

## My Second Trip to Peru

Draft 2.1.2 (draft 2.1.1 with a bit of polishing)



The children of don Manuel, 15,00 feet.

*For the context of this chapter please see the introductory words of "My First Trip to Peru", available as a post on my blog at [www.SalkaWind.com/blog](http://www.SalkaWind.com/blog), and as a PDF document at [www.SalkaWind.com/StoryBook/Trip1.pdf](http://www.SalkaWind.com/StoryBook/Trip1.pdf). In that chapter I describe in some detail the people and places in Peru that are such an essential part of these stories. Even though it has been six months since I posted that chapter, and thus perhaps six months since you've read it, I decided not to repeat those descriptions in this chapter, writing instead as if you have just sailed from that chapter into this one. Please feel free, of course, to go back and read that chapter anew.*

*This story of my second trip to Peru has been posted on my blog ([www.SalkaWind.com/blog](http://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/Trip2.pdf](http://www.SalkaWind.com/StoryBook/Trip2.pdf). I hope you enjoy it.*

At the end of our first trip to Peru, Américo invited Gina, Judy, Bob and me (the "Apu Chim") to return to Peru to work with him again. During that trip, he said that he had "seen" us all on Apu Ausangate, and that if we so desired, he would take us to visit the Apu when we returned. We were delighted.

A word about *Apus*. Part of the challenge (both fascinating and frustrating) of describing the Andean worldview (the "Andean Cosmovision") to Westerners is that so many of the Andean concepts reside outside the confines of our Western worldview. Consciousness, for example, is viewed in the West as being either the byproduct of a nervous system or as an attribute of a transcendent soul that inhabits our material body. In the Andean Cosmovision, consciousness is seen as being an inherent aspect of the energetic filaments that make up the material world. Everything is conscious as everything is made up of those energetic filaments. Apus are not conscious because they have a nervous system, nor because they are inhabited by a transcendent spirit, they are simply the conscious

beings that are the majestic mountain peaks on the planet. This concept is not an option within the modern Western worldview, although, as I discussed in the previous chapter, it was the primary view of science in the West before the 20th Century, and is being considered again as modern science attempts to come up with a working model of consciousness.

The problems the West has with this view of consciousness appeared in an early version of the Wikipedia article on "Ausangate". The article defined "Ausangate" as a peak near Cusco Peru, and also as the name of the troll that lives on that peak. Troll?! It is my guess that some Westerner trying to understand the idea that Ausangate is considered to be conscious by the Andean people, had to attribute the consciousness to some being living on the mountain. The idea that the mountain itself could be conscious probably did not occur to the author. The updated Wikipedia article, by the way, no longer mentions trolls.

Back to our second trip to Peru. We were able to grab a spot on Américo's calendar in the year following our first trip. Even better, that time slot corresponded to my Spring break at the university. The trip was longer than my Spring break so I had to arrange for my colleagues to cover the first couple of class meetings after the break. A consequence of this was that I had to fly in right before we started working with Américo, and leave the day after we were finished. This meant no additional time to enjoy wonderful Cusco. I also had no extra time to accommodate any travel complications that might arise.

Our itinerary was for us to start the trip by going to Salka Wasi (the "House of Undomesticated Energy")--Américo's ancestral home in the high Andes--to stay for several days. I love Salka Wasi, so that was great. Cusco is at 11,000 feet, Salka Wasi is around 12,000 feet, and Américo said we would be going to about 17,000 feet on Apu Ausangate. Our stay at Salka Wasi, always tranquil and beautiful, would help our bodies acclimate to high altitudes as preparation for Apu Ausangate. Equally important, our work at Salka Wasi with Américo would help us prepare energetically for our meeting with the Apu. At least, that is my after-the-fact perspective on the trip.

After Salka Wasi we would be going to Apu Ausangate. Américo informed us that we would be spending a couple of nights on the slopes of the Apu, at around 15,000 feet. We would be there during the tail end of the Andean rainy season, and so we have to bring the appropriate gear for that. I decided to take many layers of clothes: silk long johns, polypropylene long johns, normal clothes, sweater pants, a light sweater, a heavy Icelandic wool sweater, a light jacket to wear over the sweater, rain pants and rain jacket to fit over everything, and ski hat and gloves. The foundation, however, of my survival strategy for the worse case scenario was my sleeping bag. It was a poly fill bag that was good down to 5 degrees Fahrenheit. The advantage of having a poly fill stuffing versus down is that poly fill retains its insulating properties even when it gets wet (which is not true of down). I figured that if we were caught outdoors in a snowstorm at 15,000 feet I would probably survive. The only downside of the bag was that it was heavy and big (taking up about a third of my duffle bag), but our gear would be carried up the mountain by horses so I figured that would be ok. Several paq'os (mystics/shamans) from Qero (a very remote region of Peru close to Apu Ausangate) would be accompanying us on our visit to the Apu.

Our group's first trip to Peru had been arranged by Tom Best. Américo had told us that for our second trip we could make arrangements directly with his daughter Arilu. This would save us some money (we wouldn't have to pay Tom for organizing things or cover his travel expenses...he would not be coming with us), but still we were all stretched financially by the costs of transportation, food, lodging, and the honorarium to be paid to Américo and the Q'ero. Arilu (who made all of the reservations for our stay in Peru) and Américo said they would be happy to honor our request to make the trip as inexpensive as possible, which I thought was quite sweet and generous on their part.

A month before we left for Peru, Américo appeared in my dreams. He asked me if we were still

coming to Peru and I said yes. He was pleased. I asked him if we were still going to go to Apu Ausangate and he said yes, and I was pleased. I then woke up. I often dream of Américo, and the vast majority of these are normal dreams, often centered around the anxieties and complications of traveling to Peru. I sometimes, however, have a dream where Américo appears that feels different than my normal dreams, with a very different and higher energy. This dream was one of those.

The day finally came for me to leave. I was exhausted and stressed from all of the preparations for the trip. That, however, is rather usual for me, and I relied on my memories of having been with Américo and of being in Peru to remind myself that it would be worth it. I had a layover in Houston on my way to Lima. As I was walking down the terminal I was surprised to hear someone call my name. I turned and saw Bob waving at me. We discovered that we were taking the same flight to Lima, so I had a friend with me this time, which was a lot nicer.

Our plane landed at the Lima airport around midnight. I tiredly made my way down the long hallways that led to the international baggage claim area, and waited for my duffel bag to be unloaded. And waited. And waited. The conveyor belt eventually came to a stop, the rest of the passengers had claimed their bags and left. I was left with that sinking feeling that descends when it is obvious that my bag has been lost in transit. I had my carryon bag with some warm clothes (to put on before departing the plane at Cusco), but my big warm Icelandic wool sweater, and my sleeping bag, were in the missing duffel. I found the person to talk to about lost luggage and gave Américo's name and home address as the place to send the duffel bag should it eventually appear.

I caught up with Bob who was waiting for me outside of customs. We changed a small amount of dollars at the money exchange window there. You cannot get Peruvian money outside of Peru. They call their dollar a "sol", which is Spanish for "sun". I have to admire a country that calls its currency a "sun". The exchange rates at the airport are not very good and so we only got enough soles to get us to Cusco. There we would visit a money exchange office run by a friend of Américo's whom he trusts not to pass counterfeit money and that has good exchange rates.

Even though the international terminal and the domestic terminal have a connecting door, passengers are not allowed to use it. Bob and I had to exit the international terminal and go outside into the night and walk down a sidewalk to get to the domestic flight terminal. Outside it was rather surreal and a bit daunting. It was after 1:00 in the morning, and yet there was a big crowd milling around the doors; people waiting for arriving friends or family to come out, and lots of taxi drivers and tour guides clamoring for our attention. Bob and I made our way (a bit nervously) through the throng with many a "no gracias" for the taxi drivers and tour guides until we reached the entrance to the domestic terminal and could go inside. We went looking for a place to await our morning flights to Cusco (Bob and I had different flights that were both leaving around 6:00 A.M.).

We wandered around inside the airport looking for a safe place to catch a couple of hours of sleep. We settled down in a dimly lit corner with very uncomfortable chairs and a crowd of people with similar intentions. Some were stretched out in sleeping bags on the dirty tiled floor. Peru is not a safe place to be careless about possessions, and the Lima airport has a particularly bad reputation. Bob and I tried to get comfortable while resting our feet on our bags (to prevent them being stolen), and finally gave up. Up on the second floor and towards the back of the terminal we found a restaurant that was open all night. So, for the several hours until it was time to check in for our flights to Cusco, Bob and I sat in the lounge (we were their only customers) very slowly sipping beers and trying to stay awake. I attempted to read a book.

I have now travelled to Peru something like 17 times (I have lost track of the precise count). After the first trip--where I spent a couple of nights in Lima--I have faced having to cope with arriving in Lima around midnight and then catching a flight around five or six AM to Cusco. Staying overnight and waiting for an afternoon flight out of Lima is a possibility but the morning flights to Cusco are less likely to be cancelled due to weather in Cusco, and also I have been reluctant to spend the money and time to get a room in Lima. Up until somewhat recently there was no hotel at the airport, and then when one was built I decided that it was too expensive for just the few hours I had available to get some sleep. In the early trips the only safe alternative was to take a taxi to Miraflores, a suburb of

Lima on the coast, where the embassies are situated, to a hotel there. That, however, involves a 90 minute taxi ride from the airport, and so about four hours just to get to there, check in, check out, and get back. For my third trip to Peru my friend Carla told me about a safe and inexpensive hotel she had found that was only about 15 minutes from the airport. That part of town is quite sketchy but the hotel was behind a locked fence and was said to be safe as long as you didn't leave it to walk around. I stayed there a couple of times for a few hours rest, then I read a review from a couple who stayed there and were awakened by screams and shouts during the night. They later discovered that another couple coming to the hotel had their taxi waylaid just outside the fence by a group of thugs who proceeded to rob them. The hotel staff didn't bother to help or call the police. So much for that option.

So, trip after trip after trip I have found myself sitting in the Lima airport, overnight, waiting for my morning flight to Cusco. They eventually remodeled the airport and put in a food court, consisting of several fast food counters with a large common area filled with tables and chairs. No one cares if you fall asleep there with your head on the table, if you can sleep in the bright lights and conversations going on around you, but you can count on having to move to another table somewhere around two in the morning as they clean your area of the court. I then found that if I go through the ticket checkpoint to get into the domestic concourse they have chairs in there where the seats are not separated by arm rests, and so you can stretch out to sleep. That concourse, however, is not always open to travelers in the wee morning hours. Anyway, this is a big deal for me as it has been such a constant part of the endeavor of getting to Cusco. And so was, for the first few trips, having to find the airport tax window to pay for the right to board the plane. This always seemed rather bewildering and a bit intimidating to my befuddled brain at 1:00 in the morning, following directions given to me in Spanish that I didn't quite understand.

My flight took off as scheduled the next morning, which was a relief. Bob's plane had mechanical problems and he was delayed for a few hours. I got off the plane in Cusco very excited to be there: caught up in the sense of excitement by everyone on the plane; then exiting the plane into the thin air and blue sky and bright morning sunlight; with a few fluffy white clouds; and the smells and sounds of Cusco.

Gayle (Américo's son) met me at the airport, in the company of Javier, a friend of his whom I had not previously met. Javier was rather tall (about my height--six feet) and somewhat heavy, both unusual in Peru. He was a warm and gentle soul, and I liked him immediately. He also spoke English quite well. Arilu was to be our translator for this trip, but Javier helped out at times. He later served as our translator on our next (third) trip to Peru. They escorted me in good spirits to the hostel where Gina, Judy, Bob and I were to spend the night before heading to Salka Wasi with Américo the next day.

Once again I was in the hustle and bustle of Cusco; lively, noisy, energetic, full of diesel fumes and crowded with honking cars, and a combination of the ancient Andean culture and modern Peruvian commerce. This time my body seemed to recognize and accept the altitude and the energy (as Américo said it would...'the body learns' he says.) I do love Cusco.

Our hostel was located on the Calle Loreto, a narrow, cobble-stoned alley that runs from the Plaza de Armas downhill toward the ruins of Coricancha. The calle is for pedestrians only, so we parked in the Plaza and walked down about 30 yards to a large, unmarked wooden door on the left. Gayle knocked and we were let into the hostel.

Like many places I've been in Latin America, the hostel was stylish, clean, and in some state of disrepair. We walked past a glassed-in patio with breakfast tables (with a few glass panes missing), past a small garden with beautiful and bright orange flowers, and into a small room with two beds and a bathroom. The furnishings were simple but nice. The blankets on the beds looked warm and had a beautiful Andean design woven into them. Our window opened onto the garden and patio area, it had no screen and didn't close tightly, but that didn't make much difference as there was no heating in the hostel. And...we were only 30 yards from the Plaza de Armas. Arilu had found us a very pleasant and inexpensive place to stay.

On the opposite side of Calle Loreto from the door to the hostel was the longest surviving Inca

wall in Cusco. This was once the outer wall of the Inca compound known as *Acclawasi* ("The House of the *Acclas*"). The *acclas* are often referred to as *The Chosen Women* or *The Virgins of the Sun*.

The Inca empire had no currency, and the communities paid their taxes by supplying labor for the empire. All males between the ages of 15 and 50 were required to work part of the year for the public good; building roads, bridges, aqueducts, agricultural terraces and fortifications; or serving in the military. This service was known as *mit'a*. Local overseers were responsible to make sure that the men had enough time left in the season to tend their own crops. In *ayni* (the fundamental Andean concept of reciprocity) the Empire provided the advantages of empire (the roads, bridges, and so on) as well as organizing the storage of enough food to insure that the population could survive up to five years of drought.

The *acclas* provided female service to the Empire. Each year the Inca government sent out representatives to select girls around the age of 10 from the provinces to serve the state. They were mainly from the higher social classes, often the daughters of regional leaders, and were selected based upon their beauty, skills, and intelligence. They were then sent to an *acclawasi* for training. Those with the highest social standing were sent to the *acclawasi* at Cusco. The girls were trained in spiritual matters, the making of the finest weavings, and the brewing of *chica* (a type of beer.) The girls were then given a choice at the end of two years to continue their training or to return to their villages. Those who stayed became either high priestesses, or were assigned to be wives or concubines to the ruling class. The priestesses were required to remain virgins, which is interesting considering the sexual *morés* of the Andean culture, where premarital sex and trial marriages were encouraged to give couples the opportunity to discover whether they were compatible with each other.

There is a story that during the Spanish conquest of the Inca empire, a condor fell from the sky into the courtyard of the *acclawasi* in Cusco, killed in flight by a hawk. This was taken as an ominous sign by the Incas. After the Spanish prevailed, *Acclahuasi* was turned into the Catholic convent of Santa Catalina.

Before I could settle down and relax at the hostel I wanted to talk with Gayle about my missing luggage. The duffle bag contained my warmest layer of clothing (my heavy Icelandic wool sweater), my super-duper-survive-anything sleeping bag, and all of the presents I had brought for the children of Mollamarca (mainly school supplies.) Our itinerary was to go to Salka Wasi for several days, then return to Cusco for a night, and then travel to Apu Ausangate, so in the near-term I just needed enough to get by at Salka Wasi. We needed sleeping bags at Salka Wasi as they could not provide sheets there, but we would be indoors and have access to lots of wool blankets. Gayle lent me an extra sleeping bag he had, it was a light-weight bag not designed for very cold weather but it would be plenty warm enough with a couple of wool blankets. He also lent me one of his jackets. Gayle is shorter than I, and when I tried on his jacket I couldn't quite get my arms down to my sides, but I figured I had enough other layers to keep me warm enough at Salka Wasi, so I gave it back to him along with my thanks.

It was our going to Apu Ausangate, to 15,000 feet, with the likelihood of storms, that had me worried. Gayle offered to dig me up anything more significant I might need when we returned from Salka Wasi. I began to describe to him the sort of sleeping bag I would want; something really warm, that would stay warm even if wet, and that was big enough for my height. He listened to me politely, and then put his hand on my shoulder, gave me a warm smile that was half amused and half affectionate, and said, "Don't worry Oakley. I am your guardian."

I had one of those moments when something that was obvious but I hadn't noticed before suddenly became stunningly clear. Oh course Gayle was my guardian. And, what a guardian. At the time Gayle was around 20 years old. Every year he ran the annual foot race that goes the length of the Inca Trail. The trail runs along the top of the Andes, ending in Machu Picchu, and normally takes four or five days to hike. The racers complete it in one run. That year Gayle had won the race. In Salka Wasi I had seen him doing chin ups in good natured competition with his friends, and winning (I discovered I could barely do one chin up). He had climbed to the top of many of the local Andean peaks. When camping on the slopes of an Apu with a friend, a puma had prowled around the tent and stuck its head in the door. One day, at the river that runs in the canyon below Salka Wasi, he ran

across a young deer standing in the river with a pack of dogs on the bank trying to get at it. He drove the dogs away (which was a tale in itself) and then picked up the deer and carried it up the steep 2,000 foot slope to Salka Wasi. What happened after that is quite incredible, but is a story that I would like to tell at a later time. He was in amazing shape, and yet without a hint of machismo or bravado; personable, friendly, slightly shy, warm hearted, competent, and impeccable. If, when hiking in the mountains, I were to turn a corner and suddenly find myself facing danger, I would want Gayle at my side. I don't know how it would turn out, but I am sure it would be worth a song.

In the Andes they draw a distinction between our right side energy (paña) and our left side energy (lloqe). Our right side energy is for our everyday tasks, doing chores, going to work, being organized. Our left side energy is for connecting to the ineffable mystery that is the Cosmos and our presence as Beings within the Cosmos. It is on the left side where Américo likes to reside.

Whenever Américo and Gayle and I (often with my friends) have gone into the outback of Peru together, Gayle disappears when we settle down to meditate. A few minutes later Gayle can be spied sitting on some high point on the mountain side above us, keeping watch, making sure we are safe, ready to intervene if some danger approaches or if some party nears that could disrupt our meditation. Although he is now well versed in the lloqe work that Américo does with us, and could do that work himself, he frees his father to focus purely on the left side when he works with us, not having to worry about right-sided problems that could arise. He is our guardian.

Getting back to my second trip to Peru...by that evening, Gina, Bob, Judy and I had all arrived in Cusco. The next morning we took off for Salka Wasi. In the morning we took our luggage out to the curb in the Plaza de Armas and waited for Gayle. It was the first time I had been in the plaza early in the morning. The air was thin and cold but the morning sun was bright and warm. The sky was mostly blue with a few drifting cumulus clouds. It had rained the night before (this was still the rainy season) and the cobblestone streets around the plaza were wet from the rain. It was early enough that the tourists hadn't come out in any real numbers yet. Shop owners and business people strode across the plaza in the morning sun, along with women in indigenous clothing with shawls strung over their shoulders holding big bundles of goods to sell, or babies. Kids in their blue school uniforms passed by, walking together in small groups, or holding their parent's hands. Taxis and cars were entering and driving around the plaza, contributing to the sense that the city was waking up to business. Immersed in the sounds and smells and sights of Cusco in the morning it finally, fully, hit me that I was in Cusco again.

Arilu had told us that Gayle would be there right at 8:00 AM, and asked us to please be ready at the curb so that he wouldn't have to (illegally) park to pick us up. But, of course, it was about 8:30 when he pulled up in his truck. He drove us out to Américo's house in the suburbs of Cusco. Instead of us having to pay for a bus and driver to take all of us to Salka Wasi, Américo had offered to drive us there himself in his truck. The truck had a front and back seat in the cab with enough room for Américo, Bob, Gina, Judy, and I to squeeze in. All of the gear (our luggage, presents for the people of Mollamarca, and enough food and water for all of us for several days) was stacked high in the bed of the truck, covered with plastic sheets, and tied down. Arilu, Gayle, and two of their friends (Javier and Sebastian) perched on top of the gear in the back. They brought along a big sheet of plastic to pull over themselves as protection from the dust and rain during the five hour drive on the dirt roads to Salka Wasi. This really all to save us the expenses of hiring a bus.

When everything and everyone was secured in the truck, Américo drove us out of Cusco south on the paved road that leads to Bolivia. As his house was in the south section of Cusco we exited the city relatively quickly. As we drove along, Américo pointed out the Apus that could be seen along the way. I read once that Apus, like other beings, evolve spiritually, and that when they do they grow an inch during the night, thus the high peaks are great spiritual beings. It is just a nice thought that has stuck with me due to its beauty.

There are twelve major Apus in the area of Cusco. As he drove, Américo told us their names and a little bit about a few of them:

Apu Ausungate:	Who brings order to energy, our destination later that week.
Apu Sacsaywaman:	The location of the great ruins overlooking Cusco.
Apu Salcantay:	Who makes energy chaotic. This peak can be seen from the summit on the drive to Salca Wasi. People rarely visit this Apu, it is a wild and dangerous place. Sometimes they don't come back.
Apu Wanakowrai	
Apu Pachatusan:	Who holds the world on his shoulders, the location of our initiation during the previous trip.
Apu Mañual Pinta	
Apu Warakochan	
Apu Mama Simona:	
Apu Pukin	
Apu Piqol	
Apu Senká	
Apu Chillen Chillen	

I stared at Apu Mama Simona as we drove past her and I felt my energy shift. For the first time that trip I felt like I was finally immersed fully back into the energy of Peru, existing in a Cosmovision that seems so much more beautiful than the Western worldview I grew up in.

We were following the same route to Salka Wasi that we had taken on my first trip to Peru. About 30 minutes south of Cusco we turned left onto a dirt road and headed towards the mountains that flank the valley along its eastern side. After a few hundred yards of driving down the dirt road, weaving around potholes, just as we neared the base of the mountains, we were stopped at a military roadblock (the Shining Path guerrilla movement was still a threat at the time.) Américo climbed out of the truck and had a friendly chat with the soldiers. He had brought along some newspapers from Cusco that he handed out to them as they talked. The soldiers happily took them, immediately turning to the sports sections. They waved us on.

Shortly past the roadblock, right at the foot of the mountains, the road crossed a bridge over the river *Vilcamayo* (or *Willkamayu*), which in Quechua means *sacred river*. The river is a political boundary between provinces, but it is also another type of boundary, where you first feel that you are leaving the domesticated culture of Cusco and heading into the salka (undomesticated) mountains beyond. Américo stopped the truck in the middle of the bridge so we could watch some river-runners in inflatable rafts pass under the bridge, enter some rapids, and then rush out of sight around a bend.

From there the road immediately started to climb up into the mountains. I described that road in some detail in the story of my first trip to Peru. It was a narrow dirt road, with a cliff rising up on one side and a drop of a couple thousand feet on the other, with no guardrail, and big trucks carrying produce from the jungle barreling down the road around blind corners. I noticed that as Américo drove he would sometimes reach out his hand, as if he were about to grasp a doorknob, and wiggle his fingers in the direction we were heading. I asked him about that, and he said that he was checking out the road ahead, to see if there was any danger approaching. He then chuckled and added that he was a *terrible* driver, but that he had *great* intuition. I grinned and relaxed. I decided that whatever fate was in store for Américo that it was not going to be a warg's belly (Tolkien reference), or a plunge into the abyss in a truck he was driving.

We continued up the road to the highlands, through the town of Huancarani, and then down into a far valley to the town of Paucartambo. In Paucartambo, after stopping and milling around for a bit while Américo and Gayle ran some errands, we took the even narrower and rougher dirt road to Mollamarca (the village closest to Salka Wasi). Along that road we occasionally passed people from Mollamarca and Américo would stop the car briefly to chat with them (we didn't have enough room to

give anyone a ride.)

About two thirds of the way up the road to Mollamarca we turned a bend and there, suddenly, towering in the distance, was majestic Apu Ausangate. We got out to stretch our legs, soak in the energy, and take some pictures. Américo suggested that we walk down the road a bit and that he would come in a little while to pick us up. So we did, wandering down the dirt road, companionably together, in the highlands of Peru. After about fifteen minutes Américo pulled up and we piled into the truck again.

When we pulled into Mollamarca we were welcomed by the usual crowd of women and children. I don't know where the men were, I assume they were out working, perhaps doing construction, for the men, women, and children work the fields together. From Mollamarca we walked down the mountain side for 20 minutes to Salka Wasi, passed along the way by the women and children hurrying past us carrying our bags.

We entered Salka Wasi, which I consider to be the Rivendell of the Andes. Just inside we were met again by the groundskeeper, the ancient and enigmatic don Miguelito, who always seemed to regard me from a different reality than my own. There we settled down into the days of being in Salka Wasi: awaking naturally at first light, pouring a cup of coffee in the living room, wandering down into the morning sunlight in the garden, listening to the birds in the trees and the distant roar of the river far below; having breakfast, then meditating in the garden while the house was cleaned and its energy cleared, then meeting with Américo outside in the garden for some energy work. Lunch, followed by a siesta or a stroll through the neighboring countryside or a steep hike down to the river, then meeting Américo again for more energy work. Supper, then an evening lit by candles with perhaps a little wine, putting on more layers of clothes to stay warm. Delicious and simple food; coffee, tea, hot chocolate, chicha morada (a sweet drink made of blue corn), rolls, oatmeal, granola, yogurt, fresh fruit from the jungle, frittatas, fresh trout from the river, native potatoes, fresh chicken, crackers, cheese, butter, yams, large-kernel native corn, a variety of delicious soups, and other great dishes cooked up by don Abolino and his wife doña Maria. All of this in a place that seems so essentially Andean, a house with three foot thick adobe walls, and no electricity nor heating, that is old and showing its age, not "kept up" as much as kept clean and made comfortable. At an altitude of around 12,000 feet, it sits on the side of the mountain, high above the river, near the stars. The Cosmos seems close enough to touch there.

I have given a fuller description of Salka Wasi in the tales of my first trip there. Here I would like to mention some of the events that were specific to the second trip. One was that Miguelito agreed to work with us again. As before, he changed from his interesting medley of Western clothes into his Andean clothes to work with us. This time, rather than telling our fortunes with the coca leaves, he used his mesa to clean our energy.

Maria, Abolino's wife, worked on our energy as well. Maria was the daughter of a powerful curandera (healer). Américo had met Maria when she was a young woman. At that time she was not carrying on her mother's work, and seemed rather adrift in a culture where such things were being left behind. Américo could see the potential inherent in Maria and encouraged her to continue in her mother's traditions, and to include her own daughters in her work as well so that the tradition could be passed on to future generations.

We met in the living room at the appointed time and waited for Maria to arrive. She entered the room with her daughter. They were carrying a brazier full of hot coals and a shawl containing a large bundle of long, serrated, leaves. We sat there as she worked on us one by one. When it was our turn we took off our shoes and socks and loosened our jackets (it was cold in the living room). Maria then heated some of the leaves over the brazier, and while speaking Quechua, she rubbed the warm leaves over our skin; our feet and ankles, our hands, and our necks and faces. Then, depending upon where she sensed we needed more work, she tucked some warm leaves up our pant or shirt cuffs, or down between our shirt and chest, or simply held the warm leaves on some place on our body for a while. When the leaves cooled, she handed them to her daughter, who would put them in a discard pile and then hand her more, fresh, leaves warmed over the brazier. When she was finished with me I sat



there for a while, reveling in the pleasant feelings I was having, until the cold led me to put my shoes and socks back on and zip up my warm jacket. It was an experience that I fail to have words to express, other than perhaps "comfortable," "tranquil," and "clear".

We, of course, gave Miguelito and Maria some money as *ayni* (reciprocity) for their work. Not only did that restore the balance in our relationships, it also gave them a way to benefit from keeping the traditional healing practices alive. It also delivered, more deeply and clearly than words, the message that their culture had things of value that may be worth holding on to even as Western culture swept toward them like a tsunami.

One day Américo invited us to hike up to Mollamarca to meet the "Club of Mothers". He asked us to please bring our cameras. He didn't explain who the Club of Mothers were but I was certainly game to meet more of the people from Mollamarca. We all hiked up the mountain from Salka Wasi to Mollamarca, winding our way between crumbling adobe walls surrounding small adobe houses, passing small barefoot children, litters of pigs, and wandering chickens along the way.

When we reached the village, Américo led us around a building and on the other side we walked into a crowd of about 30 women. They ranged in age from the youngest mothers to the oldest grandmothers, and they were all dressed in their colorful indigenous clothing of woolen skirts over petticoats and sweaters. Most had on their colorful, flat, hats with the design and yellow fringe that indicated that they were from Mollamarca.

It was quite a feminine scene, and I hesitated for a moment before I joined them. Then I put aside my shyness, wandered in, and began to greet the women with one of the three Quechua phrases I knew (*allillanchu?...how are you?*) and responding back to them with *allillanmi...I am fine*. Just for the record, the third phrase I knew was *tupanachiskama...until we meet again*.

This is an important moment in the Andean culture, when two different groups of people first interact. It is a time to check out each other's energy and to see if the different energies can mesh in a harmonious way. It is just about impossible for me to describe in third person, but I can share what was going on inside of me at that time. I had entered a group of strangers from a very different culture as well as from a different gender. I didn't know exactly what was going on. I did not speak their language, and I wanted very much to somehow make a connection. I was eager yet nervous. I chose to put aside my shyness in favor of sincerity, and I opened my heart. Our differences didn't disappear, but suddenly I was with the women, and we were interacting, and I was in a new dance and making dance steps I've never made before, and feeling like I've never felt before.

Things went well, I was welcome. Still, after a while, I needed to sit down and escape the intensity of it all. I sat on a crumpled well next to Américo, and with his limited English and my limited Spanish, I asked him what the Club of Mother's was all about.

He explained to me that the Club of Mothers consists of most of the mothers from the area around Mollamarca. They get together once a week to work on projects that benefit the children of the village. They make crafts to sell at the Paucartambo market, and then spend that money for things the children need. They also work a plot of land to grow food to try to make sure that all the children have enough to eat.

The building that the mothers meet in was donated to the club by Américo, as was the plot of land they farm. He had asked us to bring our cameras so that we could take photographs of the women working the field and then send him copies of the prints. He told us that the women wanted a way to show the other women at the markets how the Club of Mothers worked, and thus spread the idea of mothers getting together to pool their resources for the benefit of the children. Some of our photos from that day are group shots of the women holding their farming implements with the four of us standing with them. In those pictures I am in the back row, wearing my green sweater, and towering above the women like the jolly green giant. Américo was very low key as he explained the project. I complimented him on the beauty of what he was doing. He gave some humble reply.

Later during that visit I discovered that Américo has seven local villages that he is taking care

of. He periodically arrives at the villages with his truck full of supplies for the elderly and the orphans, bringing flour, sugar, salt, candles, matches, blankets, and other essentials. He also supports the festivals in the villages by providing food, drinks, and ceremonial supplies, as long as the villagers are willing to hold the festivals in the traditional ways. This seems to me to be so typical of Américo's approach, not insisting that the villagers maintain their traditions, but supporting them to do so.

I would like to share more about Américo and his relationship with the villagers by sharing some of the stories he has told me of his life. Please understand that these stories--as they are being told by me rather than by Américo--are secondhand and they are pulled from my distant memory. While they are as accurate as I can remember them, they should perhaps best be thought of as stories that contain an underlying beauty, rather than as factual accounts.

Américo's family on his father's side immigrated to Peru from the Basque region of Europe. In Peru they were granted haciendas, huge land holdings, essentially fiefdoms, over which they ruled. The indigenous people in these lands were not exactly slaves, they were more like indentured servants, forced to work for the hacendado (the owner of the hacienda) without pay. They had to fit the tilling of their own lands around the work demanded by the hacendado. On the surface this sounds similar to the Inca mit'a system I described earlier, but the hacienda system lacked the *ayni* (reciprocity) of the Inca system where the people benefited from the work they did for the empire, and where the Inca insured that the people had sufficient time to work their own lands.

Américo's father's hacienda must have been hundreds of square miles in size. Américo described it as stretching from the high Andes all the way down into the Amazon jungle. His father owned several houses within this area, and would frequently be gone from his family for two weeks at a time as he traveled by horseback from one house to another to oversee the work being done there. Américo said that when his father would return home from one of these trips, he would ignore his children and walk directly to his wife and they would retire to the bedroom. Then later, when they emerged again, he would speak to his children. One time he told them the following story of what had happened on his journey.

At that time there was a small band of bandits plaguing the area. They stopped Américo's father as he was riding by (alone) on his horse. The leader of the bandits, however, was so impressed by his father that he invited him to eat with them around their campfire. While they were eating the leader gave his father a warning, that if he was to hear the call of (some specific local bird whose name I cannot recall) that he should immediately run away.

Later that trip, as his father continued on his way a thunderstorm approached. He took shelter in a cave, leaving the horse tied up outside and taking the saddle and the saddle bags into the shelter with him. As he was sitting in the cave, with the thunderstorm raging outside, he heard the call of that bird. His father immediately grabbed his saddle and bags and ran outside. Right after that a stroke of lightning shot down and hit the mouth of the cave, ricocheting into the cave itself.

Américo's father had a powerful personality. Américo told me that people would sometimes become incontinent when his father yelled at them. He was very much the hacendado, the patriarch of an upper class family in a highly stratified social system. Indigenous people, other than servants, were not allowed to enter his house. When Américo was a young child, his family lived in a hacienda far from the nearest town. His friends were all local children, but he could not invite them into his home.

Américo told me that despite his role as the hacendado, that his father had great respect for some of the individuals within the indigenous community. He spoke five of the local languages fluently. He also spoke an ancient form of Quechua, no longer in use, that was somewhat like an Andean Sanskrit. Américo spoke a few sentences of it to me one day. It was a beautiful language. It sounded like it arose from nature itself, bringing to mind the wind and flowing water. Américo himself grew up with Quechua as his first language, not learning Spanish until he moved to Paucartambo to attend elementary school.

Américo's mother was a quiet, book-loving, woman. She had taught herself French and had

accumulated a library of books written in that language. When her husband was away she would invite the local, indigenous, paq'os to come into the house. There they would sit around the dining table and engage in such things as the reading of coca leaves. She would ask them to use the leaves to let her know how her husband was doing and if he was safe, and they would report things such as, "Right now he is riding his horse through the rain at (some location) and is doing well. He is a fine strong man". Young Américo would hide himself in the room and watch and listen to all of this. Then, when a villager would run into the house and announce that his father was approaching, all of the paq'os would quickly disappear.

In 1968 a military junta who had taken over control of Peru dissolved the hacienda system, returning the land to the indigenous communities in what was called the "Agrarian Reform". About this time Américo returned home having been sent to Europe to obtain a college education. He told me that his pre-college education in Peru was such that it wasn't until he went to Europe that he found out that there had been a second world war.

Américo returned from Europe as a long-haired hippie (his description). When he arrived back in Peru--much to the consternation of his upper class family--he insisted that the servant who had helped raise him, and of whom he was very fond, be allowed to sit with him at his welcome home dinner. He also announced that he was going to begin studying with the indigenous paq'os. To communicate to me how his family reacted to this, he said it was like a son of an upper class family in the United States returning from Yale and announcing that he was going to start learning from the homeless people.

Américo's aunt owned the house and property that was to eventually become Salka Wasi. She had established an artist community there. When the Agrarian Reform arrived she was allowed to keep the house, along with 20 hectares of surrounding land, as the government deemed it to be a cultural asset to the nation. His aunt, however, eventually left the place and it was abandoned. After some time had passed Américo asked if he could buy it from her and she agreed.

When Américo traveled to Salka Wasi to see what sort of shape it was in after having been abandoned for a while, the whole village of Mollamarca showed up in the village square to block his way. They did not want a Yábar to return to Salka Wasi. Américo told us that it took all of his shamanistic power to proceed at that point. Before getting out of his truck he took off his shoes and picked up a bag of coca leaves. He then slowly wound his way through the crowd, smiling, greeting people, speaking to them in Quechua, and offering them coca leaves. He then turned and invited them all to accompany him down to Salka Wasi to check it out. This invitation for them to enter the house with him clearly delivered the message that he had no intentions of returning as a hacendado.

After he had stayed in Salka Wasi for a while, Américo discovered that the villagers had been killing the eagles that nested in the tall eucalyptus trees that stand in Salka Wasi's gardens. Américo spoke to them about this, reminding them of the sacred role of the eagles in their spiritual traditions. The people, however, pragmatically responded that the eagles were eating their chickens. Rather than trying to win them over to his point of view Américo made them an offer. If they would stop killing the eagles then he would replace any chickens the eagles ate. The villagers agreed. The next time Américo drove into Mollamarca from Cusco he arrived with a truck full of chickens. He said that this was the turning point of his relationship with the people of Mollamarca.

After Américo had been at Salka Wasi for several years, a social activist arrived at Mollamarca. He called a meeting of the villagers, and urged them to kick Américo out of Salka Wasi. He said that they should not have allowed a member of the Yábar family to return. After he spoke, the women of the village gathered together to discuss how they wanted to respond. They all went home, grabbed their long soup spoons and metal pots, and converged on the house where the activist was staying, hitting their pots with their spoons, and drove him out of town.

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At some point during this stay in Salka Wasi my understanding of the path I was on underwent

a fundamental shift. Up until then I had seen this all as being a wonderful and fulfilling adventure. It was a salve for the existential anguish I had developed from my life within the Western worldview. This path nourished those aspects of my being that cried for attention; my love of beauty, my love of love, and my desire to have a meaningful life. Meaning, for me, came from exploring the essential nature of the Cosmos and of my existence within the Cosmos. I had started on this path with Américo to take care of myself, to heal. The story was about me.

Then, everything shifted. I realized that I had stopped being the main character of my own story. The story I was in was really no longer my story, it was a much bigger (and more beautiful) story. It wasn't just about me, it was about me, Américo, Gayle, Arilu, the people at Salka Wasi, the villagers of Mollamarca, the Q'ero. It was about my friends, and others, to whom I have taught what I can (through my workshops, book and blog) about how to enter this story. It was about those waikis whom I do not know who have flowed into the story from other headwaters. And, of course, it was also about Pachamama, the Apus, Mama Tuta, the stars, the trees, the rivers, and the Cosmos. When I returned from this trip to Peru and looked at the prints of my photographs, I noticed that they were the best photos of other people I had ever taken.

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During our last night at Salka Wasi, Bob, Gina, Judy and I were sitting around the dining room table after dinner, chatting by candlelight. Gayle popped in to inform us that there was a beautiful full moon. We said thanks and that we would be out in a bit. Then Américo popped in to inform us that there was a beautiful full moon. OK, we got up, put on more layers of clothes, and walked out together into the night. Américo and Gayle guided us through some shrubs and under some trees, we walked along the top of a fallen log to pass over the small stream that runs by Salka Wasi, and then found ourselves in a large meadow sloping down the side of the mountain, illuminated by the full moon. There was a large ring around the moon, about ten times the diameter of the moon itself, and numerous streamers of clouds flowing off the ring, streaming off to the left.

We all played in the meadow; running, hopping, howling, and reciting poetry to the moon. Américo told us that the moon (Mama Killa) is the mirror of the shaman. I looked at the face of the moon, and searched within myself for what part of me was being reflected in that face, and I got in touch with a very mysterious and strange sensation. I recommend that, by the way. Then Américo had us feel the light of the moon in our umbilical region, rubbing that area with our hands. As I did this I had the feeling that part of me was stretching out towards the moon, but then when I realized that, it snapped back. After a while I noticed that the cloud streamers from the ring around the moon were now all going in the opposite direction, to the right. How could the upper atmospheric winds shift 180 degrees so quickly? I pointed it out to Américo, and I didn't understand his reply, other than that it was something special.

After four very relaxing days and nights in Salka Wasi it was time for us to head back to Cusco for an evening, and then take off for Apu Ausangate. I am not sure, however, that "relaxing" quite encompasses being at Salka Wasi. It was four days of no chores, of just being, of eating great natural food, breathing clean air, getting good exercise wandering around the gardens and hiking up and down to the village and to the river, existing in the quiet of just the wind and the sound of the river and the occasional braying of donkeys, and connecting in a deeply soul-satisfying way with Nature and the Cosmos and the Peruvian people. I love being at Salka Wasi.

In the morning we packed up our bags and left them for the villagers to haul up the hill for us. Then we hiked up to the village and Américo's waiting truck. After a two hour, uneventful, drive on the small dirt road to Paucartambo, and then another four hours on the dirt road up and over the mountains to Cusco, we arrived back at our hostel near the Plaza de Armas. When Arilu called home from the hostel she was informed that my duffel bag had been found by the airline and had been delivered to her house. I was back in the sleeping bag business, boys!

There was a religious celebration scheduled in Cusco for that evening in the Plaza de Armas. Outside the cathedral, religious scenes had been created on the ground using arranged flowers as the

medium. That afternoon Bob and I walked around the plaza looking at them, then we returned to the plaza again in the early evening for the celebration. The plaza and the surrounding areas were so packed with people that we couldn't get into the plaza itself, and had to watch everything from partway down a side street. I usually wear a small daypack when I am in the city, but the staff at the hostel had instructed me not to do so that evening. They gave two reasons: one was that it is considered rude to be wearing a daypack when so many people are crowded together; and the other was that it was highly likely that my pack would be empty before too long.

I am taller than most Peruvians and although Bob and I were stuck down a side street I could see some of what was going on in the plaza. A procession of people in religious attire had exited the cathedral and were making their way through the crowd and around the plaza. Behind them came a large statue of a saint, sitting on a litter being carried by a score of strong men. They were followed by a loud marching band of horns and drums. There was also a large contingent of military in the square to keep things reasonably under control. The scene was fun, interesting, cultural, and rather surrealistic.

When it ended Bob, led me to a small restaurant that he knew. It was on what I call the "Hippy Street," a pedestrian alley that leads uphill from the Plaza de Armas. The alley contains tour group shops catering to young adult adventurers, camping equipment stores, attractive young Peruvian women handing out leaflets for (legit) massage parlors, the occasional waft of marijuana smoke (which is illegal in Peru), and a few restaurants. This restaurant was mainly a pizza place and prided itself on the quality of its sangria. It had a few long tables lined by chairs and benches, and a wood burning pizza oven. Its owner was rather dour and looked to be of Eastern European origin. He reminded me somewhat of Bob. On later trips Américo has taken me there a few times, he is friends with the owner. Bob and I ordered a pizza and some beer. After a week of healthy food, exercise, and soul-satisfying meditations, I was really in the mood for pizza and beer.

The next day we headed to Apu Ausangate in a bus that we had rented. Arilu had made all of the arrangements, and Gina, Bob, Judy, and I covered the cost of renting the bus and paying its driver. That morning we piled all of our luggage on the sidewalk along the edge of the plaza and waited for our bus to arrive. When the bus pulled up (in the no parking zone) Gayle and his friends jumped out and helped us get everything into the bus as quickly as possible and we took off. Américo sat up front next to Dante, the driver; and Arilu, Gayle, and his friends sat in the back next to the big pile of all of the gear (ours, theirs, and the supplies for the trip). Dante was the driver for many of my early trips to Peru. He was a friendly, middle-aged Peruvian, slightly stocky in a prize fighter sort of way, with short-cropped dark hair, and a quiet sense of humor. Whenever we would pull into a place to park, Dante would give it a serious look to make sure we would be safe.

We started off by driving south towards Bolivia. The Plaza de Armas is on the north side of Cusco while Bolivia is to the south, so the first hour involved our bus working its way down the Avenida de La Cultura, the always crowded main route that leads south out of town. As near as I can tell, the Avenida consists of four lanes of traffic merging, weaving, and darting their way down a three lane road. South of Cusco we turned onto the dirt road that heads towards Paucartambo. When we got to Huancarani, however, Dante turned off of the main road onto a very primitive dirt road that headed steeply up towards the peaks to the right. The road was rough, barely good enough for a bus to navigate, and when a stream crossed it there really was no road, just stream. We were at the tail-end of the rainy season and there was a fair amount of water in the streams, and a lot of mud. When we came to a stream cutting across the road we would all climb out of the bus and get to the other side by hopping on stones. We would then watch Dante very carefully and slowly drive the bus into and across the water. His main challenge was to keep the tail of the bus from getting hung up on the bank as the bus dropped down into the stream. Once the bus was safely across we would all applaud and climb back on again, congratulating Dante with smiles and laughter, which he accepted good-naturedly.

As the bus climbed higher up into the mountains all signs of trees and shrubs disappeared. We entered a land of tough, short, grass and small herds of alpacas quietly grazing and staring at us as we drove by. Américo had Dante stop when we reached the summit of the dirt road. We all piled out to

walk around and breathe and soak in the energy of this desolate, high land. I looked out at the vista and saw, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, a single house sitting on the crest of another hill. It was a rather large, stone, house, within a rectangular enclosure of walls made of stacked rocks, probably for alpacas although there were none there at the time. In fact, I saw no one in or around the house. There were no vehicles parked there or even any signs of vehicle tracks. The place, however, did not look deserted, just incredibly isolated and quiet. In the utter silence of the place I felt deeply engaged in a sense of mystery, and of a seamless connection to another world. Américo walked over and stood next to me. He looked where I was looking, and softly said, "Is incredible, like monastery, no?"

As the bus wound down the other side of the mountains we passed more and more dwellings, and a small village or two. As usual when we travel through the remote countryside Américo had a big bag of candy with him. Whenever we passed children he waved and shouted to them and tossed them some candy, indicating with his gestures that the ones who got to the candy first should share with the others. He gets great delight from this, as do the children we pass in these incredibly isolated lands. In later trips--my guess is due to expressions of horror from Westerners--he started bringing large bags full of pocket bread to give out to the children instead of candy.

At the foot of the mountains our path connected with a road that runs between Ocongate (a destination along our way) and Cusco. It was a good road, not paved, but wide and well-graded. I don't know why we hadn't taken it from Cusco. Often a road we want to take in the Andes is under repair or blocked by landslides, but in this case I think it was more likely that Américo wanted to show us more of the Andes, and to have the Andes shift our energy before we approached Apu Ausangate.

A short while later we pulled into Ocongate, a town not far from Apu Ausangate. Dante parked the bus in the town square and we all got out. It was a typical Andean town square, with trucks loading or unloading sacks, crates, and barrels; people in their colorful Andean clothing climbing into or out of the beds of the trucks (where they had purchased inexpensive rides); and a market where farmers--who had walked several miles to town--had set up shop to sell their produce. There were a couple of cafes with signs written in English, and a place to sign up for tours, and a sense that this town was used to accommodating tourists.

There is an important annual religious festival held on the slopes of Apu Ausangate, called *Quyllur Rit'i (the Star Festival)* which draws tens of thousands of local people, including many from the region around Paucartambo. The people selected to represent their village dress in costumes (e.g. as bears) and dance the entire way to the mountain, accompanied by musicians. When the festival is over they return to their villages, carrying a clump of ice (from the Apu's glacier) that has captured the light of the star that is connected to their village. Américo told us that Ocongate was where many of the pilgrims exited the mountains on their way back home. We were not there during the time of the festival, and he added that it was held on a different side of Apu Ausangate than where we would be traveling. The glacier on Apu Ausangate is quickly disappearing due to global warming, and I have read that the villagers no longer carry its ice back to their villages.

After we parked in the square, Américo et al disappeared to run some errands. Gayle returned carrying a large bag of fresh coca leaves. The four of us wandered around a bit, looking in the door of a church that seemed on the verge of total collapse, and checking out the market. When we got back on the bus we discovered that someone had joined us. Américo introduced him as the man who would be providing the horses for our trip up Apu Ausangate. Américo was pleased to have run into him in Ocongate as we had arrived a day earlier than originally planned (which was news to us). Then, before we took off, the Q'ero who were to join us on our trek up Apu Ausangate appeared in the square. The seven of them had walked through the night to get there on time (as we were a day early). But, how did they know? Their villages had no power, or phones, or radios, and this was in the days before cell phones. This was not the first, or the last, time that I noticed that Américo can communicate with the Q'ero in ways I do not understand.

With everyone now on board, we headed up the road to the town of Tinki, which was as far as we could go by bus. The road to Tinki was in very bad shape. There were times when the bus had to slow to a crawl to maneuver around deep ruts and potholes, the bus throwing us from side to side as its

wheels dropped into or climbed out of some mini-chasm. It being the end of the rainy season, the dirt road was impassable after Tinki. There we would spend the night, and take horses to Apu Ausangate the next day.

It was late afternoon when we reached Tinki, an old adobe town in a river valley near Apu Ausangate. Dante drove to the far side of town and pulled into a small hostel. The hostel consisted of a one-story building where the owners lived and did the cooking and where the dining room was located, and a small two-story building for guests. Each story in the guest building consisted of one rectangular room with a bunch of beds. We moved our gear into the second story, which had 10 beds. There were 10 of us, not counting the Q'ero who disappeared to who-knows-where to sleep (though they joined us for meals). The room was clean but run down and very bare, with nothing but the beds and one electrical wire stapled to the wall and ceiling to power a dangling light bulb. The beds were comfortable with warm woolen blankets, which we threw over our sleeping bags.

Just after we got our gear into the room it began to rain, a piece of good luck. Much to my surprise, a few minutes later a group of teenagers from Israel pulled up in a bus, and moved into the room downstairs. They were heading to Apu Ausangate as well. Up to that time we had been the only outsiders I had seen in the area.

The rain stopped around sunset. Our room led out onto a rickety balcony looking toward Apu Ausangate, about 10 miles away as the condor flies, and rising majestically to 21,000 feet. Only its peak was illuminated by the setting sun, the lower peaks around it were wrapped in clouds. The surrounding landscape, including Tinki, drifted through various shades of gold, then tan, and then brown, as the sun set, shifting moods in a way that my camera completely failed to capture.

The hostel gave us a pretty good dinner that night; soup, rice, fish, and potatoes. The soup (which is a staple in the Andes) was quite good, much better than the it-is-probably-safe-to-eat-because-it-is-hot watery soups that I've eaten in outback restaurants in the Andes over the years. But then for me that is part of the charm, or at least part of the adventure, of being in such a remote, beautiful, and different part of the world.

The ten of us slept that night in the hostel. The report was that Américo snores, but if he did I slept through it.

When we woke up the next morning, Gayle and Arilu had decided to provide us breakfast from the supplies we had brought, rather than our going downstairs to eat. We sat on our beds and munched on fresh fruit from the jungle and baked-the-day-before pocket bread. When we stepped onto the balcony we could see that Apu Ausangate was wrapped in clouds. Américo came out to join us and told us that if the weather didn't clear up we couldn't visit the Apu. He informed us that our task that morning was to use the process he had once taught us for clearing away clouds to take care of the problem. He told us to first clear the weather off of the peaks to the right of Ausangate, who are the daughters of Ausangate. He added that they control the weather in the area. So, we directed our intent towards them. A little while later they were clear of clouds, then Ausangate cleared, and then finally the peak to the left of Ausangate, Qollogante--his wife--was free of clouds.

I don't know what to make of the process we had learned for clearing away clouds. It could be that the process works. It could have been a coincidence. It could be that Américo really knows the weather patterns in that area and had asked us to do something that he knew would succeed. My logical side would like to run a repeated-measures, interrupted-time-series design before it would conclude that the process works. But then...that's the thing. There is no magic that can't be explained away as a coincidence, and no momentous experience that can't be explained away by what psychology calls "response expectancy". That, however, is letting logic be my prison guard (locking me in a land without beauty), rather than being my guardian (protecting me from buying swamp land in Florida). The clouds went away.

The plan was for the horses to arrive at the hostel around 8:00 in the morning. They were late, and there was loading up to do, so we finally departed around 11:00. There were eleven horses, six were ridden by Américo, Arilu, and the four of us and the rest were pack horses. Gayle and his friends

walked, as did the Q'ero. One man led the lead horse, and the rest of the horses just followed along. Riding a horse is not something I enjoy or have much experience with, but I managed. My horse was fairly docile if not completely obedient. At one point I had to get off my horse and lead it by the reins across a stream that it was reluctant to cross. When it balked I looked back at it and both Américo and Arilu shouted out at the same time that I should never look a horse in the eyes! Hmm, I didn't know that.

Américo suggested that walking a bit would be good for us, but to let the horses do all of the uphill work. At the top of the first big rise, I hopped off the horse. Within a few steps I could feel the altitude (14,000 feet?) and within 50 yards I had to get back on the horse again.

From Tinki, our path wound up out of the river valley and onto a long slope that rose steadily up towards Apu Ausangate. As the Apu towered higher and higher in front of us, Américo looked back from his horse and gave us instructions. He told us to approach the Apu with love and to open our energy field, and that was all we really needed to do, Apu Ausangate would do the rest. This advice informed my experiences for the rest of the adventure.

The majestic, snow-covered, rocky peaks of Apu Ausangate were beautiful. The vista when I turned to look back over the land behind us was also incredible. We were well above tree level. The river valley below cut through a rolling land covered with grass and groups of grazing alpaca. Desolate farms were sprinkled here and there, small stone huts surrounded by round enclosures of stacked stone walls. The land was dotted with small lakes, and snow covered mountain peaks rose in the distance. I desperately wanted to take a picture. I found, however, that I couldn't stop my horse (who had become determined to get in front of all the other horses despite having the largest person sitting on him) and take a picture at the same time. I finally gave up.

After a while we turned up a side canyon running down from the Apu and started to gain altitude more quickly. We rode for about six hours, taking several breaks along the way. One break was near a stone outcropping next to a cascading river. There we had lunch, and the four of us fell asleep on the grass, in the cold air, under the warm sun. After resting, we headed further up the mountain.

It was late afternoon when Américo suddenly announced that we had arrived. I couldn't see any sign of being somewhere but we dismounted and followed Américo up out of the side canyon and around the shoulder of a hill, and there we found a small homestead. It was the home of don Manuel, his wife, and his three children. Américo introduced don Manuel to us as one of the "Guardians of Ausangate," although he did not explain what that meant; it seemed to be something special and beyond a physical guardianship. The homestead consisted of two, small, rectangular, stone huts with thatched roofs, and a circular stone-walled enclosure that served as the alpaca corral (although there were no alpacas in it at this time of year).

Don Américo ushered us into one of the stone huts and informed us that this was where the four of us would be sleeping. It was the family's sleeping hut, the family would be sleeping in their cooking hut. Américo, Arilu, Gayle and his friends would be sleeping in tents. The Q'ero slept under a wooden roof that provided cover over part of the alpaca corral.

The four of us were ushered through a rickety wooden door into our abode. It was simply one rectangular room with a curtain dividing a storage area to the right from the sleeping area to the left. Pushing through the curtain we found that our part of the room had a stone ledge along all three sides, wide enough to lay our sleeping bags on. The floor had a couple of llama skins as rugs. The stacked stones that made up the walls had been caulked with sod or dirt to cut down on the drafts. There was one window, located in the wall above where I put my bag. It had a wooden frame and was open to the outside air, with no glass, although it did have a cloth covering that could be secured. The roof was low over our heads, and thatched. There was a smoke hole part way down one side of the roof with its own little gabled roof to keep the rain from entering the room. One of the family's chickens found it to be a perfect place to roost, looking out over the land, giving us a constant view of its butt. Although we were at approximately 15,000 feet way up the side of the mountain, I found that being in a stone



structure made me feel secure. Outside the hut, Gayle and his friends were setting up the tents, with Arilu supervising. A fair amount of shouted instructions and laughter accompanied the process.

We had obviously been given the best place to sleep, and we offered to sleep in the tents or to let others join us in the hut as there was room in there for one or two more people, but Andean hospitality wouldn't hear of it. We finally got Américo to say that he would move in with us if his tent proved inadequate, but he never did.

After I spread out my sleeping bag and pad on the rock shelf, and arranged some of my stuff along the window ledge, I stepped back out of the hut into the cold, late afternoon, air. I found the Q'ero and Américo sitting together in one corner of the alpaca enclosure. This was my first time to interact with the Q'ero outside of a ceremony, and I found myself a bit shy to do so, but I approached anyway. When Américo saw me he waved for me to join them. I sat down and they gave me some coca leaves (which they were all chewing) and I was given a turn with a bottle of some local liquor that was making its rounds. Each person, when it was their turn, filled the small cap of the bottle with the liquor, then poured a few drops onto the Pachamama, before sipping from the cap and then passing the bottle on.

The bathroom facilities were not (facilities). We were instructed to just go somewhere outside. This posed a bit of a challenge. There were absolutely no bushes, shrubs or trees at this altitude, and the land for as far as you would care to walk had no large rocks. There were low rock walls that formed enclosures for the alpaca, but the walls were about three feet tall, and no matter where you went you were in plain sight of the widely scattered dwellings in the valley below. I never saw any of the local people relieving themselves to show me where it would be appropriate. It was a bit of a mystery that needed to be put aside with an 'oh well' attitude.

At dusk Américo took us on a short steep hike up a rocky slope to the top of a hill. From there the land dropped off on the other side, then rose again to form the main peaks of Apu Ausangate. It was an impressive sight. We were at 16,000 feet yet Ausangate towered much higher still, to 21,000 feet. Américo instructed us to look for the faces of animals on the stone cliffs of Ausangate. I let my eyes wander over Ausangate in the subdued light of dusk and I waited for the faces to come to my awareness. I saw, very clearly in the rocks, the faces of animals; a deer, a wolf, a rabbit, and many others. They were so incredibly clear that it was hard to believe they could be natural, but they undoubtedly were. We took a final look at Apu Ausangate and walked back down to the homestead.

Américo joined us in the hut for dinner, which consisted of pocket bread and a delicious hot soup. We sat around and talked for a couple of hours by candle light. Arilu came in and announced that dessert, hot chocolate, would be ready in five minutes. This announcement was made approximately every 10 minutes or so for more than an hour. It finally arrived and they served it with good humor. They explained that it was difficult to get things to come to a boil at 15000 feet when you are using dried dung as fuel.

As we sat sipping the hot chocolate, illuminated by the light of two candles propped onto narrow stone shelves, the candles flickering by the slight wind that found its way through the cracks, Américo told us that it was not ordinary that he brought us here. He said that he saw in us all a deep commitment to find the highest consciousness. He had been coming to Apu Ausangate himself for over twenty years. After many years the paq'os of the area, the 'Guardians of Ausangate', gave him a small stone hut to stay in, a hut that we would be seeing tomorrow. When he was a younger man he lived alone in that isolated hut for months at a time, developing his relationship with Apu Ausangate. He stressed to us how high a consciousness is available here. A couple of hours after dark he excused himself and went out into the cold to his tent.

I awoke the next morning and exited the hut, having to duck low to get through the small doorway. Outside, I found myself standing in the middle of a cloud that had descended onto the homestead. I spotted Américo and walked over to see what the plans were. He said that in one hour it would either clear up, or rain. Either would be OK, whatever Apu Ausangate decided. With a smile he added that lightning can provide a powerful energy (which notched my adrenaline level up a bit).

I saw that Gina was up and about and went over to talk with her. After a few minutes Américo walked over to us and said that he would contact Apu Ausangate to check out the weather. He then strode over to the far side of the enclosure and stood facing the Apu. After ten minutes he returned to us and said that the Apu would give us four hours of good weather to accomplish our work, and then it would start to rain or snow. He added that we had better get a move on.

We all had a quick breakfast of coffee, oatmeal, bread, and fruit. We then mounted our horses and began to make our way further up the slopes of Apu Ausangate. The party consisted of the four of us, Américo, Gayle, Arilu, their friends, don Manuel, and the Q'ero. Again, the four of us, Américo, and Arilu rode while the rest walked. It was cold and cloudy, though the clouds had lifted enough to form a low, grey, ceiling over our heads.

The plan for the day was to climb to about 17,000 feet, which would take us to the sacred lagunas (lakes) that lie at the feet of Apu Ausangate's main peaks. We would pass by several of these lagunas, stopping to perform ceremonies at each one, and then loop back to our camp when we finished.

The air was cold and crystal clear. The lagunas, the grass, the looming peak, stood out in incredible clarity. It was such a desolate scene, no shrubs or trees, only rocks and scarce grass and lagunas of strange colors (green, yellow, purple, blue, slate). We were incredibly high in both senses of the term, doing things I have never done before, seeing a place unlike anyplace I have ever seen before. I was experiencing a powerful, clear, and beautiful state of consciousness, and yet it seemed so natural to me that it was only when I reflected back to what my state of consciousness is like in the United States that I even realized I was in a *highly* different state of consciousness, a beautiful and powerful state of consciousness. As we were riding, Américo turned to me in delight, and shouted, "Oakley!!! Tell your scholarly colleagues about THIS!!!"

We rode our horses past two lagunas (whose names in Quechua mean "The Green Laguna" and the "Yellow Laguna") before we reached our first ceremonial site. This was on top of a hill overlooking "Alka Cocha" (a laguna of seven colors). It was a large long laguna, stretching along the foot of Apu Ausangate's highest peaks. My ability to guess distances was befuddled by the high altitude and by the extreme clarity of the air and by my state of consciousness, but I would estimate that it was about three quarters of a mile in length.

When we stopped at Alka Cocha the Q'ero spread out their mesas and prepared to perform a despacho (offering) for Apu Ausangate. The despacho gave honor to the Apu in ayni (reciprocity) for all that it gives us. The despacho also connected our energetic filaments with those of Apu Ausangate, that we may always be connected to this massive spiritual being who towers 21,000 feet up into the clear Andean air. The wind had picked up, and it had started to lightly rain, and it was *cold*. The despacho seemed a bit hurried to me, I assumed because the Q'ero were working quickly due to the weather, or it could have been that I wasn't as into it because of my own physical discomfort from the cold and rain. When the despacho was finished the Q'ero worked quickly on each of us, cleansing our energy and blowing beautiful energy down through the crowns of our heads and into our bodies.

We returned to our horses and rode along a level crest of a hill that ran parallel to the peaks of the Apu, passing one laguna after another. The clouds formed a gray roof a couple of hundred feet above our heads, sometimes lowering a little, sometimes rising. We were given occasional glimpses, through the mystical curtains of cloud, of the upper slopes of the Apu, but the highest peaks remained hidden from our view.

Occasionally a light rain would fall. My gear held up pretty well. I had purchased an expedition-quality rain jacket and had on rain pants as well. Under these I had many layers of clothing; silk long johns, poly long johns, a short sleeve shirt, long sleeve shirt, pants, a light sweater, and sweater pants. I was also wearing a scarf I had bought from a woman in Mollamarca. Américo had recommended that we keep one layer of warmth to put on only when we really needed it, so that if it got colder we would have an extra layer we could add. I had my big, thick, Icelandic wool sweater in my day pack, which I turned to later.

Our next stop was at a beautiful, almost completely circular, small lake of incredibly clear blue water, La Laguna Celeste (a.k.a. Q'oyllur Cocha), wife of Otorongo. This laguna provides a connection to the stars. We meditated there for a while, then dipped our hands into her outflow to connect to her filaments, washing our faces as well.

From the wife of Otorongo we went to Otorongo Cocha and meditated there. Américo informed us that the laguna is the "place of the jaguar," and he added that at times the laguna gives off an intense light. I approached the edge of the laguna carefully, as the turf overhung the water, and I laid down to stare into its depths. It was very deep, its walls went straight down, and I could not see its bottom. There under the water, directly below me, a large rock, like the head of a monster, stared back up at me from the depths.

It began to rain again, and Américo led us to an overhang under a large boulder. The opening under the overhang was so low that only the people at the entrance could sit up, and those of us who moved in a little further to make room for others had to lay propped on an elbow. Américo told us that this place was well known as a haven from the ferocious lightning storms that can hit the area. We rested there for about a half an hour, looking through the rain at the world outside. Then, much to my surprise, hot chocolate appeared. Gayle had hauled a camping stove up from camp to give us a surprise treat.

When the rain abated a bit we climbed back on our horses and rode for another half hour to Américo's hut sitting on the banks of a laguna. As we arrived it began to rain *very* hard, mixed with hail. The stone hut was small but we could all crowd into it. The place had a raised area that looked large enough for two people to sleep on, and a small place for a cooking fire across from the door. The thatched roof was in great disrepair. Américo said that he hadn't been there for a while, and that now that he saw what shape it was in he was going to have to arrange for someone to come and fix the roof.

We sat huddled together in the small space, sharing body warmth, for some time while it rained hard outside. After a while Américo announced that it was time for us to go back to the homestead, and that the other ceremonies he had talked about our doing on this day were canceled due to weather. He said we would do some ceremonies and meditations in the morning to make up for it. He asked if we would be willing to walk back to camp. We had completed much of the loop. It was not too far back (just a few miles), and after a little bit of climbing it would be mostly downhill. He added that it would not be safe for the horses to carry us downhill in that weather. We said "sure".

We started off. It was raining hard, it was cold, and it was starting to get dark. My jacket continued to keep the wet off of the upper part of my body (I was now wearing my big sweater,) but I was COLD. My old rain pants were not holding up too well after hours of strong rain, and water had soaked all of the way through my leather boots. Despite the rain I could hear the squish squish squish of my wet stockinged feet inside my boots as I walked. We hiked up and up and up through the clouds and over the rolling terrain at 17,000 feet. The rain turned to hail and started to sting my face. With the darkness and the weather we could not see very far ahead, maybe only 30 yards. There was no trail and no obvious landmarks to follow. We walked for another hour in the hard rain and hail, stopping many times for Américo and Manuel to confer about what would be the right direction to go. At times Américo would point one way, and Manuel another. When that happened Américo would concede to Manuel. We walked on and on in the high altitude through the dark and cold and rain and hail and I was getting exhausted, but of course we just had to keep going. Finally, to my relief and surprise, we walked right into the homestead.

The four of us, and Américo, retreated into our stone hut. I changed into dry pants and dry socks, but I had no shoes to wear as I had only brought my boots and they were soaked through. I sat huddled up with Américo under a llama pelt, colder than comfortable but warmer than shivering. Through the doorway I saw that as it was getting darker the rain and hail had turned into wet snow. And it snowed and snowed and snowed. I felt nicely safe inside the stone house, but I looked outside and worried about the next day when we were scheduled to return to Tinki.

Arilu popped into the hut and joined us for a while, then left to help the young men who were

cooking our dinner. Américo informed us that we would not be able to ride the horses tomorrow on our return to Tinki, for it is unsafe for them to be ridden in the snow. He thought that if we walked about 1/2 way back we might get below the snow line and be able to ride from there. He said that it only snows about 5 times a year here. He then added that this was a regional (not just a local) snow storm, and that as all the roads to and from Tinki climb over high passes our bus would probably not be able to make it to Tinki to take us back to Cusco.

That put me into worry mode. Our plans were to spend the next day riding back to Tinki, the day after that we were to travel to Cusco, and the morning after that I was to fly home. This trip to Peru happened to fit into my Spring break at the University. My department had given me permission to miss the first two days of Spring Semester, and before I left I had made arrangements to have my classes covered on those days. Now I was suddenly looking at a delay of who-knows-how-many-days in getting back to Cusco and then having to find a new flight back home during the busy tourist season. Looking out at the snow, Américo and I joked about my conducting my classes telepathically, or by using the one radio in Tinki (they had no phones there). I became quiet as I started to run through in my head the various scenarios of getting back. Américo became quiet too, propping himself up on an elbow as he laid there, and looking pensive.

It got dark and continued to snow. Arilu came into the hut laughing, and announced that the weight of the snow had collapsed her tent while she was in it. We all said again, for about the sixth time, that there was room in our hut for more people, but she said 'Not necessary, no problem'. So did Américo, though he promised again that he would move in if his tent was uncomfortable. I had brought a piece of heavy mil plastic, the length of my sleeping bag and twice as wide, with the thought that if we had poor shelter I could lay my bag on it and pull it up over the bag and protect it from the rain. I gave it to Arilu who said they could use it in the tents, as some of them had leaks.

I sat there thinking upon many things. *Just how many days might we be stuck in Tinki? Are there any solutions to getting out quickly? Maybe four wheel drive vehicles, maybe helicopters. I don't mind walking tomorrow, but what about our gear? We brought more than we could possibly carry back without horses. Can the horses carry our gear if they can't carry us? I didn't bring ALL that much stuff, could I carry it all that way without a pack though? Will we wait in Tinki until the snow clears, and then send the horses back for our gear? Might we get separated from our gear and have to return to the States without it? Would our gear really get back to us if we did?* My mind went over and over the same questions, what if, but, and then, but then, or maybe...

My internal ruminations were interrupted by sounds coming into the hut from outside. Arilu and Gayle and their friends had gotten into a snowball fight. There was a lot of laughter and giggling going on. Eventually the Q'ero joined in. Arilu stuck her head in our hut to announce they were working on a 'snow toy.' After some thinking we realized she was talking about a snowman.

Many years later I was asking Américo for tips on how to run a good workshop. One of the things he told me was that when difficulties or problems arise it is important for the people running the workshop to model with their own behavior and energy how they want the group to respond to the situation.

Dinner arrived a while later in the form of delicious hot soup and bread. There was not a lot of it, but enough, delivered with the usual grace and efficiency and apologies that it wasn't a fancier meal. It was wonderful to have a warm meal in my stomach. I pulled aside the cloth hanging over the window opening and looked out. In the darkness I could see, through the falling snow, a lone alpaca standing quietly on the slope of the hillside above us, in that deep silence that comes with a snow fall. It is a scene that is still clear in my memory as I write this. I pulled out my sleeping bag, took off several layers of clothes, and slipped into it with a sigh.

Even though I was exhausted, and finally warm, sleep evaded me for a while. Inside my mind all of the various scenarios for the next day, and for then getting home, paraded around. I had reached that point in the trip where my focus had shifted from being in Peru to being on the way home. The whole time I was lying there I heard Américo and Javiar out in their tent (some tent disaster had led

them to sharing a tent.) They were setting each other off, laughing and laughing in great merriment. I slowly drifted off to sleep listening to their laughter.

The night was far from over for me. Twice I had to get up and go out to pee. This was only noteworthy for two reasons. The first was that it was such an ordeal. I had to get out of the warmth of my sleeping bag and hurriedly put on the least number of layers that I could get away with. That included putting on my very cold, wet, socks as my boots were soaked and I didn't want my dry socks to get wet. Then I had to tromp out in the snow, mud, and slush. The second was my discovery of something that glows in the dark. I had tromped out of the compound with shoe laces flying to get far enough away to relieve myself, and though I had my flashlight with me I didn't need it and wasn't using it. Much to my surprise I saw something glowing green in the icy slush. It was about the size of a marble. It looked like some sort of plant, and was buried about a half an inch under the ice. I turned on my flashlight to get a better look at it but could only see the reflection of my flashlight on the ice. I turned my flashlight back off and there it was again, glowing under the ice. I kicked at the spot with my heel but didn't get down far enough to reach whatever was causing the green glow. I assume it was a phosphorescent fungus or plant of some sort. Hmm. One of life's minor mysteries.

Later that night I awoke to a big headache, nausea, and a racing heart rate. Those are symptoms of altitude sickness. It had been a very arduous day at 17,000 feet. Before we left Tinki, Bob had given me an alka seltzer package in case I happened to get altitude sickness (he had heard that it helps). I tried that and then laid back down, still feeling rotten. I didn't know a lot about altitude sickness, but I knew that it can be fatal and that the only way to cure it is to get down to a lower altitude. I didn't know how serious my case was. My mind worked on this like a dog worrying a rag doll. I started thinking about the challenges of getting back down the mountain in a snowstorm. I would have to walk as we could not ride the horses. I wondered how high rescue helicopters can fly and if anyone could go get one, if it came to that. I wondered how far down the mountain I had to go to recover, and so on. Despite all of these worried ruminations, I was so exhausted that I did eventually manage to get back to sleep. In the morning Judy gave me some medication that her doctor had prescribed for altitude sickness and that helped.

The planned morning meditations and energy work were scrapped in favor of an early start for our trip back to Tinki. We had breakfast outside on a tarp spread out on the ground. It had stopped snowing during the night but it was very soggy, muddy, mushy, and slushy. With all my layers of clothing on I was not exactly cold, but in the pre-coffee morning I was not exactly warm enough either.

Before we left, however, something important came up that trumped both our meditations and our leaving early, don Manuel had asked if we would be willing to become godparents to one of his young daughters. The ceremony began soon after breakfast. It involved, among other things, our each cutting a snippet of her hair, and giving the family presents. We all rustled through our packs to see what we had to give, in addition to what money we had to offer. I gave them a Western cloth bandana, a backpacking clothes line with clothespins, and at Arilu's suggestion my large plastic ground cloth (which she said they would find useful).

In honor of the occasion, Manuel and his family gave us a feast, which was quite a sacrifice given their meager living at 15,000 feet. The feast consisted of boiled potatoes and roasted guinea pig. I knew that guinea pigs, living as household pets, were a source of meat in the Andes. It was an honor for don Manuel's family to share their limited food resources with us, and I wasn't going to say 'no thanks' to what they offered us. Besides, I wanted to be adventurous and fully experience being in Peru and give it a try. I want to inform you, guinea pig does not taste like chicken. It was hard for me to eat my whole serving, but I got it down.

All but two of the Q'ero had left early in the morning before we awoke to walk across the mountains to their villages. The previous night, don Pascual had given us a little ceremonial speech. He said he remembered us from our trip the previous year. He gave us a warm invitation to come to the Q'ero villages as his guests, saying how glad he was that we had for a while shared the same path. That morning don Pascual and don Bonito had hung around. I was delighted, as don Pascual and don Bonito were the two Q'ero I felt closest to. Don Pascual was a particularly good friend and guardian of

don Américo, who referred to Pascual as "The Merlin of the Andes." He was somewhere between 70 and 80 years old, and still jumped nimbly in and out of the back of pickup trucks, and walked days on end through the mountains to get to Cusco from his home in Q'ero. Don Bonito was notable to me for his ready and beautiful smiles. As I could only speak three phrases in Quechua, smiling was the main way I communicated with him. I was happy to spend some time with them in the morning. When they left to return to Q'ero, don Pascual gave me an affectionate little kiss goodbye on my neck (he was much shorter than me.) I was touched. After the good-byes don Pascual and don Bonito threw their cloth bundles over their shoulders and climbed up the hill on their way back to Q'ero, walking through the snow in their sandals.

Much later than we had originally planned, the rest of us headed down the mountain. Américo told us that the horses could carry our gear safely, but not us, and so we proceed on foot. As we crossed the creek rushing down from Apu Ausangate I stopped to select some quyas (sacred stones) for myself and for my friends back in Cedar City. Américo informed us that the creek was the headwater of the Paucartambo river, which flows past Salka Wasi on its way to the Amazon.

We hiked down the mountain valley for a couple of hours in a light rain, stopping twice to meditate and to connect again with the Apu. It felt good to be walking. My altitude sickness had gone and I felt healthy and very fit. The snow on the ground continued to diminish as we headed down, and eventually Américo told us that we could get on the horses. After crossing the cascading stream again, which was now quite a bit larger, we turned off the trail for a little ways and arrived at some hot springs! Most everyone stripped down to their underwear, or had brought swim suits, and they climbed gratefully into the hot water.

Now this was ironic! My wife Betsy has been so supportive of my spending time, money, and energy going to Peru to work with Américo, and I am extremely grateful. Before this trip she asked me to make a few promises that would help her feel more secure about my safety in Peru.

One of the promises she asked was that I not do any drugs while I was in Peru. There are three major shamanistic or mystical traditions in Peru. The tradition found on the coast of Peru uses San Pedro cactus for healing and religious divination. Along with many other alkaloids San Pedro contains mescaline. The tradition found in the jungles of Peru uses the entheogenic brew ayahuasca. The tradition of the high Andes, at least as I have experienced it, involves working directly with energy, without the assistance of plant medicine. Dividing the Peruvian traditions into only three categories, of course, erases many of the differences that can be found among the local traditions. There is also an amount of overlap where a paq'o might be trained in more than one tradition. I had never done drugs as part of my work with Américo but I had benefited from exploring psychedelics earlier in my life and I didn't want to rule it out. So, this was a promise from which I asked to be excused. It did not prove to be relevant.

She also asked that I not go swimming while in Peru. We had a friend who had recently returned from Mexico with some horrible bug that he picked up while swimming in a stream there. I quickly said yes to this request. I mean, what were the odds that I would have a chance to go swimming when I would never be below 11,000 feet in the Andes?

So here I was at a hot spring at about 13,000 feet with everyone having a great time relaxing in the hot water after all of the cold we had endured on the mountain. I really believed that hot springs were perfectly safe and that Betsy would probably agree and not mind me going swimming. But, a promise is a promise. I wanted to be impeccable and to honor my side of this beautiful dance with Betsy. Everyone seemed surprised that I didn't join in, and Américo invited me to join them a couple of times. I also didn't want to explain why I wasn't joining them, as that would come across as laying the responsibility on Betsy's shoulders. I had agreed to this, and it was completely my responsibility that I wasn't going swimming. So, I just kept saying "no thanks," and sat by the pool chatting with everyone.

After a nice break we got back on our horses and continued down the mountain. It began to

rain again. Then it started hailing, really hard, pummeling us painfully. We were on the wide, treeless slope slanting down from the peaks, and there was absolutely no shelter anywhere in sight. When the hail hit, our horses bolted and the four of us went racing down the slope, our horses dangerously out of control. We quickly left everyone far behind.

That ride was quite a challenge for me. I am larger than most Peruvians, and my stirrups were so small that I could only get about a half an inch of the toes of my boots into them. My boots kept slipping out and it was very hard to get them back into the stirrups while riding a horse charging down a mountain side. The worst of the hail storm passed and our horses slowed down. Ahead we could see the men who were waiting to collect the horses and take them back home. We turned the horse over to them and walked the rest of the way.

This was much more like it. We were tired and still a few miles away from Tinki, but it had stopped raining and hailing, the walking felt good after riding the horses, and our sense of adventure had returned. Here we were, the four of us, in one of the most remote places on the planet, having shared much together, having put so much into pursuing the path that our hearts have called upon us to travel, walking through the Andes of Peru. With the prospect of (relative) civilization ahead of us we began to speculate on what we would most wish Tinki could provide. For me it was a bar or a coffee shop. Of course it had neither.

After 45 minutes of walking we were more tired than excited as we approached a little, run-down village on the edge of the river valley overlooking Tinki. As we neared the scattering of houses a middle-aged man emerged from one of them and prepared to mount a horse. He was wearing red clothes, like a uniform but not a military uniform, more like what I imagine a Peruvian landowner might have worn fifty years earlier. He had a round face, short black hair, and a thin mustache. He turned towards us and saw us as we approached. His face became flushed and distorted with anger. He leapt upon his horse, gave out a shout as if he was riding into battle with a drawn saber, and charged down the road at us. The four of us jumped to the side of the road. It flashed through my mind that it would be Bob's and my duty to protect Gina and Judy.

The man, however, charged past us and disappeared down the road. We all turned and looked at each other with a "what the hell was that all about?" look, and then continued walking toward the village. As we entered the village a very drunk Andean man wove towards me with a bottle in his hand and offered me a drink and asked for money. I turned down both--which made him angry--and he shouted at me as we continued on. As we passed through the village some children began to yell insults at us from behind some low walls and a few tossed pebbles in our direction. That was all so weird, unlike anything I've encountered in Peru before or since, and our guardians were who-knows-where, left behind in the wake of our bolting horses. We ignored the children and did the equivalent of a cat's 30 mph nonchalant walk (where they hurry while looking as if they are not concerned). I was so exhausted that it was hard to pick up speed, or even think straight about how to get to Tinki. We conferred together and then turned down a dirt path that had a small stream flowing in the middle of it, leading down into the floor of the river valley. That took us to Tinki.

We made it to the hostel and wearily climbed up the stairs to our room. A nice warm bed to collapse upon! But first, I hung my wet clothes on the railing of the balcony to dry. Finally, I could lay down and rest, gather my 'wa' (harmony), and recover in safety and warmth. Gayle was there to greet us, he must have taken a more direct route to Tinki. Before he left on an errand he let us know that the bus would arrive as scheduled tomorrow morning.

It didn't take long, lying there comfortably in my bed, for my thoughts to turn to how nice it would be to have a glass of wine, a thought that when expressed was endorsed enthusiastically by Gina and Judy. I hadn't seen any signs of commercial enterprise in Tinki, just a row of adobe buildings about the size of small houses. When I offered to venture forth to see if I could find some wine, the women expressed their appreciation and sincere wishes for my success. I left the hostel and stood in the dirt road that is the main street through the town. I didn't know in which direction to turn, and I started walking up the road back towards Apu Ausangate.

After about 100 yards I approached five men sitting on crates in front of a small building. My recent experience had spooked me somewhat, and as I approached I considered whether this was safe. Then I saw that Américo and Javier were among them. As I approached, Américo waved for me to join them. They were sitting in a circle on overturned beer crates in front of the doorway to a general store. It was a small, one-room, store, with shelves stacked with a variety of items and an apparently bountiful supply of beer. Américo turned over a crate for me to sit on, poured some beer from a quart bottle he was holding into a paper cup, and handed it to me. Well, this was a great turn of events!

Everyone was in a jolly mood. Américo spoke to the others in Quechua and then turned to me and said that he had just told them what a great waiki (brother) I am. Then he said some very nice things to me as well, about what he thought about me. He also complemented our group, saying how impressed the people here were with our energy, and with the dedication to our path we exhibited by visiting Apu Ausangate before the rainy season was over. I tried to buy some more beer to contribute to the festivities but Américo wouldn't hear of it, and insisted in a most friendly way that he buy the next round as well. So I sat there very contently drinking my beer.

I thought...well... I could just finish this first cup of beer and then go report to Judy, Gina, and Bob. Before I did, however, Gina and Judy appeared, having gone out to find out what the heck had happened to me. Américo greeted them affectionately as well, poured them some beer, and gave us all a friendly toast.

It slowly got dark. The inside of the store was illuminated by a single oil lamp, its light flowed out the open door to where we were gathered outside. That, and the stars above were our only light. For all of my love and deep appreciation of mysticism; sitting there on an overturned beer crate, at night, outside that small store with its oil lamp, in an incredibly remote village high in the Andes, drinking beer with Américo and the locals, remains one of my all-time favorite memories of Peru.

Eventually, Gayle appeared and informed us that dinner was waiting back at the hostel. We all headed back, walking down the dark dirt, road side-by-side with our arms around each other's waists. At the hostel we had a very good and wholesome dinner of soup, rice, fish and potatoes and the four of us went upstairs to bed.

The next morning we heard that Américo had spent all of his money buying food for the villagers. It had begun when he bought some cookies for the children of his friends who were there. He didn't want to leave the other children out so he bought them some cookies as well. More and more people showed up and he didn't have the heart (or had too much heart) to stop buying various food supplies for them.

Arilu asked me if I had any pain medication for toothaches. Don Manuel, our host at Apu Ausangate, and who had accompanied us back to Tinki, had a very bad toothache. I wondered if that is why he declined the offer to drink with us at the store last night, and why he had been so quiet. I gave her the rest of my pain medication and explained how often it should be taken, but I worried about him. What happens when the medication is gone, how will he get relief?

My thoughts had definitely turned to getting home. We needed to reach Cusco that day if I was to catch my flight the next morning. The day after I returned to Cedar City there was an important faculty meeting for me to attend. That morning, when our bus had successfully navigated the very rough road leading out of Tinki and had reached the point where it was a nice, flat, wide dirt road, I gave off a big sigh of relief. It was time for me to be home.

It took us about seven hours to drive back to Cusco. That night Américo took us out to eat. It was a lovely and affectionate meal together. The next morning the four of us went out to have breakfast (my flight wasn't until 10:30.) We went to a restaurant on the Plaza de Armas that had tables on a balcony overlooking the square. I didn't like it. It is one of those places that catered to Americans and Europeans, with rock and roll music, and no flavor of Peru. As we sat out on the balcony I watched the army march into the square. They were there to provide security for the ceremonies that morning, it was Easter.



Later, Arilu came by in her VW Bug to take me to the airport, arriving at my hostel only a half an hour before my flight was scheduled to depart. Then much to my consternation she stopped for gas and to get air in the tires on the way to the airport. She informed me that Américo had plans to meet me there. When we arrived at the airport she marched me right to the front of the line at the ticket counter and got me my tickets..how does she do that?

I had my boarding pass. Still no Américo. Arilu and I shared hugs and presents. I said good-bye, and then I passed through the security gate into the ticketed passengers-only concourse. I walked down to the gate and got in line to board the plane. I looked up and there was Américo coming rapidly down the terminal accompanied by a security officer whom Américo introduced as his 'dear friend.' Américo gave me a hug and a quya from Ausangate, and I was off.

The person sitting next to me on the flight to Lima was named Jose. He spoke little English and I tried to carry on a conversation in Spanish, but I just couldn't. I didn't know enough Spanish, and I was tired, tired, tired. I broke into a cold sweat. I didn't want to cope with any more challenges. I just wanted to be left alone. Now that I was back in the domesticated world I realized just how exhausted I was from the trip.

At Lima I had a 12 hour layover. I felt in no condition to cope with going into the city so I decided to wait around at the airport. I had heard that there was a first class lounge that I could pay a small fee to use, and once inside I could relax in an area that was comfortable and safe. I found it and paid the entrance fee. It was a dimly lit room with no windows and no other customers. If I were a 'member' I would have gotten free booze, but I needed to pay as I was not. The staff treated me as a second class citizen. When some other customers finally came in, they looked down their noses at me and appeared to be talking about me quietly, with disparaging glances in my direction.

My flight to the U.S. was scheduled to leave at 1:00 AM. The airline's ticket counter had a sign saying that it was closed and would open at 5:00 PM. Finally, after *many* hours in the lounge, it was almost time to go check in. I arrived at the ticket counter at 4:45. At 5:10 the staff arrived. When I went to check-in they said that my flight had been canceled. They directed me to another airline that had a later flight.

So, I went to the other airline and they had a flight leaving about 3:30 A.M. It was fully booked but they expected some no-shows, so they put me on standby status. I really couldn't stand the idea of waiting around until 3:30 in the morning to find out if I could leave or not, so I asked if there was any way I could simply buy a real ticket. They said I couldn't.

There was nothing to do but wait some more. I went up the stairs to a snack bar that was located on a balcony overlooking the terminal, bought a burger and a shake, and just sat there for a couple more hours. The airport seemed particularly dirty that night. I reflected on the fact that I was in a dirty, dimly lit, third-world airport, thousands and thousands of miles away from home, and I just wanted to go home.

At 1:00 A.M. I decided to head on out to the gate. At about 2:00 the staff showed up. I approached them and asked them about my standby status and they informed me that I had a reserved seat, I never had been on standby. At 3:30 the plane took off, accompanied by a loud bang that I worried meant that we would have to turn around and land, but we didn't. Some of the others on the plane must have been in a similar strait to mine, for as the wheels left the ground the passengers broke into applause. About fourteen hours later, with almost no sleep, I arrived home.

I have a couple of photographs of me from the day I got back. Both were taken in my backyard, one of Betsy and me, and the other of me and my young sons. Américo had said, a few days into both of my trips to Peru, that my face had changed to look like the face of an angel. After returning home from this trip, other people commented on the 'softness' of my expression. This soft appearance slowly wore off as I re-emerged into the domesticated demands of my normal life. In looking at my face in those two photographs, I do look like an angel...one who has gone through a wringer.