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In the Arms of the Pachamama
by Andrea Mikana-Pinkham, Andean Shamanic Practitioner
and Mesa Carrier in the Inca Spiritual Tradition

In the cool and enfolding darkness, we trudged up the barren hillside just as the light from *Mama Quilla*, the full moon, was peeking her bright face over the horizon. We could see the lights in the valley below us, sparkling with the warmth of activities of the people of Cusco, busy with their evening's activities. The fresh night air helped us to clear our minds of worldly concerns and prepare us for our important work that we were about to undertake. We carefully followed our guide, a ritual specialist in the Inca Spiritual Tradition, and silently continued around the hill to the right, climbing up two steep stone benches to finally stand breathlessly in front of our evening's destination...the small opening to the cave that led into the *Pachamama* (Mother Earth).

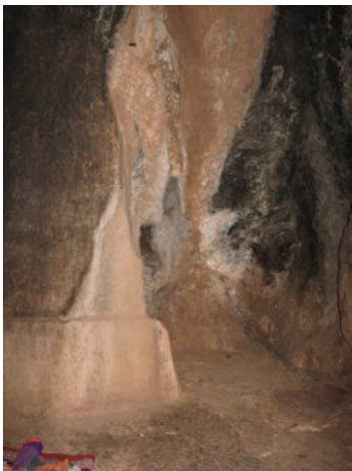
Our diverse group of spiritual seekers had come from many far away places to be here on this special night, to enter the Temple of the Moon, the *Amaru Machay*, or "Place of the Serpent", as it's known in the local indigenous Quechua language. Each person in the group had made the decision to travel in the company of other like-minded people, not only for the emotional warmth and safety they felt it would offer, but also for the enriching opportunities of sharing both the daily and the peak experiences of travel with their spiritual brothers and sisters. Certainly during our few days that we'd already been in Peru, this had been regularly occurring. The bonding had been happening easily, and a very positive group synergy had been building. Now...here we were, on the night of the full moon, ready to share and support each other again. Perhaps at one of the most profound levels yet.

We all knew that we had been called here out of our daily lives, to make this trip to Peru in order to receive the much-needed gifts for our personal healing. We each had our unique saga of how we had stepped through our limitations and fears and had then joyfully made our commitment to make this sacred pilgrimage to the mystical land of the ancient Incas, to reclaim ourselves as Sons and Daughters of the Sun, the Moon, the *apus*, (sacred mountains), the rivers, the trees, the flowers, the stones, and of course...of the *Pachamama* Herself. Now we stood outside the entrance to Her womb in silent anticipation, each of us reflecting on what had brought us to this moment and wondering where it would take us. How would it change our lives? Would we emerge from the cave born into a new life? Would we have the courage to let go of those fears that were keeping us from living our

full measure of Spirit, to be able to stand in our Truth and in Love in each moment? These and many other questions were silently reeling through our minds and hearts as we stood at the entrance to the cave, poised to take that next step for our healing.

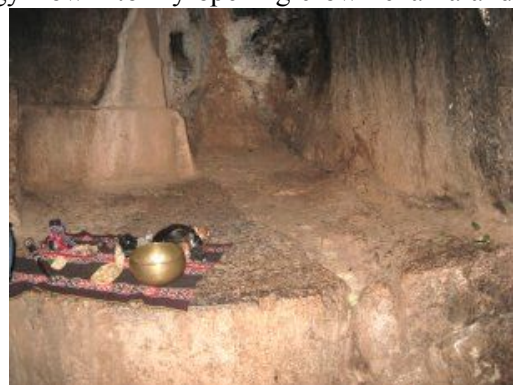
Our shaman quietly interrupted our individual reveries. “It’s important to hold a very clear focus for your healing when you enter the cave, and to try to hold that focus throughout our time inside the body of the Pachamama,” he solemnly told the group. “Pray with care, for you WILL get what you ask for!” He then took out a small bottle of *agua florida* (flower water) and poured a little in my upturned palm. I offered a small splash to the *Pachamama*, rubbed my hands together, clapped three times, placed my hands in front of my mouth and nose, breathed in several times as deeply as possible, and began to systematically cleanse my aura, from my crown to my feet. He then moved to the other members of the group, giving each one the precious shamanic liquid, urging them to cleanse away their stress and worries so they could enter the cave ready to receive their special gifts.

Once I felt cleansed and ready, he asked me to lead the group into the cave. I turned around and walked down three ancient stone steps, thinking of my many sisters and brothers who had also tread on them in the past, as they too had entered the womb of our Mother. I moved a few steps down the narrow corridor and stopped, placing my hands on either side of the entrance, on the cold, smooth rock carvings – the slender yet powerful bodies of the serpents, the guardians of the Lower World in Andean cosmology. Whoosh! I felt their strong energy surge into me, almost taking my breath away. I took a few deep breaths to calm and center myself and silently offered my thanks for being able to enter into this most holy of places.



Continuing forward into the beckoning darkness, I felt at home. I had been here many times in the past with my previous groups, so I knew that I was in a small circular antechamber that led forward to the main altar of the underground temple. I also knew that the crackles that I heard under my feet as I walked were the many offerings of coca leaves that had been left here in the past by the Inca Elders of the area who had used this cave for perhaps thousands of years to commune with the Earth Mother. I reached into my tapestry coca leaf pouch that I wore around my neck, pulled out a few leaves and gently offered them. As they fluttered to the ground I prayed, “Please Pachamama, Bless my Sisters and Brothers and me as we enter into your Body. Please bestow on each of us the healing that is for our best and highest good. Gracias.” As I continued forward, I could hear the steps of the others behind me, each one stopping at the entrance and silently offering a prayer.

Stepping quietly into the deeper part of the cave, I looked up at the dimly lit natural rock formation resembling the yoni, the female genitalia. I felt a strong rush of energy flow into my opening crown chakra and immediately felt the joyous blessing of the Mother, as She poured forth Her exquisite life force into me, Her Daughter who had come home. Tears filled my eyes as I stepped forward and looked up into the crystal blue light of *Mama Quilla*, streaming down through an open shaft in the cave and onto the stone altar in front of me. I raised my arms and again took in the divine feminine energy...allowing it to pour into every welcoming cell in my body...washing through me and out my feet into Her body, unstoppable, and cleansing me on a very deep level of fears that had shadowed me for what I was sure were lifetimes. I gladly gave them up to the Mother; I gladly allowed Her to take them from me; I gladly allowed Her to gently stroke me and to rejuvenate me by filling those now empty spaces within me with Her nurturing Unconditional Love. “Thank You, Pachamama. Gracias a ti, Pachamama.” I chanted over and over in my heart and mind.



After several moments I became aware that our shaman was standing next to me, waiting patiently for me to “return.” Reluctantly I opened my eyes, took the matches he handed me and lit my candle, placing it on the stone altar. I turned around and saw that all of the others in the group were now with us in the cave, standing mutely lost

in their own personal reveries, their own connections with *Pachamama*, each one listening, seeing, feeling and in turn receiving their own well-deserved gift of healing. He then walked and stood in front of each person, brushing his fan of condor feathers through their auras for further cleansing. I heard the whooshing and fluttering of the feathers as he quickly and adeptly did his shamanic work to support their healing. Then, in his very quiet, yet commanding voice, he urged, “Now is the time, here is the place. Let go of your fears, open once again to your true nature, to Love, that which you are. Remember who you are. You are the child of the *Pachamama*, and She loves you unconditionally.” He then began singing an ancient Quechua chant, as he again walked among us, now shaking his rattles in our auras, stirring up the remnants of the old energies that it was time for us to release. There were tears; there was audible crying and sighing and even laughing! Release was happening as each of my brothers and sisters moved forward one at a time and stood in front of the glowing altar, silently offering their supplication for healing, lighting their candle - the representation of the Light of his or her Spirit - and placing them quietly on the gigantic stone slab, the belly of the *Pachamama*.

When the last prayers ended, we spontaneously gathered in a circle with our arms around each other and began to chant with our shaman. We didn’t know how to pronounce the words, but we did. We didn’t know the meaning of the words, but we did...we knew in our hearts...and those age-old words now meant more to us than we could have ever guessed would be so. Again and again we sang with him. The stones echoed our voices and filled each of us with a rhythm and energy that bound us forever in this timeless healing moment to each other and to this cave, the loving body of our Mother. Not to be contained, the energy then begged to be carried out into the world to love and to heal. Each of us felt it in our hearts, swelling and deepening. We felt the “family” among ourselves grow, and we knew this moment would last forever in each of our hearts and souls, as well as in the lives of those we would touch when we emerged anew...born again from the Arms of the *Pachamama*.

We then closed our ceremony in the usual Andean way, with hugs, laughing and crying, and with no words needed as they were spoken heart to heart. We gazed reverently once more at our candles burning on the altar, knowing we would always remember this night and the special gifts of healing we had received from the Ancient Mother, and from our Selves. One by one we turned and hurried out of the sacred temple. As we emerged into the night, we again saw the lights of Cusco in the valley below, beckoning us to come back and join that life. We had a remarkable gift that we were ready to share with the world, and we ran giggling with it to our waiting bus! Was the world ready for our gifts that we would be passing on from the *Pachamama*? We silently looked in to each other’s eyes and smiled; we knew the answer.

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Andrea Mikana-Pinkham is the Founder and Director of **Sacred Sites Journeys**. She has been traveling and leading spiritual tours to **Peru** since 1993. Since that time she has led over 30 groups there. Her next Sacred Sites Journey to Peru is March 31 – April 11, 2019.

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