

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

traditional
Andean healer
DORIS RIVERA LENZ

talks to Howard G
Charing and Peter
Cloudsley about the
effect of belief on health,
how we get sick, and
how she helps patients
recover, and she looks
to a future when we will
need to keep balance
as material values no
longer isolate us from
the Earth



integrate yourself spiritually to help another spirit.

Human beings are sacred cosmic seeds in evolution. The coca is a sacred seed like us, only of the vegetable kingdom. As with Ayahuasca, or San Pedro, they have been created by Mother Earth to guide and heal their younger brothers - ourselves. Similarly we have been created to help other people. As we become more open we discover plants like coca, for example. Not everybody sees the spirit of coca, Ayahuasca, or San Pedro, but they are here to help us.

What about the cause of disease, and how is it cured?

Illnesses do not exist, we create them with our minds according to our attitudes and the things we do - our karma. Resentment, for example, causes cancer; a woman whose ovaries are unwell may be resentful of being a woman and suffers trauma. People who do not have the freedom to express their feelings suffer from throat problems and so on.

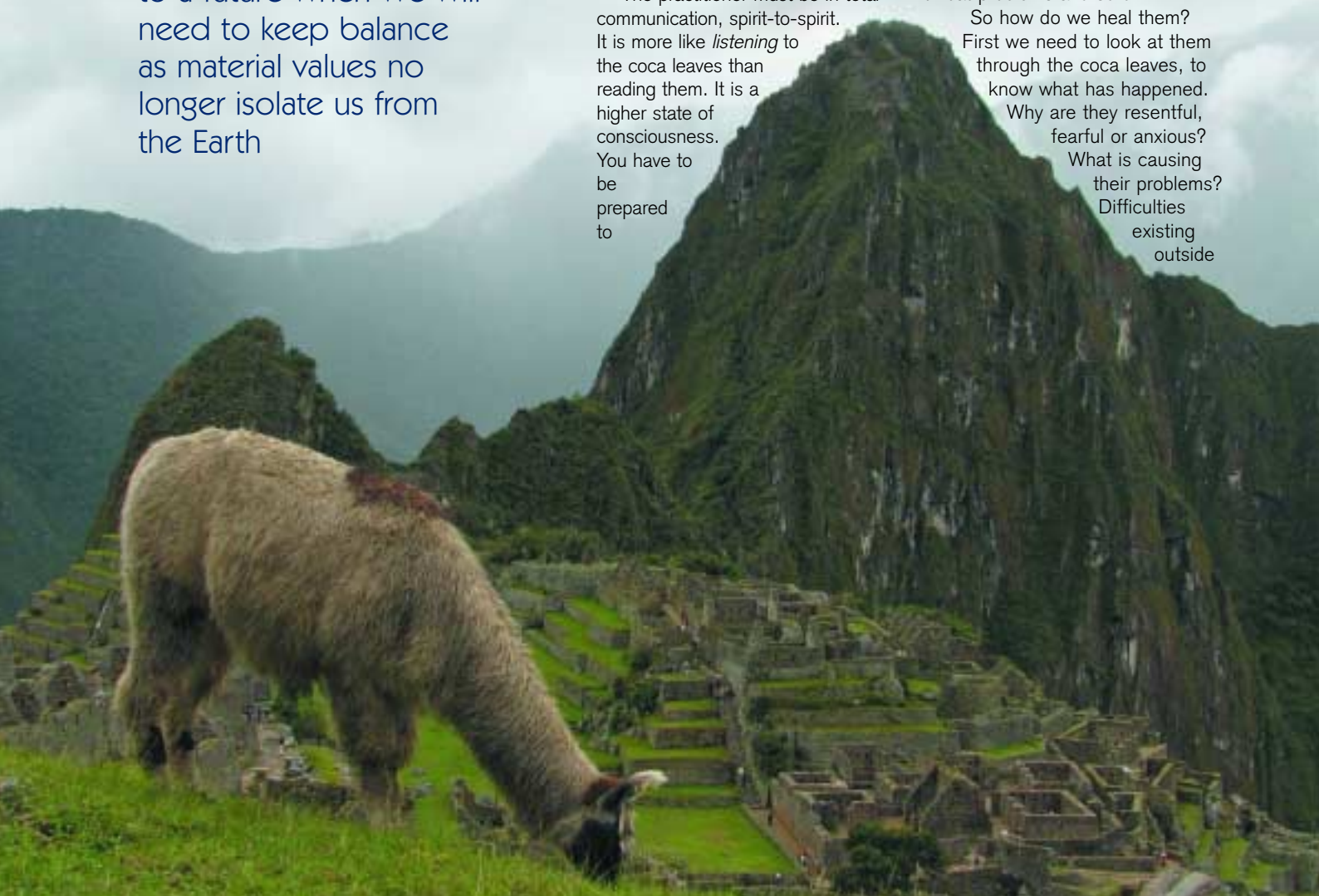
So how do we heal them? First we need to look at them through the coca leaves, to know what has happened.

Why are they resentful, fearful or anxious? What is causing their problems? Difficulties existing outside

What would you say was your understanding of divination?

It is meeting with the spirit of the element that you are working with, whether it is coca, tarot cards, maize or a mountain. In the case of coca, you meet the mother spirit, soul, or power of the plant, which is the sacred part which never dies.

The practitioner must be in total communication, spirit-to-spirit. It is more like *listening* to the coca leaves than reading them. It is a higher state of consciousness. You have to be prepared to



their body, such as a theft, disillusionment, or being lied to affect them because they are predisposed to have this pain. Then they get ill because they are not in equilibrium with themselves.

The coca shows when and how this began, it tells the story of how they got ill.

Is there a difference between the kind of condition which develops over a long period of negativity, like cancer, and a disease which you can catch from someone very quickly? The first seems to be created by oneself, the latter is biological.

Human beings are always predisposed by their attitudes, this is why you need to know their story. Someone who has a superiority complex, or is aggressive and violent, is on a downward spiral. They are weakened in their heart, stomach, and solar plexus - the *ñawi* or *naira* (equivalent to *chakra*) where emotional attitudes are held. So for example, you eat a dirty apple, and immediately you are ill.

A person who harbours feelings of hate may feel perfectly well for a time, but problems with their children, their husband, or lack of money, intensify their emotions, which degenerate their body on a cellular level. So they create their illness because they were already out of equilibrium. This is why two people might eat the same apple but only one falls prey to the illness.

Can you explain the Andean concept of the Hindu word chakra?

The nearest word in Quechua is *ñawi*, or in Aymara, *naira*, and it means 'eye' or energy centre of the body, but curiously *chakra* is a very common word in Peru, and is Quechua for a piece of cultivated land, or field. I believe it has the same linguistic root as the Hindu *chakra*. Just as some fields have lots of stones, and others are very fertile, so our bodies, also part of nature, are similar.

In the Andes, people will frequently consider an aching stomach to have been caused by sorrow. Less than a generation ago, people would make offerings, before preparing their fields for sowing. They would chew coca leaves, drink *chicha* [maize beer] and even play music - a whole ceremony. The ancient healers or shamans would give floral or smoke



baths to people, curing them of illnesses, fright and so on - the 'health' of the land and the people were treated as though interrelated.

When they remove weeds from their *chakra*, they see it as removing negative emotions from their person. So they identify themselves with their fields and with Nature, a little like Feng Shui - you feel better after you have had a Hoover up at home!

When they are feeling desperate, the people of the Andes benefit from going to a wild place, or some ruins, to scream and shout so that even the mountains will hear. In this way you align with natural forces, this puts you back into equilibrium.

Soul retrieval can be found in many parts of the world. How do they deal with it in the Andes?

When a child falls suddenly, its soul can leave its body and it may get ill. If this happens, an offering is made in the place of the fall, to heal the child.

There are many ways to 'call the soul'. You can get hold of a piece of the person's clothing and make a little doll and decorate it with flowers or whatever the person likes, and you call his soul in the place where the fright took place. You can use items like herbs, a dove's nest, rabbits' droppings, feathers, tobacco, coca, or whatever.

It doesn't matter if there is no fixed place where the problem began. If, for instance, someone has been oppressed by someone else, you simply go to the highest mountain or near to a river to call the soul. And before any session,

first you must ask permission from *Pachamama*, or Mother Earth.

Are people who come to you for coca divination often unwell?

Many people are unwell in their spirit or mind, there are lots of problems today. They are particularly afflicted in the stomach, the solar plexus, and the navel. It's the place of emotional pain, and also where we are linked to Life.

The first thing is to discover what is going on in the present. Maybe the wife had an accident, the husband was unfaithful, they haven't got a job, the house is falling down... Then I look to see their capacity to accept a criticism, to listen to the coca mother leaf ticking them off saying "You have done this, you are insecure, weak, a drunk, or a prostitute."

This sounds like a more psychological approach; you are seeing what people are doing to themselves. How do you make sense of the belief that the problem is caused by sorcery, for example someone feels that another is envious of them and will curse them?

You have to show the person he is not the victim of sorcery and that he is creating the problem in his mind. They need to go back over it; talking about it brings it out and is the first part of becoming well again.

It is true that some people will take vengeance through

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sorcery when they feel prejudiced, or offended in some way, because they are sick. When people think they have power and feel superior, the ego can become very negative. The first thing I do is to wake up the consciousness of the person who has been harmed and tell them that evil does not exist! 'You are inventing it', I tell them. *Brujos* [sorcerers] do exist of course, but you need to use a bit of psychology.

So the power of sorcery does not really exist?

Neither good nor bad exists, we *create* the good and the bad. But I recognise that the person may *feel* attacked.

When someone falls ill it means they are weak and the *curandero* [healer] must speak positively and encourage them to shine light on it. Then they can create positive thoughts for themselves. If I agree and say they are bewitched, it makes them worse.

I see you are trying to shift that person's reality around, but do you recognise that sorcery can exist?

Of course, but the act itself is not so powerful as white magic; it is the negative spirit of the *Brujos* which creates the power of the spell. If you get hold of a chicken and take off its feathers, put a toad inside, and hang it in the doorway of a hated neighbour, you can give them a nasty fright, but without a powerful negative spirit nothing will happen. But if the intentions are very negative and the person is weak they will pick it up quickly.

The most powerful *Brujos* are found in the jungle where there are powerful plants for healing, just as there are dangerous plants that can paralyse your body. But plants have much more wisdom than people. Do you think that if I go to a *floripondio* [a shaman who works with flowers] and say "I want help to do harm to so and so", that it will be at my disposal? You have to make a pact with the spirit of the plant.

Do people need to believe that your ceremony has done something?

When people trust that I am a *curandera* they open up, and I have special permission to go into their soul, and work with suggestion. I might give them a floral bath with a herb that has spines, and ask permission from the spirit of that plant to heal the person from fright or a bad spell - I bathe them, put them on a diet, cleanse them and purify

them. I call their soul and give them strength and they get well.

You are a psychologist?

It's okay to say that.

A lot depends on the mind and education of the person.

Some curanderos hardly speak to their clients, do they?

No - but I talk a lot, although there are times when I can't say anything.

Is there something similar going on when you pass eggs over people to diagnose and heal?

There are several ways of working with an egg. We know that an egg is the union of the masculine and the feminine. We should recognise that this union is supremely sacred. We are the product of an egg too. So the egg is the total energy of the mother's and the father's cells. You take the first egg of a hen, which is virgin, and ask the 'angelic', elemental spirit to take away the illness of a person, you ask the spirit for permission to do it. Then you pass it over their body, its like an X-Ray. You can also do it with guinea-pigs or rabbits, but I don't like doing it with animals.

Is it a mechanical process, or is there an energetic link between you and the client?

There is a link, a connection with the spirit of the egg, because I don't have X-Ray eyes. When I break the egg into a glass of water afterwards and interpret the patterns there is no set of rules that



says that a bubble here always means this or that. The moment the human mind comes into the passing of the egg or a coca leaf reading, the process goes out of balance. If I want to comfort you, and I say "You're not going to die, you'll be OK" it's spoiled.

The fact that there is a long tradition behind these methods of divination helps you?

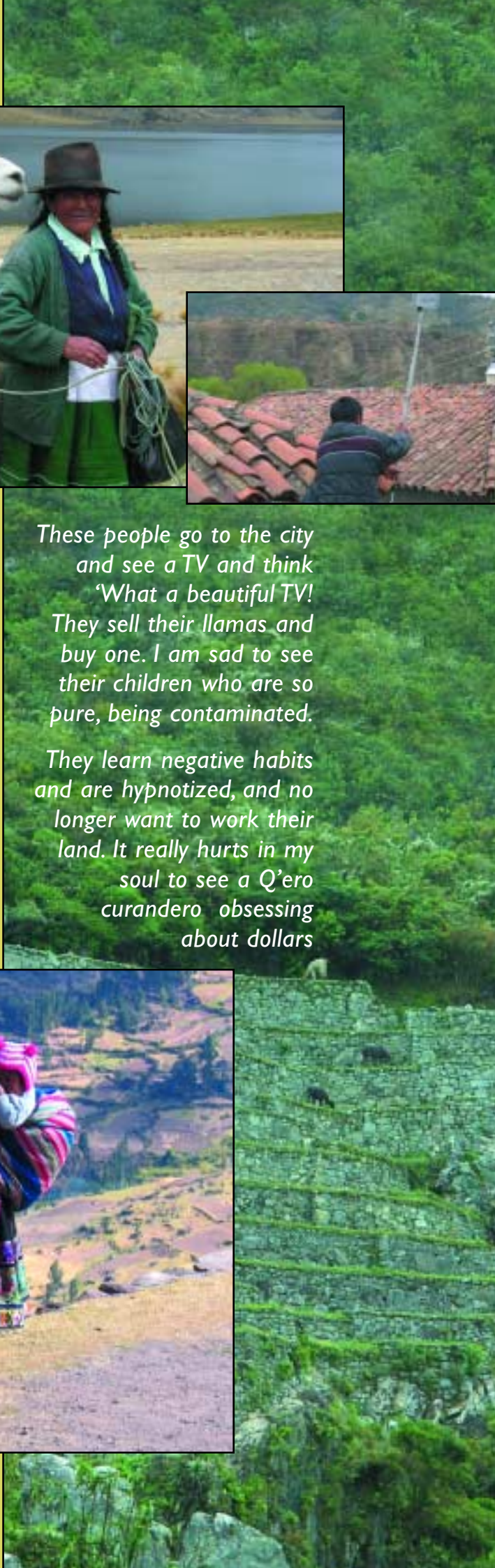
Of course, it's an ancestral thing.

What is different about Western people? What do they need?

Their heads cutting off - no, its only a joke! To be serious though, their religion has failed them, the Church authorities have kept vested interests and institutions going. Eventually people have thrown the baby out with the bath water. In Peru, the

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campesinos [country people] have never really believed in the European religion, the Pope, sin, guilt etc., which has only confused them.

When the Inca Atahualpa was told by the Spanish he should be baptised, he replied:

"No, I won't change my God, for a God which has died already. I believe in one which never dies."

It's fine to have Gods - the Oriental ones, an Inca, an extra-terrestrial, Buddha or Krishna. You can have as many Gods as you want, it doesn't close any doors, no one is being judged.

But there will never be anything like Mother Earth and the Sun, or the Moon. Think what would happen if we lost them - *that* is God! Mother Earth is the feminine aspect of God, and Father Sun is the masculine aspect, and we are all a product of that.

But what has become of Western religion?

Materialism, loss of identity, loss of customs. How can we help people in the face of the avalanche of problems being created today? Cut off their heads? Give them a heavy dose of positive cosmic radiation?

There are so many struggles today. People are no longer thinking about nature, but money and the help they need. They have become completely insecure.

The tendency today is for everybody to want to move into the cities everywhere, to live like America, build motorways. But imagine if we went to live in nature again, surrounded by mountains, or in the rainforest.

It's sad. I've spent time with people in the Andes. I have seen people leaving their traditional clothes and customs for the Maranata religion. They are a group that says why do you believe in the Earth, the Sun, the puma and the condor? Again religion is controlling the Andean *campesino*. These people go to the city and see a TV and think, "What a beautiful TV!". They sell their llamas and buy one. I am sad to see their children who are so pure, being contaminated.

They learn negative habits and are hypnotised, and no longer want to work their land. It really hurts in my soul to see a Q'ero *curandero* obsessing about dollars, meanwhile forgetting his power. This loss of

values for material things is happening so fast, it's incredible! It's the Western influence which has been working over 500 years.

They see on TV the huge kinds of potatoes which can be produced using fertilizers, and they think "How beautiful, I want that," but they don't know how the Earth is ruined by fertilizers.

What do you think will happen in the future on a planetary level?

People will get a nasty shock from seeing the increasing changes and natural disasters on the Earth and we will be shocked into changing. Unfortunately this is the only way we will change.

So that the collective fear will not infect us when these things happen, we need to work daily to balance ourselves. Even if those around you are overcome, you must be a *maestro* and maintain your centre.

Everybody worries about their future, no? But there will come a time when they will have finally woken up to the realisation that there is no future in the way we are going. They will be shocked into living in the present, and this will create a new human being. We will realise that individualism doesn't work and this will unite us in a shared future.

The desperation will show the necessity of love. Who will want to do harm or be aggressive when money and material things have become useless? We will come back to a new kind of community consciousness.

This is an expanded version of the interview published in the book *Plant Spirit Shamanism* by Ross Heaven and Howard G. Charing (Destiny Books)

Howard G. Charing has worked with many shamans & healers in the Andes, the Amazon Rainforest, and the Philippines. With Peter Cloudsley he organises specialist retreats to the Amazon Rainforest at the dedicated centre located in the Mishana nature reserve.

Peter Cloudsley has built up a documented archive of Fiesta music, icaros and shamanism, and has collected for the British Museum. He has travelled extensively in Latin America, especially Peru, studying the diversity of music and shamanism. Peter offers courses on music and popular culture in Latin America.

For more information about Amazon and Andean work, contact Eagle's Wing Centre for Contemporary Shamanism. www.shamanism.co.uk eagleswing@shamanism.co.uk Tel: (01273) 882 027

Eagle's Wing will be working with Doris and Juan Navarro the shaman from the north of Peru (featured in the article The Mesa Nortena (Sacred Hoop Summer 2004) in a special tour in Peru March 2008.