

# Gratitude



## Article by Ralph Miller

It is with overwhelming gratitude that I want to announce the end of the Heart of the Initiate workshops. I want to try to express the depth of my appreciation and thanks to those that have joined us in this project. I will do that with words and memories from my heart. But I want to first talk about what gratitude has come to mean for me.

Gratitude for many people has been reduced to utter crassness as we all hear the phrase, "Thanks and have a nice day", uttered many times every week of our lives.

Gratitude seems to be inherently coupled with a distinct insincerity. This insincerity is so pronounced that the words 'thank you' no longer carry any meaning. The polite 'thank yous' that we all utter are in most cases, automatic and obligatory. It is so easy for us to say 'thank you' without even thinking or feeling. When we hear a quick thank you, at times we sense insincerity on the part of others who say the words to us. The insincerity towards us reminds us of the insincere 'thank yous' that we mouth ourselves.

For me, I knew it would be impossible to write about gratitude without recalling what I consider to be my one true lesson about gratitude. It was brought to me one night in Colombia.

## Big Healing

I was with a few friends and many of the Southern Colombians I had just met in a very strong traditional ceremony with ayahuasca. This was the occasion when I first met my dear brother Warinei, our shaman in the Heart of the Initiate workshops for these past 5 years.

During the ceremony I had a vision that terrified me. I found myself in a very dark place of my own shadow. This was a part of me that lay just underneath the surface of my psyche and rarely appeared in the light of day. It was a part of me that was completely callous to others. It was the part of me that was rude and intolerant. It was a sort of disgust with everything and everyone. It was the part of me that would curse someone who inadvertently stepped in front of me while waiting for a cashier in a shop. It was my insincerity magnified a thousand-fold. The feeling was gaining intensity in me at a fever pitch. I felt myself losing any control to stop it.

I became the devil. I was somehow trapped on the other side ... frozen beyond my own life and unable to return. In that place I resented everything and everyone ... all turned outwards ... blame and resentment towards everything outside of me. The feeling of regret, loneliness and frustration was overwhelming.

In the vision I saw faces of family members and loved ones appear before me and in each case, I felt nothing. Only disdain and selfishness towards each person rose up within my gut. I was scared to death. But there was also a rising tsunami of anger and resentment within me. Even the faces of my wife and children could elicit nothing but defensive anger and scorn. I couldn't control it. It was as if I had descended into a hellish place where all love

and compassion had disappeared. The misery that I felt to the core of my soul was unbearable. Nothing offered a way out.

After quite some time I had become exhausted and desperate, and from deep within me there was a cry for help. I felt the wall of darkness all around me and was desperate to escape, but I couldn't do it on my own.

I remember mouthing the words ... "Help me."

It felt like a scream but the words were barely audible. As soon as I said the words a face began to emerge in front of me. I saw compassionate eyes first that I could not identify. The eyes were alive and beautiful beyond description! Slowly I began to recognize my wife Anna's loving eyes. She appeared to be searching; looking for something.

In desperation I was saying to her, "I'm right here. I'm right in front of you."

Suddenly I saw a 'there-you-are' look in Anna's eyes ... she saw me. She had found me!

It is hard to describe the feeling that overcame me in that instant. It was as if she had reached down into hell, grabbed my soul and brought me straight out. My eyes flooded with tears and my breathing was hitching uncontrollably. My heart burst wide open. The depth of gratitude I felt in that moment is something that I will remember for the rest of my life. The purity of the gratitude I felt in that moment was linked to the 'truth' of it.

Anna was not actually there with me on this trip to Colombia, but thank god she had come to me in the vision! I remember my friend Lonnie coming out into the garden where I was to check on me.

I pleaded with Lonnie with tears clouding my vision, "Lonnie, tell me it's going to be OK."

Lonnie replied matter-of-factly, "Ralph, it's going to be OK."

I asked him to repeat himself, "Tell me again it's going to be OK."

Again he said, "Ralph, it's going to be OK."

### **Your Heart Remembers Forever**

Living authentically is living in a way where you are habitually truthful not only in your outer-actions but in your inner-attitudes and feelings. This experience was a great lesson for me about sincerity. It was a great healing. I resolved myself to not pretend anymore. I resolved to be genuinely grateful for everything in my life after that experience. I reached my arms to the sky and I said, "Thank you!"

***"Gratitude is the memory of the heart."***

The words of this often repeated simple quotation from Jean-Baptiste Massieu who was an 18th century bishop of the Northern French province of Oise, coalesce into the most profound description of true gratitude that I have ever read. Even when all of the memories of a person or event in your life have faded, you are still left with the tracks of that memory in your heart. They surpass even the negative memories we have about someone we never really liked. It is the reason that at the end of your life you have a deep gratitude even for those who hurt you.

Memories of the heart can never be erased. You carry these memories with you forever. Heart-memories form an aspect of your karma. They carry you into eternity.

## Tribe

When I made my first trip to Colombia, I had envisioned the possibility of a shaman with a humble spirit and a good heart. I was searching for a shaman based on the remote (in my mind) possibility that such a person could exist. I not only encountered such a gifted shaman but a dear friend as well. Warinei has the bear as his animal 'teacher' and so do I, so I think we have a connection on many levels. Over the years we have become good friends and I know his children and his sweet wife Margarita quite well. I know that I will continue this friendship with my bear-brother for a long time to come. I am fortunate to know Warinei and my world is brighter because of him.



There can be no words to describe the feelings that you carry in your heart for those who labor with you side-by-side over the years. The best thing about these past years is that my family has grown. Peter has lived with Anna and I for around 7 years now and he will always be a part of our life. Anna refers to Peter as her brother and I refer to him as my brother-in-law.

My heart is forever bound to all those who worked in our workshop in Brazil including Jean, Sandra, Michelle, Fiona and for every one of many others who have helped us in the past. For each and every one of them I have so much gratitude in my heart for you. I feel to my core that our work will carry on in some other way as we move forward from this transition. Sara Ñusta I have always referred to as my big sister or *hermana major* because I have never known a young woman of so much wisdom and grace. Catalina welcomed me into her home the very first time that I visited Colombia and it has been such a joy to work with her again this past year.

The courage and strength of character of each workshop participant that has joined us over the years exemplifies the true nature of the initiate ... the heart of the explorer. The collective intentions of humankind in this age are stretching out and evolving in a way that is unprecedented. What I feel in this moment is a combination of cautious optimism for the future and deep gratitude for all that has past.

With tears in my eyes I am thankful for each of you who have supported us by attending our workshops. I am equally thankful for those who have visited us on our website. We are all one unique tribe and nothing will ever change that.

## Medicine for the Soul

Ayahuasca is a combination of two plants, caapi and chacruna. There are in excess of 100,000 identified plant species in the Amazon. The process of MAO (mono-amine oxidase) inhibition, which allows the transcendental human neurotransmitter DMT (dimethyl tryptamine) to pass the blood brain barrier was only discovered by Western science in 1952. The story goes that when indigenous shamans were asked the source of their knowledge millennia ago, in preparing the ayahuasca plant medicine, how they could select just two plants that would work together in this unique way, they answered saying that 'the plants told them how.'

Our world is a unique and wonderful place because it in fact contains this special medicine. For me, it seems quite plausible that ayahuasca might never have existed in the first place. The fact that it does exist is comparable in every way to any 'magical' technology or property uncovered by science through the centuries. Nanotechnology, magnetism and electricity harnessed by Western science in no way surpass the magic of this special plant medicine.

At this point we are only beginners embarking on a journey of the evolution of our consciousness that is in perfect symbiosis with a dynamic connection to nature Herself. What is certain is that we have only begun to experience her gifts.

### **End of a Cycle**

My wife Anna and I began the Heart of the Initiate project over Valentine's Day weekend with a small workshop in Colorado exactly 9 years ago today. As I said, we are now ending and closing the Heart of the Initiate workshops.

I realize that we recently announced that we would be conducting a scaled down schedule of workshops during 2010. But after more consideration we have made the decision to end the program now. We have consulted with our staff and our shaman Warinei Wanare about the current dynamic in the collective human consciousness and in the consciousness of nature Herself. This very special medicine is now in the process of an evolution towards a new sacredness of this ancient ceremony.

We respect with great admiration the many experienced shamans across the planet who are now advancing very humble and traditional ceremonies with this sacred medicine. But there are also many neophyte Western guru-teacher-type individuals that are beginning to attempt to define the ayahuasca consciousness and force it into their own concocted ceremonies.

There has been a significant change of energy in the collective mind and consciousness of many people, which is a reflection of a waking-up process that is occurring. Many people are becoming more and more sensitive to fake charlatans masquerading as teachers, shamans and gurus. This is a stressful and sensitive time for all of us.

### **Sacred Alchemy**

Heart of the Initiate workshops in Brazil were anchored in the firm belief that because the Brazilian government endorsed the use of ayahuasca there was a liberty and acceptance of the ceremony that was unique to this country. Our commitment to Brazil was further advanced in working very deliberately over the past few years to secure permanent visas and work permits to conduct this unique program. We did that. The guidelines of the Brazilian government further recommend that these ceremonies should not be offered directly for commercial profit. To that end, we have also been working for the past few years to structure our work under the auspices of a non-profit organization for the preservation of the traditional shamanic ceremony with ayahuasca. There is a need for research and careful progress as the ayahuasca plant-consciousness advances.

We have used three different very special eco-resorts, which have all been near the beautiful beaches of Bahia. As we thought of the people who would be coming to our workshops, we realized early on that a new context had to be created. The plant works her

best when new people are in a safe, beautiful and secure setting. The ceremonies were offered in an atmosphere of support, comfort and security for our participants. In most cases many participants were not only coming to Brazil for the very first time in their lives, but also having their very first experiences with ayahuasca. Given in this context, the Heart of the Initiate workshop presented a unique alchemy that allowed over 1,000 people from 55 countries to experience Brazil and ayahuasca, her most sacred tradition.

Our ayahuasca ceremonies for several years now, have been conducted by Warinei Wanare and his assistant Sara Ñusta. We have increasingly seen the vital importance of offering these ceremonies in accordance with the oldest and most sacred traditions passed forward from elder-teacher to student. I met Warinei 5 years ago after an extraordinary synchronicity that led me to the South of Colombia in search of an authentic shaman.

Warinei started his teachings with ayahuasca in 1996 with a grandfather shaman of the Inga community of Colombia in the Southern Amazonian region of the Putumayo River. His apprenticeship continued there for 6 years. In 2003 he continued his shamanic training with a yopo medicine man of the Sikuni community and made frequent visits to their community, in the eastern Orinoquia River region of Colombia. He received his sacred name from his teacher, Kasulú who gave him the sacred name of Warinei Wanare, meaning '*star from which come forth the warm and cold crystals with which it is possible to make healings.*'

While we have had several people who have expressed their interest and support for the evolution of the project, the progress towards transferring Heart of the Initiate to a non-profit structure has been difficult to accomplish. I remain steadfastly interested in a non-profit research organization to preserve sacred shamanic traditions and to accomplish ongoing study of the plant medicine itself.

### The Ouroboros



The ancient alchemic symbol of the snake that is swallowing its own tail is called the *Ouroboros*. This symbol represents the cycles that are in our life as individuals and as a community. Our lives are marked by the passing of cycles ... just as the sun sets and rises every day. Warinei explained to me that when any cycle ends, before the beginning of a new cycle there is a time in between that doesn't belong to the last cycle or the next cycle.

Since this past September Anna and I have been in such a transition-space between a cycle of the past and a new cycle yet to come. I was shown that there was a closing or ending of a cycle in my life that was connected to the work we have done these past 9 years. I spoke to the group I was with in Brazil about this in September.

I saw clearly that this 'closing' heralded a new beginning. I see clearly now that this is the beginning and I feel no loss. I only feel great hope, great adventure and the great opportunity that lies just ahead!

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