

Andean Mysticism and Healing the Planet

A speech by Dr. Oakley Gordon at a fund raising event for Kenosis Spirit Keepers
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Thank you all for being here. It is important that you *are* here, for at least two reasons. First, I greatly appreciate your support for Kenosis Spirit Keepers, in my presentation I'll be winding my way toward a description of what we are up to and why it is significant. But second, your simply being here is important, for there is more than one culture represented in the audience and that, as you will see, is important beyond the scope of Kenosis Spirit Keepers.

I would like to begin with a ceremony, which I offer with the greatest respect for the Andean culture from whence it came. I'll begin by creating a k'intu. To form a k'intu you take three coca leaves and hold them together at your finger tips, as a stack or slightly fanned. It is illegal for the coca plant to grow in the United States so I'll be using bay leaves, which resemble coca leaves, and they will suffice. Now coca leaves are particularly sacred, but the sacred is in all things, including bay leaves, and to a large extent it is the intent that counts, so bay leaves will be just fine. To form a k'intu you select the very best coca leaves in your pouch, and you hold them by their stem tips, shiny (green) side up, like this.

Now I will perform phukuy with the k'intu, which involves gently blowing my finest energy through the k'intu, mixing my energetic filaments with those of the sacred coca, and then beyond to... "Pachamama, Apu Asungate, Apu Pachatusan, Apu Waman Lipa, the rest of the Apukuna, Apu Olympus, the Salt Lake Quakers, waikis, and friends gathered here today. Let us meet in harmony and respect." I have called upon the Pachamama, the great cosmic being who is our mother the planet earth, to be with us here; and the Apus, the beings who are the great mountain peaks, the three Apus who I know the best, having been in ceremonies on their slopes--Apu Asungate, Apu Pachatusan, Apu Waman Lip--and the other Apus as well, the Apukuna ('kuna' being how you make a word plural in Quechua, the language of the Andes), and Apu Olympus, as Mount Olympus is the Apu of this valley that I have felt a strong connection with all of my life. I have called upon them all, asking them, with great respect, to be here with us now as we meet, and I have further called upon us here to meet in harmony and respect.

After phukuy the coca leaves are either chewed or they are placed within a despacho (an offering). As I don't feel inclined to munch some bay leaves I'll give them to my waiki here, Gina, who will take them outside and place them in the Pachamama. Waiki in Quechua is literally a male's brother, but my friend and teacher Americo uses the term as an affectionate way to address both males and females and I like to do that too. The forming of k'intus, and then phukuy, occurs not only in ceremonial meetings but whenever the Andean people meet, perhaps on their way to perform some communal work in the fields in the morning. Imagine, if you will, a society where whenever people meet they have a ceremony, asking that they meet in harmony, and inviting to the gathering with great respect the planet earth (Pachamama) and the mighty mountain peaks (the Apus, or 'Apukuna'). In this way they are attending to the quality of their relationships to each other, and are constantly bringing into their lives their relationships with nature, for they do not draw a distinction between nature and themselves.

Obviously, we are talking about a culture that has different assumptions about reality than our Western, industrial culture, and this is what my presentation tonight will be about. Every culture has assumptions about the nature of reality. We have to have assumptions to form the basis of our thinking, without them we would not be able to think, we would have chaos in our minds. The people of a culture more or less share the same set of assumptions, or the culture could not hold together. The assumptions made by one culture are not, however, necessarily the same as the assumptions made in another culture.

Now the assumptions which form the basis of our thinking are interesting things. They cannot, for example, be proven to be true. That is why they are called 'assumptions', we assume they are true and then base our thinking upon them. The assumptions which underly our approach to understanding reality are so basic, exist at such a deep level, that they are rarely brought to light to examine. Usually we don't need to, until perhaps we run into a culture that has different assumptions.

How can we evaluate the different assumptions made by different cultures? No logical system can prove its own assumptions to be true, we always have to start with some things we just assume without proof. If our assumptions cannot be tested with the measuring stick of 'truth' then how can they be evaluated? The answer is they are evaluated by their usefulness, by how well they help us move through life. No culture's set of assumptions, however, are perfect for everything, a culture's assumptions will facilitate it being really good at some things, but those same assumptions will, by their very nature, keep the culture from being particularly good at certain other things. And that idea takes us, finally, to a belated expression of the main theme of my presentation tonight. Which is this...

Here in the West we have the technology and knowledge we need to turn this planet into a garden of Eden; to live in harmony with each other and with Nature, in beauty, and in health, in a world rich with diversity of life. In my despair at the direction we are heading I sometimes forget this, that such a world is within our grasp if we choose, but it is, and that is very good news. We also, however, have the power to turn this world into a place of mass extinction of life, of poisoned air and water, of poverty, of hunger, and of war. The question is why, when given the choice, do we seem to be choosing the latter? Tonight I would like to give my answer not only to the 'why', but to the 'wherefore' (what we can do about it).

Our modern, Western, industrial culture has at its foundations certain assumptions about the nature of reality that allows us to be great technicians and great inventors, and this has led to many wondrous and mightily convenient goods (iPods, cellular phones, cars, movies, MRI scans). These very same assumptions that make us so good at technology, however, make it difficult for us as a culture to choose to head toward a healthy and beautiful future. We have the technology and knowledge we need to create an Eden, but we seem to lack the heart to do so.

Now let me turn to the culture found in the high Andes. It is hard to fathom just how different their assumptions of reality are from our own, until you think about how little our philosophical heritages have in common. Their assumptions were not influenced by the Bible nor by the

classic Greek philosophers. They did not have a Descartes to propose that reality consists of two independent realms of mind and matter (the sacred and the physical) nor did they go through the industrial and scientific revolutions. The assumptions they make about reality are quite different than our own, and have led to great developments in some areas and less development in others. They are specifically highly skilled in their interactions with Nature, in their ability to form loving and mutually supportive relationships with each other, with Nature, and with the Cosmos. Another way of saying this is that they have the 'heart' we need to turn our species in the right direction.

I have been studying the Andean approach since 1994. This has included several trips to Peru to work with the paq'os of the high Andes. The term "paq'o" does not have an exact equivalent in our culture, some people translate "paq'o" as "shaman" and others as "mystic". It's not a particularly great choice, it's like trying to describe a bear to a culture that has never seen one and being given the choice of saying that it is essentially a cat, or essentially a dog. Of the two, however, I think that "mystic" is closer than "shaman" in describing a paq'o. "Shaman" carries with it associations with psychoactive plants, drumming, chanting, and journeys into the spirit world to retrieve lost pieces of the soul. I haven't run into any of that in the Andes. They do chew coca leaves, which is about as exciting as drinking a cup of tea. "Mystic" seems closer. Mystics believe that the Cosmos is far more incredible, more mysterious, than words (or thoughts) can encompass. The mystic believes it is possible, however, to move beyond words--beyond just describing reality--to actually experience reality at a deep level. Mystics, thus, place little value in dogma, or beliefs, or descriptions. Words may have value as scaffolding, helping one to build the experience, but the words themselves have no value beyond that, it is the experience that really matters. Thus dogma, belief systems, have value to the mystic only in their ability to lead to a mystical experience--the direct experience of the sacred--and the dogma or beliefs themselves are worthless other than that. This pretty much fits my experiences in the Andes, where I have been led to many experiences of the sacred but no one has sat me down and said 'Oakley, this is what you are suppose to believe...'

Neighboring villages may differ somewhat in their ideology, and just as in our culture differences in beliefs about the Cosmos can be found among individuals within the same village, but that all seems unimportant. When I meet with the paq'os it doesn't matter what I believe, nor the beliefs of the paq'os I have worked with before, the paq'os seem to have the ability to determine where I am at and help me move a little further down my path. It is, in essence, not about beliefs, not about ideology, it is about ability. Paq'os advance in rank not by what they believe but by what they can do. A paq'o told me of the 'test' he had to pass to be considered a higher level paq'o, he had to use a type of divination involving the casting of coca leaves to discover where a missing alpaca was. After hours of struggling with the task he announced that the alpaca's body could be found in a specific ravine a several hours walk away. When the party traveled there and found the alpaca it was announced that he had passed the test. When my friend and teacher (the paq'o Americo Yabar) took us to a remote village to have a ceremony with a high level paq'o, he and Americo disappeared to be by themselves for a while. Americo later told us that even though the paq'o had a great reputation, he had to 'prove' to Americo that he was ready for us, I have no idea what that proof involved, but it is a safe bet that it didn't involve words.

With the emphasis on experience and ability over belief the paq'os would seem to be mystics, but mysticism strikes me as being somewhat inward and personally oriented, while the paq'os are much involved in working with energy and having an active, actually vital, role in their community. Thus neither "shaman" nor "mystic" exactly applies, but of the two "mystic" seems closer, and I usually label what I am studying as "Andean mysticism".

So, that is what I have been studying, Andean mysticism. By its very nature the study requires me to step outside of the assumptions of my culture and immerse myself into the assumptions of another culture. That may seem like a hard thing to do but there are a few simple guidelines which I would like to recommend.

The first suggestion is to approach the experiences with an open mind, this means being neither skeptical nor gullible but instead simply being open to the experience. I'd like to stress that again, to be neither skeptical nor gullible. As we shall see the reason for this is that the experience falls outside of the realm of the intellect, thus there is nothing to believe or not to believe and thus nothing to be skeptical or gullible about.

The second suggestion is to approach the experiences with a quiet mind, this involves not analyzing the experiences while they are happening, just experiencing them. Analysis puts me back into my existing ways of experiencing reality, which essentially keeps anything new from coming in. There is a place for analysis, as I do want to analyze the experiences both for the sake of my own intellect as well as to enable me to communicate what I have found to others in my culture. I analyze the experiences after I have returned home (that's a simple statement that hides years of fascinating frustration and occasional touching insights).

And the third suggestion is to approach the people of the Andes with an open heart. For the Andean culture, at least, this is a prerequisite for acceptance and respect. It is also something you don't normally find in a text book on how to perform research. But for me, it is part of the draw of my work in the Andes, I love to be in a culture where my 'success' requires that I open my heart to the people. This is something that is much more difficult to do in my culture, particularly as a man, and frankly my society seems so cold when I return. Thank goodness for my family and friends.

By following these suggestions I have found that over the years I have developed an ability to experience reality in two, very different, sorts of ways. When I am in the Andes and immersed in that way of experiencing reality it seems more 'real' and natural than my memories of what it is like to be back in the United States. When I am in the United States I find that my everyday way of experiencing reality seems real, and that the Andean approach seems but a dream, pleasant but not as real as my everyday life. I have also made some progress in integrating the two, instead of being in just one or the other I am somewhat able to be in both, and that is where I would like to speak from tonight.

Ah, but now we are back to the challenge that if I want to speak to you of the Andes then I have to try to translate one vision of reality into another. There are several challenges. The first is

that there is not always an equivalent term in the two languages (English and Quechua), which is what I face when I say I have been studying with the "paq'os" of the Andes and have to decide whether to call them 'shamans' or 'mystics' or go into a description of how they are rather both and neither. The second challenge is that our cultures use different categories, in other words we divide the world up differently. For example, our division of objects into 'animate' and 'inanimate' just doesn't make sense in the Andean world view, nor does our division of reality into the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. I'll be talking about those in a minute. The third challenge in translating from the Andean culture to Western culture goes back to the idea that we have different assumptions about the basic nature of reality. That's an interesting thing to consider so let's go there now.

First, let us consider what it means to 'know' something. In the West we usually think of knowledge as involving words. Science has its theories and models, and religion has its beliefs, dogma, and scriptures. It would be hard to think of a science that did not have theories or a religion that did not have any beliefs. When we are in the realm of 'knowledge as words' then the way we evaluate knowledge involves determining whether or not the words accurately describe reality, which is another way of saying that knowledge, when it is expressed as words, is evaluated based upon whether it is 'true' or 'false'. If the words accurately describe reality then they are 'true', if they don't then they are 'false'. Our ability to work in this realm, the realm of words and determining what is true and what is false, I call our 'intellect'. For all the time I spend in my classes making sure that the students understand the differences in how science and religion arrive at and test their descriptions of reality, science and religion do arise from the same culture--from the same basic assumptions--and both are intellectual in nature, they are both involved in describing reality and they both evaluate the descriptions based upon the yardstick of what is true and what is false.

Intellectual knowledge, the realm of words, is the primary type of knowledge recognized by our culture, but there are some contexts where we recognize that a different kind of knowledge also exists. For example, I started off as a single, fertilized egg, and that egg 'knew' how to grow into me, an incredibly complex organism consisting of billions of cells all working together to create an adult body. That is an incredible feat, involving an unimaginable amount of 'how to' knowledge, but they won't give me a Ph.D. in biology for pulling it off, for it is not intellectual knowledge, it was not stored as words in my original cell, nor could I possibly put into words how it was accomplished. There are other types of nonintellectual knowledge as well, for example, the ability to play basketball well or play a musical instrument.

In the Andes they recognize three ways of knowing, each associated with a different part of our physical body. I have found this distinction to be very useful in organizing my thoughts about what the Andean culture has to offer and how it differs from our own. One way of knowing is through the yachay, which is located in the head. The yachay is the center of the intellect. A second way of knowing is through the munay, which is located in the heart. The munay is the center of love. And a third way of knowing is through the llankay, which is located slightly below the navel. The llankay is the center of the physical body. These seem rather like the seven chakras of the East, but there are three of them rather than seven. So which number is correct, are there really three as they say in the Andes or are there seven as they say in the

Orient? The best answer to the question moves us towards a better way of understanding the Andean way of thinking. They recognize that there are many ways of organizing a single 'thing' into various aspects or parts. In this case the Andeans take the whole of who we are as a being and differentiate it into three aspects, sometimes, for they also differentiate it in other ways as well, into two aspects (the right side and left side of the body), or some other number, depending upon the context. After all, as a being we are a single, whole thing, that is what is real, and our differentiations are simply boundaries we draw around areas of the whole that seem different than other areas. The idea that we are as beings separate from the rest of the Cosmos is also just a differentiation we make, taking the entirety of the unified Cosmos and organizing it into 'me' and 'everything else'. Anyway, one class of distinctions the Andeans make in our existence is between the intellect (yachay), the heart (munay), and the ability to manipulate the physical world (the llankay), we can be differentiated in other ways as well.

I would like to focus on the munay, for the Andean people (and I suspect many other indigenous people in the world) are as expert in the munay as Western culture is in the yachay (intellect) and in technology (which could be considered to be an extension of the llankay). The munay is located in the area of the heart and is the center of love. Now, from my education as a scientist and psychologist I view the idea that love is located in the heart as being a quaint, but totally incorrect, vestige of days long gone by, for I know that the heart is just a biological pump, and that emotions are run by the brain. I am, however, wrong in a very important way. The munay is located in the area of the heart and it is the center of love, but this is different than how we usually use the term. By 'love' I don't mean an emotion. Emotions are pretty much run by the brain. Our emotions arise from how we think about what is going on around us, which is why two people don't necessarily have the same emotional response to the same stimulus. The love of the munay is not an emotion, it is not romantic love, or sentimental, or capable of jealousy, the love of the munay is the experience of being interconnected to the rest of the Cosmos. Perhaps the term 'love' doesn't quite fit and we should have a different word for it, or perhaps it is the deepest meaning of the term 'love.'

The way to access these various ways of knowing is by moving your consciousness there. My normal way of being is to have my consciousness in my head, right behind my eyes, the realm of the intellect, the yachay. It is possible, however, to move your consciousness to the area of your heart. At least 'moving your consciousness' is the best description I can give for the experience, for that is what it feels like to me. Being able to do this is part of what it means to 'know' the Andean approach.

I first really experienced this in my first trip to Peru. We were with the paq'os in a ruin in the hills above the city of Cusco. The ruins were actually a small hill with steps and benches cut into the rock. A large cleft or small gully cut the hill into two, and we were standing in the cleft. By the time we got there it was dark, the stars were out, and I could barely see the paq'os standing slightly above us on the slopes. They began a ceremony, and I felt my consciousness sinking gently down into my heart, and as that happened a sense of expansion beyond myself began to emerge. Then I recognized some Latin in what the paq'o was saying, Christian terms, and I started thinking 'Man, I can't believe it, I came all the way to Peru to learn the indigenous approach to the sacred and here is Christianity coming into the picture....yada, yada, yada'. I

realized that I had popped back into my head, and that when I did so my sense of self shrank into a small ball behind my eyes, I was no longer feeling connected to everything, I was isolated, alone, cut off, my normal experience of being a being wandering around in a world that is 'not me'. I gently told myself to be quiet and relaxed and let my consciousness drift down into my heart again and I experienced expanding out beyond myself...until I started thinking again...and then I would 'catch myself' being back in my head, and I would quiet my mind and return to my heart and so on, back and forth between the two experiences, and the contrast allowed me to for the first time really recognize what it felt like to be in my heart. I had always thought it was a metaphor...

In this exploration of the munay the intellect is not invited, I cannot be in both my munay and my yachay at the same time. They are both important, the yachay, the intellect, is a wonderful gift for us to have, but so is the munay, and we simply can't be in both places at the same time.

In our culture we do have contexts in which we recognize that something important is going on but where the intellect does not belong. Take, for example, the context of being at the ballet. A dancer comes on stage dressed as a swan. It would be inappropriate for a scientist to stand up and shout out 'wait a minute, that's not really a swan', and it would be equally inappropriate for a priest to shout out 'look at that giant swan, it is a miracle!'. Nor does the ballerina stop as she enters the stage to announce "it is important that you all believe I really am a swan", nor does the ballerina say 'please don't be alarmed, I'm not really a swan I'm just dressed up like one'. The consideration of truth versus falsity, the realm of the intellect, the realm of both science and religion, just doesn't apply to the ballet, yet we recognize that something important to the meaning of life is present in the performance.

Once I was participating in a ceremony on the slopes of Apu Pachatusan, a sacred mountain that is the supporting pillar of the Cosmos. Before the ceremony we, the paqos and my friends, were sitting on the earth (the Pachamama) having a picnic. A very old woman approached us. My memory of her is that she had shiny black eyes (I don't even know if that is possible) and was so short that she was almost at my eye level as I sat. She was dressed in the traditional skirt and sweater, and wore a tall, white, stove-pipe hat. She walked up to me and with a smile said something to me in Quechua, I had no idea what she was saying. My friend Americo responded to her (in Quechua), she said something back to him and then turned toward me again, Americo said something else and she got a beautiful smile on her face and turned and walked away. I asked Americo what that was all about. He said "she told you that she had some very nice chickens that you might want to look at. I told her, thank you mama, but my friend does not have any use for your chickens. She replied, but they are very nice chickens, he might want to see them. And so I told her, I'm sorry mama, but he can't use your chickens, but he could use you caressing his dreams tonight with your gentle hands." I felt as if I were in a song.

So, in the world of the munay, if we are to talk about it at all, we need to move out of the intellect, out of distinctions between what is true and what is false. Perhaps the best way to talk about the munay is with poetry, where truth and falsity are also irrelevant, and where words are used to point at what cannot be addressed in any other way. But I am not a poet, but I can tell stories, and perhaps that will suffice.

When we talk about the *munay* not only does the distinction between what is true and what is false become irrelevant, but also the distinction between what is true and what is metaphorical. The anthropologist Gregory Bateson pointed out that in the 1500's that Catholics and Protestants were killing each other, and were willing to be killed, over the issue of whether the wine of the sacrament really was the blood of Christ and the bread the body of Christ (the Catholic position) or whether the wine and bread 'stood for' the blood and body of Christ in a metaphorical sort of way (the Protestant position). Bateson proposes that both viewpoints (literal vs metaphorical) are somehow anti-sacred and that the sacred can be found in a realm of thought where the distinction between literal and metaphorical is irrelevant, a description which fits the realm of *munay*.

I would like to link this train of thought to my experience with the Andean term 'apacheta'. This term was first presented to me in the Andes as meaning a special doorway between two energies. When, for example, you are hiking and upon cresting a hill you suddenly find before you a beautiful vista, the highlands have ended and stretching out in front of you is a vast landscape that is utterly different than where you have been, you are in an apacheta, a doorway between two energies. You have probably experienced something like this in your travels and you know what I mean. When crossing through an apacheta with *paq'os* they will call for a stop, sit down, chew coca leaves, play their flutes, and connect with the new energy. I offer this information to you as an idea of how to begin to incorporate the Andean approach into your lives. And, apachetas don't have to be geographic, any doorway between two energies can be an apacheta.

After several years of using the term in this way, I was crossing a summit in the Andes and saw near the path, at the foot of a high mountain peak (an *Apu*), a pile of small stones. One of the *paq'os* invited us to find a stone, connect our energy to it, and add it to the pile of stones as a way of honoring the *Apu*. I asked what the pile of stones was called and he said it was called an 'apacheta', that apachetas were piles of stones made by *paq'os* at the foot of the *Apus* to honor them. Well this gave me pause, it was not what I thought the term meant. I have since come across the term 'apacheta' in a book written by an anthropologist and she also defined an apacheta as a cairn of stones. It occurred to me that perhaps my first exposure to the term 'apacheta' used the term in a metaphorical sort of way, while literally the term refers to a cairn of stones. Now, however, I am entertaining the idea that the distinction between the 'literal' and 'metaphorical' use of the term is irrelevant, and that both uses point to the same thing, that they are both windows to a term that falls outside of anything we have words for in English.

I have just been rereading Joan Wilcox's book on Andean cosmology. In one section she is writing about the Andean term 'kawsay'. Now 'kawsay' is normally interpreted as referring to the life energy found in all things. When interviewing the *Q'ero paq'os* however, in response to her request that they define 'kawsay' they all began to describe how one can best live one's life. One definition of the term then is a type of energy found in everything, and another is a mode of living life in a good way, with respect and kindness for others. I suspect this is another example of the way one speaks of the world of the *munay*, where the two definitions are not seen as being different but instead are two different windows looking at one thing that falls outside of the rules of thought of the *yachay* (intellect).

And finally, on this same train of thought, the Andean people blend the mythological and the factual into one experience of reality. This is not like what we do here in my culture, where some argue that their mythology is factually true, e.g. that the planet is 10,000 years old rather than 4.5 billion, or that the earth is the center of the solar system rather than the sun, instead in the Andes it is more like the distinction between the mythological and the factual is just not important.

In the slides I had running earlier tonight you might have noticed the photo of the small, cylindrical, stone structures standing on the top of a hill. These are 'chullpas' which serve both as the tombs and homes of the Machukuna, the 'ancient ones'. The Machukuna are the children of the moon, they lived on the earth before the sun arrived. When the sun appeared the Machukuna could not survive its intense heat and light, they fled to the jungle, they fled to the lakes, they fled to the caves, but to no avail, they all died. Yet, they live still, at least their spirits do, and the chullpas are their homes. When the sun has set and the sky is red they sit outside the doors of their homes to warm their bones. While the Andeans, the children of the sun, plant the crops and tend the fields during the day, the Machukuna tend the same fields at night. The Andeans plant the crops, the Machukuna make them grow bigger. They live in a reality that is both separate from and yet overlaps our own. And, they are bitter of their plight, and may send sickness to the children of the sun. We will return to the story of the Machukuna at the end of my speech, for it is important to talk about who will come after the children of the sun.

This might be a good point to bring in another aspect of Andean thought, which has to do with the idea of 'pacha', as in Pachamama and Pachacuti. 'Pacha' refers to space-time, a particular place at a particular time, a blending together of space and time that I believe would find a comfortable home in physics, particularly Einsteinian physics. Anyway, to the Andean people there appears to be parallel or branching threads of time and space, and that to some degree people and cultures that are long gone are yet still here, but also not here. When I read this statement in a book it took me back to another experience I had in my first trip to Cusco. I was standing in the ruins of Sacsayhuaman, looking over the courtyard where the Andean paq'os from all over the empire use to gather in the time of the Inca. There I had this experience where it seemed to me that I could *almost* see the Incas, I could *almost* hear them. It was as if they were on the opposite side of some screen or curtain of reality, they weren't really there, I didn't really hear them or see them, yet I was experiencing them nonetheless. I noted it at the time, and thought it was pretty cool, but then filed it away as 'just' a subjective experience to be remembered. Reading this in a book later on brought the memory back to me, and gave both the statement in the book and my prior experience more validity to me. I am glad I had the experience first, so that I know it wasn't an artifact of having read the book followed by an accommodating act by my unconscious. For me it is rather a hopeful view of reality.

So now let's look at the basic Andean view of reality. I'd like to start with a metaphor that I find useful but that I am unsure of how much it is my invention to explain what I have heard and how much it is what I have heard from the paq'os. Imagine, if you would, that the Cosmos consists of a network of energetic filaments, like a cosmic-wide spider web of thin threads of energy. Where these filaments come together to create nodes is what we experience as objects. There

are several consequences to this idea, the first is that everything is interconnected, and while the nodes are distinct from each other they are also just part of a whole. It opens the possibility of communicating with and interacting with other nodes through these filaments, something *paq'os* can do. In this view consciousness is an attribute of the filaments, rather than the product of a nervous system, thus all nodes have some level of consciousness, including not only animals but trees and rocks and lakes and everything else. While psychology and medicine have attempted to define consciousness differently it seems to me to be ultimately a futile task. Our attempt, as conscious beings, to define and study consciousness is like a knife trying to cut its own edge or a mirror trying to see itself, simply and absolutely logically impossible. Given that, why not define it the Andean way, that consciousness is an attribute of the basic filaments of nature rather than the by-product of a nervous system? A further consequence of this is that if everything is a node in the web, and everything has some level of consciousness, then the distinction we make in the West between animate and inanimate objects is simply less of a distinction in the Andes, more of a difference in quality or flavor than an absolute difference.

The most important filamental node in our neighborhood is the Pachamama, the great cosmic being and mother, the planet Earth. It is hard for us, the philosophical children of Descartes, to appreciate how the Andean people experience and feel about the Pachamama. In our history the philosopher Descartes proposed that reality consists of two realms, a physical realm of matter and energy and a transcendent realm of mind and spirit. The physical realm of matter and energy could be studied by science, it operates purely by mechanical laws of cause and effect, matter and energy have no free will. The transcendent realm, however, the realm of mind and spirit, falls outside of science, it is not of the physical world but is completely transcendent to (above and beyond) the physical world. In this view espoused by Descartes then our soul comes from a realm outside of the physical realm, it inhabits our body (which is a biological machine with no free will and that operates under the laws of physics and chemistry) but the soul is not of our body. After Descartes scientists began to deride the idea of the transcendent realm, they called it the 'ghost in the machine' theory, and for centuries pushed the idea that only the physical realm of matter and energy exists and that everything follows the basic laws of physics and chemistry and that thus there really is no such thing as free will. This has led to what today we call the 'mind and body' question, and our culture really only supports two alternatives, to say that the sacred doesn't exist, that everything is just a machine (biological or otherwise), or to claim that the sacred does exist but in a realm that is separate from the physical realm. In the last half century other alternatives have arisen in science, but I don't want to go into them here, as they are irrelevant to the point I am making and would be a long (and dull) diversion indeed.

Getting back to the Andean perspective, the Pachamama is the great being who *is* the planet Earth. Note that I didn't say she is the great being who *resides* in the planet (as we often envision the soul residing in our body), but that she *is* the planet Earth. This is crucial to understand, the Earth is not simply a big inanimate rock, and the Pachamama is not a spirit that inhabits the big rock, the Pachamama is the great cosmic being who is the planet Earth, a huge and vitally-important-to-us conscious node of filaments in the cosmic web, with her own qualities.

While the Pachamama is the most important being in the Andean culture (after all, we are her children, we spring from her elements, we rely on the plants and animals and oxygen and water

she provides) there are other important beings as well. I won't go into many of them in this speech as it would take too much time but I definitely want to mention the Apus. The Apus are the great beings who are the mighty mountain peaks (again, not the great beings who live in the mountain peaks but the mountains themselves). The Andean people organize much of their lives around their relationship with the Apus; honoring them, making requests from them, serving them, gaining visions and powers from them.

The Apus are both a part of Pachamama and also exist in their own right. I think this is a very important, and rather beautiful, thing to realize about how the Andean culture thinks about reality. We can take an undifferentiated whole, like the Pachamama, see various aspects of her, experience and relate to those aspects as if they were their own thing, without losing the understanding that they are also but parts of a larger seamless whole. The plots of cultivated fields, the chakras, are the daughters of the Pachamama, and are also part of the Pachamama. The various lagunas (lakes) have their own personalities and powers, which can be experienced and worked with, and they are but part of the Pachamama. Even the great being who is the planet Earth is sometimes thought of as having two aspects, the Pachamama who is her loving and nurturing self and the Pacha Tira who is the malevolent aspect of the Earth (bringing plagues and earthquakes).

The same can be said of us as humans. The yachay (intellect), munay (heart), and llankay (body) are but aspects of an undifferentiated whole. We can also be 'divided up' in other ways, into the 'right side' and 'left side' (which the Andean people identify as having different abilities), or into the seven chakras of the Orient, or any other number of ways. These parts both 'exist', as they are areas that differ from other areas, and don't really exist, as there is really just one large whole. Before moving on let me drop one more thing to ponder, in the Andes, as I understand it from Inge Bolin's book, a marriage is an undifferentiated whole, which can be 'divided up' into the male and the female.

Now I would like to turn back to the idea of the 'sacred'. In the philosophical heritage of my culture God, the sacred creator, is separate from his creation. The sacred, as expressed by Descartes, lies in a realm that is outside of the physical world, outside the world of the plants and animals and hills and mountains. For some people in my culture Nature is seen as anti-sacred, where the desires and lusts of the body take one away from the sacred, and thus Nature is evil. For others in my culture we, as humans, as seen as having a unique relationship with God (having been created in his image), and thus we have a connection with the sacred that the rest of Nature does not, in this viewpoint Nature is not evil but it exists simply to serve us. For yet others Nature is sacred in that it was created by God and all of his creations should be worshiped, but not because they are actually sacred but because they were created by a God who is uniquely sacred. This is the 'stewardship' idea, that we need to take care of Nature because we are better than it and are obligated to be good masters of it due to our reverence for God. And then, finally, there are those for whom the sacred is irrelevant or seen as nonexistent. All of these options stem from the idea that the sacred is either separate from Nature or doesn't exist, the two choices most supported by our cultural heritage.

The Andeans provide a third alternative, that the sacred does exist, but it is not separate from the

physical world, it does not lie in some realm that is transcendent to matter and energy. The Cosmos is sacred, the Pachamama is sacred, we are sacred, the trees are sacred. We don't have a unique relationship with the Cosmos other than that each species is unique, we are not special compared to everything else because we were made in God's image, we are instead all aspects of an undifferentiated Cosmos that is sacred. And by not being 'special' we are not separate from Nature, we are part of Nature. I remember someone telling me something that shocked me greatly, both because of its implications and because I hadn't thought of it before yet it seemed so obvious. I had gotten into the habit of talking about people, and myself, as being 'Pachamama's children' (which we are). When I was going on about this a friend said to me, "Well Oakley, don't forget, we are not her 'special' children". Of course, she loves all of her children; the whales, the beetles, the trees, the polar bears, the pumas, the condors. And, some of those are much more connected to the sacred than are we.

This takes us nicely to the Andean term 'salka'. Imagine, if you would, that you are an Andean child. You live with your parents and brothers and sisters in a small adobe, one room, house, with thatched roof, at 15,000 feet in the Andes. This type of house is called in the Andes a 'wasi-tira', which means 'house of the earth', for it is made of the very substance of the Pachamama and it is an extension of her. If someone were to break into the house you can go to a paq'o and ask that he or she contact Apu Asungate, who will in turn ask the Pachamama to ask the wasi-tira to describe the person who broke in. The heart of the house is the q'uncha, an oven made of earth, a hardened hollow dome of adobe that has a opening on the side for feeding wood into the fire and a couple of openings on top that are just the right size for the pots to sit. You awake in the morning to the warmth of the q'uncha and the aroma of soup that your mother is cooking for the family. Climbing out from under the alpaca skins you prepare to take your family's alpacas up the mountain to feed. You take along your warak'a, a woven sling that you can use to throw rocks in front of or to the side of the herd to direct them where you want them to go. The warak'a is also important in that it will help you protect them from the pumas, the condors, and the foxes of the high Andes. As the sun licks the frost off the ground you slowly lead the herd up the mountain, to perhaps 16,000 feet, where you know there is ichu grass for them to feed on. You find a comfortable place to sit. A thousand feet below is your home with a little smoke coming out of the hole in the roof. But up here it is all wild. Despite your being at 16,000 feet the Andean peaks tower high above you. All you hear is the soft steps of the alpacas as they graze, and the wind coming down from the mountains. The air is clear and the towering peaks seem almost within reach to touch although they are miles way, you notice clouds gathering around the Apus, perhaps the Apus will send rain in your direction, or even the deadly thunder and lightning. Below you a condor glides down the valley, barely moving its wing tips to control its flight. That is salka, you are in salka. Salka is undomesticated energy. The condor has salka, the chicken has domesticated energy. The wolf has salka, the dog has domesticated energy. The deer has salka, the sheep has domesticated energy. Salka is part of our heritage as beings on this planet, it is an energy that we can access but that oftenseems so far from the heavily domesticated life laid upon us by our culture.

There are many paths to the sacred, salka paths and domesticated paths. Western religion is a path of domesticated energy. Watch people leaving a church, do they seem more like pumas or more like sheep? In Western religion we move out of nature and into man-made structures to

seek the sacred. In the Andes they seek the sacred under the stars of the night sky, by the stream as it tumbles down the mountain side, in the sun as it rises above the peaks. I don't doubt that many of you here tonight have had this experience, of being in the wild and feeling a connection to something deep and beautiful that seems to underly reality rather than stand separate from it, something that is inherent in Nature itself. And one of the amazing things about the Andean approach is that they, as author Joan Wilcox so beautifully put it, experience this natural world as being as aware of them as they are of it.

There is so much to share of Andean mysticism, and I can't put it all in one speech, but this last point is important, and it will take us around the final curve and into the home stretch of this speech. The Andean people live in a respectful and intimate relationship with Nature and the Cosmos. Not only do the Andean people respect the Pachamama, the Pachamama in turn respects them, this is a true *relationship* of respect, which is something that is hard to fathom from within my culture's assumptions about reality. I have myself have had the experience of being connected with the consciousness of the Pachamama and the consciousness of trees. This is not proof that these consciousness's exist, either to you or for that matter to me, as I have an appreciation of the ability of my unconscious mind to influence experience, and there is no experience that my intellect cannot 'explain away'. This, however, is not the context in which to be either skeptical nor gullible. I am simply sharing my experiences of the world of the munay, when consciousness leaves the intellect and moves down to the heart, where we find we are interconnected with everything else, and everything else is alive. The Andean people live in relationship with Nature, immersed in rituals of respect for the Earth, the mountains, the lakes, the wind, the trees, the rivers. In these rituals they serve Nature, not in servitude, but in reciprocity.

The Andean culture is based upon assumptions about reality that make them masters of the world of the munay. These same assumptions pretty much guarantee that on their own they would not have invented the iPod or the internal combustion engine. My Western culture has a different set of assumptions about reality that has led to great achievements in technology and in the accumulation of incredible amounts of information; and these assumptions make it likely that we will be bickering with each other or playing with our toys when our car goes off the cliff and into the abyss of ecological disaster.

I believe we need to gather the various cultures in the world together and work on our future. Each culture brings something of value to the table, each culture has a piece of the solution. In doing so we need to recognize that no culture will encompass the solution, each culture is based upon assumptions that make it good at some things but not so good at others, this is inevitable, assumptions *always* work that way. I would like to make clear that this will not be a case where we simply assimilate a few good ideas from other cultures and then move on with a Western solution. We cannot be patronizing, we cannot say that we have 95% of what is needed and just need to tweak things a bit, we truly need these other cultures, we need a solution that goes beyond any one culture. Inge Bolins book, that I have referred to earlier, is entitled "Rituals of Respect: The Secret of Survival in the High Peruvian Andes". I believe that 'respect' may also be the secret of our survival on the planet earth.

So the goal here is not one uniform culture, but instead something that would technically be called a 'meta-culture', something that is, in Gregory Bateson's terms, a 'logical level' above culture. For a quick analogy, have you every played with a stereoscope? It is that toy where you insert a wheel of pictures and then when you look into the eye pieces you see a three-dimensional image. Now that is a pretty neat trick, really, for if you remove the disk from the stereoscope and just look at it with your naked eye you will see that the disk only contains two-dimensional images, i.e. your basic photographs. The way it works is that the disk has two versions of each image, one for the right eye and one for the left. The images differ slightly because they are taken from slightly different locations, from two cameras next to each other about the same distance apart as human eyes. This is one of the ways the brain knows how to create the experience of three-dimensional sight, using the difference between what the left eye and right eye see due to their looking at the same thing from two different locations (there are other ways too but they don't come into play with a stereoscope). In the stereoscope if you close either eye the image becomes two-dimensional, or if both eyes saw the exact same image it would be two-dimensional, or if you were to take the two slightly different images and put them on top of each other to have one image it would be two-dimensional. Only when the eyes can see two different images in the stereoscope will this magical third-dimension arise from two-dimensional images. This is the analogy then for creating a meta-culture, the various cultures need to work together, not by blending together into a mono-culture but by each presenting their view of the world in a context where each can be clearly perceived, from this a way of proceeding as a species can emerge that is beyond the assumptions of any one culture.

Of course, for this to work there needs to be a variety of cultures that together have what we need to move into a future of beauty, harmony with life, and health. We can't just abandon our technology and all try to live the way the Andeans do--almost a stone age existence--for that would be trying to move into the past and I think we have no choice but to move into the future. We shouldn't want the Andeans to abandon their culture and become like us, for we are heading toward the cliff and accelerating, running over innumerable species along the way. And, while I know basically just my culture and some of the Andean culture, that certainly doesn't mean that they are the only cultures that need to come to the table. Many, many cultures need to come. And, while I have been making the case that we need them all for everyone's sake I also strongly believe that other cultures have the right to survive simply for their own sake as well.

The problem, as you probably know, is that many cultures have become extinct or are on their way there. Our Western culture is washing across the earth like a tidal wave and if it continues there will be nothing left on the planet but one, big, MacVillage. And no matter how hard you strain, if you look through the stereoscope with just one eye the next higher level of perception just won't emerge. Western culture is also working its way up the Andes. The Q'ero I have worked with, and the Chillihuani that Inge Bolin writes about, live at 15,000 feet, in villages that have up until recently been a two-day walk from the nearest road, there they have been sufficiently isolated to maintain their ancient culture. Now roads are being built to their villages, electrical lines will follow. With electricity comes electric bills, and the people will suddenly have a need for money at a level they never faced before and that their traditional ways can't generate. They will need to leave the villages for work as laborers, or fall into debt and have to sell their land. Capitalists want these people to stop their sustainable ways and become

consumers. Mining companies have their sights on the most sacred Apus of the Andes. Evangelical Christians have arrived and they and their converts are trying to stamp out the traditional 'pagan' ways, going as far as surrounding the people who are engaged in ancient ceremonies and playing musical instruments and loudly signing Christian songs to disrupt the ceremonies.

This is where Kenosis Spirit Keepers comes in. We are not fighting this, we are not fighting anything, our goal is to sustain and nourish traditional ways of seeking the sacred. We want to present to traditional cultures the face of Western society that values who they are and how they view the world, we want them to see that the incredibly materially wealthy and enticing Western world is missing something vital and fundamental that they, the traditional cultures, have, so that that can see the value in keeping it. We want to give these cultures the resources they need to stand up to these outside pressures and we want to work with them to create together the next way of being on the planet. We want to do this with as many traditional cultures as possible, but we are starting with the Hopis and the Q'eros. This summer we have arranged to take six Hopis to Peru to meet and work with the Q'ero and other paq'os of Peru. We will see how that goes and plan from there. Your contributions tonight have helped that happen. I thank you again.

I'd like to finish by talking about the personal aspect of the stereoscope analogy. It took me several years to start to get the feeling for how the Andean people perceive reality. Then, for many years I had the choice of either experiencing the world the Western way (primarily through my intellect, my yachay) or experiencing the world the Andean way (through my munay). These two 'parts' of me formed an uneasy alliance, rather grudgingly accepting that the other approach had value, but I had no sense of integration within me, I could be one way or the other, and this has been hard for me, for despite the truce there is an underlying sense of conflict, with the result that I have felt somehow less than the sum of my parts. The last couple of years or so, however, I have slowly begun to feel some integration, where both ways of experiencing reality are still separate but are helping each other, rather than just getting along with each other and taking turns. It gives me hope that this can indeed happen at a cultural level as well.

I said earlier that I would conclude my speech by returning to the story of the Machukuna, the ancient ones, the children of the pacha (space/time) of the moon who lived before the current era, the children of the pacha of the sun (us). They had a hard fate, one day the sun arrived and they all perished in its heat. The Andean cosmology does have a 'creator God' who caused this change to occur. This God, as I understand it, is not a creator who stands outside his creation, but instead is to the Cosmos as the Pachamama is to the planet Earth, the creator god is the being who *is* the Cosmos. This God is not very important to the Andean people, not like Pachamama, as he/it/she is far removed from our lives and doesn't particularly pay much attention to or care about what is going on here. When asked why the creator god created the sun, killing all the children of the moon, a common answer among the Andeans is that 'he just felt like it'.

Well the time of the children of the sun is also limited. According to the Q'ero, at the end of the last century we passed through the 'Pachacuti', the time of the great transformation, and we are now in a crucial interim period where we need to get it together as a species or face dire environmental consequences. The pacha of the children of the sun is drawing towards its close.

The next pacha will be the time of the 'sacred children' those who have moved beyond their current limitations into a new way of being, a way of being we need to create now. How long do we have to accomplish this? Not to worry, the ancient prophecies say we will stay in the current pacha until the earth warms and the snow leave the slopes of Apu Asungate'....

Thank you so much for being here tonight and giving us your support. And now, to quote my friend Americo, I will open the floor to 'questions, comments.....and accusations'.

Resources

On the Web:

- Oakley's web site: www.SalkaWind.com
- Kenosis Spirit Keepers web site: www.KenosisSpiritKeepers.org
- Tonights musical performance by Jaime Alvaro: bambooperu@yahoo.com

Recommended Readings:

- *Masters of the Living Energy: The Mystical World of the Q'ero of Peru.* Joan Wilcox.
- *Rituals of Respect: The Secret of Survival in the High Peruvian Andes.* Inge Bolin.
- *The Hold Life Has: Coca and Cultural Identity in an Andean Community (2nd Ed.).* Catherine J. Allen.