

Oakley Gordon
SalkaWind@comcast.net

My First Trip to Peru Draft 2.3.2

The "Andean Cosmovision" refers to the way the indigenous people of the high Andes perceive and interact with reality. It is fundamentally different than the Western worldview. The Cosmovision is not a set of concepts or beliefs, it cannot be described or encompassed with words. It can, however, be experienced and thus it can be explored. I have been exploring the Andean Cosmovision for the past 26 years under the tutelage and guidance of my friend and mentor don Américo Yábar, and with the assistance of his son Gayle Yábar.

Six years ago I published a book, The Andean Cosmovision: A Path for Exploring Profound Aspects of Ourselves, Nature, and the Cosmos which included many Andean meditations that can serve as portals for entering and exploring the Cosmovision. I later published several additional meditations in this blog. I then, essentially, ran out of things to say, as I had given as much "how-to" information as I could share, and the topic is one that simply cannot be approached through intellectual descriptions and explanations.

There is, however, another way to share some of the beautiful and significant aspects of the Andean Cosmovision without becoming pedantic (and subsequently losing its essence), and that is through stories. Stories have the ability to deliver a level of understanding that can't be reached in any other way. I have decided to write a book of stories that share my experiences of working with don Américo. The following story of my first trip to Peru is the first I have written and will probably serve as the third chapter of the book. As with my previous book, I have decided to write (and post) the chapters in the order in which they want to be written, and then later go back and polish them up and arrange them in an order that is reasonable (or better yet...artistic).

I hope that for those of you who have not worked with Américo in Peru that these stories will give you a much deeper understanding and appreciation of the Andean Cosmovision. And for those of you who have worked with Américo in Peru, I hope that you find some delight in reading a description of the people and places and experiences that you know so well.

This story has been posted on my blog (www.SalkaWind.com/blog). Due to its length I have also made it available to be downloaded as a PDF at www.SalkaWind.com/StoryBook/Trip1.pdf. I hope you enjoy it.

[In the first two chapters--yet to be written--I describe how I met don Américo Yábar, a mystic and poet from the Andes of Peru; how he offered to serve as my mentor in an exploration of the Andean Cosmovision; and his invitation for me to come to Peru to work with him there. I also introduce Tom Best, who organized several Américo workshops in the United States, including the workshop in which I first met Américo two years before I traveled to Peru.]

In 1996, Tom Best arranged to take a small group, including myself, to travel to Peru to work with Américo. Our plans were to meet Américo in Cusco, and then travel with him up into the high Andes to his ancestral house, called "Salka Wasi" (Quechua--the language of the Andes--for the "House of Undomesticated Energy"). We were also going to have the opportunity to work with paq'os from Q'ero.

The term *paq'o* does not have a direct corresponding term in English. It is often translated as

mystic or *shaman*. I would say that *mystic* is closer to the mark.

Q'ero is a very remote region high in the Andes, near the sacred mountain Apu Ausangate. The people who live there are referred to as the *Q'ero*. They are considered to be among the purest keepers of the ancient Andean view of reality (the *Andean Cosmovision*). The Q'ero live in isolated villages high in the Andes. They were first "discovered" by the anthropologist Dr. Oscar Nuñez del Prado who encountered them during a fiesta in the town of Paucartambo in 1955. Since then they have become rather famous, due to their open-hearted willingness to share their knowledge with the people of the West.

My story begins with me sitting in the international terminal of the Los Angeles airport awaiting my flight to Lima, Peru. I had flown to Los Angeles earlier that morning from the small airport in St. George, Utah, an hour drive south from Cedar City (my home at the time). St. George had flights to L.A., but the airport was so small that passengers had to walk outdoors onto the tarmac and then up a flight of movable stairs to get into the plane. As I climbed up the stairs my wife Betsy, and my two sons, Ben and Christopher (eight and four years old) were waving at me from the fence along the tarmac. Betsy cried when I left them at the gate, not tears of "please don't go" but tears of "you are flying so far away, please be safe." I teared up as well as I looked at them through the plane's window and waved goodbye, not sure if they could see me.

A couple of hours later I was sitting in the LAX airport, and I was scared. Really scared. I was about to travel 4,000 miles from my home, to another continent, to another hemisphere of the planet, to a third world country, of whose language I only knew about 100 words, by myself.

As I sat there in the terminal I thumbed through again the various cautionary notes from my guidebook to Peru (The Peru Travel Survival Kit, by Lonely Planet).

Peru has a reputation for thievery and, unfortunately, it is fully warranted...By taking some basic precautions and exercising a reasonable amount of vigilance, you probably won't get robbed...It's good to know that armed theft is not as frequent as sneak theft and you should remember that crowded places are the haunts of pickpockets...Snatch theft is also common so don't wear gold necklaces and expensive wristwatches or you're liable to have them snatched from your body...Thieves often work in pairs or groups. Whilst your attention is being distracted, one thief is robbing you--whether it be a bunch of kids fighting in front of you, an old lady 'accidentally' bumping into you, someone dropping something on your clothes, the possibilities go on and on. The only thing you can do is to try, as much as possible, to avoid being in very tight crowds and to stay alert, especially when something out of the ordinary occurs...To worry you further, there are the razor blade artists...They simply slit open your luggage with a razor blade when you're not looking...When walking with my large pack, I move fast and avoid stopping which makes it difficult for anyone intent on cutting the bag. If I have to stop, at a street crossing for example, I tend to gently sway from side to side so I can feel if anyone is touching my pack and I look around a lot...One of the best solutions to the rip-off problem is to travel with a friend and to watch one another.

Definitely avoid any conversations with someone who offers you drugs. In fact, talking to any stranger on the street can hold risks. It has happened that travelers who have talked to strangers have been stopped soon after by 'plain clothes' police officers and accused of talking to a drug dealer. In such a situation, never get into a vehicle with the 'police', but insist on going to a bona fide police station on foot. Be wary of false or crooked police who prey on tourists...

It is a good idea to carry an emergency kit....

This guerrilla organization Sendero Luminoso controls and terrorizes some of the remoter parts of Peru...there is now evidence that the Sendero and the drug cartels are connected in their attempts to disrupt the stability of Peru and some of the drug growing regions of Peru are now dangerous to travel in....The routes to avoid at this time are....

As I looked up from my book at the people who were also waiting for our plane, I could see that most of them were Peruvian and they were not speaking English. I had been very much looking forward to experiencing the Peruvian culture, but in my anxiety, I now saw them as being alien, different, and that was scary. I yearned for the safety and comfort of familiarity. "I could be home right now," I thought. "I could be sitting on my couch, safe and comfortable at home, with my family, watching football on the TV. I could just change my mind and go back home instead!" When the call came to board our plane to Peru, however, I stood up and joined the line filing onto the boarding ramp.

Years earlier, when I was a young man, I went sky diving. Once. It was important to me at the time to do something that I knew logically was safe but that would scare the bejeebees out of me. I wanted to demonstrate to myself that I would not let fear, a fear that was not grounded upon real danger, stop me from doing something. It was the type of sky diving where we jumped out of the plane on our own, connected to a static line that would automatically pull out our chute after a fall of several seconds (at least that was the theory.) Something that contributed to the whole fear experience for me was that we didn't just jump out of a door. When it was our turn we had to step out onto the wheel of the small plane, and reach out to the strut leading up to the wing, step off the wheel and dangle there until we were told to let go. I obviously, survived, and I had nightmares for about a year after that, finding myself once again in the plane on the way up, so incredibly scared, and wondering why in the world I was doing it again.

We were scheduled to spend 10 days with don Américo in Peru. I was arriving a week early, giving myself a day to see Lima and then several days to explore Cusco before meeting up with Américo. I was visiting Lima just because I thought I might as well as long as I had to go through there on the way to Cusco. Lima did not have a good reputation as a tourist spot. Unlike Cusco, which was the ancient capital of the Inca empire, Lima was built by the conquistadores after the conquest of the Incas. It thus had no interesting pre-colonial ruins. It had a population of around 6 million people, many of them having moved down from the Andes and living in poverty in shanties around the city. It also had the reputation as being a relatively dangerous place to visit. I had reserved a room in a hotel about five blocks from the Plaza de Armas, the city square.

On the flight down I connected with a few people who were also going to Peru for the first time, and who seemed as nervous about it as I was. We made some tentative plans to meet in Cusco, seeking some reassurance from not being completely alone in our travels, but those plans ended up not coming to fruition. Eventually, I fell asleep in my seat, and awoke to an announcement that we were preparing to land, with an accompanying surge of adrenalin.

We arrived around midnight. I got off the plane in a strange mental state that was part adrenalin and part lack of sleep. It was a very surrealistic scene. Lima is on the coast, the air was heavy with humidity, and the lights were surrounded by globes of illumination. The air smelt of the sea, mixed with industrial pollutants and the aroma of a large city. Teenage soldiers carrying sub machine guns stood sentry on the roof of the airport and wandered around on the tarmac. The walk from the plane to customs took us down a series of long, long hallways, seemingly circling the airport a couple of times.

I made it through customs ok. Following the guidebook, I went to a counter in the airport that arranges for taxi rides. The guidebook warned that while there are many taxi drivers waiting outside the airport doors to offer rides, that this was definitely not a safe option, as some of those are not really

taxi drivers and they may take you some place to rob you. Using the taxi arranged by the airport tourist counter, I made it safely to my hotel, after about an hour drive that included sudden shortcuts down small side streets that led me to wonder if I was being taken to a place to be robbed. The hotel catered to business people and was fairly nice. The door to my room was located inside the stair well, which seemed rather strange. The room was ok but the hotel had no air conditioning. I opened the window and eventually fell asleep to the sounds of bar music and loud conversations wafting up from the street seven stories below.

The next morning I set out to explore the Plaza de Armas. I knew I was only five blocks away, but I stopped at the front desk of the hotel to ask the best way to get there. They informed me, quite sincerely, that I should not go out on the streets at all as it would not be safe. When it became clear that I was going to anyway, they added, "Today is Sunday. You should know that the police do not work on Sundays." That was certainly something I had not considered. But, I just decided to go anyway. I thought the most likely crime I would encounter would be robbery or pickpocketing, and I didn't take much money with me on the walk. I am taller than most Peruvians, and I tried to fluff up and look bigger, holding my arms a bit out from my sides, and I made it a point to look very alert. It wasn't a relaxed stroll. But still, it was interesting and stimulating. I reached the Plaza to find it rather unimpressive, just old and dirty post-colonial buildings. Standing on the edge of the square, looking it over, I was approached by a roguish looking young man; in manner and dress he reminded me of Michael Douglas in the movie "Romancing the Stone." After establishing that I didn't need any of his tourist opportunities we engaged in a friendly chat, and he gave me some advice about traveling to Cusco.

I returned to the hotel early, and later that night went to the hotel bar to get a drink. The bar took up the entire top floor of the hotel. The windows looked out on the smog of Lima. There was only one other customer, a business man. We struck up a brief conversation but had little in common. He seemed rather depressed or discouraged.

That was my experience of Lima. I have since traveled through Lima many, many times on my way to or from Cusco. After that first trip, if I have had a long enough layover to need a room, I have always taken a taxi to Mira Flores, a nice outlying area along the coast where most of the embassies are located.

My flight to Cusco the next morning was scheduled to leave at 6:00 AM. I arrived at the Lima airport around 4:00. Flying into Cusco is a bit dicey. It is located at 11,000 feet and flights there are often cancelled due to poor weather. Approaching planes have to turn and dive into the Cusco valley which is surrounded by high mountains. If the weather isn't quite right, then planes can't safely land. My guidebook warned me that sometimes flights will leave earlier than scheduled to take advantage of a break in the weather at Cusco.

The Lima airport in those days was rundown and dirty. Gates didn't list the departing flights and, due to my lack of Spanish and the distortions of the PA system, I couldn't understand a thing that was being said in the announcements. I approached a friendly looking, older woman, and managed to communicate that I wanted to compare tickets. I saw that she was on the same flight as me. At some point, the loudspeakers said "WNXDS UHJDR DWEFR XAMD!" and about half the people sitting around me got up and moved to another gate. I saw that she was one of them so I followed her.

Our plane took off just as it was starting to get light. Thanks to my trusty guidebook I had chosen a window seat on the side of the plane that usually has the best view of the Andean mountains. We climbed above the clouds. I had to struggle mightily against lack of sleep, and the warmth and hum of the plane, to stay awake. Outside, the top of the clouds turned pink from the sunrise, and then suddenly there were the Andean peaks soaring up through the clouds! Oh my God, they were so majestic and beautiful.

It only takes about an hour to fly from Lima to Cusco. The plane banked steeply and dropped down into the Cusco valley. As the plane landed, I had to once again slip into survival mode (anxiety and adrenalin) to face the great unknowns of making my way through a strange land and knowing so little of the language. While Lima had been warm and humid, when I got off the plane in Cusco it was *cold*, and the air was noticeably thin.

As I walked into the Cusco airport, I heard live Andean music playing. It ended up being from a group performing by the luggage carousels. The people around me were excited and happy to be in Cusco. I started to shift from being scared to being excited myself, but I was wondering whether or not the transportation that Américo had promised would indeed be waiting for me outside the airport, and contemplating what I would do if it wasn't. I picked up my bags and walked out of the doors into the parking lot and the cold morning sunshine.

In the crowd of taxi drivers waiting outside the door was a darling young woman (in her early twenties), Américo's daughter Arilu, calling out my name and then waving enthusiastically at me when our eyes met. She gave me a big friendly hug, and offered to take my big duffle bag, which like a dazed idiot I handed over to her. She struggled for a few feet with it before it was scooped up by a personable and handsome young man (in his late teens) who was Gayle, her brother. He gave me a friendly hug hello and introduced me to two of his friends who had also come along to pick me up. We all piled into two cars and they drove me to my hostel, The Maria Rosa, located on the Avenida Sol ("The Avenue of the Sun") about six blocks from the main square, the Plaza de Armas.

They took my luggage into the hostel and helped me to register. Then Arilu sat me down and served me some coca tea, which helps the body acclimate to high altitudes. After talking with me for a bit and being assured that I was ok, they took off, promising that someone would contact me soon to fill me in on the plans. I felt like I had been enveloped in the loving arms of my own family; it was like having my brother live in town. I knew that they would make sure I was ok and be there (and care) if there were any problems. I began to relax.

Hostals are a type of lodging found in Spain and Hispanic America. They are essentially hotels but somewhat smaller and less expensive, and usually owned and run by a family. The Maria Rosa had cinder block walls, a very thin and worn carpet, was somewhat rundown, and was very clean. Spartan, rundown, clean describes many places I've stayed in the Andes. The proprietors were two very friendly, middle aged Peruvian women. The place was cold for it had no heating. Despite Cusco being at 11,000 feet, almost none of the buildings--including restaurants, hostals, government buildings, and museums--have heat. The only exceptions I can think of are some of the fancier hotels. People there just live with the cold. That Peru is fairly equatorial helps keep it from being too amazingly cold--it rarely snows in Cusco--still it is a very noticeable part of being there. Often the hostel will provide--if you ask--a portable electric space heater for your room. No space heaters were available at the Maria Rosa, and the toilets did not have toilet seats. This is *very* common. Toilets in restrooms and lower scale hostals typically don't have toilet seats. My friend Oscar once asked about this when we were in Peru, and was told that many places don't provide toilet seats because they just get stolen. For both of us, our reaction was, "really?"

Tom Best was scheduled to arrive a few days later, right before our time with Américo was scheduled to start. I had arrived several days early to explore Cusco, as had the other three participants in this adventure; Bob, Judy, and Gina. Bob was my roommate and had arrived in town a day before me. He was out when I arrived and I climbed into bed and fell asleep, this was about 9:00 in the morning. Around 11:00 there was a gentle knock on my door and I opened it to the woman from the

front desk who informed me that Arilu had called to let me know that Américo would drop by the hostel at 1:00 that afternoon to welcome me to Peru.

Shortly before 1:00 I went downstairs to the hostel lobby, with my mind wrapped in that dull gray fog that comes from awakening from a nap after too little sleep. Following mystic/shaman time, Américo strode into the lobby from the street around 1:30, full of his usual love, energy, and presence, accompanied by Arilu to do the translating. Américo describes his English as being "catastrophic," but it is still much better than my Spanish.

After being welcomed enthusiastically by the woman at the hostel desk, he gave me a friendly hug and we sat down at a table in the breakfast area. I have since been to Peru almost a score of times, and Américo almost always has arranged to meet me soon after I have arrived. On this first trip, I arrived with one and a half of my feet still planted in the Western view of reality. Getting to Peru takes a huge amount of time and effort, and a quite a bit of money. When I arrive, I am usually at least a little ambivalent about being there, having to rely on my memory of previous times with Américo to assure myself that it will all be worthwhile. Then when I am there it becomes obvious to me that indeed it was worth it. As an irrelevant side note, this is similar to my experiences when I used to travel to Grateful Dead concerts. Which reminds me that at some point I decided that Américo was the Jerry Garcia of shamans...a reference that will be highly significant to a small minority of you.

Being in Américo's energy that morning, with his enthusiasm for what we would be doing, and his affection, immediately transported me with both feet into the Andean Cosmvision. Suddenly I was present. I felt like my being there with Américo, getting ready to go on this adventure together, was the coolest thing going on at that moment on the planet. The Cosmos was our destination, our hearts the space ship, our minds the passengers, and with the help of many, many friends along the way, including the trees and the rivers and the stars and the majestic mountains and the night sky, and with the people who converse with them. Kind of like that. My first meeting with Américo each trip always has this effect on me.

During our conversation I mentioned to Américo that that day was my birthday. He was delighted, and after a moment's reflection, said that he had a special treat in mind for me. He asked me to be at the hostel at 5:00 that afternoon, ready to spend some time outdoors in the evening, and to invite Bob, Judy, and Gina as well.

Bob arrived back at the hostel shortly after Américo left. Bob was a Hungarian-born, middle-aged man with a bushy mustache, thinning dark hair, and a dour visage. I was to find that at times, particularly in response to touching moments, his dour mask would slip away, his eyes would soften, and a delighted smile would emerge on this face. We were to get along very well together. He had already explored Cusco some, and that afternoon he took me out to show me around.

Cusco was the capital city of the Inca Empire that stretched for 2500 miles along the Andean mountains, the biggest empire in the world at the time, until it was conquered by the Spanish conquistadors. Cusco is wonderful (it and Edinburgh have become my two favorite cities). It is not connected by rail to the coast, and the road from Lima to Cusco is long and arduous. As a result, the buildings are made of local materials, there are no tall buildings or skyscrapers, and most of the buildings in the main part of town are very old, some dating back to colonial times and built upon Inca ruins. All of the Inca temples and palaces in Cusco were destroyed by the Spanish but stretches of the Inca walls still exist in the city, often integrated into other structures. The city is also surrounded by many Inca ruins and sacred sites.

The sidewalks in modern Cusco are crowded with people offering to exchange currency, old women selling candies from trays, young tourists with backpacks, stylish looking business people

smiling and chatting as they walk down the street, women dressed in traditional clothing with babies slung on their backs (the babies looking at me with wide eyes over their mothers' shoulders), darling groups of children in uniform going to school, and beggars sitting on the sidewalk looking about as needy as a person can look. The streets are jammed with cars and taxis and minibuses. The driving strategy appears to be to floor it and honk at anything that might get in the way. Traffic lanes are more of a suggestion than a rule. My strategy for crossing the street without a traffic light involves standing next to a local woman and her child and then leaping to join them when they cross the street.

The Avenida El Sol (Avenue of the Sun) runs several blocks uphill to Cusco's main square, the Plaza de Armas. Along the way it passes the remains of Coriconcha, the Court of Gold, the most famous temple of the Americas. The temple enclosure stretched hundreds of meters and housed 4,000 priests and attendants. Its walls were lined with gold and it contained a large golden disk positioned to catch the morning sun and illuminate the temple of the sun. It also contained a large silver disk that cast moonlight into the temple of the moon. In addition to these two temples there were shrines to Thunder and Lightning, to various stars, and to the Rainbow. Forty-one sacred pathways, called *ceques*, radiated out from the temple into the rest of the Inca empire. Their alignments corresponded to the rising and setting of certain stars and constellations (including the Pleiades...which was important to the Incas), and the sun and the moon. Some ceques ran out to large monoliths standing on the mountainous horizons of the Cusco Valley, marking the azimuths of the winter and summer solstices, as well as critical dates for the planting of crops. Three hundred and twenty-seven *huacas* (sacred sites) were located on the ceques.

Coriconcha was completely destroyed by the Spanish, all of the gold and silver statues and idols were taken and melted down, and the virgins who attended the temple were raped. The Spanish then built the monastery of Santo Domingo over the ruins and Coriconcha disappeared. In 1950, however, a large earthquake leveled much of the monastery and revealed again the foundations of Coriconcha. The Incas had mastered the art of constructing stone walls and buildings that could withstand the many earthquakes that strike the region. Some effort was then taken to restore a small amount of the Inca temple, which now stands intermixed with the restored monastery. It is really not much to see as a ruin, but I love to go there and sit on one of the low walls overlooking the grass square below, and meditate, connecting with the energy of this place that the Incas selected as the center of their Cosmology.

Bob and I slowly walked up Avenida El Sol, past Coriconcha, to the Plaza de Armas. Cusco had hit me like a ton of bricks. The very high altitude, the cold, the intense sunlight, the crowds on the sidewalks, the honking horns, the diesel fumes, and just the energy of the city, were overwhelming. As we walked into the Plaza, vendors converged on us, trying to sell us hand-knitted gloves and sweaters, decorated gourds, watercolor paintings, hatbands, and other various trinkets, and offering to shine my sneakers. They were surprisingly persistent, and would not take 'no' for an answer, or even 'no, gracias' repeated over and over again. I later discovered that the magic words to get them to go away was to say "posiblemente mas tarde" ("maybe later"). Also, after a day or two, once you are a familiar sight on the square, they largely stop approaching.

But at the time I was just being overwhelmed, with Cusco, with lack of sleep, with everything, and particularly with an indigenous woman who wanted me to buy one of her decorated gourds. She just wouldn't give it up and followed me all around. Finally, I told Bob I had to flee, and so we ducked into a restaurant on the square (the vendors are not allowed into the restaurants). I plopped down at a table with a big sigh of relief, and then looked up. The woman was standing on the sidewalk in front of the window. When our eyes met, she slowly raised a gourd and pointed at it...and we both burst out laughing.

After a rest, Bob showed me some of his favorite places to buy Peruvian wares (hand-woven scarfs, gloves, and sweaters; figurines; ponchos; wall-hangings; musical instruments; hand-carved items, etc.). At the time Peruvians were allowed to set up stalls under the portico along one side of the Plaza de Francisco near the Plaza de Armas (in later years they were all forced to move to a couple of warehouses and await the tourist busses). Bob, however showed me some nondescript doorways that led down small alleyways into dirt courtyards hidden inside the blocks. There, twenty or so stalls would offer all sorts of stuff without the big crush and hard sales found in the streets. I had never been into shopping as a tourist until I hit Cusco. There were so many cool things to buy, particularly those with roots in the Andean culture. There was one stall in particular that I went back to several times. It was run by an old Andean woman who just had such a pleasant energy. We couldn't converse very well with words, but that didn't matter. We smiled a lot and our tone of voice suggested a connection.

It was my first experience of shopping in a culture where haggling over the price is expected. Bob was amazingly good at it. The vendor would state a price, he would offer one ridiculously lower, the vendor would move slightly in that direction, Bob would get angry and stomp out, to be called back, and so on, until he would get them down to a cost *much* lower than the original asking price. This was all new to me, and at first I was tempted to just given them the price they asked (which still seemed amazingly inexpensive), but I wanted to enter into this new culture, and explore a new way for me to be, so I learned how to haggle. After all of these years I am still inclined to want to pay what people ask, not because I am timid (like I was at the beginning), but because I know how much they need the money. Still, I dance a bit with them, getting them to lower their price a little, to honor their ways and to celebrate their culture.

Bob and I got back to the hostel with little time for me to get in a good rest (typical for my visits to Peru) before Américo was scheduled to arrive. Judy and Gina were there by then and I had a chance to meet them. Judy was an open-hearted woman from a farm in Canada. Gina was a quiet and sincere woman from Wisconsin. We were a pretty compatible group, but then, we had in much common in our desire to work with Américo.

Arilu had requested that we be in the lobby and ready to go at 5:00 so that Américo could just pull up and we could pile into his truck in the no-parking zone in front of the hostel. Somewhere around 5:30, Américo and Gayle pulled up in Américo's cab truck (the kind of truck that has two rows of seats in the cab). In the back, in the bed of the truck, were five paq'os from Q'ero. The four of us piled into the truck and as we pulled away, I looked back through the small window in the rear of cab. Looking in at us were the Q'ero; brown faces with very big smiles. I waved at them enthusiastically and they waved back.

Américo took some side streets to avoid the worst of Cusco traffic, and before long he turned onto a road that wound up into the mountains surrounding Cusco. We drove past the massive Inca ruins of Sacsayhuaman that sits on the top of a hill overlooking the city. Shortly thereafter he turned off the main road onto a very rough dirt road. We bounced along that for a few hundred yards and parked at the bottom of a hill of stone. After we all climbed out of the truck Américo made the introductions. One of the Q'ero was don Pascual, who was a particularly dear friend of don Américo. I later learned that don Pascual and Américo had been friends for many, many, years. Don Pascual was a *pampa mesayoq*, one of the two levels of revered Q'ero paqos (the other being *alto mesayoqs*).

By then it was dusk. Peru is close to the equator and it seems to me like no matter what time of year I visit Peru, the days and nights are of about equal length, and it starts getting dark sometime between 5:00 and 6:00. Don Américo and the Q'ero led us around the stone hill to its other side. There we were told by Américo that this was a pre-Inca sacred site called "Amaru Machay", sometimes referred to as the "Temple of the Serpent" and other times as the "Temple of Mama Killa (the Moon)".

Amaru is a great, Cosmic serpent that has a powerful presence in the Andean Cosmology. *Amaru* emerges from the *uju pacha*, the underworld, below the surface of the earth; it then travels through the *kay pacha*, the surface world, where we reside; and finally enters the *hanaq pacha*, the superior or upper world.

The Quechua word *pacha* does not correspond directly to any concept we have in the West. It is, instead, an integration of our concepts of place, time, and consciousness. The *uju pacha* is both the underworld and the past; the *kay pacha* is both the surface world and the present, and the *hanaq pacha* is both the upper world and the future. Consciousness exists outside of any concepts we may have, including our concepts of space and time, and thus is present in all three of these *pachas*. As *Amaru* moves from the *uju pacha* through the *kay pacha* to the *hanaq pacha* it weaves these three *pachas* together. *Amaru* then returns from the *hanaq pacha* to the *uju pacha* in the form of lightning. In the Andean Cosmology *Amaru* is a symbol of wisdom and fertility, and also one of change. *Amaru* is a force that dismantles systems that are out of equilibrium and helps to bring them back into balance and harmony. The term *machay* translates from Quechua into English as *a portal*. *Amaru Machay* is therefore the *portal of Amaru*.

Now, Américo didn't say any of this. Two years earlier, when I first met Américo, some things became clear to me. The first was that he was offering to serve as a bridge between the West and the Andean Cosmvision, a beautiful and ancient way of experiencing reality that is still part of the living culture of the high Andes, and that is fundamentally different than the Western worldview. The second was that what he had to share could only be learned experientially, it could not be expressed or taught by words or concepts. He was offering a different way of *experiencing* reality, of *being* in reality, not a different way of *thinking* about reality. I knew that my time with don Américo was not going to involve lectures, or the laying down of conceptual frameworks, or much in the way of explanations...for that matter.

As a young man, I was a voracious reader of books about psychology, mysticism, and consciousness. I went on to earn a Ph.D. in cognitive psychology (the scientific study of perception, attention, learning, memory, and consciousness). When, however, I began to explore the Andean Cosmvision, I stopped reading anything related to that topic. I wanted my understanding of the Cosmvision to arise from my experiences in exploring it, rather than having my experiences be shaped by other people's thoughts about it.

It took me about 17 years of exploring the Andean Cosmvision before I felt grounded enough in experiential knowledge to start reading what others had to say about it. I had a whole lot of intellectual questions about Andean culture and history that neither Américo nor my own experiences had answered, and so I began to fill in the corners of my knowledge by reading (mainly anthropological) works that I considered, based upon my experiences, to be valid and reliable.

Back at *Amaru Machay*...don Américo led us to a cave in the side of the hill. Américo told us that the cave is known as *The Womb of Pachamama* (Pachamama is the great mother who is the conscious planet earth). At the entrance two large snakes were carved in the stone walls. Their heads had been chopped off by the Spanish and their bodies heavily marred. The cave ended quickly in a chamber where several places to sit and a low altar had been cut out of the rock. Gayle had brought some candles which he lit and put on small ledges. In the ceiling of the chamber, above the alter, was a large, rounded, bulge of rock, known as Pachamama's embryo. We all meditated for a while by candlelight, in the womb of Pachamama.

In the workshops I had attended before going to Peru, Américo taught us many different types of meditations that accomplish various changes in our energy. Over the years that I have been traveling to Peru, however, I have noticed that Américo often just has us meditate (by quieting our minds) and lets the energy of that particular, sacred, spot inform our meditation.

I have also come to find that there are many sacred places in Peru where the Andeans, rather than building a temple, left the site largely in its natural condition, with just perhaps some stairs, an altar, and seats upon which to meditate, cut out of the natural stone. I believe these are largely of pre-Inca origin, although they were later used by the Inca as well. Rather than moving people indoors, out of nature, to connect with the sacred, these places facilitate connecting to the beauty, and the sacred, found within nature.

When we had finished, Américo drove us all back to Cusco. When Bob and I returned to our room I found a pair of alpaca wool gloves on my pillow, a birthday present from the women who ran the hostel.

Gayle phoned the next morning and offered to drop by after lunch and take us to see the ruins of Sacsayhuaman. We had nothing scheduled before that, but then Américo and Arilu appeared at the hostel. Américo was out doing errands in that part of town and wanted to know if any of us would be interested in joining him. Judy and I were the only ones there and we were delighted to accompany him. He drove us to San Blas, an artist neighborhood uphill from the Plaza de Armas, and we followed him around as he dropped in to see a few of his artist friends, which gave us a chance to see their works. One of his friends specialized in making statues of people with very elongated necks. It was a fun outing.

Shortly before lunch time Judy and I returned to the hostel, hooked up with Bob and Gina, and then we all walked up to Plaza de Armas looking for some food. We found a restaurant on the second floor of a building with a balcony overlooking the plaza. It was very pleasant to sit on a balcony and look out over the Plaza de Armas. The square is surrounded by old, two-story buildings holding restaurants, shops, and guided-tour centers, and a couple of large, colonial churches. The square itself is mainly grass, with a large fountain with water gushing out of the mouths of geese and an Inca emperor standing on top. Not far beyond the square are the mountains surrounding Cusco, not the big majestic apus, but still they make a nice backdrop. It is a great place for people-watching. There is often a parade, or a ceremony, or protest march being held on the square, or hordes of adorable, very young, children decked out in their school uniforms, being herded around by their teachers.

The plaza comprises about half of the square that was there during the time of the Incas. Back then the square was divided by the river Sapphi, which now runs underground beneath the buildings on the West side. Before the conquest the square was flanked by Inca palaces. They were all destroyed by the Spanish. A cathedral stands where the palace of Inca Viracocha once stood. A large church stands on the ruins of the palace of Huayna Capac. There are, however, places around the square where the original Inca walls have been artistically incorporated into the buildings. There is a restaurant on the plaza that has an Inca wall, I've stayed in a hostel near the plaza where my room had an Inca wall, and there are stretches of Inca walls along the streets leading out from the square.

The Inca built their walls by shaping large stones to fit together. They didn't just cut them into cubes for stacking, they shaped each stone to fit the contours of the others. The stones fit so closely together than you can't slip a piece of paper between them. They also incorporated protuberances in the walls, looking rather like nipples, that help the wall to release excessive energy. The Inca walls and structures were designed to withstand the frequent earthquakes in the area.

The restaurant with the balcony where we ate was called *Keros*, and I later learned it was run by one of Américo's cousins. More recently its name was changed to *Los Balcones*. Every time I have visited Cusco I have gone to that balcony, and ordered a meal or a beer or a cappuccino, and sat, deeply contented, looking out at Cusco and the hills beyond.

That afternoon Gayle, Arilu, and Javier (a friend of theirs) came by to take us to, and show us

around, Sacsayhuaman. Sacsayhuaman is an immense ruin sitting on top of a hill overlooking Cusco. Western archaeologists aren't sure whether it was a citadel, a temple, or both. It was probably both, as the Inca did not draw the distinction we draw between the secular and the sacred. Cusco was originally laid out by the Inca to be in the shape of a puma, with Sacsayhuaman as its head.

It was at Sacsayhuaman that the Inca made their last stand in Cusco against the Spanish Conquistadores, a battle that the Spanish came very close to losing. After the conquest, Sacsayhuaman was used as a source of easy, pre-cut, stones for the construction of churches, government buildings, and the homes of the wealthiest Spanish in Cusco. All that is left now at Sacsayhuaman are the stones that were too large to move that constituted the immense ramparts of the site. The three ramparts are each about 1000 feet long and 18 feet tall. The heaviest stone in the ramparts is estimated to weigh some 200 tons. Like the Inca walls in Cusco, these stones were cut and placed so precisely that a knife blade cannot fit between them. Before the complex was destroyed, a Spanish chronicler estimated that it was large enough to house a garrison of 5,000 men.

Gayle led us along a path that ran along the top of a rampart. Below us was a large grass-covered plaza. Gayle told us that in the time of the Inca, the paq'o's from the length and breadth of the Inca Empire would gather together for a ceremony once a year on the plaza. We walked on for a bit, and then I began to have a curious experience. It was as if the huge crowd of paq'o's were just on the other side of a veil, I could *almost* see them and I could *almost* hear them. How I could almost see or almost hear something is a mystery to me. It was as if they were really there, but not really there. Years later I was read an anthropologist's description of how the ancient Andean people experienced the flow of time. The Andean people believed that at critical points in the timeline, time would bifurcate, and two different timelines would proceed forward. When I read that, I thought back to that experience at Sacsayhuaman. There are places in the world that are reputed to have only a thin veil between two different realities (the Scottish island of Iona is such a place). I wondered if perhaps Sacsayhuaman, or the effect it was having on my state of consciousness, might have thinned the veil between my world and one where the Inca still existed.

That was only the first of some interesting experiences I had on that visit to Sacsayhuaman. After we had gazed out at the plaza for a few reflective minutes, Gayle led us further down the path along the top of the rampart. As I was walking, I burst into tears. I wasn't thinking sad thoughts, I just started crying. Then I stopped, walked a bit further, and burst into tears again without any thoughts or images that would seem to have triggered it. This happened several times. It didn't concern me; I was just curious about what was going on with me.

Gayle then led us to the mouth of a cave that was barred with a locked gate. He said that this cave was very long, rumors had it that it went all the way to Bolivia. It was locked because there was bad air down there, and several people had died while exploring it. There was some shade where we were standing outside of the cave, and I sat down to rest with my back against a large rock. As I was sitting there, I drifted into a vision.

Now, I would like to say a little about my "visions". Some of my friends have very clear and intense images when they have a vision. I don't. I think it would be cool to have experiences like that, although these same friends also mention that there are some drawbacks. I mainly experience altered states of consciousness kinesthetically, i.e. as feelings that arise when I meditate, rather than images or sounds.

It is rare for me to have visions while meditating. When I do, they are not like the visual images I have when I look about me, or that I experience in dreams. They are more like what I experience when I daydream. My daydreams, however, are scripted by my conscious flow of thought. My visions are like daydreams that I don't script, my conscious mind observes them, but doesn't create them. So where do the images of my visions come from? Well, they are not the product of my

conscious mind, so they must either be generated by my unconscious mind or they are generated by something outside of myself. My intellect would rather like to know which it is, but my heart only wants to know whether there is beauty and meaning in the vision.

Getting back to my vision at Sacsayhuaman. As I was sitting there on the ground, with my back against the rock, looking at the mouth of the cave, a whirlpool of something like smoke appeared in front of me. The whirlpool was about 8 feet tall, its mouth facing me, and the smoke spiraling away from me toward the cave. Within the smoke, sparkling lights like stars began to flash. And--this is the part that was so significant to me--I suddenly knew that in looking at this whirlpool I was somehow looking at myself. Then a very clear thought arose within me, "I am a *much* more mysterious Being than my Western society has led me to believe." Followed by, "And so is everyone else". This, for me, had the ring of deep truth. We are much more mysterious Beings than our society has led us to believe.

When Gayle dropped us off back at the hostel, he told us that Américo again had something special planned for us the next evening. This meant that we had the rest of that day and most of the following day to relax and tourista around. In general, we spent our free time in Cusco going out for lunch and dinner (breakfast was provided by the hostel), checking out museums, shopping for Peruvian doodads, and just walking around looking at everything; interspersed with resting as our bodies were still getting used to the energy and altitude of Cusco. Being in Cusco is so different from my everyday life in the U.S. The sights are different, the sounds are different, the smells are different. The people are different, their everyday lives are different, their culture is different. And in that difference, I sense something of value that we lost in the industrial revolution.

I had, by then, reached a nice, secure, place about my being in Cusco. It sounds paradoxical, but I found that if I never let my guard down, then I could relax. By not letting my guard down I mean that *every* time I left my hostel I had my passport, tickets, and most of my money stashed in a security pouch that I wore around my waist under my pants. I *never* left my daypack dangling on the back of a chair in a restaurant, I always put it somewhere that would make it difficult for a thief to grab it and run. When I left my room, I would put anything of value that I wasn't taking with me into a locked suitcase. And I--more or less--restricted my wanderings to the safe parts of town. By taking these precautions, I could relax and enjoy myself.

The following evening Américo pulled up again to our hostel in his truck. He was in a very jolly mood. He looked at me and broke into a big smile. He complimented me on the state of my energy and said that I looked like an angel. He drove the four of us to his house in Cusco. We arrived just as a half dozen Q'ero walked up the sidewalk and at the same time as Gayle pulled up in his truck. Américo was tickled by the synchronicity of everyone arriving at the same time.

The Q'ero clambered into the back of our pickup truck with the usual amount of smiles and waves of greeting. Américo then noticed another Q'ero walking up the street. He exclaimed "Oh good...don Julio is here! I'll ask him to join us." He jumped out of the truck and walked over to talk to him. Américo returned and told us that Julio would not be joining us. He had just arrived in town after the five day walk over the mountains from Q'ero to Cusco. Américo explained that it can be very disorienting to shift from the salka (undomesticated energy) of the high Andes to the domesticated and frenetic energy of the City. Don Julio had told Américo that he needed to wander around for a few hours to adjust his energy.

We drove up to the hills above Cusco, past Sacsaywaman, to the ruins called Tambo Machay. Three tourist busses were parked there, however, so Américo changed his mind and had Gayle drive us again to Amaru Machay. By the time we got there it was dark. Mama Tuta, mother night, had opened her arms, spreading wide her robes and revealing the stars. There, hanging low in the night sky, was

the Southern Cross. As a child I had learned the names of all of the major constellations in the Northern sky. I never thought I would have a chance to see the Southern Cross, I was thrilled.

After we arrived at Amaru Machay Américo led us into a narrow canyon that cut through the stone hill. A short way into the canyon we came to a halt. One of the Q'ero climbed part way up the canyon wall and began to speak in Quechua. It was so dark in the canyon that I could only see him as a silhouette against the stars. From his tone of voice, and his cadence, and the energy I was feeling, I could tell that he was giving us a blessing, calling upon Pachamama and the Apus and other sacred Beings.

It was a beautiful moment, and magical. I felt the essence of who I am expanding out beyond the boundaries of my physical body. Then, among the various entities the paq'o was calling upon, I heard him include "Apu Jesucristo". In my thoughts I exclaimed, "What is Christianity doing in this ceremony? Man, it's everywhere, even in the Q'ero. I didn't come all the way to Peru for a Western-religion based blessing (grumble, grumble, grumble)." I realized at that point that I was back in my head. My experience of my own Being had shrunk to a small sphere of consciousness located behind my eyeballs...which is my normal state of being.

Some part of me that resides outside that sphere gave a gentle "shhhh, you can think about this later." My mind quieted and I once again found my experience of self expanding out into the Cosmos. I could feel the Q'ero and the stars and my immediate surroundings, we all seemed as one. And there was more, a vibration just below the threshold of feelings, and shimmering just on the other side of sight.

I thought, "Wow, this is a really altered state of consciousness. By turning off my thoughts am I becoming aware of a state I was already in, or does turning off my thoughts create this a shift in state?" Followed by another gentle, internal, "shhhhh." I was back in my head. "Oh yeah, sorry about that." I returned to the experience of my expanded self.

This, of course, is what mediation is all about, at least for me. Meditating requires my turning off my internal dialog. My internal dialog always intrudes. When I realize that has happened I simply release it and get back to meditating. With practice I get better at going longer periods without internal dialog while I am meditating...most days. Sometimes turning off my internal dialog is like trying to ignore a marching band parading by. The experience I had that night at Amaru Machay was special to me, for I had never swung back and forth so quickly and repeatedly from such a deep meditative state and my normal cerebral consciousness. The contrast between those two extremes taught me something valuable but ineffable about shifting my states of energy.

When the blessing was over, we slowly made our way through the darkness in the narrow canyon and then out into the open to an evening sky filled with stars, and a little light seeping up from Cusco down below. Don Américo and the Q'ero began to climb up steps cut into the side of the stone hill, which led to some benches, also cut out of the stone, and there we settled down to meditate.

I found myself sitting shoulder to shoulder between don Pascual and another of the Q'ero. It occurred to me that this would be an excellent circumstance in which to get in touch with Pachamama, the great Being who is our mother the conscious planet Earth. With my imagination I floated out of my body, traveled a little away from the hill, and then went down into the Earth. At that point I stopped consciously running the experience, and had another vision (which I swear...really are rare for me).

I found myself in a cavern below the earth. There I encountered a Being of great warmth and tremendous love. She enfolded me in her embrace. I felt at home, loved, safe. Almost as a test, I then pictured myself lying on the floor of the cavern, with my throat cut, laying in a pool of my blood, and I knew that I was safe, that all was ok, that I was simply returning home to Pachamama. I later reflected on this experience, wondering if I will really return to Pachamama when I die, or if this is the last illusion that I will leave behind when I die.

After a while we got up and started walking back to the truck. I paused, looking up at the stars. Using my intent, I sent my energetic filaments to connect with the Southern Cross. As I was doing this don Pascual passed by, he said something to me in Quechua and then continued on. I had no idea what he had said but I wanted to know, so I kept repeating it over and over in my head while I made my way back to the truck. I repeated it to Américo, asking him to translate it for me. He told me that Pascual had said, "I see you are connecting your filaments to the Southern Cross". It was neat that he could tell that was what I was doing, and yet I had rather hoped for something more mystically significant.

When we had all climbed back into the truck, Américo put it into gear and we bounced our way along the rough dirt track. Just as we were pulling on to the main road there were flashing lights behind us and the quick chirp of a siren. We were being pulled over by the police. Américo sent Gayle back to sort things out. While we were waiting Américo, turned to us with a soft smile and said, "Welcome to Peru. This is very much what Peru is like. One moment you are connected to the vast mystery of the Cosmos, and the next moment you are being pulled over by the police."

Gayle returned after a few minutes to announce that we had been pulled over because the truck had a burned-out taillight. He had promised to get it fixed right away in Cusco and the police had let us go. But then he said, and Américo agreed, that the real reason we had been pulled over was because we had a truck full of Q'ero.

Peru has a very strong and very stratified social structure. At the top are the very rich European-looking Peruvians. At the very bottom are the indigenous people of Peru. These people, whom I have come to so greatly appreciate and respect, are often treated with scorn by the rest of the Peruvian society. In Peruvian television shows they are portrayed as buffoons. The Q'ero, identified by their traditional clothing, are often denied admittance to hotels and restaurants.

Tom Best once told me of a time when he and Américo had gone with the Q'ero into a restaurant. The restaurant served the Q'ero food that was obviously inferior to what was being given to everyone else, watery soup with no meat and few vegetables. Américo stormed into the restaurant's kitchen and shouted at the cooks. What I have noticed over my trips to Peru is that when we go to a restaurant with the Q'ero, usually in some little village in the way outback, that Américo goes and talks with the management. He and Gayle then take on the role of being the waiters for the Q'ero, serving them their food with affection and respect.

As we were driving back that night from Amaru Machay, Américo told us that when the Q'ero walk the streets at night in Cusco, that pickup trucks will sometimes stop and teenagers then jump out and assault the Q'ero. For many years, to give them a safe place to stay and to make sure they had food, Américo would put the Q'ero up at his house when they visited Cusco. When his wife finally tired of this, Américo rented a house in Cusco where the Q'ero can stay in safety. He also made arrangements with a restaurant where if the Q'ero put their thumbprint on the bill Américo will pay it.

The next morning Tom Best arrived in Cusco. That evening was when our time with Américo had been officially scheduled to begin. Shortly after dinner that night, Gayle picked us up in the truck and drove us into the mountains surrounding Cusco. He parked the truck at the bottom of a canyon, and led us on foot up the side of the mountain and then into a forest. It was now getting dark. We wound our way slowly through the deeper darkness under the trees, and into a small clearing. There, sitting in a circle in the very dim light, were don Américo and about ten Q'ero. A gap had been left in the circle so that we could join them.

This was the beginning of our formal work with the Q'ero. The next day they were going to give us a *karpay* (initiation ceremony). First, however, they wanted to meet with us to check out our energy, to make sure that it was congruent with their own. It was also a chance for our energy to start to mingle with theirs.

As we sat down, I could see that the Q'ero all had woven cloths spread out on the ground in front of them. In the dark it was difficult to see exactly what they had displayed on the cloths, but it looked like some of them had their mesas out. *Mesa* is the Spanish word for *table*, but in the Andes the mesa is a large, square, woven cloth that the paq'os used to wrap up and carry some of their sacred objects. The mesa is then opened and spread out on the ground to serve as a portable altar, with the sacred objects spread out upon it. Many of these sacred objects are q'uyas. *Q'uyas* are stones with which the paq'o has a special relationship. Q'uyas may be given to someone by a paq'o, or a person may find q'uyas of their own.

When I saw the paq'os and their mesas I entered into an internal debate. I had a q'uya that Américo had given me. I had it wrapped up in a red bandana and stashed in the daypack I had brought with me to this gathering with the Q'ero. I was debating whether or not it would be ok for me to lay my bandana on the ground in front of me and put my q'uya on it. I wanted to do this to show my respect for the Q'ero and to participate fully in the power of the moment. I didn't know, however, whether this would be ok, whether it would be taken as a sign of respect or as a sign of disrespect by the Q'ero. I vacillated for a few minutes and then decided I would rather err on the side of not being timid and to follow my heart. I quietly spread my bandana on the ground and put my q'uya in its center. No one said anything.

Don Américo started things off with beautiful words of welcome, and then we went around the circle, with everyone saying what they wanted to about us all being there together. When the Q'ero spoke they spoke in Quechua, Américo would translate that into Spanish, and Tom would translate from Spanish to English. When we spoke to the Q'ero, the translations moved in the opposite direction.

As everyone took turns talking, I noticed something special going on inside me. I could feel the energy in the region of my heart growing stronger and expanding outwards. When it was my turn to speak, I started off by saying what a great honor it was that the Q'ero had come all of the way to Cusco to be with us. Then, when I couldn't think of anything else to say, I described what was going on within me at that moment, that I could feel the energy of my heart expanding. Don Pascual responded back, "Yes, we are watching that happen."

Later, when the meeting was over, we all stood up and gave each other hugs. Then we began to slowly walk in the darkness, down through the trees, and back towards the truck. A Q'ero took each one of us by the hand to lead us down safely. As we emerged from the trees and into the starlight, I looked at the Q'ero around us, and I had a Tolkienesque thought. It came to me that the Q'ero had the bodies of dwarves and the spirit of elves. The starlight shone upon their faces.

When we were back in the truck, I asked Tom whether he thought it was ok that I had put my q'uya on a bandana in front of me when we sat down. His response was that the Q'ero had been hiding in isolated villages in the high Andes for the past 500 years, trying to protect themselves from the Spanish society that had outlawed their religion and ridiculed their customs. We represented the West to them. They knew that we had traveled a great distance to meet with them, and I had pulled out a q'uya and put it on a mesa. Tom looked at me, and stopped talking.

The next day was our karpay (initiation) ceremony with the Q'ero. It was not an initiation along the lines of going through some ordeal and then becoming members of the club. It was, instead, an initiation into a new state of consciousness. After having entered that state of consciousness, it would then be available for us in the future, a new step in our dance with the Cosmos.

Américo picked us up around 10:00 in the morning, and we headed south on the main road that leads to Bolivia. After an hour or so we turned onto a dirt road that took us east into the Andes. After about another half hour of driving, we came upon Gayle and a dozen paq'os sitting on the side of the road next to a van. Gayle had driven them there to meet us. We got out of the truck and visited for a

while. Ten of the paq'os were from Q'ero, and then there were another two paq'os from a region close to Q'ero who had gotten wind of what was going to happen that day and had asked if they could join in.

Three of the Q'ero who were with us that day were to play important roles in my later trips to Peru. Don Pascual was one. At that time Pascual was in his seventies, but still did the five-day walk from Q'ero to Cusco, and back, in sandals, over the mountains, sometimes through snow. Américo had a special affinity with don Pascual, calling him "the Merlin of the Andes." In addition to being friends, Pascual served as a guardian of Américo's energy. Américo told me that when Pascual died that he might die soon thereafter. But Pascual did eventually die, several years later, and Américo is still going.

Another Q'ero with us that day was don Martin. Américo had saved his life once and they had become close friends. After this trip I didn't see Martin again for another twenty years (when Américo arranged for Martin and his wife to do some energetic work on me). He is now, perhaps, the most highly revered of the Q'ero paqos. I'll have more to say about don Martin when I describe my later trips to Peru.

The third Q'ero who was there that I would like to mention was don Pascualito. He was to accompany me on several later trips to Peru. When we met on this first trip, he was quiet and withdrawn. Tom said that Pascualito's first child had died during the first winter after her birth. Then his second child died during her first winter. And recently, his wife had died during the birth of their third child, leaving him with a newborn daughter to raise. About 800 Q'ero were living at that time, and their numbers were slowly diminishing from the rigors of living at 15,000 feet, the very limit of agriculture and herding, and far from any medical help. According to Tom, Pascualito had about had it with life in Q'ero and wanted out. Some years later, when I met Pascualito again, he had a new wife, and they worked together as healers. I believe he lives in Cusco now.

We all palled around for a bit on the side of the dirt road. Tom had brought a rather large video camera (good video cameras in 1996 were large) and he and the Q'ero were having fun making videos of each other and then looking at them on the camera's screen. After a while we piled into our two vehicles and drove on a bit to where the road met the river Vilcanota. There we got out to meditate for a while next to the river, to prepare our energy for the karpay. Meditating with a river, connecting your energy to the energy of the river, can clean your energy as well as help it flow.

The Vilcanota River flows along the foot of Apu Pachatusan. An *Apu* is a great Being who is one of the majestic mountain peaks on the planet. An *Apu* is not a transcendent spirit who inhabits the mountain, it is the conscious mountain itself, a fine distinction, but I believe an important one. In our Western worldview we have, since the time of Descartes, separated reality into a physical realm of matter and energy, and a transcendent realm of souls who inhabit our physical bodies. In this view, consciousness is seen as being either part of our transcendent soul, or as something that emerges from a complicated nervous system. My understanding of the Andean Cosmvision is that the Cosmos consists of a vast network of energetic filaments. Where these energetic filaments come together to form a bundle, or node, is what we experience as an object. Consciousness is seen as an inherent attribute of the filaments. In this view, everything is conscious as everything is made out of these filaments, including the Earth (Pachamama) and the mountains (the Apus) and the stars and the rivers and the trees...

In the history of Western philosophy, the view that everything is conscious is known as *panpsychism*. Just out of intellectual curiosity I looked into panpsychism and found some interesting information. Panpsychism has a long and venerable history in philosophical traditions of both the East and the West. It seems like such a strange concept to us now--that everything is conscious--but it was the predominant viewpoint in Western science until the beginning of the 20th Century. I discovered that William James and Alfred North Whitehead (both described below) ascribed to it. Panpsychism is

emerging again in philosophy and psychology as modern scientists attempt to arrive at a reasonable model for the basic nature of consciousness.

William James (1842-1910) has been my favorite psychologist ever since I first discovered him while studying the history of psychology as part of my graduate studies. He is considered to be the "Father of American psychology." Discovering that he was a proponent of panpsychism delighted but didn't surprise me. He examined religion from a psychological perspective in his book The Varieties of Religious Experience. Two of the more famous statements from that book are, "The whole drift of my education goes to persuade me that the world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist," and "Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different."

That Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) was a proponent of panpsychism *was* a pleasant surprise to me. Whitehead and Bertrand Russell wrote a book entitled Principia Mathematica, that was one of the twentieth century's most important works on mathematical logic. The book contained a chapter about "logical types", which resolved a type of paradox that can arise in human communication but that also had fascinating ramifications in understanding reality. That chapter had a big effect on the anthropologist Gregory Bateson, and through my studies of Bateson's writings, had a big effect on how I view reality as well. I find it particularly useful in understanding how it can be possible to integrate two different worldviews, in my case, the Western worldview and the Andean Cosmovision.

Earlier in my career I would have used James' and Whitehead's belief in panpsychism to give the Andean Cosmovision some validity in the eyes of Western scientists. But frankly, I no longer care whether or not the Western worldview can validate the Andean Cosmovision, for I don't see the Western worldview as being the superior of the two. They are simply two fundamentally different ways to face the ineffable mystery of existence. The integration of the two...well that is something special...and important.

Apu Pachatusan, unlike the other Apus I have since visited (e.g. Ausangate, Veronica, Salkantay, Wamanlipa), is rather unassuming in its appearance. It lacks the towering rocky peaks and glacial fields of the other Apus. It is just a large, brown, mountain, but it plays an important role in the Andean view of the Cosmos. That role has been described to me in two different ways: that Apu Pachatusan is the pillar that supports the Cosmos on its shoulders, and that Apu Pachatusan is the axis around which the Andean Cosmos turns. In either description, it is an important Apu in the Andes, and it was significant that our karpay ceremony was going to be held on its slopes.

After meditating by the river, and taking some group photos, we turned onto a road leading up the side of the Apu. We were heading for a huaca (sacred place) that, before the conquest, had been of great importance to the Andean people. The Spanish had built a sanctuary of San Salvador named *Señor de Huanca* on that spot, keeping with their strategy of placing Christian churches on sacred Andean locations.

Our two vehicles pulled into the church's parking lot and we all climbed out. At that point a priest, looking quite agitated, came running out to confront us. I assume this was because of the presence of the Q'ero in their traditional clothing. Américo talked quietly to the priest for several minutes and what he said seemed to calm him down. Américo waved to us all to follow him and led us into the church. We went in, lit some candles, and sat there quietly for a bit. The Q'ero sat in the back row of pews looking slightly amused.

After sitting there for about 10 minutes, Américo stood up and we followed him out of the church, across the parking lot, and up the side of the mountain. The vegetation on the mountain consisted mainly of low trees and shrubs and--wherever the land was somewhat level--small plots of cultivated land. We stopped at one of those to have lunch. Gayle had hauled up a large burlap sack

filled with food. He spread out a tarp on the ground to serve as a tablecloth and dumped our food out in the middle of it. Lunch consisted of fresh fruit (Cusco is only a day's drive from the jungle), big wedges of cheese, piles of pocket bread (a locally baked product that is very tasty), and chocolate bars. The chocolate barely hit the ground before being grabbed up in delight by the Q'ero.

After lunch we all laid in the shade on the ground and had a siesta; Américo and Gayle, the dozen paq'os, Tom, Gina, Judy, Bob and I. I don't know where it started or why, but one of the Q'ero began to giggle. It spread, of course, and soon we were all laughing. After a respite, someone would start to giggle again, and then the rest of us would break out laughing, and so it went on for ten minutes or so. Finally we settled down for a half hour of rest.

When the siesta was over, don Américo led the paq'os a bit further up the side of the mountain. Then he came back and beckoned us to join them. We found the paq'os in a small grassy area, sitting in two lines facing each other along opposite sides of a long woven cloth. On the cloth each paq'o had laid out various sacred accoutrements, primarily mesas, flowers, and piles of coca leaves. The ceremony began.

Several paq'os carefully selected, from the stashes in front of them, three perfect coca leaves for each of us, presenting them to us arranged as a fan. These ceremonial sets of three coca leaves are called *k'intus*. We were told to blow our very finest energy into the coca leaves, commingling our energy with that of the k'intu. Some of these k'intus were then added to an offering that the paq'os were putting together, and other k'intus were given to us to chew if we wished. Another use of a k'intu is to blow your finest energy through the coca leaves to establish a sacred connection with the Pachamama or an Apu or some other aspect of the Cosmos.

I had drunk coca tea in Cusco, but this was my first experience of chewing coca leaves. Gayle quietly told us that this was completely optional. If we wanted to, we were to chew the leaves a bit, and then stash them between our gums and cheek where their essence could flow into our body. He added that we were not to swallow the leaves. Then, when we felt like it, we could discretely take the wad of leaves out of our mouths and dispose of them in the foliage around us (it is considered impolite to just spit out the coca leaves).

Coca is very sacred to the Andean people. While it is also the base for making cocaine, coca leaves and cocaine are very different. It takes a huge amount of coca leaves to make a small amount of cocaine, and during the process 28 other chemicals are added as well. On a physical level, coca is a mild stimulant and anesthetic; it subdues hunger and helps the blood carry more oxygen; both useful for a day of strenuous work in the mountains. My own experience in chewing coca leaves is that it provides a level of stimulation about like having two cups of tea. On a social level, when a stash of leaves is shared among people it serves as a token of friendship and mutual connection. On a sacred level, it plays a very important role in a ritual connection to the Cosmos. For more information on coca I recommend [The Hold Life Has: Coca and Cultural Identity in an Andean Community](#), by the anthropologist Catherine Allen.

As we continued with the ceremony, a woman or a child would occasionally walk by, driving a flock of sheep or a cow, or carrying a large bundle on their backs. They would just glance at us and continue on. Families were working their fields on the mountain side, not too far from us. At first I was surprised that Américo hadn't selected a more isolated spot. But then I understood that this was Peru, where the sacred and the secular are one. The people greet the sun every morning as it rises above the mountains, they ask permission of the fields (the daughters of Pachamama) before they work them, they invite the Cosmos to join them when they have a fiesta. The sacred is inherent in everyday life.

After the paq'os had completed their offering to the Cosmos, several of them began to work on our energy. They took their mesas (the woven cloths containing their sacred objects) and gently

touched us on the top of our heads, on our heart regions, and near our belly buttons. They leaned over and spoke Quechua into the top of our heads, and then blew energy down through the top of our heads and into our Being. When they blew down through the top of my head, I experienced a flow of beautiful energy cascade down my spine. From the beginning of the ceremony I had begun to slip into an altered state of consciousness, with no apparent reason other than the ceremony itself. By the time they finished working on our energy I had been initiated into a profound, and beautiful, altered state of consciousness.

When they were finished working on us don Martin and don Pascualito gave us each a q'uya. A q'uya is a stone with which a paq'o has a special relationship, or one that he or she has infused with some special energy to give to another. Those q'uyas, 24 years later, are still in my mesa.

When the ceremony was over, we all sat back and relaxed. Américo had brought some pisco (local brandy) and we passed that around, each pouring ourselves a capful of pisco from the bottle. The Q'ero were also engaged in the partaking of sacred tobacco (smoking unfiltered Marlboro cigarettes...which I found to be rather amusing). I was feeling so mellow, and happy, and relaxed.

At that point an old woman approached our group and walked right up to me. She was dressed in indigenous clothes, wearing a colorful, knitted sweater and woven skirt, and sporting a white stove-pipe hat. She was amazingly short, so that even though I was sitting on the ground and she was standing we were almost at eye level. She had shining black eyes and a friendly smile. She spoke to me in Quechua. I had no idea what she said, but Américo, who was sitting near me, responded back to her in Quechua. She looked at him and then back at me, and smiled, and said something more. Again, Américo responded. When he finished, she got a big, beautiful, smile on her face and turned to walk away. Américo called her back for a moment, rummaged around in what was left in the food bag, and gave her as much food as she could carry.

After she left, I asked Américo what that was all about. He said that when she first approached me she asked if I would like to see her chickens. Américo had responded by saying, "No thank you mama." She responded to that by saying, "But they are really nice chickens, he might want to see them." Américo then replied, "No thank you mama, I'm afraid he has no use for your chickens. But what he could use, would be for you to caress his dreams tonight with your gentle hands." That was when she got her beautiful smile and walked away. When Américo told me that I felt like I was in a song.

We walked back down to the parking lot, Gayle drove off with the Q'ero, and Américo drove us back to Cusco. Our time with the Q'ero was over for that trip. We were left with a deep concern about the future for the Q'ero. I don't see how anyone with at least half a heart wouldn't be worried about what was in store for them. They lived lives still informed by the Andean Cosmovision, and little influenced by the West. This was possible due to their living in such isolated villages in the high Andes. The Q'ero we met lived at 15,000 feet. As Américo put it, Western civilization was sweeping up the Andes like a tsunami. At the time of our trip, it had reached 12,000 feet and was still rising. The Q'ero could not move any higher. Q'ero, indeed, represented one of the few places on the earth where the West had yet to significantly intrude.

It was tempting to want to (metaphorically) build a wall around Q'ero to keep the West out. This, however, raised all sorts of ethical problems. Who are we to want to direct the future of Q'ero? Their numbers were declining, the story of don Pascualito is telling. To want them to stay isolated from the West was asking them to please continue their almost stone-age existence so that we could come visit them, and then return home to our refrigerators, central heating, internet and modern medicine.

The West, however, does not simply arrive with modern advancements and material goods.

History shows us that when the West arrives, the indigenous worldview blows away in the wind, the land is exploited and destroyed, and the people move from subsistence farming to starving poverty. In reaching out for what they wanted (and in my opinion deserved) the Q'ero were likely to end up much worse off. That seemed by far the most likely result if everyone just stood by while the Western colonization of the Andean culture proceeded.

I also had a more global concern. Every worldview is based upon a set of assumptions about reality that make it easy for a society to excel at some things but with a tradeoff that it makes it more difficult for the society to excel at other things. The Western worldview makes it easy for my society to excel at gathering information and inventing new technology, but it makes it hard for us to directly experience our connection to nature. The Andean Cosmvision makes it easy for people to experience our connection to nature but I don't think the Incas would ever have gotten around to inventing the internal combustion engine. Our Western society is in a car speeding toward the edge of a cliff, and when we go off that cliff no saying we are sorry will make any difference, and we will take much of what is beautiful about this planet with us. We have all the technology we need to head toward a future of greater health and beauty on this planet, but we seem to lack the heart to do so. The Andean culture lacks the technology but has the heart. Integrating the two worldviews may be the answer. We can't integrate the Andean Cosmvision with the Western worldview, however, if the Cosmvision no longer exists.

These were the issues I was wrestling with in my first trip to Peru (now 26 years ago). Since then, the Q'ero and other Andean people have been faced with all of the calamities that hide in the hand held behind the back of Westerners who have reached out the other hand to greet them. Some of us have done our best to help them. But I'd rather that story come out as I move forward through time in the accounts of my other trips to Peru.

The next morning, Américo, Gayle, and the five of us drove in a rented van to the Sacred Valley of Peru. The Sacred Valley is about an hour's drive from Cusco. The road climbs up out of the Cusco Valley and travels along some high, flat land until it suddenly drops down into the Sacred Valley. That high territory is quite beautiful. It is covered in small plots of farmland, containing various crops at various stages of growth; some plots are fallow, others coming into bloom, and some showing just the promise of new growth. For all the world it looks like a patchwork quilt, spread out upon the lap of Pachamama, extending out from the road to the snow-capped peaks in the distance.

We stopped along the way to get out of the van, stretch our legs, take some pictures, and to just enjoy being there. Across the road from where we stopped, a potato field was being harvested (by hand). When the people harvest potatoes, they take the first few potatoes of the day and bury them in a hole, putting them back into the Pachamama from whence they came. They then light a small fire over the potatoes, cooking them for lunch. The fires are tended by people who can't work the field. In addition to providing the nourishment needed for the hard day's work, the ritual also honors the Pachamama.

Across the road, only about 30 yards away, sat a young woman, tending a fire while she nursed her baby. She was dressed in the typical indigenous clothes of a knitted sweater and a skirt woven from wool. She wore a tan hat with a wide brim and rounded peak, her baby was at her breast. Just as I was about to turn and climb into the van our eyes met, I paused, and she gave me a smile. It was the most beautiful smile I have ever seen. It was a smile that communicated a complete contentment with life. It was a moment that became embossed in my psyche. I climbed into the van and we took off.

At the far end of that high plateau the road came to the edge of the Sacred Valley, bordered along its far side by a line of truly spectacular mountains. The valley stretches 36 miles from the town

of Pisac (elevation 9,800 feet) down to the town of Ollantaytambo (9,160 feet). It has a nice sized river confusingly known at various stretches as the Vilcanota, the Urubamba, the Vilcamayo, the Wilcanuta, and the Yucay. At Ollantaytambo the valley narrows, the road comes to an end, and the river tumbles down a gorge for 20 miles to Machu Picchu, before falling further down into the jungle to empty into the Amazon River, to begin a 4,000 mile journey to the Atlantic Ocean.

The valley has fertile soil and an agreeable climate and was the breadbasket for the Inca empire. Driving down its length you can see the remains of farming terraces the Incas had cut into the mountain sides, climbing unbelievably high up the mountains, almost to the peaks. While the vast majority of the terraces have long been abandoned, the valley floor is still heavily cultivated and provides food for Cusco.

The valley has many Inca and pre-Inca sacred sites and ruins (including major ruins at Pisac and Ollantaytambo). The Inca considered the Sacred Valley, and its river, to be an Earthly manifestation of the Milky Way, which they referred to as *The River of Stars*. The Milky Way played an important role in the Incan cosmology.

The road wound down into the Sacred Valley, arriving at the valley floor at the town of Urubamba (I've always liked the sound of that name). There we turned left onto the road that travels alongside the river to Ollantaytambo, following the railroad tracks that lead from Cusco, through Ollantaytambo, to Machu Picchu. When we reached Ollantaytambo we were directed by traffic officers down some narrow, one-lane streets to the main tourist parking lot at the foot of the Inca ruins. The lot was surrounded by vendors sitting at tables under awnings, selling the many and varied things that tourists like to buy in Peru.

The small town of Ollantaytambo is the only town in Peru that has survived pretty much as the Inca's laid it out several hundred years ago. When you climb up one of the surrounding hills and look down at the town you can see that it is trapezoidal in shape. In its full, original, design it represented an ear of corn. The streets of Ollantaytambo are oriented to the rising of the sun on summer solstice. Water still continually flows down gutters along the sides of some of the streets.

The main Inca ruins are on the side of a mountain facing the village. A long series of terraces with steps lead up to a temple at the top. The terraces and temple were designed to form the outline of a llama on the side of the mountain. The Inca work at Ollantaytambo was interrupted by the invasion of the Spanish and the temple was not completed. After the defeat at Sacsaywaman, Manco Inca led his troops to Ollantaytambo to make another stand against the Spanish. At first, the Incas were victorious against the Spanish forces, but when overwhelming Spanish reinforcements arrived, Manco withdrew from Ollantaytambo to make his last stand at Vilcambamba. During the battle at Ollantaytambo, the Spanish captured Manco's wife. When Manco refused to surrender the Spanish stripped her naked, flogged her, shot her with arrows, then tied her body to a raft and sent it down the river to be seen by Manco's men who were arrayed downstream.

On a cliff across from the ruins, on the opposite side of Ollantaytambo, is a huge stone face, with a partially defined upper body holding a large sack over his shoulder and wearing what looks like a small crown. The whole figure is 140 meters tall. It has the appearance of being a natural rock formation that looks remarkably like a face, but the cliff was at least partly worked by human hands. The figure is *Tunupa*, messenger from the Cosmic Consciousness to humanity, depicted as he emerges from the *Uju Pacha* (the interior world and the world of the past). A few hundred yards to his right (as he faces you), on the shelf of a cliff, sits the ruins of a temple dedicated to Tunupa. When the sun first rises on the summer solstice it sends a shaft of light that illuminates the temple.

A note on my use here of the term "Cosmic Consciousness". When you read of Tunupa he is usually described as a messenger of Wiracocha. Wiracocha, in turn, is usually described as the Andean god of creation. I believe, however, that this is a conceptual distortion that comes not just from

translating from one language to another, but from translating from one worldview to another. In his chapter *Three Times, Three Spaces in Cosmos Quechua*, in the book Story Earth: Native Voices on the Environment, the indigenous Peruvian anthropologist Salvador Palomino writes, "In the Quechua language, the words 'religion' and 'god' do not exist, but we use them in Spanish to indicate our relationship with the divine beings that are the holy forces of nature." It is my understanding that in the Andean Cosmivision, the Cosmos, rather than being the creation of an outside entity, is itself a conscious Being with a creative impulse that organizes itself and changes over time.

After we arrived at Ollantaytambo, Américo sent Gayle to find us a place to have lunch. When he returned, he led us up some stairs to the second floor of a building to a restaurant that had windows overlooking the ruins. If you have ever been to a third-world tourist site and had lunch at a place that draws in the young adult backpacking crowd you can probably picture about what the restaurant was like. Gayle had managed to find a table with enough chairs for us to crowd around, and we had some lunch selected on the principle of what would be safe to eat.

After lunch we walked down to the parking lot at the foot of the ruins, passed through the tourist ticket gate, and slowly climbed the stairs leading up past the terraces to the Temple of the Sun at the top. It was rather crowded with tourists, and there wasn't a lot to see at the uncompleted temple. Américo led us around a corner, up at that high place, that took us out of the crowds, to a rock shelf overlooking a canyon. This, Américo told us, was the Temple of the Wind, which was indeed blowing at that spot. We sat down and meditated, connecting with the wind, for a while. Meditations that connect us to the wind can be used to clean our energy and to expand our consciousness and Being.

After the meditation, Américo took us along the highest terrace to another long set of stairs where we could descend to the valley below. At the bottom we turned away from the main ruins and walked along a very nice stream. After we had walked a little way, Américo had us turn back and look at the rock formation we had just passed. There, up a bit on the side of the cliff, was a large, stone condor. It looked like a completely natural rock formation, but also looked uncannily like a condor's head, poking out between hunched shoulders. The exactly correct position of its eye supports the idea that it was worked at least a little by human hands. Below the condor, toward the foot of the cliff, the Incas, or pre-Incas, had carved out of the cliff a flat shelf to serve as an altar. There, the shadow from the beak of the condor falls, and there they would leave offerings to the condor. On that shelf is a stone gnomon where the shadow from the condor's beak falls on the summer solstice.

We continued up the valley floor along a path that led between the bottom of the cliff and the river until we arrived at the ruins of several small rooms made of stacked blocks of stone. Channels had been cut into the stone to allow some of the river's water to flow artistically through the area. Américo told us that in the ancient days this place had been reserved for the women to do their ritual work. He added that the women at that time were amazingly short in height, which brought to my mind the old woman who approached me on Apu Pachatusan. Here he invited us to meditate again.

I started to realize something at this point. When I am with a group of people in Peru, at some sacred spot or a place of good energy, and Américo invites us to meditate, he then disappears around a corner or over the crest of the hill. He comes back after a while to bring the meditation to a close. I don't know what he is doing out of our sight. Perhaps he is resting or having a smoke (metaphorically speaking). When he returns, however, he often makes a few--sometimes specific--comments about the quality of our meditations. From that I get the impression that he is monitoring our meditating at some level I don't understand, or perhaps even aiding us, as an intermediary with the Cosmos. He has never mentioned it and I haven't asked.

When we finished at Ollantaytambo, we drove to a hotel in the Sacred Valley to spend the night. It was a nice step-up from our place in Cusco. The hotel had an expanse of grass around it, and lots of tropical flowers growing in the flower beds, and tables under large umbrellas. The rooms were

also nice. It would have been great to spend more than just the one night there. I was so tired I went to bed early and felt like I was missing out on some of the pleasure of being in that comfortable and pretty locale.

The next day we drove to the town of Pisac at the upper end of the Sacred Valley. Once a week, including the day we were there, it has a farmer's market for the indigenous local people. It also has a really nice, and large, crafts market. I had never been much into tourist shopping before that trip, but I have discovered that I really enjoy it in Peru (and still do). There are so many fascinating things to buy that are very Peruvian, that I have never seen anywhere else, and that make great presents for when I return home. Just being there milling around and interacting with the Peruvian people is such a pleasant difference from my normal life.

After we had finished shopping, Américo took us up to the ruins in the terraced hills above the town. The Pisac ruins were a major Incan site; with a Temple to the Sun (including a rock outcropping that was a hitching post for the Sun), altars, fountains, and baths, all situated within a large enough walled enclosure to provide a sanctuary for the people in the area during an invasion. We went there to meditate in the energy of the ruins. The meditation there, by my perspective, was a bit of a dud. Américo had taken us to a relatively isolated place in the ruins to meditate, but soon after we started a tour group came by, led by someone wielding a whistle and a megaphone. The group finally moved on but they were soon followed by others.

After our visit to Pisac we headed back to Cusco to spend the night before moving on to stay for several days at Salka Wasi, Américo's ancestral home in the Andes.

The next morning Arilu and Américo picked us up in a van with a driver that we had hired to take us to Salka Wasi. Gayle had earlier taken off in the truck, which was filled with provisions (food, safe water, and candles) for our stay. On the way out of Cusco Américo stopped at a store where we could stock up on personal things we might want to have with us at Salka Wasi; wine, cookies, bottled water for the trip there, and so on.

During the previous few days, we had all been busy trying to get small bills and change for our visit to the outback of Peru. The people outside of the cities cannot make change for large denomination bills, nor do they want them. Merchants in Cusco can make change but don't like to. My strategy is, when in Cusco, to pay for meals with large bills (restaurants can handle that), and to avoid spending the small stuff whenever possible (which can be darned inconvenient at times). For every trip I've taken to Peru, I have spent the first couple of days working the system to get change before leaving Cusco.

We drove south out of Cusco on the paved road toward Bolivia for about an hour. Much of that hour was spent just getting out of Cusco. We then turned east on a dirt road and headed up into the mountains. It was a frightening and dangerous journey. The road climbed up a side canyon towards the mountain peaks, climbing much faster along the side of the mountain than the river at the bottom of the canyon. Soon there was a steep drop off of two thousand feet on one side of the road, and a cliff face on the other side. There were no guardrails. The dirt road was barely wide enough for two cars to pass each other...slowly and carefully. Occasionally huge open-bed trucks would come barreling around the corners and down the road at us, filled with produce from the jungle (this was one of the routes from the jungle to Cusco). In the back of the trucks, standing between or sitting on the bags of produce, were colorfully dressed indigenous people (it is an inexpensive way to travel through the Andes). When we confronted each other, often accompanied by the hard application of brakes, one of the vehicles, usually ours, would have to back up--very carefully--to a wider spot in the road. The narrow road had many blind curves and the trucks were traveling fast and downhill. At each blind

curve, our driver would slow down and sound his horn before we would venture around it.

As we neared the top of the mountain, the bottom of the canyon to our left rose quickly up to meet us, and then the road spilled onto a high land of rolling hills. We had entered the purely indigenous lands of the Andes. Cusco and the Sacred Valley are a mixture of the indigenous, Quechua-speaking culture, and a modern, Spanish-speaking culture that has benefited from the inflow of money from tourism. Up in the high Andes the money from tourism doesn't flow. The culture, the language, the dwellings, and the life-style are predominantly indigenous.

In the van we bumped up and down the dirt road, passing small villages, people working the fields by hand, and adobe walls. Our driver was playing a cassette tape that could be described as "101 Peruvian Pipes Play the Beatles". Although it was some 30 years after the Beatles had broken up, we often heard their music in places that catered to tourists. I figured the Peruvians knew it was a safe bet that the music would be enjoyed by Westerners, or perhaps it was the case that the Peruvians liked it a lot too.

We were all sitting in our seats watching Peru, and the people of Peru, and the lives of the people of Peru, glide by the window. We had just reaching the outskirts of the Andean town of Huancarani, when on the van stereo the Beatle song "With a Little Help from My Friends" came on, and we all started to sing along with it. I was looking at a Peruvian woman, in her native dress, running along the road as we drove past. And I realized, suddenly, that the Beatles had always been singing about a world, or a potential world, or some very special aspect of our world, that was not like our world, but better, more beautiful; and that I was seeing, outside the window, in the high Andes of Peru, the reality the Beatles had been singing about. It was a very deep connection for me, and seemed to come not from my conscious mind, nor my unconscious mind, but from the depths of ourselves where we connect with the Cosmos.

Huancarani was a large enough town to have a town square and a few local government offices. We climbed stiffly out of the van and went in search of a restroom we could use. We found one close to the government offices; bring your own toilet paper, no toilet seat, and a 50 centimo fee. Américo was out by the van talking to a couple of locals. What we were to discover is that almost everywhere we go in Peru, from Cusco down to the tiny villages, people come running up when they see Américo, smiling and greeting him, eager to talk with him, or lean out of windows to wave at him. On my most recent trip to Peru, one of those big produce trucks passed our bus, and a woman riding in the back spotted Américo and shouted out "Papa Américo! Papa Américo!" as they went by. This happens all the time.

I'm like, "I'm with him!" when we meet people. But more seriously, being with Américo is like having a ticket into instant acceptance by the indigenous people of Peru, which is incredible. Being with Américo is a ticket into the people's lives, but to stay welcomed there requires my willingness to interact with them with an open heart. I can't tell you how much I love being in a culture where that is the path to acceptance. When I return to the United States our society seems so cold.

After leaving Huancarani, Américo told us that if we needed a bathroom break in the future that all we needed to do was to shout out "Pee Pee Time", and he would have the driver pull over at the first convenient copse of trees.

The road climbed a bit higher after Huancarani, and we soon reached a summit. Américo had the driver stop, and we got out. Américo pointed out in the distance the snowcapped peaks of Q'ero, and in a slightly different direction, but still far away, the majestic peak of Apu Ausangate, perhaps the most important Apu in Peru. I was to travel to both Q'ero and Apu Ausangate in later trips.

After the summit, the road began to slowly work its way down until we reached the edge of the valley containing the town of Paucartambo, our next stop. Just over the edge, the road wound by a collection of small, stone, cylindrical, structures called *chullpas*. The van pulled over and we walked

over to them. There Américo told us the story of the *Machukuna* (Quechua for 'ancient ones'), spiritual beings also known as The Children of the Moon, who are said to have built the chullpas. They cannot abide the sun, and after it has set, they emerge from the chullpas and warm their bones by the red glow of the early evening sky. For a fuller version of this story please see "The Fate of the Machukuna" in my book [The Andean Cosmvision](#), or my blog post by the same name (www.SalkaWind.com/blog).

We had been traveling on the dirt road for a couple of tiring hours by then, and we could see Paucartambo on the floor of the valley below us. The road, however, turned and went way up a side canyon before turning and heading down into the valley. The road was bone-jarringly washboarded, and it seemed like we would never get there. We finally arrived at the valley floor and the Paucartambo River (also known as the Mapacho River), that springs from the glaciers on the slopes of sacred Apu Ausangate.

Having reached the valley, we turned downriver and soon arrived at the town of Paucartambo, nestled between the river and the foot of the mountains. Paucartambo was important both in Inca and colonial times, being a gateway between Cusco and the jungle. It is also where Américo went to elementary school.

As we approached the town, we could see that it was located on the other side of the river. On this side there were just a few buildings; a couple of small buildings on the bank of the river that could generously be called cafes, and a cement, two-story building containing a local farmer's market. Along the curb on both sides of the road, women in indigenous clothing sat with cloths spread out on the ground in front of them, displaying various items of produce for sale.

Just past the cafes, Américo had the van stop to let us out. He invited us to walk into town by crossing the river on its steeply arched, old, stone bridge (build in the 1770's). He said the van would cross further downstream on the modern bridge used by cars and trucks and meet us in the town square. We walked up to the top of the bridge and looked out over its stone parapet at the river for a while. The banks of the river were lined with 20 feet tall brick walls, leading from the river edge up to the level of the town. The walls were adorned with hanging flowers, the aesthetic effect of which was somewhat lessened by the large amount of trash floating in the eddies of the river. The river was somewhat milky, given its origins in the glaciers. Looking downstream we could see the new, metal, bridge for vehicular traffic. It had a plaque on it with the unlikely name of "Sven Ericsson".

We passed over the bridge and walked through the narrow, cobblestone, streets of Paucartambo to the main square, where our van was indeed waiting for us. Américo had disappeared on some errand, and Arilu suggested we explore around a bit or visit a store for any last minute supplies we might want, for there would be no more stores after this.

Paucartambo was a town of one- and two-story buildings; most painted white, and all quite old. It seemed like a town where, 100 years earlier, time had stepped out, saying it would be right back, and then was never seen again. One of the surprising things, for me, was that the place appeared to be deserted. In looking around I couldn't see a single person in the streets. It was a hot, sunny, afternoon; perhaps it was siesta time.

Across the square from the van a short flight of cement stairs led up to an open door. Bob and Judy and I climbed up the steps and looked in. It was a small, general store, about the size of a living room. It was quite dim inside, the only light being what was flowing in through the door. After a moment of looking around I noticed in the shadows the proprietor, a middle-aged, Andean woman, sitting completely still behind the counter, and looking at us with--at the most--mild interest. I bought a candy bar and another bottle of water.

When we came back out into the sunlit square, Américo was still not around, so we began to wander. The square had a fountain with no signs of water having flowed in it for a long time. Within the fountain were metal sculptures of figures wearing slightly disturbing costumes and masks with long

noses, that we later heard play an important part in Paucartambo's annual Fiesta de la Virgen del Carmen. While Paucartambo is located at 9,534 feet elevation, it is close to the equator, and palm trees grew in the town square. The town had an air that was an interesting blend of the high Andes and the jungle.

Américo eventually appeared and we all piled back into the van. Under Américo's directions the driver drove up a winding side street of Paucartambo towards the mountains. We stopped once for Américo to jump out and talk to an old woman who lived along the way, someone with whom he had a special friendship. He wanted to make sure she was ok. As we got to the edge of town the paved road turned into dirt. Shortly thereafter the road forded a wide but shallow stream. On the other side of the stream was a closed-up adobe shack. Américo told us that sometimes, when it rains, the ford becomes impassable for a day or two. People coming down the road toward Paucartambo just have to wait it out on the far side of the river. When that happens, a woman shows up and sells them beer from the shack.

The dirt road from Paucartambo to Mollamarca--the village close to Salka Wasi--was rougher and narrower than the road from Cusco, just one-lane wide. When we encountered a vehicle coming the other way, which fortunately was rather rare, one of the vehicles had to back up to a wider spot. Like the road from Cusco, this one climbed up and up along the side of the mountain until there was a sheer drop of thousands of feet to the river far below. We drove for about a half an hour when the road suddenly turned around a bend and there, towering in the distance, was Apu Ausangate. Américo had the driver pull over and we climbed out to take pictures and to connect with the energy of the majestic and beautiful Apu.

We were on our way to *Salka Wasi*, which is Quechua for "The House of Undomesticated Energy", Américo's ancestral home in the high Andes. Tom Best had come down to Peru the year before and had been taken to Salka Wasi by Américo. Tom effused with the wonderfulness of the place, saying it was like an Andean monastery. This was to prove to be correct in some esoteric sense, but it gave me a completely inaccurate image of what it was like. In any event, it sounded like a great and mystical place, and we were going to spend several days there.

Eventually we pulled into the village of Mollamarca, situated about one third of the way up the side of a very large mountain. This was as close to Salka Wasi as we could get by car. I am sorry to say this Mollamarca, but I was very disappointed and concerned when I first stepped out of the van and looked around at the village. We parked in the main square, which was a large, flat, expanse of dirt, rather like a vacant lot, with piles of rocks and debris scattered about. It all looked depressingly dirty and poor. The small adobe houses had windows with no panes or shutters. I saw nothing charming about it, and I wondered how we could possibly have a pleasant time there.

A crowd of smiling villagers, mainly women and children, ran up to meet Américo when we arrived. He instructed us to take our daypacks with us, but to leave all of our luggage. Arilu would lead us down to Salka Wasi, while he met with the villagers. So, Tom, Judy, Gina, Bob and I followed Arilu as she made her way past some houses and down the side of the mountain. We passed some chickens running around, and a sow with piglets rooting in the ground next to a house, and the situation started to seem rather ok. We went rather steeply downhill for twenty minutes. The path was steep enough to require all of my attention to avoid sliding. Then Arilu opened a small gate in a rustic fence made out of sticks, and we walked over uncut grass towards a wooden door in an adobe wall. We had arrived at Salka Wasi, and my energy was reacting as if I was at the cusp of something special.

Arilu took out some keys, and applied one of them to the big wooden door, wondering out loud as she did so whether or not Miguelito would be there to greet us. She opened the door and we walked in. Standing in a door to our left, immediately after we entered, was Miguelito. He looked ancient, short (compared to me...but most Andeans are), slight of build, with a fair amount of stubble on his

aged face. He came across as immanently indigenous, but he was wearing a hodgepodge of Western-style clothing, including a Western, felt, hat with an upturned brim that he had squashed down over his traditional Andean hat (which was woven, colorful, with tassels).

Miguelito had the eyes of someone who had seen many very strange things, magical things, and that viewed as an outsider the world that I knew. He had the mannerisms of a very old person. I almost always have at least some sense of how to interact with someone, but with him I was clueless. I was friendly to him, but I also rather stepped back energetically, not knowing how to act. I felt a little bit intimidated, not by fear as much as by uncertainty.

Having greeted Miguelito (who greeted Judy and Gina with more interest than he did Bob and I) we entered the courtyard of Salka Wasi. The courtyard was covered with dry, rather threadbare, grass, with the remains of what might once have been a well in the center of it. It was surrounded on one side by a crumbling, old, adobe wall and on the other three sides by old, one-story, adobe buildings. The courtyard was on a bit of a slope. The upper boundary (on our right) was an abandoned building that looked like it might have once been used for storage or as a stable. Along our left, sloping downhill, was a series of dark-looking rooms with small windows and wooden doors that served as bedrooms for don Américo, and Gayle and his friends, when guests were staying in the main house. Across the courtyard from it was the old adobe wall. The back of the main house formed the lower boundary of the courtyard, showing just a couple of windows and a door.

Arilu led us down the lawn to the house. She showed us around, including where we would be sleeping. The house had three-foot thick adobe walls, with deep windowsills. The floors were of wood. We entered the main room first. It had a long dining table, capable of seating a dozen people, and a living room area with old and simple chairs and sofas covered with Andean blankets, and llama pelts as rugs. The living room had a big, multi-paned window looking out over the garden area on the downhill side of the house. Previous visitors had left many mementos on the shelf below the window, photos, little pieces of art, favorite books, and so on. On the whole, the place had a very pleasant, rather Andean counter-culture, feel about it. I came to decide that Tom was wrong, Salka Wasi was not an Andean monastery, it was an Andean Rivendell, the last homely house East of the Sea and West of the Mountains.

Salka Wasi had no electricity. We were to spend our nights there lit purely by candlelight. I had never before stayed in a place lit only by candles, and I quickly grew to love it. The only running water was a hose that came in through a window into the bathroom for use in flushing the toilet (which had a toilet seat). The house had three bedrooms with two beds in each and little else; Spartan, clean, very old, and welcoming. We had brought our sleeping bags to throw on the beds, as there was no way for them to wash sheets for guests. There were, however, plenty of warm woolen blankets if we needed them.

As we were plopping our daypacks on our beds, we heard coming from the courtyard many voices, animated, and happy, and Américo's voice above them all. We went out and saw that the women and the children of the village had arrived with our luggage; women carrying duffle bags almost as big as themselves slung over their shoulders, and children half-dragging the smaller pieces. Américo was handing out tips to the women and candy to the children, trying to herd them into line so he could be sure to give something to everyone. We went out to get our suitcases and to be introduced to everyone. Américo had suggested, while we were in Cusco, that we buy some bags of candy for the children and we handed that out as well.

Sometime after we had settled down, I was standing in the living room looking out the window at the garden, when I saw Miguelito walk solemnly by. He had put on a blue suit coat and was carrying some large garden shears. Gayle walked into the room at that moment, and standing next to me looking out, chuckled affectionately. He said that as near as he could tell, Miguelito, who was the

caretaker of Salka Wasi, didn't do anything when Américo and Gayle were away. Then, when he heard that they had arrived in the village, he would turn on a couple of sprinklers, put on his coat, get the shears, and go out to do some trimming.

Gayle had come in to let us know that dinner would be in a couple of hours, and that we should relax or wander around or do whatever we wanted until then. I decided to check out the gardens below the house. Immediately below the living room windows was a small lawn with healthy, green, uncut grass. Then the path dropped down a few steps at a small wall, and led into the garden area itself. The garden looked like the result of planting nice, domesticated, flowers, and then letting the area run a bit salka (wild), for many, many years. The path divided and wound its way through many engaging places to meditate, each with one or more places so sit on homemade chairs and stools made out of local willow or sawed-off tree trunks. There was a quiet place under a fruit tree that--long ago--had been part of an orchard, surrounded by flowers, that I came to like a lot. There were a few, tremendously tall, eucalyptus trees, where eagles nested, with benches at their feet where you could sit, meditating, with your back against the trees. Eucalyptus trees had been imported to Peru many years earlier to provide straight logs for buildings. Around one corner, and down a few steps, was a natural, shallow cave, with several stools, where you could get in touch with the uju pacha (the interior world). There were many places like this, created with an artistic touch, welcoming humans to connect with nature, in salka.

At the end of the garden the land dropped off steeply, down 2,000 feet to the Paucartambo River below, flowing from Apu Ausangate to the jungle. Its distant roar rose up the side of the mountain to the garden. There were no motorized sounds; the occasional trucks passing up the road past Mollamarca were too far away to be heard, and no jets fly over the area. I could only hear the distant river, the wind through the trees, the birds calling to each other, and the occasional braying of a donkey. On one of my trips to Salka Wasi I made a short video of the view from that spot. It can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UczpGBwRKdk&feature=youtu.be>

The view was amazing. The scale of the mountains was staggering. A village, on the mountainside across the river from Salka Wasi (and a little higher up) was so far away that it could barely be seen. And everywhere was salka.

After meditating for a while, sitting on a large fallen tree trunk at the edge of the abyss, I headed back to the house. Soon it got dark, and Gayle and Arilu went around lighting candles for us; on the dining room table, in the living room, on a stool in the hallway leading to the bathroom, and in the bathroom. We all also had candles next to our beds, but we didn't light them until we needed them. Salka Wasi is somewhere between 11,000 and 12,000 feet, it got cold at night, and there was no heating, so we kept putting on layers of clothing until we were warm enough.

I hadn't seen Américo for a while, and I wondered where he was, and I also wanted to go out into the evening, so I ventured forth to see if I could find him. Standing on the porch in the dark, I heard quiet conversation and saw some fire light. I headed in that direction and approached a covered veranda. There, the family who cooks for Salka Wasi were working on our dinner. I saw that Américo was sitting there with them. The veranda was lit only by the mellow light of the cooking fire in the quncha.

A quncha is a home-made, hollow, dome of hardened clay, with an opening in the side for feeding the fire within, and a couple of holes on top of the dome that are the right size for setting in and heating the pots. In the Andes, houses made of the stuff of Pachamama (i.e. adobe and stone houses), are called Wasi Tira, (literally a 'house of the earth') and are extensions of the Pachamama. The quncha is considered to be heart of the house.

Américo sitting there in the fire light, with the family busy making the meal, was an intimate

scene, but, I thought, perhaps not an exclusionary one. I hesitated before getting close enough for them to see me, then I girded my loins, overruled my shyness, and stepped forward.

"¿Con permiso?" I asked ("With permission?").

"Of course!" replied Américo, and he motioned me to enter the veranda. I found a place to sit on a stone balustrade running along the side of the veranda. The family politely acknowledged my arrival and then went back to work on preparing the meal, talking quietly to each other in Quechua.

Américo was eating a small potato that he had selected from the pile of those that had been cooked for dinner. He offered one to me. I did what I saw him do, and peeled off the outer skin with my fingers before eating it. Then I sat, in the warmth and light flowing out from the concha, listening to the fire crackling and the soft conversations in Quechua, some of which involved Américo, and slowly ate my potato. Just beyond the veranda was the deep darkness and silence of the high Andes, and a sky filled with stars. I had been welcomed into the intimacy of that moment, and I savored it, and my heart quietly sang a beautiful tune.

After a while, Gayle rang a small gong hanging next to the door leading from the house out into the garden, indicating that dinner was ready. We all filed into the dining room and found seats at the long table. The food was delicious, we broke out some of the wine that we had brought, and we slowly sank down into that state of relaxation that comes after a long day's journey.

The cook at Salka Wasi was Abolino, who was assisted by his wife Maria and their family. Abolino had been cooking at Salka Wasi for many years, during which time Américo had welcomed visitors from around the world, many from Europe, and many who were themselves skilled cooks. Abolino had learned much from them, and had become a very good cook indeed. When Américo had bought Salka Wasi from his aunt, it came with 20 hectars of land. He gave half of that to Abolino and his family, as theirs, to farm and support themselves. We also paid Abolino and his family for their work on our behalf.

After dinner I retired to my bedroom to put on some long-johns, and then came back to the dining room table to perhaps read, or to write in my journal. I found both a little harder to do by candlelight than I had supposed. And I was tired. I soon headed to bed.

Sometime in the early morning hours I awoke. It was dark and completely silent in my room. And I realized that it was not quiet because the house, with its three foot thick adobe walls, was protecting me from the sounds of the outside world, but because the world outside the house was also absolutely silent. If I went outside, I would be with Mama Tuta, Mother Night, who holds the stars in her embrace in the deep silence of the Cosmos, and I would be with the stars themselves. And nowhere in the distance would I see an electric light, nor view the glow of lights from a distant town, nor see the blinking lights of a jet plane flying overhead. Just salka stretching out through the night to infinity.

I arose early the next morning. Gayle had put thermoses of hot water on the dining room table, along with a selection of teas (including coca tea), a couple of jars of instant coffee, and canned evaporated milk (for the coffee). I usually can't stand instant coffee, but this was really good. I don't know if it was the brand or the setting or both. I know that Américo says that the instant coffee in Peru is better than what is sold in the U.S. I made myself a cup of coffee and stood looking through the living room windows at the sunrise as it flowed across the mountains and up the river valley. Then I went out into the garden to meditate.

Our schedule while we were at Salka Wasi was as follows: breakfast was served around 9:00. From 10:00-11:00 we were requested to be outside while Gayle and some local friends cleaned the house, both physically (with brooms) and energetically (smudging each room with burning sticks of Palo Santo). At 11:00 we would meet with don Américo for a couple of hours in the garden. He would lead us through some energy work and answer our questions about the energy work, the Cosmos, just

about anything. Around 1:30 we would have lunch. After lunch Américo would take a break for a siesta and we would do anything we wanted, including resting. Somewhere around 4:30 we would meet with don Américo again for a couple of hours. Finally we would have dinner. Don Américo would then often join us after dinner for a little while, and then head off to bed. Some of the things Américo would reminisce about, by candlelight, with a glass of wine, were deeply touching and part of my favorite memories about my times with him in Peru.

That was more or less the official plan, but the days were often filled with interesting intervening events, and if it involved getting together with the villagers then there was a fair amount of imprecision regarding starting times. One thing I noticed, which concerned me, had to do with Américo's siestas. He had talked to us about how much he relies upon siestas to recover his energy during the day. Whenever I was out and about during siesta time, however, I found Américo having some earnest conversation from one or more people from the village who had come down to Salka Wasi seeking his help or advice about something. When I expressed concern about his lack of downtime he said he was fine. I believed him, as I have never met a person who was so skilled at taking care of his own energy.

That first morning, as I entered the courtyard, I found Miguelito talking with Bob, Américo, and Tom. Américo was translating Quechua to Spanish, and Tom Spanish to English, so that Bob and Miguelito could have a conversation. As I approached, Bob said that Miguelito was just starting to describe something that happened to him the day before. Miguelito then recounted that he was walking down the trail when he saw a rooster ahead of him. Something about the rooster caused Miguelito to want to follow him, so he did. The rooster walked down to a pond and hopped into the water, turning into a swan. The swan glided across the pond to a waterfall, where it turned into a woman, who then disappeared behind the falls. At this point the story seemed to suddenly be over. Américo grinned at us and said that Miguelito must be channeling Bolivia again.

There are two major ways of becoming a paq'o (mystic/shaman) in Peru. One way is to find a teacher, either by going looking for one or by having one find you. The second way is to be hit by lightning, and (of course) survive. Miguelito had come down that second path. He also worked extensively with q'uyas (special stones) that had been hit by lightning.

My memory of the events of the following few days is like a deck of cards whose order has become hopelessly shuffled. I would like to just deal them out to you without having to remember exactly in what order they originally occurred.

One event I remember happened while we were doing energy work one morning with Américo in the garden. We were doing a meditation that involves two people connecting to each other's heart energy (munay). This meditation is called "Heart to Heart" and instructions on how to do it are provided in my blog. I had partnered up with Américo to do this meditation. When I was connected to his heart energy and he was connected to mine I suddenly felt the energy in my heart explode outwards like a super nova. At which point Américo said "ouch!".

During lunch Américo asked if we would be interested in having the women of the village come down that afternoon to sell us some of the goods they had made (e.g. sweaters, hat bands, woven necklaces). He emphasized that this was completely optional, he just wanted to know if it would be something we would like to do. We all enthusiastically said yes. During siesta time a score of women arrived, along with their babies and younger children. That sat in a large circle on the sparse, dry grass of the courtyard with their wares spread out in front of them on blankets. Américo said he didn't want to be the middle-person in any of the sales, and that this was between the women and us. He just asked

that, if possible, we buy from as many different women as we could, rather than all of us buying from just a few. Then he left us to it. It was a chance for us to interact with the women of the village, and start to get to know them...and their energy. And, it was a way for us to support both them and the continuation of their traditional crafts.

Speaking of the energy of the women...one afternoon a group of women from the village came down to Salka Wasi. They were all wearing their indigenous clothing; sandals, a woven skirt over several petticoats, a sweater or two, and a hat. Their hats were rather like the mortar boards worn at graduation in the U.S., with flat tops, but the tops were circular rather than square, much larger, and very colorful (the color and decoration of such hats indicate which village a woman is from).

They entered the courtyard and sat on the ground. At an earlier time, when talking about how the women of the Andes usually sit on the ground rather than in chairs, Américo had mentioned that this made it possible for their vaginas to be in contact with Pachamama and that this was very important. I entered the courtyard and sat not too far from the women. After a short while I realized that I was slipping into an altered state of consciousness which seemed to be caused by my proximity to the women. I grew up in a culture where femininity was associated with pink frills. What I was experiencing then, however, was something else entirely; a powerful, womanly, energy that felt as strong as the foundations of the Earth. Later, when I was mentioning this to Américo, he concurred that the Andean women had a strong energy. He added that if I spent more time with them then my own energy would never be the same. His tone of voice implied that this would be a worthwhile thing to do.

When we sat down to our meals, Gayle would bring in our food, and when we were finished, he would take our dishes away to be washed by Maria's children. Imagine that you had a cabin in the mountains and some dear friends were coming to stay with you. But it snows before they get there and their car gets stuck in the snow. They finally arrive at your cabin, hours late, cold, and exhausted from the worry and toil of the road. You have some delicious, hot, soup waiting for them. As they sit at the table, you bring it out. Imagine your feelings, and your demeanor, as you bring them the soup. That is as close as I can describe how Gayle served us, every time. A level of service, impeccable, present centered, as if that moment in the Cosmos was sufficient and worth attending to, but more than that, a service based upon an open heart. His was an impeccable level of Being in service that had no hint of either servitude or condescension, yet not particularly more important than, say, a flower in the garden.

A few years later, when I was again in Peru with Gayle and Américo, Gayle told me that I was his teacher. I didn't know what he was learning from me, and as I write this now I pause to think of how Gayle and I are different, and what I have of value in my approach to life that he could learn by being with me. We can set off each other's senses of humor, and that I highly value, but that is something we share. I do know this, however, that Gayle is my teacher as well. The first thing I learned from him was how to be a host, like a breeze coming in through the window from salka meadows beyond.

During a later trip to Peru, my friend Karen asked Gayle about the difference between the two types of paq'os; pampa mesayoqs and alto mesayoqs. Others often describe the difference between the two in terms of their abilities. Gayle responded, however, by saying that pampa mesayoqs dedicate their lives to service to the Pachamama, while alto mesayoq's dedicate theirs to service to an Apu. It's all about service, salka, and the heart.

One afternoon Américo approached us and asked if we would be interested in having Miguelito read our fortunes using coca leaves. Reading coca leaves is one of the skills, or paths, that a paq'o can choose to master in his or her life. It is rather like an Andean version of a Tarot reading. Américo

added that it would be appropriate to offer Miguelito a small amount of money in *ayni* (reciprocity) for reading our fortunes. We all said we would be delighted.

That night, after dinner, Miguelito entered the house dressed, for a change, not in Western clothes but in indigenous, Andean, clothes. Again I was struck by how old he looked, moved, and spoke. Américo sat at his side in support, helping him through this long and energy-draining work.

One at a time, we came up to sit next to Miguelito to have our fortunes read. As we sat down we gave him our *ayni*. He took the money, said something in Quechua to it, and placed it near where he did his work, involving it in the coca reading. Then he took a hand full of coca leaves and placed them in a bag made of animal hide. Speaking in Quechua, he threw the bag onto the table in such a manner that the bag made a big exhalation when it hit, causing the coca leaves to come shooting out of its mouth and onto the table.

He then began to poke around the leaves, noting their position and orientation, and their condition (torn, or bent, or straight and flat) and began to speak. Miguelito spoke in Quechua, and Américo translated that into Spanish, but Américo also did more. Often he and Miguelito would discuss for a bit some interpretation of the leaves, for Américo had also been trained in reading coca leaves.

For many years, as a young man, Américo had traveled through the Andes seeking and studying with venerable *paq'os* in the area. One of them was don Bonito Qoriwaman, the most renowned *paqo* of his time. As his "graduation exam" from his studies with don Bonito, Américo was tasked with using coca leaves to find the whereabouts of a llama that belonged to one of don Bonito's friends, and that had gone missing. When he was telling us about this, Américo said that it took him about 45 minutes of intense work to arrive at the answer. He finally announced that the body of the llama could be found in a specific ravine several miles away. Some of the *paq'os* headed off toward the ravine, and arrived back a few hours later with the body of the llama. They threw it at don Bonito's feet. Américo had passed his exam.

When it was my turn for Miguelito to give me a coca leaf reading he told me many things. The one that stands out in my memory is when he said I was an excellent father to my sons, for I walked in the light of the great Cosmic Being. I hadn't told Miguelito that I had children, but then, Américo knew and he could have told him. In any event, it was meaningful to me.

Miguelito was quite old, and giving all five of us a coca reading tired him greatly. When he was finished, don Américo helped him off to bed.

Something happened during our stay at Salka Wasi that was of significance to my next couple of trips to Peru to work with Américo. Américo really liked Tom (Tom is now deceased), and yet one afternoon when Bob, Gina, Judy and I were with Américo he told us that he had a special name for the four of us; he had decided to call us "The Apu Chim", which refers to those condors that are considered to be the royalty among the condors. If I understood his gestures correctly, the *apu chim* are the condors who have the white collars around their necks. Américo then said that if we wanted to come to Peru to work with him again that we could arrange that directly with Arilu, and that we didn't have to rely on Tom to organize the trip for us.

Late one afternoon the people of Mollamarca--women, men, and children--came down to Salka Wasi to dance for us. We all gathered in the courtyard, which was large enough for us to sit along the side--on ledges and benches--and still leave a big enough area in the center for dancing. The villagers brought a small band (drum, guitar, flutes) to provide the music. While some of the villagers had adopted Western clothing for their everyday use, for the dances they were all wearing their traditional clothes. Women, men, and children all had their own dances, and there were some dances where the

men and women would dance together in a fashion that suggested ritualistic flirting. In one of the dances by the men they were dressed in costumes that matched the statues in the fountain in the main square of Paucartambo. In another dance the women and men paired up, and while they were dancing, they whipped each other about the legs using their warakas (slings). In some of the dances the women came over and pulled Bob, Tom, and I into the dance, while the men pulled Gina and Judy into the dance.

The various dances went on for about an hour. I was getting exhausted from being pulled into some of them, as we were at around 12,000 feet. About the time it looked like they might wrap things up, Tom gave some money to the band. They shouted with delight and played for another half an hour. When it was finally all over, Tom turned to us with a wry grin and said, "Lesson to be learned...don't tip the band."

I have been to other places where the indigenous people have demonstrated their dances for tourists, but in those circumstances the dances seemed to have lost their connection to the culture, and were being done simply as a show. This wasn't like that, these dances felt like they were still grounded in a living culture.

On our last full day in Salka Wasi we went on a field trip. Américo had arranged for some horses from Mollamarca to be brought down to Salka Wasi. Mollamarca and Salka Wasi are situated about one third of the way up a massive mountain, and we were to ride to the top of that mountain to a sacred site known as Misti Pucari. We were accompanied by the owners of the horses and a few local paq'os. I wasn't too crazy about the idea of riding a horse, I hadn't had much experience doing that, but, of course, I wasn't going to pass on whatever experience Américo had in mind for us.

The horses were small but with barrel-like chests to handle the altitude. My feet didn't quite drag on the ground as we rode, but I did have to lift my feet occasionally as we rode past rocks and shrubs. We rode to the top of the mountain and then over its crest. There, not very far away, rose the majestic peaks of Apu Ausangate. As we got off our horses and stood there taking in the sight, Américo told us that he "saw" that on our next visit to Peru that we would travel together to Apu Ausangate. We then walked a short distance to a circle of stones.. This was Misti Pucari. The local paq'os informed us that this was a nodal point where lines of energy (*ley lines*) from Apu Ausangate and other powerful spots in the area meet. We meditated there for a while and then two of the paq'os from Mollamarca gave us each two q'uya's. The mountain side was too steep to ride the horses back down (they can carry people up slopes more easily than they can carry them down) so we walked most of the way back. There I was, with a healthy body, walking down the side of a mountain, breathing in the clean air, soaking in the salka, with my friends and don Américo and the paq'os from Mollamarca, still vibrating from the meditations, in the remote high Andes of Peru.

During our stay at Salka Wasi, I began to come to a fuller understanding and appreciation of what don Américo was up to. As a young man he had studied under many Andean teachers representing a variety of paths leading into the Andean Cosmovision, and he had reached a high level of mastery. While Cusco is now rife with people offering Andean energy work, when don Américo hung up his plaque there many years ago he was about the only one. He told me once that his fee schedule when he first started was 50 soles if the client was rich, 10 soles if the client was not, and for clients who were very poor Américo would give them 5 soles to work on them. He added that his list of clientele grew rapidly.

But the point I am heading toward here, is that Américo could have given us the karpays himself rather than having us work with the Q'ero. Indeed, in earlier years he had helped the Q'ero to recover some of the elements of the path that they had lost. Instead of giving us the karpays, he

arranged for us to work with the Q'ero. This delivered to the Q'ero the clear message that what they have to offer is something of value to the West, so valuable that we traveled thousands of miles to receive it. This is important for them to know as they face increasing pressure to be integrated into the Western worldview, that it does not have to be an all or none proposition, that they may want to hold on to aspects of their Andean worldview.

We pay them for their work with us, which gives them a way to improve their standard of living (which they want) while maintaining their connection to the Andean Cosmivision. The money is ayni, the energy of reciprocity, which in this case brings individuals from the two worlds, the Andean world and the Western world, into closer relationship, a relationship based upon the munay (the energy of the heart). The same thing applies to Miguelito reading our coca leaves, and the paqos of Mollamarka giving us a ceremony at Misti Pucari. Américo could have done those himself, but he arranged for us to work with and pay others instead. He arranged for us to give the dancers of Mollamarka some money as ayni for their coming to Salka Wasi to share their traditional dances. He arranged for the women of Mollamarka to sell us their traditional hand-made goods. All of these actions nourished within the Andean community the view that their traditional ways have value and that they can obtain the increased income they desire without giving up the culture.

Américo has never stated any of this explicitly to me, being explicit is not how he walks through the world. Artists are rarely if ever explicit about their work, they can't be, or it is no longer art. Don Américo approaches his life as a work of art. As a student of his, all I can or need do if I want to learn from him, is to be in harmony with this way of being.

Our time with don Américo wasn't quite over yet. After several days in Salka Wasi we drove back to Cusco and then the next day we all (including Américo) caught a ridiculously early train for a day trip to Machu Piccu.

Machu Picchu is the creme de la creme of Inca ruins. It is situated on the peak of a mountain, above a river gorge, several miles downstream from Ollantaytambo. It is a truly impressive site, the location is awesome and the architecture amazing, and frankly, I found it disappointing. I had just spent a week in isolated reaches of the Andes, in a world of salka (undomesticated energy) and munay (heart). At Machu Picchu I was elbow-to-elbow with hordes of distracted and impatient tourists. What beautiful energy the place no doubt had, was overwhelmed by the energy of the thousands of people who walked through the site every day, each person leaving a whirlpool of society-flavored Western energy with every step. Américo estimated that if Machu Picchu were given a break from tourism, that it would take about seven years for it to return to its essential energy.

Still, while I was disappointed by the lack of mysticism in the experience, it was a cool place, and we had Américo as our guide. In those days, after you handed in your ticket at the gate, you were free to just freely wander around the site. Américo said that the last time he had been there was many years earlier, when he went there with an Andean teacher whom he revered. His teacher was quite old, and had informed Américo that he would soon be dying. Américo followed him around Machu Picchu in tears.

Américo shared with us some of the things his teacher had told him about the place. The structures in Machu Picchu are made of stone, but their roofs have not survived. His teacher told him that when Machu Picchu was inhabited that all of the roofs were covered in colorful bird feathers from the jungle (which is not very far downstream). He also told Américo that paqos from all around, including some from faraway lands, used to meet through astral projection once a year at Machu Picchu. Let me note that in general I have found the indigenous people's accounts of Inca and pre-Inca ruins to be much more interesting than those provided by anthropologists.

In addition to the various, famous, sites in Machu Picchu (e.g. the temple that has a hitching

post for the sun), Américo showed us a place where the stone balustrade had been shaped to match the distant peaks on the other side of the river, allowing the paqos to connect with those peaks by touching their closer replicas; and a face, cut into the stone, of an Inca sporting the large ear disks that were the symbol of status. Américo, apparently, also found the energy of the tourists to be too much, for he told us that he thought that that would be his last visit to Machu Picchu. As far as I know, it was.

While my fascination with Machu Picchu had to battle it out with my disappointment at its crowd of tourists, I did very much enjoy our lunch, and a beer, at Aguas Calientes. Aguas Calientes is a tourist town at the foot of the mountain below Machu Picchu where the railway station is located. Sometimes, having a relaxing meal with friends or family after a day of being a tourist is my favorite part of the day. After lunch we took a late afternoon train back to Cusco.

Machu Picchu had not been discovered (and subsequently) destroyed by the Spanish. It was simply abandoned by the Incas. It was brought to the attention of the Western world by Hiram Bingham, who was shown the ruins by a local campesino in 1911. As a fun note, there are several similarities between Bingham and Indiana Jones, and a fair amount of speculation that the Jones character was inspired by Bingham. In any event, the untouched (except by time) and spectacular ruins of Machu Picchu lead me to wonder what the world lost when the Spanish destroyed every Inca temple and site that they found.

The Inca, however, while constructors of a huge empire, were simply an imperialistic expression of older civilizations and cultures that emerged within Peru. I would like to semi-close this chapter with some words from one of my favorite guidebooks to Cusco. "So what are we to make of the Incas? This book proposes no answer, except to note that they, and the continuum of cultures that preceded them, represent a significant event in human history. It is true that their civilization was brought to an abrupt end, and little of what they created has entered the mainstream of human culture. They were overwhelmed by a race that was blind to all but the most obvious material aspects of their world. But much of what sustained Andean civilization was not external, and the spirit of the ancient way lives on in the hearts and customs of the millions of native inhabitants of the Andes. In this sense it is possible, after all, that we have not heard the last of the Incas." Exploring Cusco, by Peter Frost.

The next day, Bob and I were scheduled to take the same flight out of Cusco on our separate journeys back home. I realized that I was suddenly going to be kicked out of the cocoon of love and safety in which I had been immersed for the past two weeks. I was faced with making my way through a third-world country where few people, including those who ran ticket counters, spoke English. I was going to have to leave the heart-centered reality of the Andean Cosmovision and enter the cold reality of the Western world. Fear and anxiety hit me like a bucket of cold water.

Bob and I needed to leave the hostel at 4:00 AM to catch our flight. Arilu, bless her heart, offered to pick us up and take us to the airport and make sure we got safely on our flight. We gratefully accepted her offer. Tom couldn't believe it. He harangued and shamed us for accepting Arilu's offer, and we eventually gave in and said we would take a taxi instead.

The next morning we took a taxi to the airport. When we arrived there, and were standing in line at the ticket counter, I heard a sweet voice call out "Oakley! Bob!" We turned around and there were Arilu and Américo. Arilu stepped forward and talked to the ticket person and made sure our tickets were correct. Then, when we arrived at the security checkpoint where only people with tickets can go any further, Américo talked to the security guy, who let him enter, and he walked with us to the gate. He gave both Bob and I a hug and a q'uya (briefly blowing on and talking to each q'uya before handing them over). Then with a friendly wave he strode off.

The trip back was an exhausting 40 hours of flights and layovers. I landed at the St. George, Utah airport in the late evening. Betsy was there to pick me up. The drive back to Cedar City took an hour, and I talked nonstop the whole way, recounting all of the amazing and touching experiences of the trip. The next day I didn't want to face the Western world. I asked Betsy to please intercept all phone calls and to answer the door if anyone dropped by, and to say that I was unavailable. I hid in the house for two days before I gingerly reemerged into a Western society that now seemed so cold and heartless after my experiences in Peru.