The path of the sacred plant medicines is a great path towards healership and brings many gifts to those who walk it. For this reason I encourage anyone to take this path and use these plants to heal one’s self and to assist others in that.

Over the last few years I have seen a pattern unfold in the Western world in which people aspire to make healing work with plant medicines their career. Some, usually young men, go into a rainforest for an Ayahuasca retreat ranging from several weeks to several months, become enchanted by the plants and then return to their home country to start administering the plant to others by organizing their own ceremonies. Sometimes they even learn a few icaros, the songs of a healer, and a few shamanic techniques, and are in this way able to draw in people to set up a medicine circle.

In most cases I see them do this truly from the heart, with a deep desire to do something good for others. And indeed, to some extent healing happens in their ceremonies. Of course it does, as the medicine is what it is and the support of a well-organized structure that most of them have set up is a major contributor to personal healing. Such structures help to reduce fear and to firmly deal with unexpected situations. The resultant healing, and the usual positive reactions of those that come to their ceremonies, stimulate them to continue what they are doing.

Regrettably, many continue doing so without asking themselves whether the healing is happening because of them, or in spite of them. And they continue without asking themselves the question as to what is really happening anyway. Moreover, since they lack the training and experience to truly hold the space, the lower energies that are vomited out by the participants during plant medicine ceremonies are left largely untransformed. These unguided energies make them and others sick. If left untransformed, these energies will re-enter the weakest links of the participants. This also includes the person who is guiding the ceremony. Naturally they do not see it this way themselves but in a sense they are denying the patients that visit them an opportunity to visit a professional instead.

Please do not think that I am trying to discourage them from continuing on this path. To the contrary, I love them for who they are and I wish them all the best. This includes continuing on the path of sacred plants. Each of these aspirants has a unique quality, a unique essence to bring to their work with medicinal plants that in turn will attract clients to work with them. It is exactly this unique essence that they hopefully want to discover within themselves and are able to expand into the world, although for some it might be better to bring it in a different line of work other than organizing ceremonies. They raise my eyebrows but I never tell them not to do what they are doing. Firstly, because I believe that everyone is his or her own master. You can only show people the way you see things but after that they literally have to drink the cup themselves, but by being honest and direct I help them to make sure that the cup is close to their mouths. Secondly, I do not want to make them insecure about themselves because that would open even more doors through which negative energies, and thus sickness, would come in. What I do ask them is to be more sensible about what
they are doing and use their brains as much as their hearts and only do what is within their area of competence, which is a challenge in itself anyway. I know very well that it is impossible to convince them to do things in a different anyway. They are so captured by the idea that they are doing something good that they do not see the damage that they could do to themselves and others.

Some claim that they do this work because they have been initiated by this or by that master to do their work with plants. My answer is always very simple: initiations do not exist. Period. There is only one way to get ‘initiated’ and that is when you do the deep introspective work to clean out your own garbage and thus arrive at the level where you can connect to potent healing energies. When you are there you have actually initiated yourself, congratulations! For this to then transform into something useful for your healing work, the next step is to finalise pacts with these healing energies, of whichever tradition. The only way to close pacts with these energies is by gaining their respect, which comes through deep personal processing work and embedding their qualities within you so that you will become them. There are no shortcuts to this. It is interesting to see how many shamans are laughing all the way to the bank because people buy their ‘Certificates of Initiation’ en masse. This is out of a desire to get something without actually doing any work. That is also a manifestation of the ego.

Others say that an incredibly powerful shaman gave them permission to work with this medicine, or that the plants asked them to do this work. Where do people even get the idea that they need the approval of an external authority to work with medicinal plants? And where do they get the idea that because someone or something, including a plant, asked them to do this work that they themselves would not have the largest and arguably even only say in this? By claiming that you started this work primarily because the plants asked you to, you pretty much disqualify yourself as a capable decision making human being. It is interesting to see that as soon as a seemingly powerful authority comes into play many people are bound to give their power away. Hitler rose to infamy this way, with a whole nation several years later claiming they did not know about the greatest damage that was done.

Some say they organize plant medicine circles in Europe and the US because their circles are more adapted to Western culture than indigenous ceremonies and thus fill a need. But how can you conduct a powerful healing ceremony with these sacred plants if you accept the plants but reject the cultures that have cultivated and cared for them in the past millennia and that are intrinsically connected with them? Again, even in those ceremonies, healing occurs because the medicinal plants are what they are. But these ceremonies would be far more powerful if they would be more embedded in the indigenous traditions that the plants originate from and which have developed over millennia. Usually, these indigenous traditions are far more grounded and less rooted in manmade rules than the Western world is.

Lacking the necessary introspective work and lacking the connections to the higher energies that are used within ceremonies, these hopefuls consciously or subconsciously know that there is an empty hole to fill within them. They know this very well. But instead of shifting into a lower gear and getting more realistic about themselves and their capabilities, they fill this hole within with a ballooned personality, and with ‘outside stuff’ that might include beautiful singing, indigenous clothing and a superficial kind of humility. Add to that the ‘groupies’ that they sometimes collect around them and
who feed them with positive feedback. These supporters really make me grin from ear to ear when they send emails around in which they give high praise to the ‘incredible healing powers’ and ‘truly developed awareness’ of the ‘shaman’. A good wine needs no bush, of course.

The proficiency to work with the medicinal plants comes by connecting deeply with your own body and bodily functions only; ‘as above so below, as below so above’. You cannot have an out-of-body experience before you have had an in-the-body experience first. The body provides an anchor that prevents you getting lost once moving into higher realms or when taken by energies. Most aspirants have unfortunately not mastered the vomiting techniques and other uses of the body that are absolutely necessary to disperse energies within this field of work. Only a few of them are actually aware of the energies within the space, and the close connection this space has with the energy fields of the participants, let alone that they are able to transform these energies. I still have to meet the first person who has fully mastered the art of being able to keep a space without mastering the body first, all of which is done foremost through mastering yourself. Because of this lack of insight they miss what this job is about and thus they make themselves and others sick.

They are not alone in that though. Over the years I have also met many indigenous shamans that look absolutely stunning in their traditional clothes, can sing like the indigenous version of Frank Sinatra and pluck their musical instruments as if they were an Amazonian version of Slayer themselves, but are energy wise relatively powerless and do more bad than good. It is interesting to see how people flock to them by the thousands and how some of these shaman guys and girls are put on immense pedestals by people who really like to give their power away to others. It has no use having negative feelings towards them because they are what they are, as are their clients; just another manifestation of the ego. Instead, it is much better to have a good laugh at them. That a person has a brown skin and can put a feather crown on his head does not mean that this person actually has any healing capabilities. Neither is it true that a person without an indigenous background and without a brown skin has not mastered any of these powers. For anyone of us this path is open.

In a way you cannot blame participants for visiting the circles of these ‘shamans’. There is not much reliable information about plant medicines available, and what is around is usually shrouded in mystery with a lot of possibility for confusion. Egos and self-righteousness are abundant, maybe even more abundant than anywhere else, and do not help to put clarity and transparency into this line of work. In that regard there are many healers that are distinctively more lost in the woods than most of their patients are; but because they know how to speak the language they get away with it. Add to that the fear for plant medicines that first-timers and the occasional veteran have, and you can easily understand why people put their power into the hands of these fakes, not knowing any better. You won’t believe how many people come to me to highly praise a ‘powerful’ shaman. By going beyond the apparent outside and simply tuning in and feeling the essence of the person, they would be able to debunk these people quickly themselves. It is their own ego which prevents them from doing that. People like to believe in fairy tales and that is exactly what prevents them from listening to their own intuition. I usually reply to their praise for a certain shaman by praising a completely different but genuine aspect of that shaman, because everyone has their own qualities, although self-mastery might not be one of them.
Wherever I go in the world to perform ceremonies, either leading them myself or as an assistant, I encounter these aspirants that do their own circles. With little exception they have attracted entities in their energy fields. They have acquired them through the circles that they organized. Those who are aware enough know that they have attracted entities, but lack the techniques to remove them out of their system. Those who are not aware usually bring in the heaviest. Without asking questions I will take these entities off them if I can, although I will always give them some advice on how to protect themselves and others. It is for them to take the advice or to leave it. I never lecture, because it would only create a barrier for them to come to me for help if they need it. And if I am not able to help, I will of course send them to someone who can. I know what my limits are.

Now I am not saying that aspirants should necessarily learn things the way that I learned them. I trained with these plants for nine years before I even considered working with medicine circles larger than just a few people. In that regard the aspirants that start organizing ceremonies after having been in the rainforest for a few weeks definitely have bigger balls than I have. In those nine years, for a third of the time, I have been in the direct vicinity of different masters who showed me many things that shaped the way I work; either through a positive or a negative experience. I went to many retreats, both in and outside the rainforest, and have visited numerous non-indigenous masters who could teach me various aspects of energy healing. These include meditation, energy reading and simple but important skills for human interaction. The main teachers were the plants themselves. Their teaching did not come by telling me how I should run my things but by allowing me to learn through experience and fine-tune where necessary.

In between I visited a large amount of faraway places to become acquainted with various energies in these locations and to conduct pacts with them to be able to embed their qualities into my system. Through my photography in rainforests around the world I connected with the energies of many animals and plants. In Asia I learned to master the boorish energies of the Mongolians which help to battle entities, and learned from them how to get into higher states of awareness using the medicine of alcohol. I lived and worked in Tanzania for a year and connected to the humble but proud spirit of the Masai and was taught the energy of simplicity. By helping out in a field clinic in the highlands of Guatemala I understood that it could just as well have been me whose eyesight would depend on an ‘unaffordable’ medicine worth a few dollars and I thus learned the energy of appreciation. The energies in North Korea taught me about immense frustration and how to manage it, and also about focus and discipline. The machismo-energies I came to know in Latin America help me to transmit useful energies into the energy fields of male patients that are insecure around women and thus have difficulties attracting one. The soft and sweet energies of the people of Laos helped me to find the sweetness within myself.

Before I even thought about holding a ceremony for a large group, I had assisted in several hundreds of an indigenous Shuar master’s ceremonies and had cleaned out thousands of liters of other people’s vomit in the process. This allowed me to build up my skills from the bottom. In a way it was a bit like the Karate Kid painting a wall, where eventually the most trivial household chores turned out to contain the greatest gifts to understand how to manipulate energies and to work with them. Years of running vomit buckets taught me to protect myself from energies possibly jumping over. Years of cleaning and arranging the ceremonial place taught me about cleaning and arranging my own mind. Fitting a large number of people in a small place taught me about authority and when to
use it. That is why I can do what I do today. Healership does not come through singing nice songs in a la-la-land environment. It comes through cleaning vomit buckets.

Training to work with medicinal plants is like training a spiritual muscle and it takes many years to become even close to sufficiently proficient to act within a ceremony as the physical extension of the plants. Even though there was nine years of training, I have many more years ahead of me to get even close to the level that I would like to perform at. It was a deep and rigorous training, guided by the plants themselves. The first thing I learned was how to remove energies from my own system and get my act together. I learned this through many diets and many discomforts. These discomforts included countless nights of helplessly crawling through a moist jungle floor vomiting my guts out with the energy of the medicine hammering in on my energy system to make the changes that are necessary to do this kind of work. After that I learned how to move energies. Firstly I mastered how to move them with my rump and my intestines, then later to move them with my hands, followed by my breath and ultimately I learned how to move them with my mind.

I learned how to fight demons by creating traps and by taking them head on. I learned to regulate the dominant part within me so that I could use it to subdue and command entities by energetically becoming a meaner bastard than they are. Some of the ordeals that I went through involved having entities move into me to learn about them, with sickness accompanying the entity that was sent to teach me. I also learned when not to fight and thus managed to stop the fighting with myself. The supplementary but still important techniques that I learned were playing instruments and singing which I consider to be of lesser importance as one can easily loose them, including one’s own voice. One’s own body one cannot loose. Such is also the case with amulets, crystals and other tools that help to focus energy. They are nice tools, but vigorously clinging to a small feather while mumbling mantras instead of relying on what was already there in the first place is not really my idea of healership. You have probably seen such a thing before. It was in an animated movie that featured a flying elephant with unusually large ears. The most important thing I learned was to open my heart both for myself and for others, and especially for those patients that come into a circle with the most hideous and sinister energies you could ever imagine and which they themselves have attracted and embraced. Thus I learned that it is always about the patient and never about me.

Anyone that is born on Earth has the natural capability to ‘see’ energies to some degree. To many it is obscured by conditioning. In a way it is like your left big toe. It has always been there but now that you read these words you are actually aware of this toe. I was born with this capability relatively open and from when I was young I have been able to perceive energies and thus entities in people. I am not unique in that regard as I know many who have capabilities even far beyond what I can do. I can ‘see’ energies without the use of medicinal plants, although it took me quite a while to understand what I was seeing because I was not paying attention. This capability enables me, among other things, to instantly discover where anyone’s blocks are and what is necessary for the person to overcome these blocks and subsequently move to the next level of him or herself. I deployed my skills in the business world for many years where companies paid me large sums of money to work with their people in this way, although I rarely told them how I do it as it would frighten them. When in a ceremony I use the medicine, this skill gets enhanced; the difference that the medicine makes is the difference between watching a movie on your TV at home and watching a movie in a 3D IMAX theatre.
By having been partly exposed to the energetic reality behind all phenomena from a young age, I might had a bit of a head start over those who aspire to be on this path of plant medicines but have yet to work to achieve that type of sensitivity. This has, however, never released me from the necessity to do deep and intense introspective work to be able to assist others in their transformation, which is my joy. Since I know the hardships of the path of the plant medicines I have nothing but appreciation and respect for all those who walk it. But there is only pity for those who think that there are any shortcuts. And that includes those that are stupid enough to want to drive on the highway while they have not even mastered to drive on a small rural road. You will in this way damage your vehicle and those of others.

I never tell people what to do, nor do I tell them what they should not do. People become their own master only if they make their own decisions and learn from their mistakes, if those mistakes do not kill them, of course. On the contrary, the path of the plant medicines is a great path and in the coming decades we need far more people who are able to work with the sacred medicinal plants in a sensible way. What is important on this path of healership is to match the will to work with these plants with an equal amount of self-knowledge. It is knowledge and understanding of one’s own capabilities that prevents people from doing stupid things. With just a little bit more self-knowledge they would ask themselves why it is that only after very rigorous training of many years the indigenous shaman would start administering medicinal plants to its tribes’ members. Why would anyone be special and be an exception to that? That is also a manifestation of the ego.

A lot of supporters of plant medicines were outraged when the United Nations anti-narcotics council published their 2012 report in which they said that the growing number of Ayahuasca circles is worrisome and should be curtailed. I think that in a way the UN has a point; not by reasoning from the great contribution that these plants make to our world, but by looking at the contributions that some of those working with the plants are making. Any job where there is a risk of you or others becoming sick or even passing away requires rigorous training to prevent accidents. Working with sacred plants is no different, although regulating the right to work with these plants as is done in other professions is, in my opinion, undesirable. The many different cultures and different ways of working with these plants make that impossible. Additionally, a qualifying system based on ethnicity would also not work as it would favour useless indigenous ‘fakes’ over non-indigenous who actually have the capabilities to work with medicinal plants. Hopefully the sector will do itself what it helps others to do so well and this way through deep introspective work people clean up their act.

The four universal pillars of working with any plant medicine are Will, Sincerity, Integrity and Humility. It does not lack many aspirants in will and most are sincere enough to do this kind of work. They almost all do it from their hearts, thus with a high standard of integrity. But what this work also asks for is humility. It is not humility defined as to kowtow for someone else. It is the humility to have an attitude of servitude towards what the situation needs; not what you need. Sometimes this humility is necessary to know when you are not the right person, in the right place, at the right time. Accept it and do whatever it is that you need to do.

With all my love I wish them and their patients well. I wrote this book for you.
This article is an excerpt from the book ‘Uwishin’, to be published later this year, about the author’s experiences with the indigenous shaman of the Upper Amazon. The author can be contacted via email at paul@tsunki.com, or through the website www.Tsunki.com, and is open to inquiries and constructive discussions on the use of plant medicines. You are cordially invited to share with others his values, which are maybe yours too.