

My Ayahuasca Experience

-Intro-

Hey guys and girls!

They say the experience is ineffable, but I will do my best to describe my recent venture to the Amazon jungle to sit with myself and tap into my subconscious and expand my higher consciousness. I am a first-time ayahuasca consumer so I'll dive into how I first learned about ayahuasca, some of the events that contributed to my being open to what ayahuasca could potentially offer, and the journey into the Amazon and back.

If you're reading this then I dare say you're wondering if ayahuasca is for you, and to that I say only you can decide for yourself if you feel the calling, everyone's experience is extremely individual and this is my personal recap so read on with a grain of salt (unless you're about to leave on your retreat in which case you can't have salt as it doesn't fit the dieta)



Recent events that lead me to ayahuasca

Let's go back to May 2018, I had been living in the USA for the last two years, building a life and helping expand an Australian company, things were good, we had grown the business from 5 staff working in an Air BnB to just two years later running two sales offices, one in Austin, Texas which I was running as sales manager, and the second in Los Angeles, we had seen the share price soar from 11c when I first joined the company, through to an all-time high of \$4.98, we were expanding so rapidly that we took over a 26,000 ft office space in LA and consolidated the team and the two offices under one roof. Things were great.

Then came a phone call from my friend and boss 'We just filed chapter 11' (bankruptcy) unfortunately our CEOs back in Australia had been fudging the numbers for some time and it all came crashing down that Saturday when I received that call, unfortunately being in management we needed to break it to our respective teams. So the following day consisted of Google hangout meetings advising our 45 full-time staff and 60+ contractors that there would be no need to come in tomorrow and that they would also not be getting paid for the last two weeks they had worked-good times.

Naturally not many days went past that I wasn't drunk at this point, trying to figure out a way to stay in the country, the following week was my girlfriends Ph.D graduation in Aarhus, Denmark, flights for which I was going to purchase with that last paycheck that never arrived, I already had a maxed out credit card so that wasn't an option, ultimately I feel this was the beginning of the end of my relationship and it was totally my fault, I didn't budget earlier or manage my finances, and quietly had debt piling behind the scenes. This should give you a good idea how I had managed my finances until that point, week to week, and now that the regular income I had was gone I was worried.

After a few weeks more with my friends and I trying to figure out a way to stay in the country it was time to bite the bullet and leave the life I had looked to create, I spend my last money on a flight home. The morning I was due to fly from LA back to Australia, nursing a hangover, I received a call from my sister telling me that my father had passed away, I sat in the hallway and cried. He had been battling cancer for the last two years, and although I knew his time was limited and knew he was now in a better place it was a tough time.

How did I first learn about the plant medicine ayahuasca?

About 4 months after my father passed and I returned to Australia I had thrown myself into work, averaging between 90 and 110 hours a week my thought process was to work as much as possible to keep busy and clear the debt that had accumulated over the previous years, and to work on me. I'm sure you can judge by the number of hours I was working the whole 'working on me' aspect didn't really happen. I tried meditating here and there but nothing consistent at all.

I was lucky enough to have some time off and had seen a friend's Instagram story where he had taken part in a silent retreat in Bali, where you meditate and don't say a word to each other over the week, this intrigued me and I reached out to learn more about it, once I did some research I felt that getting away somewhere foreign and 'switching off' from all the stimulation of life would be of great benefit, from here I did some research into other styles of retreats in different parts of the world, and strangely enough the book I was reading at the time (Yusa: Guide to balance) had a section on Plant Medicines with Ayahuasca and Ibogaine being discussed, after learning about the two I began doing more research into Ayahuasca as that sounded like a better fit for what I wanted to achieve.

With little research, I found Aubrey Marcus, CEO of Onnit supplements and business partners with Joe Rogan I listened to several of his podcasts on the subject of Plant Medicines and particularly Ayahuasca, and his experiences. I was excited. I researched several healing centres in Peru, Brazil and Ecuador as the centre Aubrey recommended was temporarily not doing retreat due to their facilitator and healer Don Howard Lawler was currently in hospital. Although I was excited I wanted to wait and ensure I was taking the trip with the right intent and not just to 'escape reality' so I told myself I would wait a few months and if I still felt the calling I would book a retreat.

Personally due to my personality when I find a topic I enjoy I get obsessed about it, and I would have consumed in excess of 100 hours of podcasts, youtube documentaries and read dozens or Reddit posts about Plant Medicines and Ayahuasca within the first few months while still looking for a centre, then thankfully I received word that the treatment centre Aubrey recommends was offering retreats again, [SpiritQuest Sanctuary](#) 'where kindred spirits meet', this was the only centre that really spoke to me and having watched many documentaries and podcasts about this place I was ready, I contacted SpiritQuest and complete a questionnaire to ensure I was what they were looking for in an attendee (not many other treatment centres do this, and those other centers will take anyone). Thankfully my intentions aligned with their standards and I paid my deposit.

About Ayahuasca

Ayahuasca (or Mother Ayahuasca) is known as the Vine of Souls, or Vine of Death, and has been used for hundreds of years in the Amazon jungle by many tribes. Ayahuasca has a feminine energy about it, hence the name Mother Ayahuasca, and in one word boils down to 'confrontation', and will show you all the things you try and hide from yourself, however leaves it open to interpretation like a mother, essentially guiding you to self reflection and self realization- whereas something like Huachuma (San Pedro, mescaline based) is more like a stern father. Ayahuasca is DMT based, N.N. Dimethyltryptamine, which is naturally occurring in nature, and we humans actually have trace amounts in our bodies at all times and so as Joe Rogan would say 'we're all carrying'.

Ayahuasca itself is a vine, (pictured below) however, when people discuss ayahuasca they are actually talking about the brew made of several other plants and the Ayahuasca vine, in our brew we had 3 other plant leaves one of which was Chacruna which contains DMT, the ayahuasca vine itself contains no DMT, it does, however, contain another important factor, the MAO inhibitor (monoamine oxidase inhibitor), MAO is an enzyme in the human digestive system that dissolves DMT almost instantly (which is beneficial because otherwise, we could be tripping balls every time we eat a salad) the MAO inhibitor then allows the DMT to be orally active, giving you a 3-4 hour experience vs. a 15 minute experience when DMT is smoked. How the local Amazonians figured this out of the 50,000+ plant species is open to discussion but early on would tell westerners 'the plants told them'.



Ayahuasca vine

Pre Retreat (Dieta)

After corresponding with SpiritQuest newly appointed facilitator Parker Sherry I knew I had come to the right place, his care and professionalism shone through even via email. From all the research I had complete there is a very important preparation in the diet, Parker had outlined what should be cut out of the diet and for how long before the retreat, this list included;

- No salt
- No sugar
- No alcohol
- No pork
- No red meat
- No excess fats and oils

Oh and no sex or orgasm, this was part of reciprocity and what you are willing to 'give up' to mother ayahuasca, in addition to the added benefit of much-needed energy in the ceremonies.

They say that everything on the list should be adhered to for 1 week before the retreat, other than pork which should be avoided for 1-2 weeks before the retreat. Personally I began my dieta 2 months before the retreat, cutting out alcohol, excess salt and sugar, and sexual abstinence, as I thought it would take me some time to adjust, however, I was on the path early and kept strict to my dieta, and yes that even meant no masturbation for 2 months in case you're wondering. I cut out red meat one week before the dieta and coffee 3 days before the retreat (this was the hardest to kick). In addition to the dieta I begun intermitted fasting only eating between 12 pm and 8 pm and active looked to consume more 'alive' food, so fresh fruit and vegetables in addition to my daily supplements of Lions Mane mushroom powder and super green mix.

The Retreat

I took 3 days off before my retreat to ensure I was in a good mindset going into it, boarding my second flight of the 5 flight journey to Iquitos, Peru I was sat almost directly next to two other people heading to the same retreat as me, after seeing their pictures in the group email I recognized them and started chatting, (hows the synchronicity with that). We connected in Chile through to Peru's capital Lima, where we (myself and my 2 retreat buddies) stayed in a hotel, as soon as I met these guys I knew I was in for a treat and that the retreat truly had attracted such like-minded people.

After we arrived in Iquitos from Lima (a city only accessible by air or boat) we were met by SpiritQuest facilitator Parker Sherry, a 6ft4 guy with a smile and hug just as big, with the most genuine and calm healing energy I'd felt from another human. We met the other participants (we had 9 total in our group) and boarded a bus which took us to a local dock.

We boarded the boats, put on our life jackets and headed off up the river, we took small passageways through the trees and experienced the sights, smells and sounds of the Amazon, as we passed several local tribes we received lots of waves from the kids and families swimming by the banks.



As we arrived at the retreat it was the most beautiful sight and felt like a big tree house on the water, everything made of beautiful timber and the roofs made of leaves and trees, with limited phone service I truly felt like we were part of the jungle.

Day One

Shortly after arriving we had lunch and then sat outside of the ceremonial maloca (where we complete the Ayahuasca ceremonies) where we were given the house and etiquette rules, which consisted of being mindful and respectful of others, so no music played out loud, respect each others' sleep and generally respectful of others. We then complete our first talking circle, something that I would come to enjoy immensely after each ceremony. The talking circle consisted of getting to know each other by discussing our intentions of why we were there (if you felt comfortable in discussing), each person took their turn holding the 'talking stick' (a stick just longer than a normal walking cane, with various carvings and nut husks hanging from it) Parker admitted that the more people open up and the more honest and vulnerable you are this week then the more the medicine works, so I laid everything out on the table to the group.

I shared the reason I was there was to reassess and look objectively at my life, and for the last 10 years I had been looking outside of myself for fulfillment in romantic and sexual relationships, in addition to jumping between careers and places of living

that took me from Adelaide, Melbourne, Alice Springs, and the USA, and now wanting to look within. I also wanted to address my self diagnosed self-sabotage in various areas, residue from my relationship with my father, guidance around my higher purpose and generally wanting to look at any blockages in my life that are not serving me so I can be the best version of myself and add value to the masses and raise collective consciousness (a long list I know).

I am very thankful to say we had a fantastic group of people and everyone shared their deep desires for what they wanted to heal, this really can be attributed to SpiritQuest's screening of people wanting to come on the retreat.

After our first talking circle we settled into our rooms, which were an extension on the beautiful timber work around the retreat, although bare, there were 2 single beds and 2 tables, and a green tiled toilet, the showers are at the end of the accommodation block and there is only one tap, because there only one temperature - cold. But this isn't really an issue after the first shower when you realize you're just a little bitch used to your western comforts and electric blankets back home, plus its always about 27 degrees year round. But as Wim Hof would say 'A cold shower a day keeps the doctor away'.

When we returned back to sitting in front of the ceremonial maloca we were shown the leaves and ayahuasca vine that we would be consuming, we each received a large plastic bowl with the leaves of 3 plants, which contained n.n.DMT, 5-meo-DMT and bufotenine, we were told to begin setting our intentions and thinking about what we wanted to get out of our ceremonial experience while we tore up the leaves into small pieces, the then took turns hitting the ayahuasca vines with a hammer to break it open, the vines themselves would open up like a wire cable when hit and fan out as if it were several strands held together.

Once this was complete we took our time and relaxing in the afternoon, going for a swim and mentally preparing for the first ayahuasca ceremony the next day.

For dinner that evening we met in the dining maloca where there was a spread of fresh fruits and vegetables, and one source of protein, fish. This is a spread you get very accustomed to as fish is the only meat you receive while at the retreat, taking into consideration all meals are dieta approved there is no salt, spices or oils, the kitchen does an amazing job tweaking and presenting the meals differently every day.

Day two

No alarm goes off What a great feeling, naturally woken by the jungle birds chirping I woke up about 6:30 am and headed for a walk around just soaking in the serenity and the silence, walking up to the star deck looking over the forest.

From 0800 you have fresh fruit salad waiting for you in the dining maloca and you put in your order for the breakfast, converting to Spanish of course, fresh vegetables, fruit, and eggs various ways are on offer for breakfast and different fresh juices each day, although the meals do not contain any spices, salt or pepper, the food is deliciously fresh.

Later in the afternoon we took a 2 minute walk into the jungle to the kitchen, admittedly Parker said 'its nothing like a scene out of breaking bad', we found ourselves in a pergola with a cement floor with two places cut out for a fire pit to boils the large pots of ayahuasca, we met our Shaman Don Rober Acho a 3rd generation Ayahuasquero, at 73 years old he has conducted thousands of ceremonies and drank his first ayahuasca at 9 years old, accompanied by his wife Dona Eliana Acho and his Son (also a shaman) Don Carlos Acho.

We complete a Mapacho ceremony, which we smoked large tobacco rollies like cigars, and blessed the leaves and vine once more, only breathing the mapacho into our mouth before blowing the smoke onto the leaves and placing them in the pot.



Once all guests had an opportunity to do this the shamans sang two icaros, every shamans icaros are different, this is a song they develop over the years of practicing their shamanism, a song singing to the energy and spirit of the plants, while singing the icaros they shake their chakapa, which is a bundle of large dried leaves, tied together at the stalk end and when shaken sounds like a soft maraca, this combined with the singing is heavenly.

Today there wasn't much on the agenda but to relax and prepare for the ceremony tonight, I relaxed in one of the many hammocks on the 350-acre property, swam and got in a bodyweight workout before lunch.

Because it was a ceremony day it meant there is no dinner as you need to go into the ceremony on an empty stomach.

That afternoon we met and had some fruit and set up our mattresses in the maloca and picked out our spot where we would sit, as there are only 9 of us we had quite a lot of room to ourselves, I placed two of the small mattresses up against one of the vertical beams directly opposite the shamans. We discussed the ceremonial protocol and what time we needed to be there, we were advised that helpers would be positioned outside the maloca in case we needed to go to the toilet, in which case you could call out 'bano' (pronounced bahn-yo) and someone would walk you back to your room. Once this was done the majority of people went back to their room and napped as the ceremony wouldn't start until 9:20 pm that night.

Ceremony one

My alarm went off at 9 pm, I brushed my teeth and put on a plain white long sleeve shirt as we were advised to wear white, or light coloured shirts, and certainly no black or red, this was because it is almost pitch black in the maloca and can be problematic, it also could be to promote light/positive energy but that is just my interpretation.

As I arrived in the maloca I was the second person there, candles illuminated the maloca and gave it a whole new vibe than in the day, it seemed to come alive and breathe with the flickering of the candles. I saw that shallow buckets had been placed next to each person's mattress with about half an inch of water in the bottom, the purge bucket. I lit a mapacho and complete my own blessing of myself as we had done the day before. I sat on my mattresses sitting up with my legs crossed and started focussing on my intentions for that evening, as people started arriving at the maloca and settling into their spots I was aware of how nervous I was, having all of

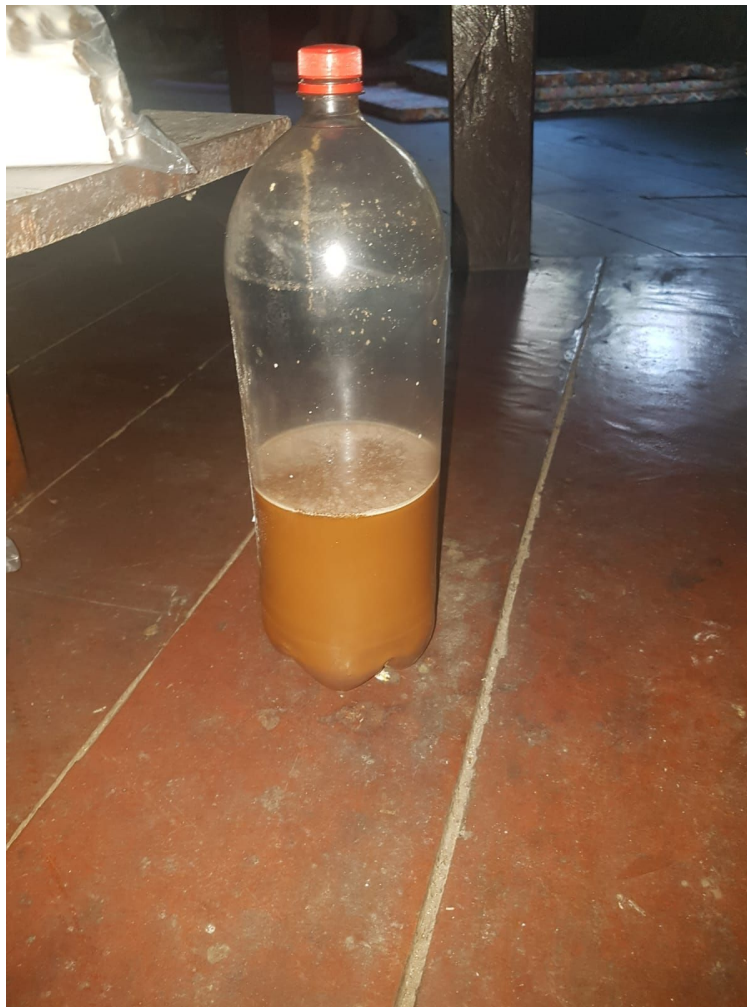
these thoughts running through my head 'am I going to be ok?', what if I freak out? What if I go crazy and get stuck in the trip?' I noticed my heart was racing, I did my best to calm myself with my breathing but not much luck, about this time is when the shamans Don Rober and Don Carlos, and Dona Eliana arrived as did our facilitator Parker, who sat in rocking chairs next to each other behind a small table with pieces of ayahuasca and several other artifacts, stones, and ornaments.



As we sat in our positions Don Rober and Don Carlos began walking around the room blessing us one at a time, blowing the tobacco smoke onto our head with a melodic whistle/wooshing sounds like healing missile, they then sung an icaro while tapping us on the head with their chakapa to open our crown chakra and keep our spirit safe, once everyone had been opened and protected we were welcomed to the session Don Rober addressed us and Parker translated, we were about to embark on our first ceremony and we were all there in the name of healing, one big family and 'para el bien de todos' or 'for the good of all'.

We then were called up to the table one by one to receive our medicine, which was poured into what appeared to be a polished coconut husk, my heart was racing as

my name was called and I walked up to the table, I kept thinking I was going to drop the cup I was so nervous, however when I was handed the cup I closed my eyes and set my intentions of what I wanted to get out of my experience, and in return told mother ayahuasca what I was willing to give, the law of reciprocity, and before I drank I repeated to myself 'thank you for my healing', and drank from the husk, it was almost full to the brim, and I drank it down as fast as I could, and what can only be described as fermented tobacco tasting coffee with an almost spicy and sour aftertaste, wasn't actually as bad as everyone had said it was going to be.



As I returned to my spot I sat and begun to meditate after the last person had drunk their cup they blew out the candles after about 15 minutes and it was pitch black and silent.

About 40 minutes in you heard people moving their purge buckets around and it wasn't long before people began to vomit, and if you're thinking 'that sounds horrible' it was much the opposite, it was cleansing, and I was genuinely smiling and happy when I heard people purge. It didn't take me long after before I too purged, the taste

of the ayahuasca coming up wasn't great though, after I purged I returned to my seating position and begun to be still again, not long after I noticed my stomach feeling very warm, and the warmth was moving, it was slowly making its way up my body and my ears started to ring, and I noticed that the closer the warmth was getting to my head the ringing got louder and louder, until the warmth reached my head and the ringing popped and my sight blew out into a yellow colour, my eyes were closed but I was seeing yellow and what looked like Egyptian symbols, I remember Parker told us early on to 'witness and allow' and try not to get wrapped up in solving things or figuring out what it means at the time, so I just sat back and watched.

Immediately I was taken back to a time I had smoked DMT at a friend's house and I was literally right there on the bed again, and I remember thinking 'oh damn I just went back in time and now I'm here in my friend's room, how am I going to get back to the ceremonial maloca?' It felt that real, but I had the understanding feeling that time was nonexistent and the realm I was tapping into is in a constant state of being. After I shook that off by opening my eyes and brought myself back to the maloca.

I began to go through the questions I had brought, I asked if there was any healing I needed to be the best version of myself, and I immediately was shown images of my mother and father, I remember internally saying 'no, not them what about me?' and it kept bringing back the images of them, remembering what Parker had said earlier 'Ayahuasca gives you what you need, not what you want' I went with it, I focused on my mother and was taken back to her family home growing up, and watched her life on fast forward in what felt like was over in 1 second but I had received all of her emotions throughout her life, happiness, sadness, feeling insecure, and I began to cry. I felt all of the times she had reached out to me and I had done something hurtful as children do growing up, I just wanted to hug her more than anything and realized I had pushed her away emotionally after some scenarios when I was younger, except this time I was experiencing it from her perspective and understood where she was coming from, I cried some more. Once this passed I just kept repeating I wanted to heal her pain, and I was then seeing her in what felt like real time, sitting at her home on the couch, I was able to look into her body and saw a large black mass in her stomach that had black jagged spikes coming out of it. As I was looking at it I knew it was negative and although I can't explain it the feeling I had when I looked at it was 'insecurity' - in what context I am not sure, I literally said to myself 'that isn't serving her' and picked it up and threw it away, however there were some black patches of residue, so just like a computer program I pressed 'command a' and selected all of the cells that had the black mass and deleted them, doing my best to try and remove all black goo that was affecting her. Once this happened she faded out and I went back to look for my father.

Before my father passed away there were many things I wish he had the ability to discuss however, he wasn't the best communicator, as soon as I thought about him I was taken to the farm I grew up on and we were standing in the front yard, I said 'Hi dad, is there anything you want to tell me while I'm here?' I was completely conscious of choosing my words for him, my dad then turned away and wouldn't look at me. I asked him again 'c'mon I'm in the jungle trying to talk to you, is there anything you want to say?' In response to this I felt a huge feeling of being ashamed, but this wasn't my shame, this was his shame, of how he had acted when he was alive, I responded 'it's ok, I'm here, let's just talk' hoping now that he has left his meat suit (body) behind, we could have conversations with his higher self, except he still wouldn't turn around, I just said 'ok, well I'll come back later' and the picture of him disappeared.

From here I was given a secret of the universe, and how all energy has a frequency. I saw behind the curtain of how you can literally change the flow of the world, I had always heard people say 'thoughts have frequencies' and 'what you think about you bring about', however now I was be shown, how that works and how if you think about something enough, it is already done, the universe just needs to change its flow to align with it.

From here I looped back to my dad and was taken back to the farm. He used to build old cars in the sheds we had and that's where I found him this time, except I was looking through his eyes, feeling his feelings, about 20 years earlier, he was sitting in the shed, I could feel his pain, I feel isolated, like no one around me understood me, so totally emotionally disconnected from everyone. I felt he was thinking of suicide, hanging himself right there in the shed, at the moment he had thought about doing it, he instead came into the house and asked me to come and help him work on the cars- this anything out of the ordinary he would always ask me to come and help him, except from my 11 or so year old brain at the time I just wanted to play Super Nintendo. I then switched back to viewing things through my 11-year-old perspective, except now understanding he wasn't asking for my help this time practically, he wanted emotional help, as I reach the shed two scenarios ran through my mind simultaneously, one where I walked into the shed and helped him work on the car, the other I walked in and saw his feet hanging just below my eye level, he had gone through with the suicide in this instance, the message I received was 'this very easily could have happened', then this vision faded out. Reflecting on this it has given me a lot of things to be thankful for, although I wished things had been different between my father and I, he was still there throughout my life, which is a new depth of appreciation. During the time at the retreat, I reflected on this and wondered how true it could be, was I just imagining it? When I got home after the retreat I spoke to my dad's sister and told her the story, she began to cry, and said 'Cain, do you know

how many times I had to talk him out of it (suicide) while you were growing up?' - that really hit home, I tell you this medicine is something else.

After the last vision these were the most profound things and the feeling and effects of the ayahuasca were starting to wear off, as a single candle was lit in the maloca, signifying the end of the ceremony, I picked myself up and staggered back to my room, I checked the time, 2:10 am the past 4 hours had felt like an eternity and 10 minutes at the same time.

As I slept that night I was brought many strange dreams and different people in my life, but I wasn't able to remember the context or feelings.

Day three

On this day, like every other day, I woke to nature's alarm clock being the sounds of the jungle birds.

I met with my other brothers and sisters of the retreat outside the ceremonial maloca where we were greeted with a jug of Limonada, which we drank and waited for our flower bath which we receive each morning after an ayahuasca ceremony, that consists of river water combined with various flowers, which smelt absolutely heavenly. We met Don Rober and Dona Eliana just off the side of the path under a small shelter, where you sit on a plastic chair in your bathers still quite foggy from the night before, but you're quickly snapped back to being present when the shock of the cold, flower bath is poured over your head and your breathing and heart rate jumps. As each splash washed over me I couldn't help but feel cleansed, emotionally, physically and mostly spiritually. Don Rober then took his chakapa and sung an icaro while tapping it on my head, completing the ceremony with a puff of his mapacho and with his trademark whistle woosh, blew it like a healing missile onto my crown chakra. Then with a tap on the shoulder, indicating my flower bath was complete I headed to the dining maloca for breakfast.

After breakfast, we had free time to reflect on the ceremony the night before, some people sat in hammocks, some people did yoga or swam, personally I walked part of the property and found a hammock to journal in, thinking back to all of the things I had seen and experienced the night before, I felt light, even though I was confronted with some very personal things, 'this is the reason I came', I told myself, very thankful to be where I am. Journaling, I soaked in the sounds of the jungle as all my senses were heightened, my hearing, my feeling of connectedness with the plants and animals, doing my best to capture all things going through my head. I remembered Parker telling the group 'you get only about 2% of the downloads during the ceremony and the other 98% after', so I was just visualizing myself being open and receiving all the downloads.

Later that afternoon, as a group we departed the sanctuary by boat to the local Kukama tribe, we were greeted by men, woman, and children on the bank waving and smiling as we arrived. We all made the effort to hi-5 all of the kids after stepping onto the shore.

As we entered their maloca we were asked to take a seat and enjoy 5 of their traditional dances, we were then invited to join in with them for a final dance, this was a phenomenal experience. With a huge smile, not only on my face but on all of the people and children of the Kukama tribe, it really hit me that compared to western society these people have very little material things but seem to be overflowing with happiness, and fulfillment, 'damn', I thought, we overcomplicate things in the Western world.



When the dancing concluded we traded clothing and bought items that they make in their village, everything from bracelets and necklaces to dream catchers and tribal masks, their craftsmanship was outstanding.



Day four

After our breakfast, we met across the Bridge to Eternity and held our first post-ceremony talking circle, in preparation for our second ceremony tonight. As we took our time hearing people's experience from the first ceremony I couldn't help but appreciate and be thankful for having a group so open and being vulnerable, it appeared from discussions of the group that most people hadn't had a profound of an experience that I had on the first ceremony, and I had some quite emotional topics. Although I went last in the talking circle I know the best way to experience and share was to also be vulnerable and discuss what I had experienced and reminded the group of what I wanted to get out of the experience of the retreat. I shared everything I described above with the group, and elaborated more on my relationship with my father and always feeling the need to prove myself to him, the group was amazingly supportive which in turn made them want to share more about their own experiences or traumas. The talking circle gave us an opportunity to review our own intentions ready for round 2 later this evening.

Ceremony two

That evening again I had a nap before waking up at 09:00 pm, I dressed in my white shirt and settled into my routine of my personal mapacho ceremony and took my seat in the maloca waiting for the rest of the group to arrive, around 9:20 the shamans and our facilitator arrived and we began the ceremony the same as

ceremony one, with Don Rober and Don Carlos blessing each of us with the mapacho smoke and the icaro.

When it was my turn to drink this time I was much calmer, and when my name was called I was quietly confident and ready for another wild night, I held the cup and closed my eyes again re-confirming why I am here and saying 'thank you for my healing' to mother ayahuasca. This time as I took my first mouthful I realized the brew's taste had gotten worse, much worse, it was like it had been sitting in the sun getting hot and rancid all day, but I gulped it down anyway and the spicy burning aftertaste lingered, you're not supposed to chase it with water as it can upset your stomach so I just swooshed some water around in my mouth and spat it into my purge bucket.

I sat waiting for the visions to come, the candles were out and people around me begun to purge, my stomach was hurting tonight, I was quite hungry going into the ceremony so maybe that was it, I felt the need and purged myself, 'this is it' I thought, as in ceremony one my visions started after my purge, but nothing, no visions, no buzzing in my ears, nothing, I remember Parker telling us one of Don Howard's sayings 'Ayahuasca is a very holistic medicine, with occasionally interesting side effects' I took this on board and tried not to let the lack of visions bother me. Another great saying of Don Howard's is 'it'll take out all the bad and leave all the good' in which case I was getting pleasure out of purging knowing I was purging out negativity.

As I threw up in my purge bucket I got a flash of light, almost as if there was lightning illuminating the room, and as that flash lit up the purge bucket I saw that I had thrown up a black snake writhing around in the bucket, at the time I knew it wasn't real so I didn't freak out, I just had a thought of 'oh well I guess that thing wasn't serving me' and chuckled to myself, I placed the purge bucket back to the side and laid down, this was the only thing I consciously took away from ceremony two.

We concluded at about 2:00 am.

Day Five

Like every morning after an ayahuasca ceremony, I consumed my Limonada and received my flower bath, this morning greeting Don Rober with a hug of gratitude for the work and healing he does.

Later this day we were privileged to join the local Bora tribe, where we were treated to watch their traditional dancing and asked to join them in dance. We had the opportunity to take some photos with them and trade clothing for their crafts and artwork. Like the Kukama tribe, the Bora tribe showed great happiness with what they had, and you couldn't wipe the smiles off the children's faces. I am here with the chief of the Bora tribe.



As we met in the afternoon outside the ceremonial maloca we complete our second talking stick circle, as we passed the talking stick around we all shared our experiences from ayahuasca ceremony number 2, the theme that came from this talking stick circle (like every other) is just how varied each person's individual experience is, some having visions, some with sounds, some with feelings and body sensations and some with no noticeable effects at all. 'Ayahuasca is a very holistic medicine, with occasionally interesting side effects' Parker reiterated, repeating one of Don Howard's favorite quotes, which gave everyone the opportunity to reflect and not get disappointed if their visions were not as intense as some others in the group, as we were again reminded only about 2% of the benefit is realized there in the ceremony.

These thoughts aside, I was extremely thankful to have such an open and sharing group of people on this retreat. As the talking stick circle came to a conclusion we

were reminded that this evening we were going to receive a different plant medicine, Bobinsana.

Bobinsana Ceremony

That evening we again met in the ceremonial maloca, however this time the set up was much different to the ayahuasca, instead of mattresses there were chairs set up in an arc around the ceremonial table with Parker, Don Rober, Dona Eliana and Don Carlos sitting opposite us on the other side of the table. Parker addressed the group after we had received our blessing and chakapa from the maestros, 'If ayahuasca boiled down to one word is about confrontation, Bobinsana is about love'. Bobinsana is a very heart opening ceremony and is said to provide very vivid dreams within the days and weeks after the ceremony. The group and I had discussed beforehand we were very excited about the ceremony because as you go through life you can get hurt by loved ones and family members and begin to put up emotional walls, we were excited to treat this evening as a reset.

I was the first to drink the medicine, although drinking from the same cup as the ayahuasca I am pleased to report it tastes nothing like ayahuasca! It had a sweet taste and burnt going down as any good alcohol does, it was very warming in my stomach, and no, no one purged.

After the last person has drunk their Bobinsana Don Rober, Dona Eliana and Don Carlos began singing this icaros, and tonight we were invited to join in, whether it be singing, humming, clapping or tapping. As the group became more comfortable we kept our eyes closed and began singing and tapping along as best we could, it wasn't about how good you can sing (although I can say as a group singing the icaros sounded angelic) it was about connecting and opening our hearts.

The Bobinsana ceremony only lasted about 35 minutes, after which as a group and Parker included we walked up to the star deck when we sat, laid, looked at the stars, talking and laughing until well into the night.

What a perfect experience.

Day Six

No need for a flower bath after the Bobinsana ceremony, but as I ate my breakfast I was very excited for tonight's 3rd ayahuasca ceremony now that we had our heart opening ceremony the night prior.

That afternoon was the same as each other afternoon before an ayahuasca ceremony, meeting outside the ceremonial maloca in the afternoon for a snack of fruit and to choose our places in the maloca and place our mattresses there. Afterward, I would attempt to sleep before the ceremony.

Wanting to test out different pre-ceremony routines to try and heighten my experience and increase overall comfort, I did a few push-ups in my room to get the heart rate and potentially some endorphins elevated, then went for a cold shower.

Ceremony Three

Heading into the ceremonial maloca around 9:10 pm, seeing the candles lit you know you're about to go to work on yourself, I took my seat and awaited the rest of the group to join, it's silent in the maloca before the ceremony, out of respect and in many cases knowing you're about to get your butt kicked in all the right ways by the medicine. I continued to repeat to myself why I was there and what my intentions were until the room was finally full and the shamans had taken their seats.

After Don Rober and Don Carlos had complete their individual blessing and icaro (an experience I had come to love and look forward to) for each of the group, we took our medicine, as the liquid reached my lips I repeated to myself what I had each other ceremony 'thank you for my healing', unfortunately for me, the brew continued to worsen in taste with age.

As I sat waiting for the medicine to kick in I hoped for a visual experience like the first ceremony, but quickly let that thought go, as did many other thoughts come and go, I was getting annoyed that I couldn't calm my mind, so I reverted back to a meditation technique I had learned about 10 years earlier, I imagined with every breath I took in I was breathing in little, white '+' signs (positive energy) to different areas of my body that needed healing of physical or emotional pain, the breath rushing there like little paramedics to an injured person, and as I would breath out, I was breathing out little '-' signs (negative energy), expelling any negativity or pain out of me, this kept my mind clear and I felt this was a good step to start off the ceremony on the 'healing myself path'. Before I realized it the last candle had been blown out and people were purging so at least 20-30 minutes had passed, I was pleased with myself when I realized I had been meditating without fidgeting or having my thoughts run my mind, at that moment a voice, what I will call my higher self, came to me in a very calm, non-judgemental, motherly feeling voice saying 'see how easy it is to be still, dummy', I chuckled to myself. This is one thing that immediately gave me the ah-hah feeling and something I know I had been neglecting at home, just being still.

At about this point (or so I can remember, each ceremony like to disrupt your normal perception of time) I began asking the universe if there was anything I needed to heal, anything I needed to learn? What *should* I be doing in my life? Exactly when I asked this last question a stern voice came over me 'STOP SHOULDING ON YOURSELF!' except the 'shoulding' sounding more like 'shitting', so 'stop shitting on myself', this felt like gentle smack on the back of the head by a friend or parent that has seen you beating yourself up for too long and they're sick of seeing you hold yourself back. This hit me like a tonne of bricks, as it was something I was intentional

about wanting to address, at that moment I realized I had been 'shoulding' on myself for many years, always asking myself 'what *should* I be doing' for a career that is appealing to others, what *should* I be doing to please the other person in a relationship, how *should* I be acting so other people like me, all these realizations of the way I had acted on various occasions over the last 10 years or so came to me instantly, and just as fast as the 'STOP SHOULDING ON YOURSELF' came, it was followed with a gentle, empowering 'well, what do you want to do?' as if to say, 'align with your higher purpose you dummy, and we (the universe) will make it happen'. Wow, I thought to myself, and the term 'awareness is curative' came to mind (see linked video at the bottom of this blog), which outlines that simply becoming aware of something in itself begins curing it.

Not long after this I felt my stomach began to rumble, which meant it was time to get my purge bucket at the ready, after purging I was getting hot flushes and found I had quite a headache come on, which isn't uncommon as I generally find myself with at least one headache a day back home.

I began thinking about one of Don Howard's sayings 'my mind is my office and my heart is my home. And I only go to the office when I absolutely have to, otherwise, I work from home', and without intentionally meaning to, whenever I told myself 'get in your heart and out of your head' my headaches would subside, go figure.

I continued to be present and dismissed some thoughts of work and then was very surprised the ceremony was over so soon, had I fallen asleep? I thought to myself, I wasn't sure, but I was very happy to crawl into bed.

While lying in bed I could see myself on Joe Rogan's podcast being interviewed by him, talking about all things, life, love and vulnerability, I couldn't distinguish the difference if this was a vision or a dream, I just thought 'well as long as it serves me does it really matter which it was?'

Day Seven

Feeling foggy, the Limonada, flower bath and Don Rober's icaro had me back to cloud 9, today was the final ayahuasca ceremony and I was ready.

Today we were also going to be visited by the highly anticipated Shipibo tribe, known for their breathtaking artwork and paintings, ayahuasca is a large part of this tribes customs and the Shipibo tribe are the best at capturing the ayahuasca experience. Parker did an amazing job letting us know before the retreat that when everyone sees the amazing artwork of the Shipibo tribe they continue to repeat the same message 'I should have brought more money', so with a little over 1400 Peruvian Soles left (about \$610 AUD) and some shirts to trade, I was genuinely excited.

That morning we complete our third talking circle, again very thankful for such kindred spirits to share and be open with, by now we have built some very close relationships with other members in the group, feeling like we all truly are on the same path.



After lunch we all walked across the Bridge to Eternity (pictured above) where the Shipibo tribe had arrived on boats and set up their artwork, necklaces, bracelets, tapestries and clothing, 'each section is a different family and they make their own pieces' Parker had told us earlier, which made me want to buy something from everyone, as most tribes in the area are fishing and hunting tribes making most of their income from the sale of their artwork. I was absolutely blown away by the artwork on the paintings, all of which are one-offs, I took a walk around trying to take in as much as I could before deciding on some pieces. The artworks and paintings varied in size from 30cm x 45cm to 120cm x 180cm and everything in between, just depends how much you want to spend.

I had my eye on one piece that the seller was asking 1000 Soles for, luckily he was wearing the same colour shirt as two shirts I had to trade (so I knew he liked the colour), in the end I had traded him two shirts, a head torch and 900 soles for two beautiful pieces of artwork (pictured below), as well as buying some pants for the ceremony that evening printed with ayahuasca vine and some bracelets and necklaces.





After we departed and thanked the Shipibo tribe we all returned to the ceremonial maloca back across the bridge to eternity where we inspected each other's purchases, we then de-briefed ready for the final ceremony and set up the maloca.

Ceremony Four

The night began like all other ceremonies, respectful silence and sitting ready to get into the clean calm frame of mind, tonight, my intention was to simply be 'shown what I needed to be shown' and nothing more.

I was wrestling with the idea of asking for more than a cup for tonight, the last ceremony, but I didn't want to push it 'you've come all the way here, just do it' I told myself, then having all the worrisome thoughts from ceremony one come flooding

back, thoughts of what if it's too much? What if I freak out and lose my mind?! I just attributed that to my ego not wanting to get its ass kicked in an ayahuasca street fight- for the fourth time in a row. When my name was called I held the cup to my lips 'thank you for my healing' and drank it down, and to my surprise, the brew wasn't bad tasting at all, in fact, it was really sweet! Kidding, it was way worse than the night before, in my journal I wrote that it was 'a fermented, tobacco coffee with a spicy and sour after taste', the thought of asking for more made me gag right there, but much to my egos disappointment I raised my right hand making a pinching gesture, indicating that I wanted a little more, I closed my eyes because I didn't even want to look at the ayahuasca it was so revolting, but as Don Carlos passed me the cup I smashed it down, having more than half a cup more.

I returned to my seat and waited, 'did I have too much?' I thought to myself 'nah you'll be fine' I reasoned, it didn't take long before it kicked in, except for this time like a freight train, I had the feeling of all this energy around me and standing over me, as if there were people standing all around me as I sat with my back to the wall, a voice (my own) was yelling 'IS THIS WHAT YOU WANTED?!' (for having the second cup), I opened my eyes and the thought and feeling disappeared, thankfully. I tried to get comfortable sitting but no luck, I moved my mattress and laid on the ground, this felt orgasmic to be lying down, as I laid there I tensed my butt cheeks and it felt like the most amazing feeling in the world! Like my whole body was vibrating at the brink of a body orgasm (and no, I didn't have an orgasm), all I could think was 'damn, we are spiritual beings having a physical experience and this is exactly the reason we have a human body, to feel, to feel this damn amazing', as I laid there I saw myself as a baby in a bouncer jumping happily, at that moment I felt like I was on a bungee cord, my whole body felt like it was leaving the ground bouncing up 6ft then back down within a 2 second span, this lasted for about 45 seconds and felt absolutely phenomenal, I was ecstatic!

From here moving forward I have no idea which orders my experiences came in as I lost all concept of time and space, so I'll break them down in no particular order.

I was lying on the floor and my mind was popping, literally popping, this could have potentially aligned with my heartbeat and my blood flowing into my head but I can't say for sure, with each pop I could see white light pumping out of me in all directions like a ripple of positive, healing energy, and as the ripple hit other people in the maloca they would light up and I was healing them. This lasted for about 45 seconds as well and the pops felt blissful.

I was then transformed into feminine energy and was having intercourse (I use the term intercourse because I can't otherwise describe the intertwining and merging of two energies) with masculine energy, was this my conception from my mother's perspective? I thought to myself, but as soon as the masculine energy had appeared it literally swam upward and I had the feeling I was underwater, the masculine

energy, I then realized was a mermaid, mer-MAN (Zoolander voice), accompanied by a pink dolphin swimming away, I don't know what to make of this but thought it could have had something to do with looking at the paintings earlier that day which depicted many animals, including mermaids and pink dolphins.

When the icaros began I could see all of the shamans in traditional tribal wear dancing in a circle in the middle of the maloca accompanied by about 15 other people, the icaros sounded like they were being sung directly into my ear as if they were standing right next to me.

In the next vision, I was seeing the world from within myself, from my soul's perspective and I was peering through my eyes except there was a shell with eye holes that separated my soul from my physical body, and the message I received was that unintentionally my soul shines through a little bit, occasionally (which is when I'm aligning with my higher self), but all I have to do is give it permission to shine through more and it will choose to let it through. At this moment I thought about Don Howard and Parker saying, 'lead with the heart'.

Around this point was when I purged, I didn't see any visions, just emptied the stomach.

I then received flashes and images of different animals, jaguars, snakes, eagles, again this could have been attributed to the paintings we had seen earlier.

At this stage I was shown a feminine energy, with a sunrise behind, I saw into the feminine energy and saw a conception, the beginning of life, a baby, my baby, and the message 'this is what is *really* important' and a way I can give my best self, followed by 'and just find something to do you enjoy' and 'stop worrying', this was in the context of work and career, this for me was a very impactful moment as for the last 10 years I have tried 5 very different careers, always looking for fulfillment from a career, this was an experience I was very thankful for.

From here I was then inside myself once again, as a separate being from my body, I had the feeling there was another energy or being with me but I couldn't depict if it was masculine, feminine, me or someone else, I was going deeper and deeper inside myself, lifting up trap doors and descending stairs, in what I could only describe feeling like I was going deeper and deeper into my subconscious.

Once the last vision faded I was seeing flashes from all the different movies I had seen in the past, almost a collage of all the content I had seen or read, with a big flashing sign over it saying 'be cautious of the content you consume, it's all recorded in here (my mind), so choose wisely what you put in'.

I felt a headache wash over me and I asked the universe 'why do I always get headaches?' in a fast and matter of fact response I received 'because you need to open your third eye', followed by the message of, 'there's all this built up spiritual energy in here (my head) and you need to release the pressure by opening your third eye, this aligns with following through on my meditation practices when I get home.

I then tapped myself in the middle of the forehead with my index finger and commanded 'open'.

By this stage, the purging from the group had subsided and the 'bano' calls had diminished, a good indication the ceremony would probably conclude shortly, my lasting vision and memory of this ceremony was seeing energetic vibration and how it can be used to heal people and nature, and I remember thinking this is something I need to research more and explore when I am home as a way to help the masses and I should pursue it, you'll be happy to know I've started a vibrator company- just kidding.

Shortly after this, the candle was lit and we began our staggered walk back to our rooms.

I just remember being so thankful that I had come and experienced this.

Day Eight

Today I enjoyed my flower bath more than normal, potentially because of the amazing insights from the night before, or just relishing in the cold water wanting to appreciate every second of it, because who knows when or if I would ever be receiving one again.

At breakfast, we all shared stories of the evening before and all expressed our appreciation of what a wonderful week it had been so far. Knowing we were drawing near to the end of the retreat we all begun discussing which foods we were looking forward to having when we got home.

In the afternoon of this day, we visited a local animal sanctuary that had been built after many animals were rescued during an illegal animal trafficking operation and held until they can be returned to the wild, we were lucky enough to hold some (or in some cases be held by) truly remarkable animals. The monkeys and sloths were quite affectionate.



We returned to SpiritQuest Sanctuary all knowing that we had our last evening as a group, as Parker said 'It's the longest, shortest week of your life' and this statement rang true through all of us. That evening we met in the dining maloca for our final talking stick circle, it really wasn't about what everyone was saying it's about how they were feeling and the amount of love, care and openness I felt in that circle really summed up the entire week, reflecting on the deep conversations we had and deeper bonds made, or even the silliness trying to pile 6 people into the blow up boat on water, it had been a phenomenal week and made friends for life.

At dinner, we were joined by all staff at the Sanctuary as well as our maestros Don Rober, Dona Elina, and Don Carlos. We gave the staff and family tips (optional), but in truth, no financial amount can cover the immense learnings and gratitude we had for those that could make this week possible.

(I really wanted to insert a photo here of all guests, staff and our maestros, however, I will respect certain people's want for anonymity, just know that it was the most amazing group of like-minded people, regardless of age, sex, occupation or background)

Day Nine

Waking up on the final day was bittersweet, the beautiful sound of the Amazon's natural alarm clock is something I wish I could hold onto forever. But as much as I would like to stay in the Amazon at Spirit Quest for another month or more, the true growth happens during the integration and applying the learned lessons back in your life.

After we had our final dieta-approved breakfast we boarded the boats we had arrived on, although we were boarding the same boats, we certainly were not the same people, a quote from Parker (yes another one haha) who quotes Heraclitus here was 'you never enter the same river twice, for it is never the same river and you are never the same person', nothing could have summed up this moment better, I sat watching the SpiritQuest lodge disappear behind the trees as we rounded a bend on the river, wishing I could live that week again, wishing I could return as soon as possible and wishing I could share this experience with others.



Final thoughts

I went to SpiritQuest hoping for healing or 'fixing', if anything needed to be fixed, I left knowing that I am the energy and light that can fix and heal myself, and that life really does happen because of you and not to you. I left feeling that potentially there were things that I hadn't addressed that I really wanted to, such as my association with money and that it is hard to come by (instilled from my father) as well as thoughts on careers, however after a week of reflection journaling and meditation I realized that I had in fact worked on this issue and many others that were not received with an ah-huh smack to the head, and I was comforted that only 2% of the download and benefits of ayahuasca come during the ceremonies and doing the intensive work those 9 days at the Sanctuary.

I feel lighter, happier and completely vibrating at a different frequency, where I used to ask 'what *should* I be doing?' In a calm and detached tone, I was replied with 'well, what do you want to do?' which made me chuckle, I am now asking myself, 'what do I want to do?' and although I have probably asked myself this question thousands of times before in different ways, but, to ask that question in alignment with serving the greater good of all, it now feels empowering.

Wanting to impact humanity positively on a large scale my mind jumps from assisting on similar retreats as this, researching and applying psychedelic research to assist mental health issues, businesses helping people on their own path to being their best selves and reaching their full potential.

I feel like a clean, objective slate genuinely excited to help people on their own journey to be the best version of themselves.

I feel extremely healthy, having only eaten fresh fruits, vegetables and fish these last few days, in combination with my mental clarity and calmness, I feel like the tests and challenges of the world could bounce right off me.

This week showed me just how much I stimulate and attempt to fill my mind without ever being mindful. Always listening to podcasts or audiobooks without ever sitting to just be, and meditate.

How wrapped up in our phones we are that in one week of phones being away, I have had conversations and built relationships comparable to those that took years to build in western society.

I leave this week being forever thankful for the opportunity to meet these beautiful people, I leave feeling calm and content, empowered and humble, I leave this week

as a different me, a better me, leaving with positive momentum and a positive trajectory.

I don't feel my plant medicine journey has come to an end, I am thankful for my awareness and new perspective of consciousness and my spark for exploration will continue.

Disclaimer

I offer you this writing as honestly as I can as a reflection of my own experience, each person well and truly 'confronts' their own learnings and lessons through the time of the ceremony and thereafter.

If you feel the calling, and only if you feel the personal calling, I cannot recommend SpiritQuest and the family there enough, I had no concerns completely surrendering (a vital part of the ceremonies) due to the safety and support I felt here. So if you feel like this is for you, take the step and enroll at the Don Howard University of Higher Consciousness.

Conclusion

As only seems fitting to leave you with this quote, as Parker left us with it, by Winston Churchill;

'Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning'.

Much love my brothers and sisters,
-Cain



Links and Books that helped me get here

(Not specifically all Ayahuasca, but Plant Medicine based)

SpiritQuest;

- www.biopark.org (best website on the planet)
- Insta: @spiritquest.sanctuary

Aubrey Marcus (Attends SpiritQuest Sanctuary)

- SpiritQuest/ Ayahuasca Documentary: [here](#)
- AMP Podcast with Don Howard: [here](#)
- Huachuma Documentary: [here](#)

Amber Lyon (Attends SpiritQuest Sanctuary)

- Reset.me Podcast with Don Howard: [here](#)

Books:

Michael Pollan: How To Change Your Mind, 'The new science of psychedelics'.

The Yusa Guide to Balance: Body Mind Spirit

Youtube: [Awareness is Curative](#)- Actualized.org (a really great channel for all things psychology)