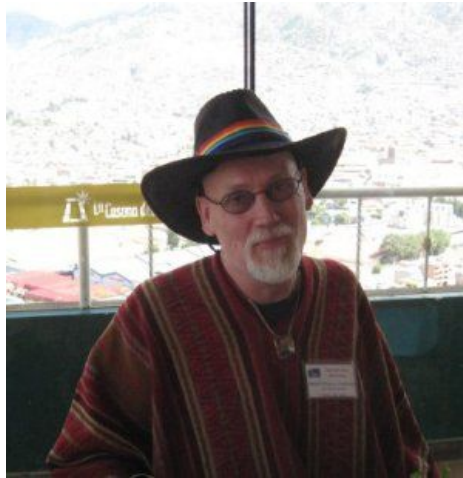


The Andes Opened My Heart



**by Mark Amaru Pinkham,
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The Return of the Serpents of Wisdom,
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in the Inca Spiritual Tradition**



It was a sunny afternoon during an October day in 1998 when I arrived at the plateau of Marca Wasi, 11,000 feet high in the Andes Mountains of Peru. I was the first of my group of six persons who had accompanied me on this spiritual journey to enter the sacred precincts of this mysterious place which has served as a sanctuary for shamanic ritual and vision quests for thousands of years. As I walked onto the unique plateau, I found myself surrounded by huge finger-like stone monoliths, the kind of enigmatic rock formations for which Marca Wasi is famous. These towering rocks were bound together into a circle, thus creating the shape of a colossal, megalithic temple.



As a condor soared silently overhead, I was gradually joined by the others. I informed them that this Temple was to be the location of the special shamanic ceremony for which we had all come to Marca Wasi. When the facilitator of our ceremony entered the gates of our Temple, I learned that during a personal vision quest here he had been brutally slain by a huge condor and was then “reborn” as a shaman. Having assimilated power and wisdom from the condor, A.C. has since been referred to as Kuntur, “the Condor.”



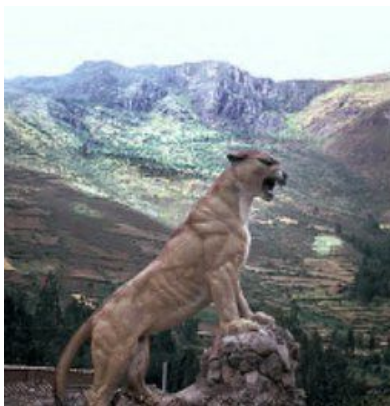
Our ceremony at Marca Wasi was to involve the consumption of San Pedro, a cactus that grows wild near the coast of Peru and is renowned for its ability to open the heart and expand consciousness. The Andean people have used it since the time of the Chavin culture, which flourished between 900 BCE and 200 BCE. I knew that A.C. had been facilitating San Pedro ceremonies for over 25 years, and I therefore felt confident in his guidance and excited about the unique experience in store for myself and my group of serious spiritual seekers that I’d brought to Peru on this sacred pilgrimage.

At four o’clock in the afternoon, as the midday shadows began to drape Marca Wasi in darkness, the five of us stood in the center of our Temple and faced A.C. After a brief discussion about the San Pedro cactus and the possible reactions we could have to it, A.C. passed a small mug full of green liquid to each person. When I held the mug to my lips and the unpleasant potion entered my mouth, I instantly began to gag, but then I took a few slow breaths and reverently swallowed it quickly down, focusing on taking it into my body and consciousness as a sacred sacrament.

In order to let the San Pedro begin its work within us, A.C. directed each of us to a special area of the Temple for meditation. Since it was a couple hundred feet across, there were plenty of contemplative spots available. As I walked to the spot my guide had chosen for me, a ledge halfway up one of the rock walls, A.C. took out his Andean flute and began to play evocative melodies, which echoed throughout the immense temple. By the time I finally sat down to

meditate, I was already deep in trance. The San Pedro had begun to take effect, and I felt as though I would soon be visiting another world.

The next thing I remember was A.C. standing over me and pointing to a rock formation directly across the temple. "Look at the puma," he instructed, and then silently walked away. With squinting eyes, I searched in the direction A.C. had pointed and was soon able to discern the shape of a large cat. It appeared to be about fifty feet in length and cut into the opposite temple wall. "This must be why I was told to meditate in this place," I concluded.



After another thirty minutes of meditation, I was called back into the center of the temple so A.C. could do some shamanic work with us in order to remove emotional toxins lodged within our energy fields. When it was my turn, I lay on my back and exposed my navel while A.C. proceeded to pull energy through it. While he instructed me to chant "San Pedrito come to me," I felt an intense power begin to surge through my body and compel me to contort my body into various hatha yoga-like positions. A growl simultaneously emerged involuntarily from my objecting lips.

I decided not to resist the energy contortions and growls, feeling that they might be helping me to release inner blocked energy. When I had fully surrendered to them, I moved into another phase of experience as my body spontaneously flipped over and I began scampering rapidly on my hands and knees around the temple floor. The inner power transformed me into a wild cat or, as it is known in Peru, a puma. As I came near the others of my group, I hissed and lashed out at them with my hands as though they were sharp claws. Each person made sure to give me plenty of room to pass. Eventually I committed myself solely to playfully rolling around in the sparse grass covering the floor of the temple.

After an hour of intensive feline cavorting, I became myself again. As I sat in the middle of the temple reviewing my experience, I slowly picked off the blades of grass that now completely covered my alpaca poncho. The explosive energy had finally quieted down, but now it seemed to have lodged itself within my stomach in the form of a large and very uncomfortable mass.



Sensing my painful condition, A.C. walked over to me and studied me with concern. Strangely, the first question out of his mouth was not “How can I help you?” but “What do you want to experience?” I instantly forgot the mass of energy and replied that “all I have ever wanted was to open my heart more and to experience Unconditional Love.” Taking this as his cue, Don Arturo immediately began working with me to move the mass from my stomach up into my chest. When it subsequently reached the area of my heart, the mass felt like it exploded into a million particles of light. My heart opened simultaneously with the “explosion,” and an intense euphoria and feelings of Divine Love instantly engulfed me. I was now completely at one with Marca Wasi, as well as the entire universe. All beings, whether on Earth or in the heavens above, were my brothers and sisters.

With a knowing smile, A.C. nodded his approval of my new state, and then invited the others to come over and embrace me. As each one took turns holding me in his arms, I heard them say with great affection, “We are now truly brothers.” Having been through San Pedro ceremonies with A.C. in the past, they apparently knew what I was experiencing. They, too, had had their hearts opened at Marc Wasi with the San Pedro.

I remained in my ecstatic state of divine love for most of the remainder of the night. When the stars came out, they provided a sparkling roof for our Temple and we all danced under them to the lively music of A.C.’s flute. With great joy and excitement, I felt like a new chapter of my life was beginning. Another layer of separation between Universal Consciousness and myself had been removed, and I was one step closer to knowing my True Self.

Mark Amaru Pinkham continued his training in San Pedro Shamanism with A.C. after his initial experience at Marca Wasi for three subsequent years. He now offers the sacred plant medicine ceremonies when he leads groups to Peru. Mark Amaru has been leading Sacred Sites Journeys groups on spiritual pilgrimages to Peru & Bolivia, Egypt, England, Ireland, Scotland, India, Nepal & Tibet and Sedona AZ USA since 1994. Mark and his wife Andrea will be leading Shamanic Retreat at Machu Picchu, Cusco & The Sacred Valley of the Incas, March 31 - April 11, 2019. For itinerary details, pricing and information about how to join our group: www.sacredsitesjourneys.com/Peru-April2019/Peru-April2019.htm

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