

A Journey through the Stones & Bones of the Andes: Sifting Through Personal Terrain

By: Sandra Corcoran

This was my ninth time to the Land of the Ancient Inca, and by my own admission, it was to be my last. I had gone in journey's past as neophyte, as student, as teacher and as *p'aqo*. What brought me there the first time was a repetitious dream; and due to that, the encouragement and insistence by my Seneca mentor Gram Twylah, to 'seek further'. What was bringing me this 'last' time was the repeated prodding of my students to have their own opportunity to seek further. My dear friend and Andean mentor, Juan Nunez del Prado would lead this journey with me.

My immersion into the Andean Mystical tradition has been a vehicle for me to continue to heal, to grow and learn personally and spiritually about my Self. My introduction to the Native Path had begun years prior, in my early thirties when I experienced the loss of my first daughter. My feet were put to 'a path' by a series of female Native American mentors who sought me out, and guided me through my profound grief, bringing me out the other side with a more meaningful respect for, and belief in, Great Mystery (there are many ways to express the 'essence of God'); the healing world of nature; energy in it's ever changing, ever manifesting forms; and the ability to heal, and in fact grow, from deep personal woundedness.

This would lay a foundation over many years, for me to use these 'lessons' as workshop facilitator, psychotherapist, healer & *p'aqo* (a person who has been initiated into, and practices the Andean mystical path)--offering to others, what had been offered to me. In the Andean tradition this 'giving back' is referred to as *ayni*. What I had experienced with the grace and gentleness of all my mentors was the act of learning how, and benefiting from, *soul healing*.

Ayni is reciprocity, or the exchange of energy. The goal of any *p'aqo*, medicine person, shaman is to walk with perfect *ayni* through all your relationships: relationships to Nature and the cosmos; family relationships (both biological and global); and in its utmost simplicity and most profoundly difficult, relationship with the true Self--both its light & dark sides.

Soul Healing, from the perspective of my teachers, is not necessarily curing rather; it is living your full potential in alignment with where you find yourself in your every day life--utilizing compassion, awareness and personal responsibility. To be a *p'ago* is to live in service, not in servitude; to take responsibility but not to be responsible for everything; to be grateful for the awareness that life brings you; and to let your 'heart work' connect you to and guide you down your Earthpath.

Where I found myself as I brought these seekers to this beautiful, diverse, ancient land of the Inca, was in a deep personal struggle. Gram often pointed out that "Spirit would allow you only so long to be where you weren't supposed to be, and then It would have to show you otherwise". Gently or harshly, the path was committed to you only if you were committed to the path. I had learned that through the years, that at its most basic, it's up to you.

I had left quite a large practice as therapist and 'healer' over three plus years ago and moved to another state. Shortly after arriving I was confronted with a reality that did not mirror my expectations. My only brother became one of those blessed souls on one of the planes in the great tragedy we have come to refer to as 9/11. I could not fully embrace the work I had been trained so long for, and had earned the right to offer, as I could not seem to raise above the 'fog' of anger and frustration at life's unfairness. I found myself in Peru in this limiting mind-set.

Though the details are less important than the outcome, the confrontation of my Self, through the teachings encountered on this journey, helped me to recover a renewed motivation of my soul's work— to teach and counsel with others, all I have learned from the lessons and guidance of my mentors, on this wondrous path called life. My desire to assist others as they explore their personal terrain in shared communion, reviewing the pain and joy of life, to gain a new perspective. It was my students' *ayni* back to me, the land's *ayni* for my trust in Her, and my mentor Juan's *ayni* for my faith in the path.

The terrain of the Andes, the stones along the rocky paths and those that make the magnificent ruins of towns and ancient structures, are seen as the 'bones' of the *Pachamama*, Mother Earth. The Natives believe certain stones, and these ancient sites can help us heal, by imparting vibrations that bring us into re-alignment with our Self. Being in the vibration and structure of Her bones had touched me deeply, as we communicated stone to bone.

You do not need to be a *p'ago* or work within an Indigenous culture to experience a soul healing. The abilities to create personal change are in you, and all around you, each and everyday should you choose to 'receive', surrender your wounds, and shift your perceptions. I still, as do we all, have to choose between woundedness and life in a larger context—understanding that the painful situations we all experience can be a potent opportunity for soul growth. The ultimate balance, through belief, is Spirit's healing within our life.

Note: This article was originally printed in Indigo Sun Magazine, TX/2004 and reprinted in 2005 at the request of the website editor for Spirit1 website/CA and that same year at the request of the print editor of Art of Wellbeing/NC)

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