I kept staring at it. And then I realized that I had never fully understood what it meant until I met Mother Ayahuasca. WE ARE NATURE! Quite literally it means that we are the same. Not in a hippie sense, but really being ONE. We come from the same place, we're going to the same place and we are always connected to the same source. People, leaves and rivers are all different manifestations of the same energy. We are different drops of the same ocean.

I know this all sounds very airy-fairy, but it's like that. Together, we are the mysterious entity that many of us call God. This is the reality – everything else is an illusion.

Reflections

What has changed?

Since taking the medicine, eleven weeks have passed. It's September 2012 – there are exactly three months left until the world as we know it is supposed to end. Three months to get ready for the big Awakening or the ultimate disaster. Will there be some massive natural catastrophe? Nuclear war? Or a nasty epidemic, wiping out humankind? Or maybe some alien will visit and teach us how to live well? Maybe nothing will happen. Who knows... Right now, it doesn't matter. Because right now we can only focus on what is, not what will be.

The extreme buzzing feeling has eased off. Not that the medicine has stopped working, it just does so in more subtle ways. I've noticed feeling more compassion and kindness, for myself and for others. Compassion for all the struggles we are facing in life. Rather than quickly judging my own faults or all the silly things that others say and do, I take a step back and try to accept our imperfections. Now, that doesn't mean that I am suddenly the nicest person on the planet or that I've started liking all the idiots in this world. Nor does it mean that all my problems have

disappeared overnight. But through the deep spiritual experience that I've had with Mother Ayahuasca most problems and most idiots have become far less threatening. They're a part of life – here to teach us, not to annoy us or frighten us.

Of course it can be difficult to convert every situation into a big life lesson, but that's not even necessary. Sometimes the best way to deal with all the crap that we encounter on a daily basis is to cultivate a good sense of humour. I've started to laugh much more at myself and at others, not in a nasty way but with a sense of humbleness. And in doing so, everyone and everything is slowly becoming more lovable.

Another thing that has changed since the ceremony is that I've developed an aversion for eating meat. I haven't become a vegetarian but I am not very attracted anymore by dead pieces of flesh. Why should I eat other living beings, with eyes and hearts, when there is no need for it? And if I do, why don't I do it in a respectful manner? Eating chickens that have spent their life cramped into tiny cages, pumped up with chemical growth stimulants and antibiotics, I mean, surely animals deserve a more dignified treatment than that. They deserve respect! And since we are all One, not showing respect to other life forms means that we don't respect ourselves either. If we kill animals to feed our greedy stomachs, at least we should treat them well while they are alive and show some

appreciation. Sadly, in our modern society this is rarely the case.

Instead of meat, I've started to crave sacred moments. I meditate more often, light incense when I get up in the morning and I even bought a Tibetan singing bowl. Creating little moments that help me to feel part of that sacred space we all belong to. It's like the feeling I get when staring at a fire – using an ancient ritual to stay in the moment and to feel connected to the divine light. This is what I want more of in my life.

We ask questions such as: Where do we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go? Big, essential questions which remain unanswered as long as we use logical thinking. No matter how hard we try, certain aspects of life and death stay a mystery for our rational minds. It's only when we start looking with our hearts that we begin to find answers. We might not be able to see the intangible divinity that lies within us, but we can feel it. And there, deep inside, there are all the answers.

Probably the biggest impact the medicine had on me is my renewed friendship with death. Don't get me wrong, I love being alive but just like everyone else, I know that my time here is limited. And then what? Will we march right through heaven's gate? Or into hell? Or will there be a black hole filled with nothingness? Thinking about this can be quite daunting and it

can cast a dark shadow on life. For me, the Ayahuasca experience comes closest to how I imagine death to be. It certainly wasn't all fun but neither was it only hell nor nothingness. It was a different dimension of being, an Ego-free zone where everything happens to everyone at once. There was no concept of time, hence there was no beginning or end. There was no death, just different experiences co-existing next to each other.

About four weeks after the ceremony I had a very vivid dream whilst in Germany. In the dream, my daughter and I were flying back to Spain. Suddenly there was a loud bang and we started to descend rapidly. At this point I ought to mention that while not having a pathological fear of flying I'm always very glad when the plane lands again. Gliding in a metal box through the sky doesn't make me feel very comfortable, to say the least. It's simply not natural – we are people, not birds! Anyways, back to the dream: While the plane was speeding towards the ground I grabbed my daughter, put her on my lap and gave her a huge hug. Panic was all around and soon it became obvious that we were all going to die. The strange thing was that I wasn't scared, not in the slightest. We were heading towards death and I felt totally at peace, a bit like 'okay, let's see what happens next'. I kept hugging my daughter and together we dissolved into a bubble of warm light. It felt like we were

protected, there was no reason to be afraid. When I woke up from that dream I remember feeling great relief, as if death had lost its power to frighten me. I was filled with a deep sense of trust that no matter what would happen, everything was going to be alright.

I continue to feel strongly affected by the Ayahuasca experience even though I have lost the crazy look in my eyes that I had for several weeks after the ceremony. Time has put a distance between me and that magic night. Feeling constantly high is an emotion that is difficult to maintain in everyday life, no matter how desirable it may seem. According to Aldous Huxley this has to do with distraction – there are so many thoughts and feelings that steal our attention!

“I took my copy of The Tibetan book of the Dead, and opened at random. ‘O nobly born, let not thy mind be distracted.’ That was the problem – to remain undistracted. Undistracted by the memory of past sins, by imagined pleasure, by the bitter aftertaste of old wrongs and humiliations, by all the fears and hates and cravings that ordinarily eclipse the light.” (from The Doors of Perception).

Taking the state of blissful Oneness into normal reality seems close to impossible and yet that’s exactly what the challenge is – to make it possible. There is no need to be madly in love all

the time but perhaps there is a way to keep loving...

Messages from the jungle

A few people have asked me whether I would do it again, another journey with Mother Ayahuasca. Usually I answer 'yes – if the moment feels right'. When I returned from Germany at the end of August I actually found out that they were having another ceremony a week later. Same place, same Shaman, same medicine. Immediately I reserved a place and started with the recommended diet. But then I started to get doubts. Was I ready for another trip? Did I really need another crazy ride just yet? I hadn't even digested the first experience properly. What if I suddenly had another tsunami to deal with? At the same time I was tempted to do it, to see how much deeper I could dive into that space between life and death. Something told me that I had only scratched the surface, that there's still so much to be learnt. I was going back and forth for a while, but then I decided to give it a miss. I was more than happy with the experience I had in July and I felt the medicine was still working. So why do it again? After all it's not a drug you take for pleasure; it's a powerful ritual involving a medicine. More like intense therapy than a funky night out. And what's the point in getting more lessons if you are still saturated from the last session?

In homeopathy one of the basic principles is the 'Law of the minimum dose'. In the first year

of college you learn that a remedy shouldn't be repeated if it continues to work. Once the organism isn't stuck any more, it doesn't require more pushing in the same direction. I feel the same is true with Ayahuasca: if it's still working, let it work. And most importantly – cooperate! There's no medicine that can solve problems without your help.

I can well imagine that I will embark on another journey with *Abuelita* one day. For now, I have plenty to work with though. There have been so many valuable insights – about myself, about life, about death – I really feel the need to take on the challenge to integrate at least some of them into my normal reality. It is true that Mother Ayahuasca is extremely wise and helpful, but at the end of the day she's just a teacher. And any lesson, no matter who taught it, can only turn into wisdom if it is applied.

Looking at the messages from the jungle, it is interesting to find that there's nothing new. They are all reminders of things that we have heard many times before. The problem is that we often fail miserably at putting knowledge into practice because we keep forgetting the most valuable insights. That's why we need to be reminded. Over and over again, until we learn the lesson.

Here are some of these reminders. They are little treasures that carry ancient wisdom from the past into the present; universal and timeless messages that have the power to make the

experience of life a truly beautiful one. It's up to us whether we use them or not.

HAPPINESS IS A CHOICE

This is possibly the most important message of all. Every single moment we make choices: We choose to say yes or no, to go right or left, to get up early or late; we choose to smile or frown, to love or hate, to look up or down. There are always two sides to every situation, to every story. By choosing which side we look at we are shaping our own reality. Do we want to experience life as an optimist or a pessimist? It doesn't matter which of the two is better or worse – what's important to know is that it's our free choice. We have the power to decide how we want to live and feel, what we think and who we want to be. If my house burns to the ground I can feel sad for the loss or excited about a new beginning. It might be a difficult choice, but it's me who turns my head to the left to face a problem or to the right to see an opportunity. There is always light and darkness, there is good and bad in everyone and everything. How I perceive life depends solely on where I put my attention – do I focus on positive news or negative news? Do I look for happiness or sadness? Do I dream of heaven or hell? It's my decision! Some call it a curse, some a blessing and others ignore it. Personally I believe it's the

greatest gift that we were given: Having the freedom to choose!

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

With the freedom of choice comes responsibility – since it's me who chooses, it's also me who is responsible for my choices. During the second night with the sacred medicine, Janus talked several times about the need for taking responsibility. For our environment, for other human beings and, most importantly, for ourselves. We all know that the world we are living in could be a much better place and a much better experience for everyone. There could be more justice, more respect and more kindness and love. Natural resources are being exploited in unsustainable ways; we take all the good stuff from our rivers and seas and in return we dump our rubbish into the water; we help the rich getting richer by supporting multinational corporations instead of using local shops; we give our money to the big banks that invest in weapon companies even though there are ethical banks that invest in forests and renewable energy; we choose to watch TV instead of helping a friend; we complain more often than we say thank you... Unfortunately, this list is almost endless. We tend to blame politicians, bankers or our neighbours for the misery we are in – there is always someone else who is

responsible. But this is wrong because WE choose! Therefore it is OUR responsibility.

No matter how much or how little you are doing to help create a better world – you can do better. We can all do better! If we don't want bad things in our lives, we have to choose good things. If we don't do that, nothing will change. Mother Ayahuasca was very clear about that: Change is possible, but we are running out of time. We have to care for nature and share this planet rather than abusing it selfishly; we have to start being honest with ourselves and each other, for lies prevent us from evolving into something better; we need to cultivate diversity and respect all life; we need less war and more peace – within the global community, the neighbourhood and within the family too; we need more fair trade, more real food and more ethical banks. But – none of this will happen by itself. WE have to make it happen! Through our daily choices we decide what kind of world we live in, and so whichever world we see – it is our responsibility. Mine, yours, everybody's! We can wait until the last fish has been caught and life has turned into hell and then we can blame God and the evil world rulers for our bad luck. Or we can choose to wake up, take responsibility and change what needs to be changed. Perhaps we'll never reach paradise, but we definitely have the power to create a little bit of heaven here on Earth.

TRUST

I have no idea how my journey with Ayahuasca would have turned out without trust. I actually don't want to know. When things went really dark and scary, I had to let go and stop trying to control the situation. My options were to either go insane or to trust that it will be alright.

Imagine being buried alive – outside are some friends who will dig you out in thirty minutes, but until then you are stuck under a thick layer of soil. I think it's safe to say that panic would be a common reaction. 'What if they don't dig me out? What if I stay here and die?' In a situation like that, all you can do is trust. There is no control, none! The darkest side of my Ayahuasca experience felt a bit like that, like being buried alive. I looked the devil right in the eye and was unable to turn around, as if I were trapped in hell. It was only through letting go of my desire to stay in control that my panic could be transformed into a blissful feeling. It's like jumping into a wild river: there is no point in swimming against the strong current, you'd get tired and disillusioned and you'd be likely to drown. You have to let go and trust that the river will take you to a nice place...

Quite often, life is like a wild river too. It can be scary and overwhelming and nobody knows exactly where it leads to. But we've chosen to jump in and now we have to ride it out. We may try to fight the current and sometimes we might

even reach the riverbank for a little rest, but there are certain moments when all we can do is to remember the first message – choice! We can choose to trust and let go, and in doing so we become truly free.

CREATING SACRED MOMENTS

Over the last decades the church has lost more and more power, at least in the western world. In principle, that's great. Most religions have failed miserably in producing happy and loving individuals. But while it's good that people stop following random interpretations of ancient scripts, all in the name of some superior God, there is also a downside to the decline of religious identification: A spiritual void has been created. Our modern society suffers from a severe loss of values. There is nobody to turn to with our ethical and moral questions. In a world where material wealth has become the new religion, what is right and wrong is no longer based on how it affects humans or nature, but what it does to profit.

Most so-called civilized people enjoy more luxury than ever but at the same time there is an increasing lack of meaning in their lives. We've created a material world around us, but we are not material beings – even in the 21st century you still can't buy happiness!

Slowly but surely we are discovering that we can't live without something meaningful,

something that touches us deeply and that can answer questions about life and death. That's what spirituality is all about! Yet thanks to organized religions and some weird new age folks, 'spiritual' has almost become a swearword nowadays. This has to change because unless we fill the spiritual void we will always feel empty, no matter how much material wealth we accumulate. It's not that we have to go back to church, but we have to value and cultivate a spiritual life again. We have to start believing in something that is capable of nurturing our souls, be it nature, humanity or a neutral God. There is no need for yet another new religion, another ism to follow, but that doesn't mean we can live without spirituality.

A good way to reconnect to the spiritual world that lies within each of us is to start creating sacred moments in daily life. Going to church is one example, having ceremonies with Mother Ayahuasca another. But there are many more: meditation; spending time in silence; lighting a candle; going for a long walk in nature; listening to beautiful music; being creative – moments that trigger self-reflection and promote a peaceful sense of being. We need to find little rituals that help us to feel part of something bigger, that help us to feel connected to others and to all of nature. Because that's what we are – a part of nature, a part of everything.

LIVING NOW

I still hear Janus's words echoing in my head, 'the moment is all that matters...' It's probably the most powerful and most simple message of all, yet for some strange reason it's also the one which is most difficult to put into practice. We are constantly living either in the past or in the future – we carry all the bad feelings and memories that have happened a long time ago and we worry about what may or may not be. Distracted by so many thoughts and emotions, we forget to value the one thing that we possess: the moment that is happening right now! We are busy dealing with what was and what might be, and in the process we neglect what IS. More than anything else, Mother Ayahuasca reminds us to live in the present. She tells us to choose between light and darkness, to be responsible citizens of this planet, to trust and to create sacred moments, and she tells us to do it now! It doesn't matter what we did yesterday and who knows what we might do tomorrow – today is the day when change has to begin. Often we find excuses, saying we don't have time and then we forget about our good intentions. Yet time is not only relative, it's actually totally irrelevant because all there ever is, is NOW! So if you want to change something, what are you waiting for? Forgive the past, welcome the future and be in the present!

How to explain an orgasm?

They say that every Ayahuasca journey is different. Some are darker, some are brighter, some produce more hallucinations and others make you vomit more. It depends on who you are and what you need at the time. Because people have many different experiences with the sacred brew, it's difficult to generalise what Ayahuasca does.

There is certainly a theme of death and rebirth, of renewal and change. It's a medicine that offers healing. It's cleansing. It can produce feelings ranging from being trapped in hell to having reached enlightenment. It's intense and wild and kind, all at the same time.

I really like something that Dr Gabor Maté has said: *'Ayahuasca shows you your full potential as a loving, connected human being'*. Every person has the potential to be and to do good, to add a beautiful scent to life. Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed were just examples – we can ALL wake up! I think the reason why we suffer during Ayahuasca ceremonies is because we are being shown that we are still asleep and that we aren't truly loving and connected human beings yet. There is still a lot we have to learn about ourselves and each other and nature. That's why we need the medicine – we need to be taught! And I assume that the better we are at learning, the less strict the teacher will be...

I've tried as best as I could to describe my Ayahuasca experience. It was impossible to remember every single detail of the night, there was simply too much information. I think even Google would have struggled! But all in all it's a very complete and authentic documentation of my journey with the mysterious medicine. For others it might be totally different, for me it was like this.

When I was writing about the crazy ride of the second night I suddenly got stuck. I wondered, 'how can I explain the blissful feeling of oneness to someone who has never experienced anything like it?' It was like trying to explain what an orgasm feels like to a virgin; a virgin who hasn't even masturbated. I actually posted this question on Facebook: *"If someone never had sex – how do you explain an orgasm?"* Lots of people answered. Most described a tingling sensation rushing through the whole body. Some mentioned chocolate, others fireworks in the mind; someone talked about an internal explosion and another friend described it as a little death. My favourite one was a big sneeze – the long build up of tension and then the sudden release followed by a moment of profound relaxation! They are all good attempts, but all fail to really explain what an orgasm feels like. Unless you have one, you will never know. If you belong to those who know what an orgasm feels like, well, the good times I had with

Ayahuasca were a bit similar. When I have an orgasm, for a few moments I experience a beautiful state of total clarity that rises from deep within. I feel totally at peace and I'm happy to be alive. I know who I should be with or not, what I should do with my life, what's good for me and what's not. There is no desire, no yesterday or tomorrow, just the present moment. Taking Ayahuasca is like this, but for several hours and with little detours to hell once in a while. It's an orgasmic rollercoaster ride where you experience the ugliest and the most beautiful sides of yourself and of life.

I'm glad that I took part in the two ceremonies with the sacred plant teacher from the Amazon. Very glad indeed! But this doesn't mean that everybody has to do the same. If you are curious, if you get a calling and if it feels right, go for it! If not, there are many other ways to discover who you really are and what life is about. After all, many roads lead to Rome. A trip with Ayahuasca is like taking a rocket, flying with the speed of light to the ancient city and spending a few hours there to see what it's like. Afterwards you have to come back and walk the path of life in the same way as everyone else does – on your own two feet!

There are no shortcuts, there's no-one who will carry you to enlightenment. Others can help you to wake up, but there's only one person who can open your eyes: You!

Thank you, Mother Ayahuasca! Thank you for seducing me into the unknown and for showing me the biggest illusion that there is: duality. Once we stop being selfish and strip off all those layers of me and you and them, we are left with our core being. There is no divide – deep inside, we are all ONE!

*“Why do people take Ayahuasca?
So they learn to die.”*

Master Gabriel

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