

Ayahuasca: Spirit Of The Sacred Vine

Ayahuasca is not a recreational drug for the native cultures that have been using it for as long as anyone can remember. It is as much a sacred spiritual element in their lives as are Holy Communion wafers and sacramental wine within the Christian religion. Except that the spirit with which drinkers of this herbal tea commune is an elemental being that is the essence of this magical plant. Instead of a priest, the shaman who leads an ayahuasca ceremony is known as an ayahuascero. If it seems strange to think of spiritual beings residing in plants, consider the amazing story of the Findhorn community in the north of Scotland. Residents of Findhorn were able to grow lush gardens of huge vegetables and even tropical plants under impossible conditions: poor, sandy soil, cold temperatures and a shortage of sunlight. They attributed their horticultural success on their contact with plant divas: elemental beings that were the spirits of the plants. So also do the Hopi Indians of Arizona successfully grow corn with very little water, with the help of Kachinas, plant spirits that are a part of their spiritual traditions. Once again we see a direct parallel to the usage of ayahuasca in South American cultures.

Those who drink the beverage refer to its spirit as a gatekeeper who allows participants into a different dimension, a realm that seems to be a different world from the three dimensional one of normal human activity. It is said that Amazonian shamans who, with the help of the ayahuasca vine, travel into these spiritual worlds, they are able to cure illnesses, both physical and mental. A reporter, Kira Salak, writing for the magazine National Geographic Adventure, in March 2006 reported that her depression was cured by taking ayahuasca. She said there is a long list of documented cures associated with drinking the brew, including cocaine addiction and metastasized colorectal cancer, and that this medicinal tea has been proven safe and not addictive to drink.

Some other western authors who have written about ayahuasca are Wade Davis, author of *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, and Terence McKenna, author of *Invisible Landscapes*. It is believed that Paul Simon's song, *Spirit Voices*, is based on his ayahuasca experiences in the Amazon.

Many different blends of tea are brewed using various ethnobotanical ingredients, but the common element is the ayahuasca vine, *Banisteriopsis caapi*. Some plants with which the vine is often blended with are *Psychotria viridis* and *Diplopterys cabrerana*.

In Ecuador and Peru, where ayahuasca has been a part of rainforest life for centuries, it is not unusual for a special diet to be followed before drinking the herbal tea. This includes avoiding fatty and spicy foods, as well as caffeine and citrus foods, and even abstaining from sex both prior to and subsequent to an ayahuasca ceremony.