

The author at Pachakamaq Temple, Lima.

Andean Shamanism through Wiccan Eyes

Article and photographs by Michele Fontaine

The Q'ero Indians of the Andean highlands practice a form of shamanism that greatly appeals to me as a Wiccan priestess. Besides its similarities to Wicca in some of the tools and practices used, Q'ero shamanism is critically useful on both a personal and a planetary level. *Ayni* (reciprocity) is key to the Q'ero belief system, and sharing their wisdom with the outside world is an integral part of their spiritual practice. *Yanantin* (harmonious relationship between different things) is another important Andean concept. The Q'ero provide viable ways for people to work together in harmony while appreciating and maintaining their diversity. This article will present some of their methods.

Before I took my initiatory journey to the Andes, Peru had been haunting me like a mysterious and tantalizing lover for many years—it seemed slippery, shadowy, and just out of reach. Our first encounter was in college where, in an extremely depressed state during my junior year of pre-med studies, I took a life-altering course in Peruvian art. The archetypes and images that flooded my being in that class took root and flowered among the painful shards and weeds of my shadowy recesses. I began tracing the images, painting and reproducing them endlessly. Infused with and fed by these ancient symbols, I was healed and restored to the point that I was able to complete my degree in biology.

It wasn't my time to journey to Peru, however, until after my fortieth birthday. While searching for the most transformative

and spiritual journey available, I found Elizabeth Jenkin's book *Initiation: A Woman's Spiritual Adventure in the Heart of the Andes*, and I discovered that Elizabeth has been leading small groups of seekers to work with the Q'ero in Peru for ten years through her organization, the Wiraqocha Foundation.¹

Through Elizabeth, I met my teacher, Juan Núñez del Prado, who is a professor emeritus at San Antonio Abad University in Cusco, a disciple of don Benito Qoriwaman (a renowned Andean priest), and an expert in Jungian psychology. His father, Oscar Núñez del Prado, led the first anthropological expedition to Q'ero in 1955, after "discovering" these descendants of the Inka in 1949. Joining Juan on the initiation journey that I participated in was another *kuraq akulleq*, or fourth-level priest, Juan Hector Murrillo, who answers to Juanito (to distinguish him from Juan Núñez del Prado). In addition, Juan's son, Ivan, assisted at some of the rituals we performed.

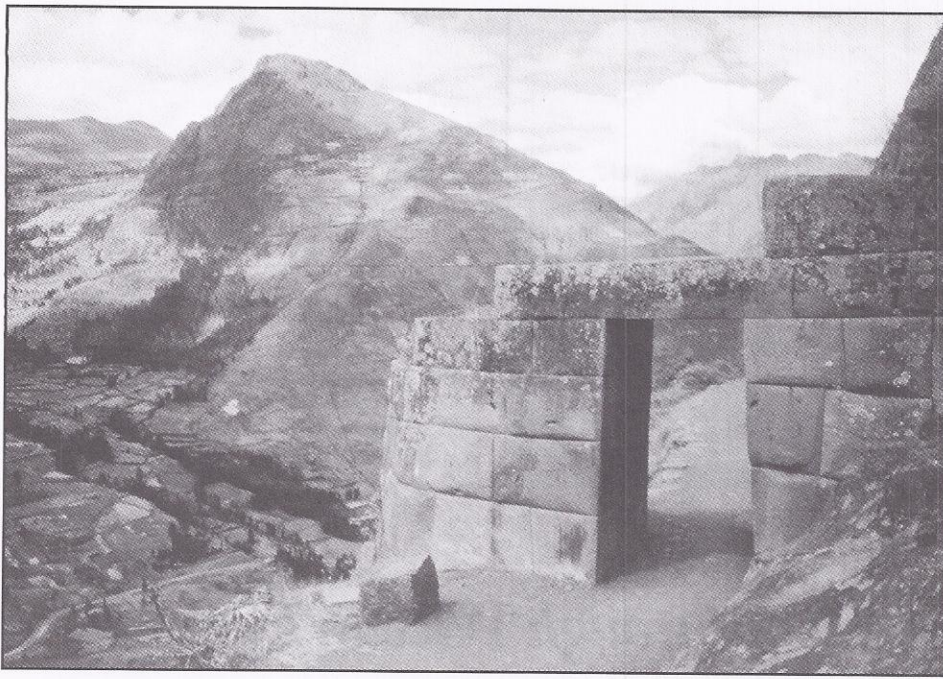
The Q'ero belief system is a syncretism of ancient shamanic principles and a form of sixteenth-century Catholicism, which the current-day Vatican would consider heretical.² Juan refers to the Q'ero as mystics rather than shamans, but I have witnessed elements of both types of system during my work with Andean spirituality.³ There is no concept of "good" or "evil" energy in the Andean system—only light, refined energy and its opposite, heavy energy. Andean priests shamanically relieve clients of their heavy energy, or *hucha*, sometimes with the aid of special tools, and at other times

through the use of their own energy bodies, or *poqpo*. Additionally, Andean priests practice divination with the stars and gain esoteric and healing knowledge through meditative connection with the *apus* (mountain spirits) and the inhabitants of *Hanaq Pacha* (the heavens). Thus, both mysticism and shamanism coexist in the practice of the Andean priest.

It is also important to note that there are many more Andean priests than just the Q'ero. Don Benito, Juan's teacher, is from the lineage of Huaskar Inka, from the Cusco Valley. His knowledge derives from the last Inka (prior to the conquest), while the Q'ero lineage comes from the first Inka, Inkari. According to Joan Parisi Wilcox, who has studied the Q'ero extensively: "They call themselves grandsons of Inkari, the mythical first Inka who founded the Tawantinsuyu, the Inka empire, and who bequeathed to the Q'ero the mystical tradition."

Mesa Work in Cusco

On the first day of my work in Cusco, at the start of our ten-day *Hatun Karpay* (Great Initiation), our group of North American *paqos* (initiates) hiked with both Juans to the altar of Illiapata, a sacred Inka site in the hills, far above the jaguar-toothed temple of Sacsayhuaman. We stopped at a flat clearing where many fires had obviously been lit in the past. A stone altar stood in a V-shaped crevice between two sheer rock walls. This was the altar of the *ñust'as*, or princesses, who connect the site to the twelve *apus* in the Cusco area. The ritual began



The ancient Inca gateway to Pisac.

with each of us blowing on a *k'intu* (a fan of three coca leaves) to honor and connect with the *apus*. Both men then blew sharply on their *mesas* (medicine bundles) in three directions, and Juan approached me.

The shaman pressed his small *mesa*, a brilliantly colored woven bundle of folded cloth, to my heart. As he recited a Quechua prayer, he snapped it away in the direction of the crude rock altar twenty feet away. A dozen fine, gold threads now energetically connected me to the sacred stone. Juanito then did the same with his *mesa*, spinning a single silver thread from my heart to the same altar. On just the first day of my Peruvian shamanic quest, two Andean priests had lassoed me energetically to an ancient altar, using a small, folded bundle of cloth as a tool. This was beyond cool. I had tried hard for years to see the luminous blue lines that I drew with my *athame* (ritual knife) as I cast circle after Wiccan circle, with no luck. Now at an old ceremonial site above Cusco, I saw the light—and it was silver and gold.

Tethered by the heart with cords of silver and gold, I stammered: "Do the colors of these fibers have any significance?" "Yes! The colors of the cords are very significant!" Juan beamed, adding, "There are two paths an Andean priest can follow. The first is the right-hand path, which is mystical, masculine, and more linear. The color associated with this path is gold. The left-hand path is that of the intuitive, more feminine shamanic healer, and its color is silver." I felt lucky to have the good fortune of working with a teacher from both paths.

Later, reviewing my journal notes of my

experiences that day, I would be duly impressed by how the Q'ero shamans use their *mesas* to take on and transform a client's *hucha* and then send *sami* (light, refined energy) back to the person. Numerous times in my initiation, a *mesa* or just a single *cuya* (sacred object) would be used to absorb and transmute my *hucha*, and then send me the transformed *sami*. Additionally, the Q'ero use their *mesas* to send *sami* that they channel from *Hanaq Pacha* or *Pachamama* (Mother Earth).

The simplicity and portability of the *mesa*, which functioned as both chalice and altar, intrigued me. I was eager to incorporate this new tool into my own ritual work. Later that day, I traveled to a Q'ero market to buy my own *mesa*, so that I could charge it with energy from the sacred sites I would visit and the rituals I would participate in.

At the market, a group of Q'eros sat cross-legged behind their wares. I was drawn to the fiercely bright eyes and the simple fabric of one particular man. The tiny hawk-nosed man in a red alpaca poncho opened an origami-like package of woven wool before me. "Ausangate," he pronounced with emphatic nodding, as he pointed to a butter-scotch-colored crystal lying on the unfolded square. Next to the crystal were three dried fuchsia-colored flower petals and three tiny and perfect coca leaves. The *mesa* I had chosen was charged with the spirit of Ausangate, the *apu* of the highest peak in the Cusco area.

A *mesa* contains a representation of each direction, as does a Wiccan altar. Additionally, it contains power objects from sacred

sites and energetically charged gifts from one's teachers. I received several *cuyas*—tiny ceramic tiles with symbols etched into them—at the completion of various stages of my *Hatun Karpay*. Later, I added other *cuyas*—small stones—from the power places that I worked with, such as the Wiraqocha Temple (the Inca coronation temple) and the *Willkañust'a* (Urubamba River), which spiritually connects all sacred sites in Peru.

Perfect Harmony in Pisac

"*Yanantin* is harmony between two different things. *Masintin* is harmony between two similar things," Juan explained patiently, as we began another hike the next day with a group of ten other initiates. As always, Juan was dressed in a very modern fashion, with jeans and a casual button-down shirt. His only ethno-eccentricity was a conical felt hat that he always wore, which became particularly useful as a face covering when he was napping.

"A perfect instance of harmony between two different things is called *japu* (ha'-poo)," added Ivan. With his thoroughly modern cellular phone, baseball cap, and Miami Dolphins T-shirt, Ivan didn't fit my image of an Andean mystic. "A perfect instance of harmony between two similar things is called *ranti*."

The rich diversity of energetic expression in the Quechua language was impressive; there seemed to be as many linguistic nuances of harmony and energetic relationship in the Andean mystical world as there are Eskimo words for snow. But I was bothered by a revelation: Here was knowledge that seemed to fit the dire need of our planet, and yet this was the first I'd heard of it. Fortunately, this information is finally becoming more widely known. As voiced by don Manuel Q'espi, the head Q'ero priest: "We have always been open with our knowledge. Before now, no one cared!"

According to Juan, Andean prophecy states that the years from 1993 through 2000 have been the "Age of Meeting Ourselves," or *Taripay Pacha*. This has been a critical window of time in which humans have had an opportunity to experience a great evolution of consciousness. It has been a time when, if we have been evolved enough to "get it," we could learn how to work with each other's diversity and live in harmony with each other. According to the prophecy, the following years, from 2001 to 2012, may be of even greater importance, as this new knowledge could actually be put to use, creating a "Heaven on Earth."⁴

Our hike continued up to the ancient village of Pisac (Inca Pisac),⁵ which contains a series of temples hundreds of feet up a

mountain peak overlooking both the Urubamba River and the more well-known colonial Pisac village far below, which has a popular weekend market. After about a half-hour of strenuous trekking, our group reached a tubelike cave. As we ducked through the narrow tunnel, Juan instructed us to absorb *Pachamama's* energy and "taste" the Earth's vibration. Inside the cave, I drank in the peaceful energy of the womblike channel, and then I emerged, blinking in the bright sunlight like a newborn.

Continuing along the trail, I rounded a bend, where Juan motioned me to stop. To my left was a sheer cliff, providing a dramatic view of five prominent mountains on the distant Andean ridge. To my right were five niches in a rocky outcropping, like picture frames set into a wall. Juan instructed us to step up to each niche, poke our faces into it for a good "taste" of its energy, and then move on to the next. As a Wiccan, I'd previously connected with plants and trees to experience their energetic flavor, but I'd never "tasted" a mountain, and I'd never made a connection with any being through a mirror of an energetic template, as with the niches.

At the first niche, an almost menacing swarming sensation tore around my head. I felt as if I'd stuck my face into a hornets' nest. Quickly retreating and moving on to the second niche, I felt an energy that was silvery and much lighter than the first. At each of the next three, I received only a word: "stars," "sand," and "black," respectively. When we had finished "tasting" the niches, we stood with our backs to them at the edge of the ledge and faced the five mountains that they represented.

Juan explained that the five niches mirroring the five mountains were an example of *ranti*. He also told us that the first mountain was the only female peak of the five. To my chagrin, I realized that, in addition to having difficulty with human feminine energy, I had a problem with female *apu* energy!

After another half-hour of fairly strenuous climbing, we were greeted by a stone archway through which the trail continued. "Notice how the Inkas followed the natural flow of the rock and built in harmony with it," Juan instructed. He pointed to a low wall built with perfect Inka stonework, blending with the natural rise of rock. It ended at the archway. "This follows a *seqe* (energy line) that crosses this portal," he said, as his finger traced the energetic path. One by one, we stepped through the gateway and, to our surprise, we could now clearly hear full sentences spoken in the town far below, where prior to crossing the portal,



The Yanantin Temple of Pisac.

we could only hear vague, muffled noises. "Feel the change of energy in your *qosqo*, or spiritual stomach," Juan instructed us, as he patted his belly. I felt surrounded by a palpable and very clear energy field.

Our dusty steps finally stopped at an overlook at the end of the trail. Below us was a phenomenal site: a village of ancient, finely wrought temples. When we descended to the town, the women in our group were instructed to enter a temple to our left and connect with its feminine energy. The men were told to connect similarly with a masculine temple to the right. Between the two lay a third structure, where we would all gather and create *yanantin* with our two divergent energies (male and female).

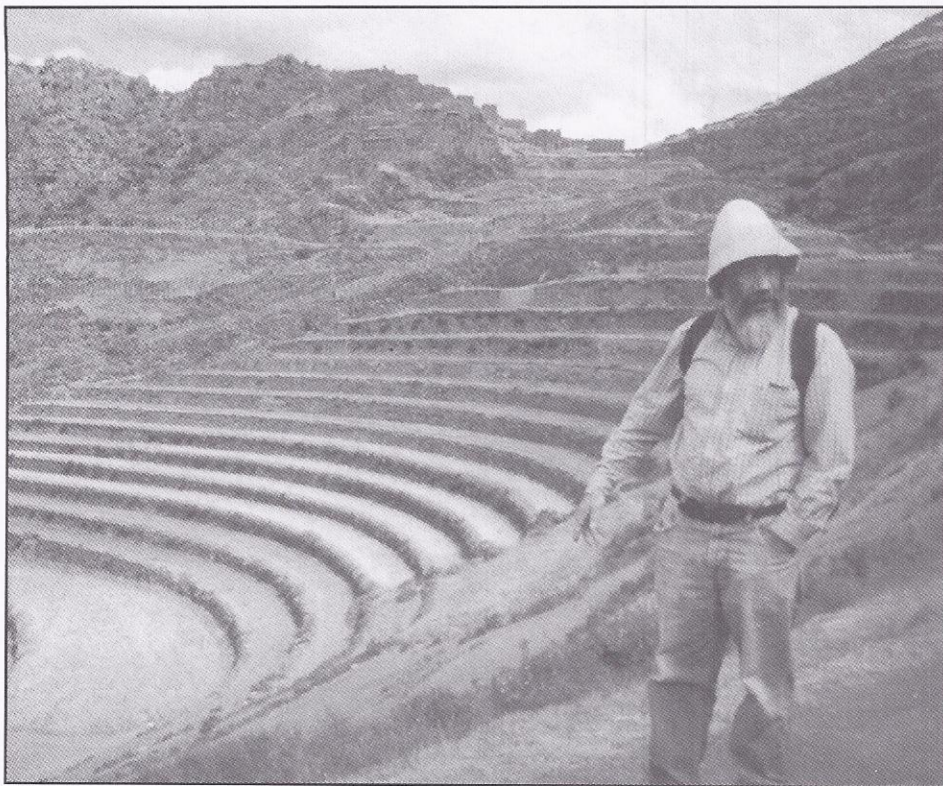
Some of the women faced the walls and quietly connected with the female temple, while others joined hands in a circle in the center. Giggles soon erupted, as we felt bubbly and girlish from the powerful energy of the place. As we peaked in a giddy yin high, we heard Juan's voice beckoning us from outside. Proceeding to the Yanantin Temple, we women linked arms with the men, creating a circle, and Juan instructed

us to each send our energy to the person on our right and receive energy from the person to our left.

I closed my eyes and began the exercise. As I sent and received, sent and received, I began to perceive a distinct flowing and harmonizing of the swirling energy. In my mind's eye, I saw a circle of bright white comets burning with our yin/yang essence, each comet ending in a little black tail. I felt a cone of energy begin to rise in the center of the circle. As the cone became a powerful vortex of the group's blended chi, it simultaneously rose to the sky and pierced down into the Earth.

In my Wiccan circles, I'd created "cones of power" many times by raising energy through drumming or chanting. In that setting, a High Priestess or Priest usually directs the cone towards an agreed-upon healing purpose at its energetic peak. However, until that day, I'd never seen the cone, and I'd never heard it described in the Wiccan world as a double cone—both rising and descending at the same time.

I drank in the heady and satisfying swirl for several minutes. "Enough," Juan said



Juan Núñez del Prado at Tipon.

gently, and the whirlwind subsided. The inner peace remained for some time, however, as I gazed into the smiling baby faces of the other initiates.

Several days later, in the hot springs of Aguas Calientes, our group raised another cone of energy, which I directed to an ailing member of our troupe. Although neither Juan nor I had mentioned directing the cone, as it reached its peak intensity, I made an executive decision to direct its healing energy to the girl. Under a full moon, in a waist-deep hot spring, by the shadow of *Waqay Willka* (a female glacial mountain), I sensed that directing the healing energy was a natural fulfillment of the Goddess's wishes.

Later, expecting to be reprimanded, I sheepishly explained to the gathering that I had sent our energetic efforts to help our friend. In most Wiccan traditions, you are supposed to get the permission of a person prior to sending him or her healing energy; cancer and death might be just the teacher that a person needs, and depriving him or her of that choice is considered almost unethical. This certainly wasn't the case in the Andes, however, where eating *hucha* and sending *sami* are viewed as the ethical prerogative of the more enlightened party. In fact, acts of healing are considered obligations on the part of Q'ero healers. Even though ethics hadn't been discussed in our group, nobody had a problem with my energetic appropriation, and everyone was

happy when the girl appeared much better the following day.

Water Rituals and Despachos

The following day's journey would teach me about the *despacho*—yet another intriguing tool of the Q'ero. I'd witnessed Andean shamans using the *mesa* to channel and transform energy as Wiccans (and Christians) do with the chalice. Now, I would witness a gathering of Q'ero shamans creating a device for transmitting and linking energy—not unlike a Wiccan wand. As I watched the masterful precision that went into the construction of this tool, I could see that a *despacho* was also an ephemeral work of art, much like a Tibetan mandala or a Navajo sand painting.

I joined the other North American *paqos*, and we boarded a bus with six of the Q'eros who had sold us our beginner's *mesas* on the first day. The two-hour ride from Cusco brought us to an ancient water ritual temple called Tipon, which was a live archaeological site. After climbing several terraces, we assembled at the back wall of an amphitheaterlike plateau and gazed at three door-sized niches. Juan explained that the niches represented the young girl, the maiden, and the mother (water being the feminine domain, while mountains were mostly masculine in the Andean spiritual system).

Once again, we would "taste" their energy. As I poked my head into the young

girl's niche, I felt a sunny, bubbly, innocent joy for life. The maiden was about sensual blossoming, while the mother was about the joy and satisfaction of creativity and manifestation.

Shortly thereafter, we connected with the crone (old woman) and sage (old man), in a different way. Stepping down several terraces and facing outward from a double fountain, we were told that the crone or grandmother (*paya ñust'a*) was present in the twin fountain and that the sage was present in one of the closest mountains before us. Juan instructed us to call in the crone and then the sage in any way we liked. Since we had a quiet group, which hadn't shown much interest in my Wiccan insights into the work we'd been doing, I decided to invoke them in my own silent way. At *Samhain* (Halloween), when the veils between the worlds are thin, Wiccans invoke the spirits of their grandparents with the following song, which I now sang silently:

Oh grandmother, oh grandmother, come to the circle and dance with me!

Oh grandmother, oh grandmother, come to the circle and dance.

Oh grandfather, oh grandfather, come to the circle and dance with me!

Oh grandfather, oh grandfather, come to the circle and dance.

As I drifted into a light trance, I could feel two snakes floating toward me from the fountain behind and from the distant peak. The female snake started spinning counterclockwise and the male clockwise, with no particular color to them. Twining together, they formed a caduceus.

When the invocation and meditation were complete, Juan ushered us into a nearby temple, where the Q'ero performed their *despacho* ceremony. Handing each of us North American *paqos* a *k'intu*, the lead shaman urged us to invite our local *apus* to the temple. After working with foreign mountain spirits for a week, it was a joy to invite the loving, green mother-spirit of my local *apu* Tamalpais from northern California. Juan was surprisingly familiar with many of the North American *apus*, perhaps because he frequently travels and teaches in the United States.

The lead Q'ero shaman then created a beautiful circle of our *k'intus* around a scallop shell (symbolizing the feminine) that held a tiny cross (symbolizing the masculine); the shell and cross functioned as the base of the *despacho*. He then added red carnation petals, sugar, and candies for the feminine spirits; and white carnation petals, crackers, and rice for the masculine spirits. Topping off the package were a llama fetus, a ball of cotton, some llama wool, and

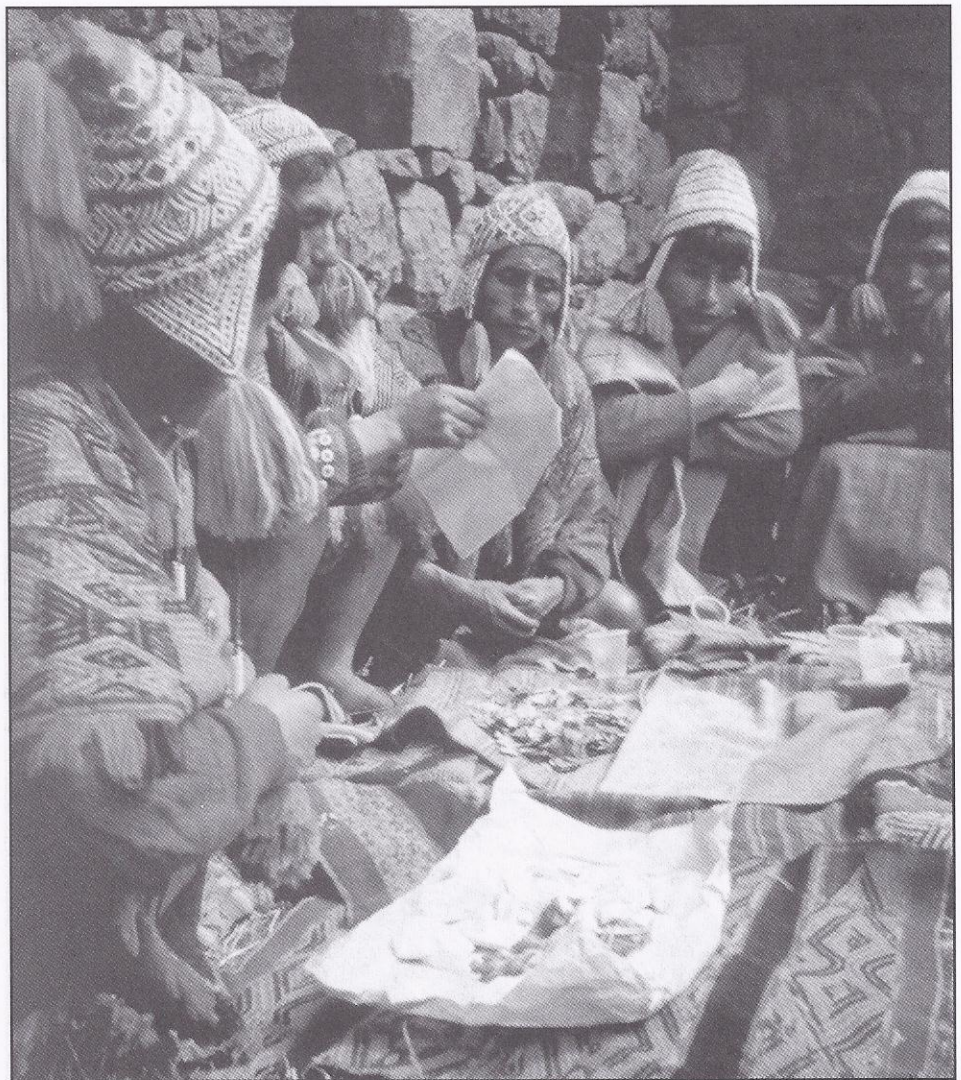
splashes of both a Chilean cabernet for the feminine spirits and some *pisco* (a clear brandy) for the masculine spirits. We each drank a toast of each beverage and poured a little on the ground for *Pachamama*, as the shaman added this final embellishment. Carefully folding the white paper around the hefty *despacho* bundle, he wrapped it tightly with white and gold yarn. Then, he refolded all the tiny packages of *despacho* ingredients (*recados*) that he'd bought at a market earlier that day. With the sacred bundle finished, the North American initiates left the temple, and the shamans burnt the *despacho* to distribute the offerings to all the *apus* we'd invoked, both near and far.

We hiked down a few more terraces, and then Juan stopped us at an alcove that was being reconstructed by some local archaeologists. Within the alcove, there were two stone thrones facing each other with an altar between them. "What do you suppose this could be?" Juan quizzed us, pointing to the altar, which had a groove down the middle through which water obviously had once flowed. "A *tinkuy*!" I beamed, "an altar where *yanantin* happens." This was a hallowed spot, where we novices would get a taste of the sixth level of initiation—a level formerly reserved for the kings and queens of the Inka.

We were told that our connection with this level would provide us with a sort of spiritual ladder, upon which we could climb beyond our current level, if this was to be our destiny. "At this spot, you will become part of the Inka lineage—not by birth, but by privilege," Juan explained in reverent tones. After pausing pensively for a moment, he continued, "Because the Conquistadors irreparably destroyed not only most of the indigenous population, but also the structure of Inka community and leadership, the next Inka ruler may not necessarily be of Andean descent." According to the Q'ero, after many devastating massacres, the survivors were forced to reconsider the historical tradition of blood lineage. As a result, they began to place more emphasis on the importance of spiritual lineage and the creation of a spiritual family (*allyu*), which is much more appropriate for these times. The Q'ero are now reaching out to the rest of the world to build this new global community and a more enlightened leadership together.

I took a deep breath and approached the throne of the *Inka* (king). As soon as I sat on the cold stone, a swirling golden snake appeared in my mind's eye, twirling clockwise. Then, when I switched to the throne of the *Qollo* (queen), a silver snake appeared, twisting in a counterclockwise direction.

Approaching the *yanantin* altar, I rested



Q'ero shamans prepare a *despacho* for a ritual at Tipon.

the palms of my hands on it and immediately saw the silver and gold snakes writhe together, forming another caduceus. This time, the energy swirled up and out through the top of my head, bursting forth in a fountain of light. "So, this is a glimpse of the sixth level," I mused, with a smile on my face. Stepping out of the alcove, past the waiting group, I gazed at the distant masculine peak of Manuel Pinta and then back to the double fountain of *paya ñust'a*. I could feel their presence within me, along with an increase in my awareness, as if my *poqpo* had grown much bigger and was now spread out all over the Andes, perhaps even all over *Pachamama*. It was a deep and expansive feeling of connectedness. I gazed appreciatively at the rugged landscape, which now was a part of me and very, very much alive.

The Goddesses of Machu Picchu

Our next journey took us down to the *Pachamama* cave on Huayna Picchu, the majestic peak that appears in the background

of nearly every photo of Machu Picchu. Although the peak looks formidable, it is hikable via an ingenious series of stone stairs. About half a mile from the Citadel of Machu Picchu, the Huayna Picchu trail forks, and the right fork goes straight to the top, while the left fork winds down to the *Pachamama* cave. The cave is curiously referred to on a trail sign as the Temple of the Moon. Of course, very few of the names on the archaeological signs we encountered during our *Hatun Karpay* matched the names we were given by Juan.

At a ritual held the day before, at the Qorikancha temple in Cusco—the temple whose walls were once covered in pure gold—I had experienced a most disturbing example of archaeological mislabeling. As I stood before a *tinkuy* altar, performing a *yanantin* exercise between right- and left-energy temples, I was bathed in a profound sense of peace. By chance, my eyes drifted open and rested on a sign before me that read "Human Sacrifice Altar." I recoiled in



Costumed dancers perform during the Pentecost festival in Ollantaytambo.

shock. Thankfully, Ivan, who must have noticed, stepped over to remind me that many stories of the temples' original usage had been chronicled or, more accurately, fabricated by the Conquistadors, who had found it to their advantage to depict the Inka in a negative light. I was reminded of a passage from my Wiccan teacher's book: "Unfortunately, the witch herself—poor and illiterate—did not leave us her story. It was recorded, like all history, by the educated elite, so that today we know the witch only through the eyes of her persecutors."⁶ If it were not for the Q'ero, such might have been the case with the Inka.

My encounter with the cave of *Pachamama* was more positive. After trekking for a couple of hours under a canopy of red bromeliads and Tarzan vines, we reached the cave—a sizable ovoid Earth womb, containing dripping stalactites and an altar in its darkest recess. The cave exuded a deep,

peaceful quiet that enveloped me with the loving arms of a mother. I approached the dim altar and offered my *k'intu* of coca leaves along with a pledge dedicating my love, intellect, and labor—the three qualities (known as *munay*, *yachay*, and *llank'ay*) that an Andean *paqo* must integrate—to working for the goddesses.

After connecting energetically with the cave, we were ready to work with the five door-sized niches in the outer arc of the recess, where five *nust'as* lived. *Nust'as* are princesses of the fifth of seven spiritual levels in the Andean system. Our initiation would bring us up from the third to the fourth level. The third level is characterized by conflict, and the fourth by an ability to heal through an "energetic and conscious resonance with the entire planet, *Pachamama*, the spirit of the Earth herself, and ... [contact with] ... the superior world, *Hanak Pacha*."⁷

We had worked with smaller niches at

previous sites, but had always faced into the rock, which I found gave me a strong hit of the spirit present. Now, sitting awkwardly on a wet, lumpy stone, facing outward toward onlookers, I found it hard to focus my attention behind me and peripherally in order to "taste" the energy. We were later told that each person would resonate with different colors, different *nust'as*.

Perhaps due to my distraction or my nonresonance with the black and red *nust'as*, I felt nothing in the first two niches. However, soon after I settled into a trance at the third, silver niche, I struck pay dirt: I saw a graceful and slender Balinese dancer dressed entirely in silver appear in my mind's eye. Fluid and snakelike, she charmed me with her enchanting smile and her watery, swaying movements. At the fourth, gold niche, I saw a glowing tiger in my mind's eye—my totem animal! Here I felt strength, power, and solidity—stone as opposed to water.

Before proceeding to the fifth and final niche, we were instructed to sit on a large ovoid rock that had a flat seat carved into it. This was one of many *Wiraqocha* (Creator) stones that we would encounter during our visit. They were always connected with the energy of a particular location, and we could only touch them after a ritual process. At this spot, we were instructed to release all our *hucha* so that we could encounter the green *nust'a* in a purified state. I felt myself lighten as I released my *hucha* into the stone and I simultaneously felt the stone pulling it from me.

In this more purified state, I hunkered down in the niche of the green *nust'a*. Within seconds, I was caressed by a thick cloud of love—as much as I dared let in. I felt that there was much more love available than I was willing to receive, but what I did allow felt wonderful. I floated, bathed in an amniotic bliss, not wishing the flow to end. I reluctantly left the niche only after I became aware of the next initiate's shuffling in the sand before me.

This yin reception of Goddess energy was more passive than I had ever experienced in Wicca, but more satisfying in a very deep way. The previous *Samhain* I'd been cast as a dancer to represent the fire of the South at our greatest *Sabbat* (holiday) of the year. The other dancers and I had begun our ritual evening with a spirited body-painting session at my house. When I finally stood barefoot, masked, topless, painted with flames, and joined in spirit with my fellow goddesses, I had felt ready to dance before the crowd of seventy-five people—until it was my turn to dance! Then, as all eyes turned on me, I realized I hadn't choreographed my moves, assuming a spontane-

ous performance would suffice. I sent a strong, silent (and somewhat desperate) prayer to Pele, volcanic goddess of the flames, to give me dancing feet. To the thunderous beat of five drummers, she dove into my body and I flew around the circle, leaping and crackling with the fire of Pele.

Looking back, I can see that my embodiment of Pele had been a very yang embodiment, a very active connection. Sitting in the niche of the green *n̄ust'a* at the *Pachamama* cave, I came to know a slightly different princess, as she moved in a slow, thorough way through every molecule of my body.

Because two of our sojourners were getting married the next day at the Yanantin Temple of Machu Picchu, Juan performed a *chunpi* (energy belt) cleansing ritual, which he ordinarily doesn't do during a *Hatun Karpay*. The five energy belts, which correspond roughly to the chakras, are black (pelvis), red (*qosqo*, or navel), gold (heart), silver (throat), and lavender (third eye). Each belt has a different *cuya* to match it, starting with one that has a single bump and ending with a five-nubbed *cuya*.

As I stood with my eyes closed at the mouth of the cave, facing Juan, he began by opening my *poqpo*, which seemed to some to be accompanied by a very loud flapping of wings. Moving the series of special *cuyas* around the periphery of my body, Juan then removed all the unhealthy attachments between myself and other people. At the end of this painstaking process, the final *cuya* was pressed sharply into my third eye.

When Juan was finished, I stepped away, feeling my energy bubble clean and sealed. All the former conflict of my life suddenly seemed irrelevant. I sat at the edge of the grassy outcropping in front of the cave, feeling squeaky clean and pure, and drinking in the majestic peaks of the Andes. As a Wiccan, I had practiced the ritual of cord cutting, but usually it had involved cutting the filaments with just one person, in order to sever an unwanted relationship. Remarkably, although the process Juan had just performed was intended to disconnect me from *everybody's* negative cords, I didn't feel lonely or cut off from the world. Rather, I felt extremely peaceful, with a new sense of wholeness—as if I wasn't being subtly drained anymore.

After Juan finished cleansing all the initiates, I asked him if he was tired, as he'd been working for a couple of hours. "Only my feet and hands are tired," he said and smiled. According to Juan, extended energy channeling places its biggest stress on the shaman's conductors—his hands and feet! "Do you pull the energy for your work from *Pachamama*?" I asked, familiar with Wiccan



The ruins of Machu Picchu guard the approach to the sacred peak of Huayna Picchu.

healing through Earth energy. "Yes," he replied, "and from *Hanaq Pacha*, too." This new concept of pulling healing energy from the upper world surprised me, and it was one of the more difficult practices for me to incorporate.

The Gods of Machu Picchu

The following morning, we hiked the upper fork of the trail to the top of Huayna Picchu, in order to work with male energy at the summit, which overlooked the ruins of Machu Picchu on one side and the deep river gorge on the other. As I awoke that day, I had sensed that the day was one of the primary reasons I had come to Peru. My slumbering animus needed a kick in the pants to help me manifest my creativity as a writer.

After an endless climb up irregular stone stairs, terrified by a sheer drop on either side of me, I hauled myself onto a plateau near the top. A narrow, tubelike cave lay before me. The women entered the cave, aligning ourselves on either side of the channel. We'd been instructed to connect with the frequency of the feminine tunnel, and as the men filed past us, we were to drain them of their masculine energy. We did so, and after the last man had stumbled out of our energetic grasp, it was our turn to be drained of our feminine energy as we emerged from the cave into the loving arms of the men. "Welcome, brothers," they beamed, slapping us on our backs. We had been energetically transformed into young men, so that we would be ready to face a formidable male *apu*.

The short climb from the tunnel to the

summit took us over a precarious pile of slate-gray, refrigerator-sized dolmen stones. As I eased myself awkwardly out and over the final boulder, and I looked down at a sheer drop of several hundred feet, I felt a pinch of raw terror. Juan waved me over to lie on a flat, ten-foot-long oval stone altar. He worked with my *qosqo* and his *mesa*, chanting in Quechua. Pulling the *mesa* away from my belly, he created an energetic connection, as he'd done the first day, at the altar of Illiapata. On that first day, the connection had been within one world, *Kay Pacha*, the world inhabited by both *apus* and humans. This time, he connected me with *Hanaq Pacha* and Huayna Picchu—or two worlds. On the final day of the *karpay*, the other initiates and I (with Juan's shamanic leadership) would connect all three worlds of the Andean system: *Ukhu Pacha* (the underworld), *Kay Pacha*, and *Hanaq Pacha*. Andean mystics believe that the act of bringing the three worlds closer together brings us closer to the Andean goal of creating "Heaven on Earth."

At Juan's cue, I sent a column of energy (*sami saiwa*) up to the heavens and to the *apu* upon which I rested. Then, practicing *ayni*, I received *sami* from above and also from Huayna Picchu. After finishing this ritual, I felt a very real and tangible connection to both places.

The descent from Huayna Picchu was long. When I returned to the Citadel, however, I was reluctant to leave—even though part of me was tugging to get on the bus and head back to the hotel for a shower. I was mesmerized by Huayna Picchu, and I had to

pay this *apu* silent tribute for another hour before he was finished with me. When I finally reached Aguas Calientes, and I started walking back to the hotel, I realized I wasn't the least bit tired, even though we'd just done four hours of the most strenuous hiking on our trip. I felt very energized and alert, yet peaceful at the same time. I redirected my steps to the main square of Aguas Calientes. Turning right onto Pachacutec, I strode up the main, shop-filled street of the village, and I encountered Juan and Juanito approaching me. Spotting an opportunity to ask some of the questions that had arisen over the past several days, I invited them both to coffee. When I mentioned to Juan that I was feeling unusually energized, he wasn't surprised. "Huayna Picchu gives powerful *sami*," he replied simply. Powerful indeed!

Journey on the Willkañust'a

On my last day at Machu Picchu, I had a chance to apply an old Wiccan technique to an Andean exercise, with amazing results that connected all the experiences of my *karpay*. The Wiccan technique is called "Betwixt and Between," and it is about creating a portal between the worlds, something witches are fond of doing. The first step involves meditating on two juxtaposed items—such as the wick of a candle and a flame. First, you imagine becoming the wick. You explore this until you understand what a wick really feels like—the tickle of oxygen bubbles flowing up through you, the consumed quality of your incinerating fiber. Then you become the flame. When it feels right, you slip between the two and you begin to play. I have often become a dancing firebird—reveling in the lightness, the airiness, and the flickering, darting sensation of being fire.

On that day, I joined the Juans and the rest of our group on a large, flat stone at the edge of the rushing *Willkañust'a*. When we were instructed to become one with the water and to "taste" the river, "Betwixt and Between" sprang to my mind as the perfect game for this exploration. I chose a spot close to the rapids, where I felt connected with the mighty force of the Urubamba River.

I slipped into a trance and became the water—frenetic, flowing, carefree, with no mooring—and played with the feeling for a long while. Then, I became the rock upon which I sat. My consciousness immediately slowed down to the molecular rock-level and spread out as I felt my connection with the surrounding rocks and Earth. I didn't so much support the water as I gave it direction; it was moving so fast that it weighed very little to a rock like me. At a certain

point, I opened my eyelids and saw before me a tiny rainbow portal between the rock and the water. Recognizing the gateway, I slid my consciousness into the opening like a playful otter.

A black void loomed before me—the black light! The most powerful force in Peru, it contains both destructive and creative forces. Out of the darkness a shape materialized. I was standing before the throne of a beautiful princess with long, glossy black hair and condor wings. The black *ñust'a!* After being too distracted to connect with her in the *Pachamama* cave, I felt lucky to have a second chance at her audience. She smiled at me and held in her outstretched hand a crystal pyramid with all the colors of the rainbow in it. I accepted her gift and held it to my third eye. As soon as it touched my forehead, the scene before me dissolved in brilliant white light. Another form materialized before me. I was now in an Egyptian temple, facing Isis, who was dressed in gold. "I am one and I am many," she intoned with authority. She also held an offering in her outstretched hand: a tiny coiled serpent. As I reached for the snake, it bit my hand. Immediately, Isis transformed into an underworld queen, hideous, vengeful, and volatile. "Are you angry with me?" I pleaded. "I am angry and heartbroken about the atrocities your kind have done to me!" she screamed. I humbly understood. She was *Pachamama*.

Like Inanna with Ereshkigal, I reached out and cried with *Pachamama* for all the ways the Earth has been raped and wronged. We embraced in agony for a long while, and then as I stepped back, I felt our tears had opened up a deep love between us. She smiled and held out to me a pair of golden wings, which I slipped on. I rose on luminous feathers and joined the river of golden energy that flows above the *Willkañust'a*. Flying its entire length, I visited all the sacred sites I'd worked at during my *karpay*. I circled like a condor over Huayna Picchu—the brilliance of my wings reflecting the radiance of the sun. Then, I retraced my flight and found the rock upon which my group sat. I landed and my wings folded, disappearing into my back as I opened my eyes.

That evening, as I journaled my experience furiously, I realized that I'd received what I had journeyed to Peru for, and much more. And I understood that it was my turn to practice *ayni*, to share all I'd learned with my North American friends.

Notes

1. The Wiraqocha Foundation, founded by Elizabeth Jenkins, regularly offers the *Hatum Karpay* initiation in Peru with Juan Núñez del Prado. Profits from trips with

the Wiraqocha Foundation directly aid the Q'ero by cleaning up their water supply. Juan and the author, Michele Fontaine, will be leading a Wiraqocha Foundation trip in June 2001 to the sacred sites described in this article.

2. The beliefs of the sixteenth-century Conquistador missionaries dovetailed nicely with traditional Q'ero spiritual beliefs, and also provided the surviving Indians with the safety of appearing to be devout Catholics while practicing their own religion.

3. *Shamanism*, according to *Webster's New World Dictionary, 2nd College Edition* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1992), is "the religion of certain peoples in NE Asia (or any similar religion), based on a belief in good and evil spirits who can be influenced only by the shaman." *Mysticism*, according to the same source, is: a) "The doctrine that it is possible to achieve communion with God through contemplation and love without the medium of human reason;" b) "Any doctrine that asserts the possibility of attaining knowledge of spiritual truths through intuition acquired by fixed meditation."

4. Parisi describes this prophecy, which mirrors those of many other cultures, of a "Heaven on Earth."

5. Lonely Planet distinction.

6. From *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*, by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, as told by Cerridwen Fallingstar.

7. Juan Núñez del Prado, from an unpublished thesis.

8. The most beautiful rendition that I've seen of this myth is in Brinton-Perera 1981.

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