

C A R L O S

# Castaneda

*Teachings  
of Don Juan*



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# Carlos Castaneda

## The Teachings of Don Juan

First book in the series.

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**Carlos Castaneda**  
*"The Teachings of Don Juan"*

*Introduction*

In the summer of 1960, while I was an anthropology student at the University of California, Los Angeles, I made several trips to the Southwest to collect information on the medicinal plants used by the Indians of the area. The events I describe here began during one of my trips.

I was waiting in a border town for a Greyhound bus talking with a friend who had been my guide and helper in the survey. Suddenly he leaned towards me and whispered that the man, a white-haired old Indian, who was sitting in front of the window was very learned about plants, especially peyote. I asked my friend to introduce me to this man.

My friend greeted him, then went over and shook his hand. After they had talked for a while, my friend signalled me to join them, but immediately left me alone with the old man, not even bothering to introduce us. He was not in the least embarrassed. I told him my name and he said that he was called Juan and that he was at my service. He used the Spanish polite form of address. We shook hands at my initiative and then remained silent for some time. It was not a strained silence, but a quietness, natural and relaxed on both sides.

Though his dark face and neck were wrinkled, showing his age, it struck me that his body was agile and muscular. I then told him that I was interested in obtaining information about medicinal plants. Although in truth I was almost totally ignorant about peyote, I found myself pretending that I knew a great deal, and even suggesting that it might be to his advantage to talk with me.

As I rattled on, he nodded slowly and looked at me, but said nothing. I avoided his eyes and we finished by standing, the two of us, in dead silence. Finally, after what seemed a very long time, don Juan got up and looked out of the window. His bus had come. He said good-bye and left the station.

I was annoyed at having talked nonsense to him, and at being seen through by those remarkable eyes. When my friend returned he tried to console me for my failure to learn anything from don Juan. He explained that the old man was often silent or noncommittal, but the disturbing effect of this first encounter was not so easily dispelled.

I made a point of finding out where don Juan lived, and later visited him several times. On each visit I tried to lead him to discuss peyote, but without success. We became, nonetheless, very good friends, and my scientific investigation was forgotten or was at least redirected into channels that were worlds apart from my original intention.

The friend who had introduced me to don Juan explained later that the old man was not a native of Arizona, where we met, but was a Yaqui Indian from Sonora, Mexico.

At first I saw don Juan simply as a rather peculiar man who knew a great deal about peyote and who spoke Spanish remarkably well. But the people with whom he lived believed that he had some sort of "secret knowledge", that he was a "*brujo*". The Spanish word *brujo* means, in English, medicine man, curer, witch, sorcerer. It connotes essentially a person who has extraordinary, and usually evil, powers.

I had known don Juan for a whole year before he took me into his confidence. One day he explained that he possessed a certain knowledge that he had learned from a teacher, a "benefactor" as he called him, who had directed him in a kind of apprenticeship. Don Juan had, in turn, chosen me to serve as his apprentice, but he warned me that I would have to make a very deep commitment and that the training was long and arduous.

In describing his teacher, don Juan used the word "*diablero*". Later I learned that *diablero* is a term used only by the Sonoran Indians. It refers to an evil person who practises black sorcery and is capable of transforming himself into an animal - a bird, a dog, a coyote, or any other creature.

On one of my visits to Sonora I had a peculiar experience that illustrated the Indians' feeling about *diableros*. I was driving at night in the company of two Indian friends when I saw an animal that seemed to be a dog crossing the highway. One of my companions said it was not a dog, but a huge coyote. I slowed down and

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pulled to the side of the road to get a good look at the animal. It stayed within range of the headlights a few seconds longer and then ran into the chaparral. It was unmistakably a coyote, but it was twice the ordinary size. Talking excitedly, my friends agreed that it was a very unusual animal, and one of them suggested that it might be a *diablero*. I decided to use an account of the experience to question the Indians of that area about their beliefs in the existence of *diableros*. I talked with many people, telling them the story and asking them questions. The three conversations that follow indicate what they felt.

"Do you think it was a coyote, Choy?" I asked a young man after he had heard the story.

"Who knows? A dog, no doubt. Too large for a coyote."

"Do you think it may have been a *diablero*?"

"That's a lot of bull. There are no such things."

"Why do you say that, Choy?"

"People imagine things. I bet if you had caught that animal you would have seen that it was a dog. Once I had some business in another town and got up before daybreak and saddled up a horse. As I was leaving I came upon a dark shadow on the road which looked like a huge animal. My horse reared, throwing me off the saddle. I was pretty scared too, but it turned out that the shadow was a woman who was walking to town."

"Do you mean, Choy, that you don't believe there are *diableros*?"

"*Diableros*! What's a *diablero*? Tell me what a *diablero* is!"

"I don't know, Choy. Manuel, who was riding with me that night, said the coyote could have been a *diablero*. Maybe you could tell me what a *diablero* is?"

"A *diablero*, they say, is a *brujo* who changes into any form he wants to adopt. But everybody knows that is pure bull. The old people here are full of stories about *diableros*. You won't find that among us younger people."

"What kind of animal do you think it was, dona Luz?" I asked a middle-aged woman.

"Only God knows that for sure, but I think it was not a coyote. There are things that appear to be coyotes, but are not. Was the coyote running, or was it eating?"

"It was standing most of the time, but when I first saw it, I think it was eating something."

"Are you sure it was not carrying something in its mouth?"

"Perhaps it was. But tell me, would that make any difference?"

"Yes, it would. If it was carrying something in its mouth it was not a coyote."

"What was it then?"

"It was a man or a woman."

"What do you call such people, dona Luz?"

She did not answer. I questioned her for a while longer, but without success. Finally she said she did not know. I asked her if such people were called *diableros*, and she answered that "*diablero*" was one of the names given to them.

"Do you know any *diableros*?" I asked.

"I knew one woman," she replied. "She was killed. It happened when I was a little girl. The woman, they said, used to turn into a female dog. And one night a dog went into the house of a white man to steal cheese. The white man killed the dog with a shotgun, and at the very moment the dog died in the house of the white man the woman died in her own hut. Her kin got together and went to the white man and demanded payment. The white man paid good money for having killed her."

"How could they demand payment if it was only a dog he killed?"

"They said that the white man knew it was not a dog, because other people were with him, and they all saw that the dog stood up on its legs like a man and reached for the cheese, which was on a tray hanging from the roof. The men were waiting for the thief because the white man's cheese was being stolen every night. So the man killed the thief knowing it was not a dog."

"Are there any *diableros* nowadays, dona Luz?"

"Such things are very secret. They say there are no more *diableros*, but I doubt it, because one member of a *diablero's* family has to learn what the *diablero* knows. *Diableros* have their own laws, and one of them is that a *diablero* has to teach his secrets to one of his kin."

"What do you think the animal was, Genaro?" I asked a very old man.

"A dog from one of the ranches of that area. What else?"

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"It could have been a *diablero*."

"A *diablero*? You are crazy! There are no *diableros*."

"Do you mean that there are none today, or that there never were any?"

"At one time there were, yes. It is common knowledge. Everybody knows that. But the people were very afraid of them and had them all killed."

"Who killed them, Genaro?"

"All the people of the tribe. The last *diablero* I knew about was S. He killed dozens, maybe even hundreds of people with his sorcery. We couldn't put up with that and the people got together and took him by surprise one night and burned him alive."

"How long ago was that, Genaro?"

"In nineteen forty-two."

"Did you see it yourself?"

"No, but people still talk about it. They say that there were no ashes left, even though the stake was made of fresh wood. All that was left at the end was a huge pool of grease."

Although don Juan categorized his benefactor as a *diablero*, he never mentioned the place where he had acquired his knowledge, nor did he identify his teacher. In fact, don Juan disclosed very little about his personal life. All he said was that he had been born in the Southwest in 1891; that he had spent nearly all his life in Mexico; that in 1900 his family was exiled by the Mexican government to central Mexico along with thousands of other Sonoran Indians; and that he had lived in central and southern Mexico until 1940. Thus, as don Juan had traveled a great deal, his knowledge may have been the product of many influences. And although he regarded himself as an Indian from Sonora, I was not sure whether to place the context of his knowledge totally in the culture of the Sonoran Indians. But it is not my intention here to determine his precise cultural milieu.

I began to serve my apprenticeship to don Juan in June 1961. Prior to that time I had seen him on various occasions, but always in the capacity of an anthropological observer. During these early conversations I took notes in a covert manner. Later, relying on my memory, I reconstructed the entire conversation. When I began to participate as an apprentice, however, that method of taking notes became very difficult, because our conversations touched on many different topics. Then don Juan allowed me - under strong protest, however - to record openly anything that was said. I would also have liked to take photographs and make tape recordings, but he would not permit me to do so.

I carried out the apprenticeship first in Arizona and then in Sonora, because don Juan moved to Mexico during the course of my training. The procedure I employed was to see him for a few days every so often. My visits became more frequent and lasted longer during the summer months of 1961, 1962, 1963, and 1964. In retrospect, I believe this method of conducting the apprenticeship prevented the training from being successful, because it retarded the advent of the full commitment I needed to become a sorcerer. Yet the method was beneficial from my personal standpoint in that it allowed me a modicum of detachment, and that in turn fostered a sense of critical examination which would have been impossible to attain had I participated continuously, without interruption. In September 1965, I voluntarily discontinued the apprenticeship.

Several months after my withdrawal, I considered for the first time the idea of arranging my field notes in a systematic way. As the data I had collected were quite voluminous, and included much miscellaneous information, I began by trying to establish a classification system. I divided the data into areas of related concepts and procedures and arranged the areas hierarchically according to subjective importance - that is, in terms of the impact that each of them had had on me. In that way I arrived at the following classification: uses of hallucinogenic plants; procedures and formulas used in sorcery; acquisition and manipulation of power objects; uses of medicinal plants; songs and legends.

Reflecting upon the phenomena I had experienced, I realized that my attempt at classification had produced nothing more than an inventory of categories; any attempt to refine my scheme would therefore yield only a more complex inventory. That was not what I wanted. During the months following my withdrawal from the apprenticeship, I needed to understand what I had experienced, and what I had experienced was the teaching of a coherent system of beliefs by means of a pragmatic and experimental method. It had been evident to me from the very first session in which I had participated that don Juan's teachings possessed an internal cohesion. Once he

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had definitely decided to communicate his knowledge to me, he proceeded to present his explanations in orderly steps. To discover that order and to understand it proved to be a most difficult task for me.

My inability to arrive at an understanding seems to have been traceable to the fact that, after four years of apprenticeship, I was still a beginner. It was clear that don Juan's knowledge and his method of conveying it were those of his benefactor; thus my difficulties in understanding his teachings must have been analogous to those he himself had encountered. Don Juan alluded to our similarity as beginners through incidental comments about his incapacity to understand his teacher during his own apprenticeship. Such remarks led me to believe that to any beginner, Indian or non-Indian, the knowledge of sorcery was rendered incomprehensible by the outlandish characteristics of the phenomena he experienced. Personally, as a Western man, I found these characteristics so bizarre that it was virtually impossible to explain them in terms of my own everyday life, and I was forced to the conclusion that any attempt to classify my field data in my own terms would be futile.

Thus it became obvious to me that don Juan's knowledge had to be examined in terms of how he himself understood it; only in such terms could it be made evident and convincing. In trying to reconcile my own views with don Juan's, however, I realized that whenever he tried to explain his knowledge to me, he used concepts that would render it "intelligible" to him. As those concepts were alien to me, trying to understand his knowledge in the way he did placed me in another untenable position. Therefore, my first task was to determine his order of conceptualization. While working in that direction, I saw that don Juan himself had placed particular emphasis on a certain area of his teachings - specifically, the uses of hallucinogenic plants. On the basis of this realization, I revised my own scheme of categories.

Don Juan used, separately and on different occasions, three hallucinogenic plants: peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*), Jimson weed (*Datura inoxia* syn. *D. meteloides*), and a mushroom (possibly *Psilocybe mexicana*). Since before their contact with Europeans, American Indians have known the hallucinogenic properties of these three plants. Because of their properties, the plants have been widely employed for pleasure, for curing, for witchcraft, and for attaining a state of ecstasy. In the specific context of his teachings, don Juan related the use of *Datura inoxia* and *Psilocybe mexicana* to the acquisition of power, a power he called an "ally". He related the use of *Lophophora williamsii* to the acquisition of wisdom, or the knowledge of the right way to live.

The importance of the plants was, for don Juan, their capacity to produce stages of peculiar perception in a human being. Thus he guided me into experiencing a sequence of these stages for the purpose of unfolding and validating his knowledge. I have called them "states of non-ordinary reality", meaning unusual reality as opposed to the ordinary reality of everyday life. The distinction is based on the inherent meaning of the states of non ordinary reality. In the context of don Juan's knowledge they were considered as real, although their reality was differentiated from ordinary reality.

Don Juan believed the states of non-ordinary reality to be the only form of pragmatic learning and the only means of acquiring *power*. He conveyed the impression that other parts of his teachings were incidental to the acquisition of *power*. This point of view permeated don Juan's attitude toward everything not directly connected with the states of non-ordinary reality. Throughout my field notes there are scattered references to the way don Juan felt. For example, in one conversation he suggested that some objects have a certain amount of *power* in themselves. Although he himself had no respect for power objects, he said they were frequently used as aids by lesser *brujos*. I often asked him about such objects, but he seemed totally uninterested in discussing them. When the topic was raised again on another occasion, however, he reluctantly consented to talk about them.

"There are certain objects that are permeated with power," he said. "There are scores of such objects which are fostered by powerful men with the aid of friendly spirits. These objects are tools - not ordinary tools, but tools of death. Yet they are only instruments; they have no power to teach. Properly speaking, they are in the realm of war objects designed for strife; they are made to kill, to be hurled."

"What kind of objects are they, don Juan?"

"They are not really objects; rather, they are types of *power*."

"How can one get those types of *power*, don Juan?"

"That depends on the kind of object you want."

"How many kinds are there?"

"As I have already said, there are scores of them. Anything can be a *power* object."

"Well, which are the most powerful, then?"

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"The *power* of an object depends on its owner, on the kind of man he is. A *power* object fostered by a lesser *brujo* is almost a joke; on the other hand, a strong, powerful *brujo* gives his strength to his tools."

"Which *power* objects are most common, then? Which ones do most *brujos* prefer?"

"There are no preferences. They are all *power* objects, all just the same."

"Do you have any yourself, don Juan?"

He did not answer; he just looked at me and laughed. He remained quiet for a long time, and I thought my questions were annoying him.

"There are limitations on those types of *powers*," he went on. "But such a point is, I am sure, incomprehensible to you. It has taken me nearly a lifetime to understand that, by itself, an *ally* can reveal all the secrets of these lesser powers, rendering them rather childish. I had tools like that at one time, when I was very young."

"What power objects did you have?"

"*Maiz-pinto*, crystals and feathers."

"What is *maiz-pinto*, don Juan?"

"It is a small kernel of corn which has a streak of red colour in its middle."

"Is it a single kernel?"

"No. A *brujo* owns forty-eight kernels."

"What do the kernels do, don Juan?"

"Each one of them can kill a man by entering into his body."

"How does a kernel enter into a human body?"

"It is a *power* object and its *power* consists, among other things, in entering into the body."

"What does it do when it enters into the body?"

"It immerses itself in the body; it settles on the chest, or on the intestines. The man becomes ill, and unless the *brujo* who is tending him is stronger than the bewitcher, he will die within three months from the moment the kernel entered into his body."

"Is there any way of curing him?"

"The only way is to suck the kernel out, but very few *brujos* would dare to do that. A *brujo* may succeed in sucking the kernel out, but unless he is powerful enough to repel it, it will get inside him and will kill him instead."

"But how does a kernel manage to enter into someone's body?"

"To explain that I must tell you about corn witchcraft, which is one of the most powerful witchcrafts I know. The witchcraft is done by two kernels. One of them is put inside a fresh bud of a yellow flower. The flower is then set on a spot where it will come into contact with the victim: the road on which he walks every day, or any place where he is habitually present. As soon as the victim steps on the kernel, or touches it in any way, the witchcraft is done. The kernel immerses itself in the body."

"What happens to the kernel after the man has touched it?"

"All its power goes inside the man, and the kernel is free. It becomes just another kernel. It may be left at the site of the witchcraft, or it may be swept away; it does not matter. It is better to sweep it away into the underbrush, where a bird will eat it."

"Can a bird eat it before the man touches it?"

"No. No bird is that stupid, I assure you. The birds stay away from it."

Don Juan then described a very complex procedure by which such *power* kernels can be obtained.

"You must bear in mind that *maiz-pinto* is merely an instrument, not an *ally*," he said. "Once you make that distinction you will have no problem. But if you consider such tools to be supreme, you will be a fool."

"Are the power objects as powerful as an *ally*?" I asked.

Don Juan laughed scornfully before answering. It seemed that he was trying hard to be patient with me.

"*Maiz-pinto*, crystals, and feathers are mere toys in comparison with an *ally*," he said. "These power objects are necessary only when a man does not have an *ally*. It is a waste of time to pursue them, especially for you. You should be trying to get an *ally*; when you succeed, you will understand what I am telling you now. *Power* objects are like a game for children."

"Don't get me wrong, don Juan," I protested. "I want to have an *ally*, but I also want to know everything I

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can. You yourself have said that knowledge is power."

"No!" he said emphatically. "*Power* rests on the kind of knowledge one holds. What is the sense of knowing things that are useless?"

In don Juan's system of beliefs, the acquisition of an ally meant exclusively the exploitation of the states of non-ordinary reality he produced in me through the use of hallucinogenic plants. He believed that by focusing on these states and omitting other aspects of the knowledge he taught I would arrive at a coherent view of the phenomena I had experienced.

I have therefore divided this book into two parts. In the first part I present selections from my field notes dealing with the states of non-ordinary reality I underwent during my apprenticeship. As I have arranged my notes to fit the continuity of the narrative, they are not always in proper chronological sequence. I never wrote my description of a state of non-ordinary reality until several days after I had experienced it, waiting until I was able to treat it calmly and objectively. My conversations with don Juan, however, were taken down as they occurred, immediately after each state of non-ordinary reality. My reports of these conversations, therefore, sometimes antedate the full description of an experience.

My field notes disclose the subjective version of what I perceived while undergoing the experience. That version is presented here just as I narrated it to don Juan, who demanded a complete and faithful recollection of every detail and a full recounting of each experience. At the time of recording these experiences, I added incidental details in an attempt to recapture the total setting of each state of non-ordinary reality. I wanted to describe the emotional impact I had experienced as completely as possible.

My field notes also reveal the content of don Juan's system of beliefs. I have condensed long pages of questions and answers between don Juan and myself in order to avoid reproducing the repetitiveness of conversation. But as I also want to reflect accurately the overall mood of our exchanges, I have deleted only dialogue that contributed nothing to my understanding of his way of knowledge. The information don Juan gave me about his way of knowledge was always sporadic, and for every spurt on his part there were hours of probing on mine. Nevertheless, there were innumerable occasions on which he freely expounded his knowledge.



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## Chapter 1

My notes on my first session with don Juan are dated 23 June 1961. That was the occasion when the teachings began. I had seen him several times previously in the capacity of an observer only. At every opportunity I had asked him to teach me about peyote. He ignored my request every time, but he never completely dismissed the subject, and I interpreted his hesitancy as a possibility that he might be inclined to talk about his knowledge with more coaxing.

In this particular session he made it obvious to me that he might consider my request provided I possessed clarity of mind and purpose in reference to what I had asked him. It was impossible for me to fulfill such a condition, for I had asked him to teach me about peyote only as a means of establishing a link of communication with him. I thought his familiarity with the subject might predispose him to be more open and willing to talk, thus allowing me an entrance into his knowledge on the properties of plants. He had interpreted my request literally, however, and was concerned about my purpose in wishing to learn about peyote.

*Friday, 23 June 1961*

"Would you teach me about peyote, don Juan?"

"Why would you like to undertake such learning?"

"I really would like to know about it. Is not just to want to know a good reason?"

"No! You must search in your heart and find out why a young man like you wants to undertake such a task of learning."

"Why did you learn about it yourself, don Juan?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Maybe we both have the same reasons."

"I doubt that. I am an Indian. We don't have the same paths."

"The only reason I have is that I want to learn about it, just to know. But I assure you, don Juan, my intentions are not bad."

"I believe you. I've *smoked* you."

"I beg your pardon!"

"It doesn't matter now. I know your intentions."

"Do you mean you saw through me?"

"You could put it that way."

"Will you teach me, then?"

"No!"

"Is it because I'm not an Indian?"

"No. It is because you don't know your heart. What is important is that you know exactly why you want to involve yourself. Learning about "*Mescalito*" is a most serious act. If you were an Indian your desire alone would be sufficient. Very few Indians have such a desire."

*Sunday, 25 June 1961*

I stayed with don Juan all afternoon on Friday. I was going to leave about 7 p.m. We were sitting on the porch in front of his house and I decided to ask him once more about the teaching. It was almost a routine question and I expected him to refuse again. I asked him if there was a way in which he could accept just my desire to learn, as if I were an Indian. He took a long time to answer. I was compelled to stay because he seemed to be trying to decide something.

Finally he told me that there was a way, and proceeded to delineate a problem. He pointed out that I was very tired sitting on the floor, and that the proper thing to do was to find a "spot" (*sitio*) on the floor where I could sit without fatigue. I had been sitting with my knees up against my chest and my arms locked around my calves. When he said I was tired, I realized that my back ached and that I was quite exhausted.

I waited for him to explain what he meant by a "spot", but he made no overt attempt to elucidate the point. I

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thought that perhaps he meant that I should change positions, so I got up and sat closer to him. He protested at my movement and clearly emphasized that a spot meant a place where a man could feel naturally happy and strong. He patted the place where he sat and said it was his own spot, adding that he had posed a riddle I had to solve by myself without any further deliberation.

What he had posed as a problem to be solved was certainly a riddle. I had no idea how to begin or even what he had in mind. Several times I asked for a clue, or at least a hint, as to how to proceed in locating a point where I felt happy and strong. I insisted and argued that I had no idea what he really meant because I couldn't conceive the problem. He suggested I walk around the porch until I found the spot.

I got up and began to pace the floor. I felt silly and sat down in front of him.

He became very annoyed with me and accused me of not listening, saying that perhaps I did not want to learn. After a while he calmed down and explained to me that not every place was good to sit or be on, and that within the confines of the porch there was one spot that was unique, a spot where I could be at my very best. It was my task to distinguish it from all the other places. The general pattern was that I had to "feel" all the possible spots that were accessible until I could determine without a doubt which was the right one.

I argued that although the porch was not too large (twelve by eight feet), the number of possible spots was overwhelming, and it would take me a very long time to check all of them, and that since he had not specified the size of the spot, the possibilities might be infinite. My arguments were futile. He got up and very sternly warned me that it might take me days to figure it out, but that if I did not solve the problem, I might as well leave because he would have nothing to say to me. He emphasized that he knew where my spot was, and that therefore I could not lie to him; he said this was the only way he could accept my desire to learn about Mescalito as a valid reason. He added that nothing in his world was a gift, that whatever there was to learn had to be learned the hard way.

He went around the house to the chaparral to urinate. He returned directly into his house through the back.

I thought the assignment to find the alleged spot of happiness was his own way of dismissing me, but I got up and started to pace back and forth. The sky was clear. I could see everything on and near the porch. I must have paced for an hour or more, but nothing happened to reveal the location of the spot. I got tired of walking and sat down; after a few minutes I sat somewhere else, and then at another place, until I had covered the whole floor in a semi-systematic fashion. I deliberately tried to "feel" differences between places, but I lacked the criteria for differentiation. I felt I was wasting my time, but I stayed. My rationalization was that I had come a long way just to see don Juan, and I really had nothing else to do.

I lay down on my back and put my hands under my head like a pillow. Then I rolled over and lay on my stomach for a while. I repeated this rolling process over the entire floor. For the first time I thought I had stumbled upon a vague criterion. I felt warmer when I lay on my back.

I rolled again, this time in the opposite direction, and again covered the length of the floor, lying face down on all the places where I had lain face up during my first rolling tour. I experienced the same warm and cold sensations, depending on my position, but there was no difference between spots.

Then an idea occurred to me which I thought to be brilliant: don Juan's spot! I sat there, and then lay, face down at first, and later on my back, but the place was just like all the others. I stood up. I had had enough. I wanted to say good-bye to don Juan, but I was embarrassed to wake him up. I looked at my watch. It was two o'clock in the morning! I had been rolling for six hours.

At that moment don Juan came out and went around the house to the *chaparral*. He came back and stood at the door. I felt utterly dejected, and I wanted to say something nasty to him and leave. But I realized that it was not his fault; that it was my own choice to go through all that nonsense. I told him I had failed; I had been rolling on his floor like an idiot all night and still couldn't make any sense of his riddle.

He laughed and said that it did not surprise him because I had not proceeded correctly. I had not been using my eyes. That was true, yet I was very sure he had said to feel the difference. I brought that point up, but he argued that one can feel with the eyes, when the eyes are not looking right into things. As far as I was concerned, he said, I had no other means to solve this problem but to use all I had - my eyes.

He went inside. I was certain that he had been watching me. I thought there was no other way for him to know that I had not been using my eyes.

I began to roll again, because that was the most comfortable procedure. This time, however, I rested my chin

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on my hands and looked at every detail.

After an interval the darkness around me changed. When I focused on the point directly in front of me, the whole peripheral area of my field of vision became brilliantly coloured with a homogeneous greenish yellow. The effect was startling. I kept my eyes fixed on the point in front of me and began to crawl sideways on my stomach, one foot at a time.

Suddenly, at a point near the middle of the floor, I became aware of another change in hue. At a place to my right, still in the periphery of my field of vision, the greenish yellow became intensely purple. I concentrated my attention on it. The purple faded into a pale, but still brilliant, colour which remained steady for the time I kept my attention on it.

I marked the place with my jacket, and called don Juan. He came out to the porch. I was truly excited; I had actually seen the change in hues. He seemed unimpressed, but told me to sit on the spot and report to him what kind of feeling I had.

I sat down and then lay on my back. He stood by me and asked me repeatedly how I felt; but I did not feel anything different. For about fifteen minutes I tried to feel or to see a difference, while don Juan stood by me patiently. I felt disgusted. I had a metallic taste in my mouth. Suddenly I had developed a headache. I was about to get sick. The thought of my nonsensical endeavours irritated me to a point of fury. I got up.

Don Juan must have noticed my profound frustration. He did not laugh, but very seriously stated that I had to be inflexible with myself if I wanted to learn. Only two choices were open to me, he said: either to quit and go home, in which case I would never learn, or to solve the riddle.

He went inside again. I wanted to leave immediately, but I was too tired to drive; besides, perceiving the hues had been so startling that I was sure it was a criterion of some sort, and perhaps there were other changes to be detected. Anyway, it was too late to leave. So I sat down, stretched my legs back, and began all over again.

During this round I moved rapidly through each place, passing don Juan's spot, to the end of the floor, and then turned around to cover the outer edge. When I reached the centre, I realized that another change in colouration was taking place, again on the edge of my field of vision. The uniform chartreuse I was seeing all over the area turned, at one spot to my right, into a sharp verdigris. It remained for a moment and then abruptly metamorphosed into another steady hue, different from the other one I had detected earlier. I took off one of my shoes and marked the point, and kept on rolling until I had covered the floor in all possible directions. No other change of colouration took place.

I came back to the point marked with my shoe, and examined it. It was located five to six feet away from the spot marked by my jacket, in a southeasterly direction. There was a large rock next to it. I lay down there for quite some time trying to find clues, looking at every detail, but I did not feel anything different. I decided to try the other spot. I quickly pivoted on my knees and was about to lie down on my jacket when I felt an unusual apprehension. It was more like a physical sensation of something actually pushing on my stomach. I jumped up and retreated in one movement. The hair on my neck pricked up. My legs had arched slightly, my trunk was bent forward, and my arms stuck out in front of me rigidly with my fingers contracted like a claw. I took notice of my strange posture and my fright increased.

I walked back involuntarily and sat down on the rock next to my shoe. From the rock, I slumped to the floor. I tried to figure out what had happened to cause me such a fright. I thought it must have been the fatigue I was experiencing. It was nearly daytime. I felt silly and embarrassed. Yet I had no way to explain what had frightened me, nor had I figured out what don Juan wanted.

I decided to give it one last try. I got up and slowly approached the place marked by my jacket, and again I felt the same apprehension. This time I made a strong effort to control myself. I sat down, and then knelt in order to lie face down, but I could not lie in spite of my will. I put my hands on the floor in front of me. My breathing accelerated; my stomach was upset. I had a clear sensation of panic, and fought not to run away. I thought don Juan was perhaps watching me. Slowly I crawled back to the other spot and propped my back against the rock. I wanted to rest for a while to organize my thoughts, but I fell asleep.

I heard don Juan talking and laughing above my head. I woke up.

"You have found the spot," he said.

I did not understand him at first, but he assured me again that the place where I had fallen asleep was the spot in question. He again asked me how I felt lying there. I told him I really did not notice any difference.

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He asked me to compare my feelings at that moment with what I had felt while lying on the other spot. For the first time it occurred to me that I could not possibly explain my apprehension of the preceding night. He urged me in a kind of challenging way to sit on the other spot. For some inexplicable reason I was actually afraid of the other place, and did not sit on it. He asserted that only a fool could fail to see the difference.

I asked him if each of the two spots had a special name. He said that the good one was called the *sitio* and the bad one the enemy; he said these two places were the key to a man's wellbeing, especially for a man who was pursuing knowledge. The sheer act of sitting on one's spot created superior strength; on the other hand, the enemy weakened a man and could even cause his death. He said I had replenished my energy, which I had spent lavishly the night before, by taking a nap on my spot.

He also said that the colours I had seen in association with each specific spot had the same overall effect either of giving strength or of curtailing it.

I asked him if there were other spots for me like the two I had found, and how I should go about finding them. He said that many places in the world would be comparable to those two, and that the best way to find them was by detecting their respective colours.

It was not clear to me whether or not I had solved the problem, and in fact I was not even convinced that there had been a problem; I could not avoid feeling that the whole experience was forced and arbitrary. I was certain that don Juan had watched me all night and then proceeded to humour me by saying that wherever I had fallen asleep was the place I was looking for. Yet I failed to see a logical reason for such an act, and when he challenged me to sit on the other spot I could not do it. There was a strange cleavage between my pragmatic experience of fearing the 'other spot' and my rational deliberations about the total event.

Don Juan, on the other hand, was very sure I had succeeded, and, acting in accordance with my success, let me know he was going to teach me about peyote.

"You asked me to teach you about Mescalito," he said. "I wanted to find out if you had enough backbone to meet him face to face. Mescalito is not something to make fun of. You must have command over your resources. Now I know I can take your desire alone as a good reason to learn."

"You really are going to teach me about peyote?"

"I prefer to call him Mescalito. Do the same."

"When are you going to start?"

"It is not so simple as that. You must be ready first."

"I think I am ready."

"This is not a joke. You must wait until there is no doubt, and then you will meet him."

"Do I have to prepare myself?"

"No. You simply have to wait. You may give up the whole idea after a while. You get tired easily. Last night you were ready to quit as soon as it got difficult. Mescalito requires a very serious intent."

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## Chapter 2

Monday, 7 August 1961

I arrived at don Juan's house in Arizona about seven o'clock on Friday night. Five other Indians were sitting with him on the porch of his house. I greeted him and sat waiting for them to say something. After a formal silence one of the men got up, walked over to me, and said, "*Buenas noches*." I stood up and answered, "*Buenas noches*." Then all the other men got up and came to me and we all mumbled '*Buenas noches*' and shook hands either by barely touching one another's finger-tips or by holding the hand for an instant and then dropping it quite abruptly.

We all sat down again. They seemed to be rather shy - at a loss for words, although they all spoke Spanish.

It must have been about half past seven when suddenly they all got up and walked towards the back of the house. Nobody had said a word for a long time. Don Juan signaled me to follow and we all got inside an old pickup truck parked there. I sat in the back with don Juan and two younger men. There were no cushions or benches and the metal floor was painfully hard, especially when we left the highway and got onto a dirt road. Don Juan whispered that we were going to the house of one of his friends who had seven mescalitos for me.

I asked him, "Don't you have any of them yourself, don Juan?"

"I do, but I couldn't offer them to you. You see, someone else has to do this."

"Can you tell me why?"

"Perhaps you are not agreeable to "him" and "he" won't like you, and then you will never be able to know "him" with affection, as one should; and our friendship will be broken."

"Why wouldn't he like me? I have never done anything to him."

"You don't have to do anything to be liked or disliked. He either takes you, or throws you away."

"But, if he doesn't take me, isn't there anything I can do to make him like me?"

The other two men seemed to have overheard my question and laughed.

"No! I can't think of anything one can do," don Juan said.

He turned half away from me and I could not talk to him any more.

We must have driven for at least an hour before we stopped in front of a small house. It was quite dark, and after the driver had turned off the headlights I could make out only the vague contour of the building.

A young woman, a Mexican, judging by her speech inflection, was yelling at a dog to make him stop barking. We got out of the truck and walked into the house. The men mumbled "*Buenas noches*" as they went by her. She answered back and went on yelling at the dog.

The room was large and was stacked up with a multitude of objects. A dim light from a very small electric bulb rendered the scene quite gloomy. There were quite a few chairs with broken legs and sagging seats leaning against the walls. Three of the men sat down on a couch, which was the largest single piece of furniture in the room. It was very old and had sagged down all the way to the floor; in the dim light it seemed to be red and dirty. The rest of us sat in chairs. We sat in silence for a long time.

One of the men suddenly got up and went into another room. He was perhaps in his fifties, tall, and husky. He came back a moment later with a coffee jar. He opened the lid and handed the jar to me; inside there were seven odd-looking items. They varied in size and consistency. Some of them were almost round, others were elongated. They felt to the touch like the pulp of walnuts, or the surface of cork. Their brownish colour made them look like hard, dry nutshells. I handled them, rubbing their surfaces for quite some time.

"This is to be chewed [*esto se masca*]," Don Juan said in a whisper.

I had not realized that he had sat next to me until he spoke. I looked at the other men, but no one was looking at me; they were talking among themselves in very low voices. This was a moment of acute indecision and fear. I felt almost unable to control myself.

"I have to go to the bathroom," I said to him. "I'll go outside and take a walk."

He handed me the coffee jar and I put the peyote buttons in it. I was leaving the room when the man who had given me the jar stood up, came to me, and said he had a toilet bowl in the other room.

The toilet was almost against the door. Next to it, nearly touching the toilet, was a large bed which occupied more than half of the room. The woman was sleeping there. I stood motionless at the door for a while, then I

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came back to the room where the other men were.

The man who owned the house spoke to me in English: "Don Juan says you're from South America. Is there any mescal there?"

I told him that I had never even heard of it.

They seemed to be interested in South America and we talked about the Indians for a while. Then one of the men asked me why I wanted to eat peyote. I told him that I wanted to know what it was like. They all laughed shyly.

Don Juan urged me softly, "Chew it, chew it [*Masca, masca*]."

My hands were wet and my stomach contracted. The jar with the peyote buttons was on the floor by the chair. I bent over, took one at random, and put it in my mouth. It had a stale taste. I bit it in two and started to chew one of the pieces. I felt a strong, pungent bitterness; in a moment my whole mouth was numb. The bitterness increased as I kept on chewing, forcing an incredible flow of saliva. My gums and the inside of my mouth felt as if I had eaten salty, dry meat or fish, which seems to force one to chew more. After a while I chewed the other piece and my mouth was so numb I couldn't feel the bitterness any more. The peyote button was a bunch of shreds, like the fibrous part of an orange or like sugarcane, and I didn't know whether to swallow it or spit it out. At that moment the owner of the house got up and invited everybody to go out to the porch.

We went out and sat in the darkness. It was quite comfortable outside, and the host brought out a bottle of tequila.

The men were seated in a row with their backs to the wall. I was at the extreme right of the line. Don Juan, who was next to me, placed the jar with the peyote buttons between my legs. Then he handed me the bottle, which was passed down the line, and told me to take some of the tequila to wash away the bitterness.

I spat out the shreds of the first button and took a sip. He told me not to swallow it, but to just rinse out my mouth with it to stop the saliva. It did not help much with the saliva, but it certainly helped to wash away some of the bitterness.

Don Juan gave me a piece of dried apricot, or perhaps it was a dried fig - I couldn't see it in the dark, nor could I taste it - and told me to chew it thoroughly and slowly, without rushing. I had difficulty swallowing it; it felt as if it would not go down.

After a short pause the bottle went around again. Don Juan handed me a piece of crispy dried meat. I told him I did not feel like eating.

"This is not eating," he said firmly.

The pattern was repeated six times. I remember having chewed six peyote buttons when the conversation became very lively; although I could not distinguish what language was spoken, the topic of the conversation, in which everybody participated, was very interesting, and I attempted to listen carefully so that I could take part. But when I tried to speak I realized I couldn't; the words shifted aimlessly about in my mind.

I sat with my back propped against the wall and listened to what the men were saying. They were talking in Italian, and repeated over and over one phrase about the stupidity of sharks. I thought it was a logical, coherent topic. I had told don Juan earlier that the Colorado River in Arizona was called by the early Spaniards "*el rio de los tizones* [the river of charred wood]"; and someone misspelled or misread "*tizones*", and the river was called '*el rio de los tiburones* [the river of the sharks]'. I was sure they were discussing that story, yet it never occurred to me to think that none of them could speak Italian.

I had a very strong desire to throw up, but I don't recall the actual act. I asked if somebody would get me some water. I was experiencing an unbearable thirst.

Don Juan brought me a large saucepan. He placed it on the ground next to the wall. He also brought a little cup or can. He dipped it into the pan and handed it to me, and said I could not drink but should just freshen my mouth with it.

The water looked strangely shiny, glossy, like a thick varnish. I wanted to ask don Juan about it and laboriously I tried to voice my thoughts in English, but then I realized he did not speak English. I experienced a very confusing moment, and became aware of the fact that although there was a clear thought in my mind, I could not speak. I wanted to comment on the strange quality of the water, but what followed next was not speech; it was the feeling of my unvoiced thoughts coming out of my mouth in a sort of liquid form. It was an effortless sensation of vomiting without the contractions of the diaphragm. It was a pleasant flow of liquid

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words.

I drank. And the feeling that I was vomiting disappeared. By that time all noises had vanished and I found I had difficulty focusing my eyes. I looked for don Juan and as I turned my head I noticed that my field of vision had diminished to a circular area in front of my eyes. This feeling was neither frightening nor discomforting, but, quite to the contrary, it was a novelty; I could literally sweep the ground by focusing on one spot and then moving my head slowly in any direction. When I had first come out to the porch I had noticed it was all dark except for the distant glare of the city lights. Yet within the circular area of my vision everything was clear. I forgot about my concern with don Juan and the other men, and gave myself entirely to exploring the ground with my pinpoint vision.

I saw the juncture of the porch floor and the wall. I turned my head slowly to the right, following the wall, and saw don Juan sitting against it. I shifted my head to the left in order to focus on the water. I found the bottom of the pan; I raised my head slightly and saw a medium-size black dog approaching. I saw him coming towards the water. The dog began to drink. I raised my hand to push him away from my water; I focused my pinpoint vision on the dog to carry on the movement, and suddenly I saw him become transparent. The water was a shiny, viscous liquid. I saw it going down the dog's throat into his body. I saw it flowing evenly through his entire length and then shooting out through each one of the hairs. I saw the iridescent fluid traveling along the length of each individual hair and then projecting out of the hairs to form a long, white, silky mane.

At that moment I had the sensation of intense convulsions, and in a matter of instants a tunnel formed around me, very low and narrow, hard and strangely cold. It felt to the touch like a wall of solid tinfoil. I found I was sitting on the tunnel floor. I tried to stand up, but hit my head on the metal roof, and the tunnel compressed itself until it was suffocating me. I remember having to crawl toward a sort of round point where the tunnel ended; when I finally arrived, if I did, I had forgotten all about the dog, don Juan, and myself. I was exhausted. My clothes were soaked in a cold, sticky liquid. I rolled back and forth trying to find a position in which to rest, a position where my heart would not pound so hard. In one of those shifts I saw the dog again.

Every memory came back to me at once, and suddenly all was clear in my mind. I turned around to look for don Juan, but I could not distinguish anything or anyone. All I was capable of seeing was the dog becoming iridescent; an intense light radiated from his body. I saw again the water flowing through him, kindling him like a bonfire. I got to the water, sank my face in the pan, and drank with him. My hands were in front of me on the ground and, as I drank, I saw the fluid running through my veins setting up hues of red and yellow and green. I drank more and more. I drank until I was all afire; I was all aglow. I drank until the fluid went out of my body through each pore and projected out like fibers of silk, and I too acquired a long, lustrous, iridescent mane. I looked at the dog and his mane was like mine. A supreme happiness filled my whole body, and we ran together toward a sort of yellow warmth that came from some indefinite place. And there we played. We played and wrestled until I knew his wishes and he knew mine. We took turns manipulating each other in the fashion of a puppet show. I could make him move his legs by twisting my toes, and every time he nodded his head I felt an irresistible impulse to jump. But his most impish act was to make me scratch my head with my foot while I sat; he did it by flapping his ears from side to side. This action was to me utterly, unbearably funny. Such a touch of grace and irony; such mastery, I thought. The euphoria that possessed me was indescribable. I laughed until it was almost impossible to breathe.

I had the clear sensation of not being able to open my eyes; I was looking through a tank of water. It was a long and very painful state filled with the anxiety of not being able to wake up and yet being awake. Then slowly the world became clear and in focus. My field of vision became again very round and ample, and with it came an ordinary conscious act, which was to turn around and look for that marvelous being. At this point I encountered the most difficult transition. The passage from my normal state had taken place almost without my realizing it: I was aware; my thoughts and feelings were a corollary of that awareness; and the passing was smooth and clear. But this second change, the awakening to serious, sober consciousness, was genuinely shocking. I had forgotten I was a man! The sadness of such an irreconcilable situation was so intense that I wept.

*Saturday, 5 August 1961*

Later that morning, after breakfast, the owner of the house, don Juan, and I drove back to don Juan's place. I

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was very tired, but I couldn't go to sleep in the truck. Only after the man had left did I fall asleep on the porch of don Juan's house.

When I woke up it was dark; don Juan had covered me up with a blanket. I looked for him, but he was not in the house. He came later with a pot of fried beans and a stack of tortillas. I was extremely hungry.

After we had finished eating and were resting he asked me to tell him all that had happened to me the night before. I related my experience in great detail and as accurately as possible.

When I had finished he nodded his head and said, "I think you are fine. It is difficult for me to explain now how and why. But I think it went all right for you. You see, sometimes he is playful, like a child; at other times he is terrible, fearsome. He either frolics, or he is dead serious. It is impossible to know beforehand what he will be like with another person. Yet, when one knows him well - sometimes. You played with him tonight. You are the only person I know who has had such an encounter."

"In what way does my experience differ from that of others?"

"You're not an Indian; therefore it is hard for me to figure out what is what. Yet he either takes people or rejects them, regardless of whether they are Indians or not. That I know. I have seen numbers of them. I also know that he frolics, he makes some people laugh, but never have I seen him play with anyone."

"Can you tell me now, don Juan, how does peyote protect..."

He did not let me finish. Vigorously he touched me on the shoulder.

"Don't you ever name him that way. You haven't seen enough of him yet to know him."

"How does Mescalito protect people?"

"He advises. He answers whatever questions you ask."

"Then Mescalito is real? I mean he is something you can see?"

He seemed to be baffled by my question. He looked at me with a sort of blank expression.

"What I meant to say, is that Mescalito..."

"I heard what you said. Didn't you see him last night?"

I wanted to say that I saw only a dog, but I noticed his bewildered look.

"Then you think what I saw last night was him?"

He looked at me with contempt. He chuckled, shook his head as though he couldn't believe it, and in a very belligerent tone he added, "*A poco crees que era tu - mama* [Don't tell me you believe it was your - mama] ?"

He paused before saying "*mama*" because what he meant to say was "*tu chingada madre*", an idiom used as a disrespectful allusion to the other party's mother. The word "*mama*" was so incongruous that we both laughed for a long time.

Then I realized he had fallen asleep and had not answered my question.

*Sunday, 6 August 1961*

I drove don Juan to the house where I had taken peyote. On the way he told me that the name of the man who had "offered me to Mescalito" was John. When we got to the house we found John sitting on his porch with two young men. All of them were extremely jovial. They laughed and talked with great ease. The three of them spoke English perfectly. I told John that I had come to thank him for having helped me.

I wanted to get their views on my behavior during the hallucinogenic experience, and told them I had been trying to think of what I had done that night and that I couldn't remember. They laughed and were reluctant to talk about it. They seemed to be holding back on account of don Juan. They all glanced at him as though waiting for an affirmative cue to go on. Don Juan must have cued them, although I did not notice anything, because suddenly John began to tell me what I had done that night.

He said he knew I had been "taken" when he heard me puking. He estimated that I must have puked thirty times. Don Juan corrected him and said it was only ten times.

John continued: "Then we all moved next to you. You were stiff, and were having convulsions. For a very long time, while lying on your back, you moved your mouth as though talking. Then you began to bump your head on the floor, and don Juan put an old hat on your head and you stopped it. You shivered and whined for hours, lying on the floor. I think everybody fell asleep then; but I heard you puffing and groaning in my sleep. Then I heard you scream and I woke up. I saw you leaping up in the air, screaming. You made a dash for the



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water, knocked the pan over, and began to swim in the puddle.

"Don Juan brought you more water. You sat quietly in front of the pan. Then you jumped up and took off all your clothes. You were kneeling in front of the water, drinking in big gulps. Then you just sat there and stared into space. We thought you were going to be there forever. Nearly everybody was asleep, including don Juan, when suddenly you jumped up again, howling, and took after the dog. The dog got scared and howled too, and ran to the back of the house. Then everybody woke up.

"We all got up. You came back from the other side still chasing the dog. The dog was running ahead of you barking and howling. I think you must have gone twenty times around the house, running in circles, barking like a dog. I was afraid people were going to be curious. There are no neighbors close, but your howling was so loud it could have been heard for miles."

One of the young men added, "You caught up with the doe and brought it to the porch in your arms."

John continued: "Then you began to play with the dog. You wrestled with him, and the dog and you bit each other and played. That, I thought, was funny. My dog does not play usually. But this time you and the dog were rolling on each other."

"Then you ran to the water and the dog drank with you," the young man said. "You ran five or six times to the water with the dog."

"How long did this go on?" I asked.

"Hours," John said. "At one time we lost sight of you two. I think you must have run to the back. We just heard you barking and groaning. You sounded so much like a dog that we couldn't tell you two apart."

"Maybe it was just the dog alone," I said.

They laughed, and John said, "You were barking there, boy!"

"What happened next?"

The three men looked at one another and seemed to have a hard time deciding what happened next. Finally the young man who had not yet said anything spoke up.

"He choked," he said, looking at John.

"Yes, you certainly choked. You began to cry very strangely, and then you fell to the floor. We thought you were biting your tongue; don Juan opened your jaws and poured water on your face. Then you started shivering and having convulsions all over again. Then you stayed motionless for a long time. Don Juan said it was all over. By then it was morning, so we covered you with a blanket and left you to sleep on the porch."

He stopped there and looked at the other men who were obviously trying not to laugh. He turned to don Juan and asked him something. Don Juan smiled and answered the question. John turned to me and said, "We left you here on the porch because we were afraid you were going to piss all over the rooms."

They all laughed very loudly.

"What was the matter with me?" I asked. "Did I..."

"Did you?" John sort of mimicked me. "We were not going to mention it, but don Juan says it is all right. You pissed all over my dog!"

"What did I do?"

"You don't think the dog was running because he was afraid of you, do you? The dog was running because you were pissing on him."

There was general laughter at this point. I tried to question one of the young men, but they were all laughing and he didn't hear me.

John went on: "My dog got even though; he pissed on you too!"

This statement was apparently utterly funny because they all roared with laughter, including don Juan. When they had quieted down, I asked in all earnestness, "Is it really true? This really happened?"

Still laughing, John replied: "I swear my dog really pissed on you."

Driving back to don Juan's place I asked him: "Did all that really happen, don Juan?"

"Yes," he said, "but they don't know what you saw. They don't realize you were playing with "him". That is why I did not disturb you."

"But is this business of the dog and me pissing on each other true?"

"It was not a dog! How many times do I have to tell you that? This is the only way to understand it. It's the only way! It was "he" who played with you."

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"Did you know all this was happening before I told you about it?"

He vacillated for an instant before answering.

"No, I remembered, after you told me about it, the strange way you looked. I just suspected you were doing fine because you didn't seem scared."

"Did the dog really play with me as they say?"

"Goddammit! It was not a dog!"

*Thursday, 17 August 1961*

I told don Juan how I felt about my experience. From the point of view of my intended work it had been a disastrous event. I said I did not care for another similar "encounter" with Mescalito. I agreed that everything that had happened to me had been more than interesting, but added that nothing in it could really move me towards seeking it again. I seriously believed that I was not constructed for that type of endeavor. Peyote had produced in me, as a post-reaction, a strange kind of physical discomfort. It was an indefinite fear or unhappiness; a melancholy of some sort, which I could not define exactly. And I did not find that state noble in any way.

Don Juan laughed and said, "You are beginning to learn."

"This type of learning is not for me. I am not made for it, don Juan."

"You always exaggerate."

"This is not exaggeration."

"It is. The only trouble is that you exaggerate the bad points only."

"There are no good points so far as I am concerned. All I know is that it makes me afraid."

"There is nothing wrong with being afraid. When you fear, you see things in a different way."

"But I don't care about seeing things in a different way, don Juan. I think I am going to leave the learning about Mescalito alone. I can't handle it, don Juan. This is really a bad situation for me."

"Of course it is bad - even for me. You are not the only one who is baffled."

"Why should you be baffled, don Juan?"

"I have been thinking about what I saw the other night Mescalito actually played with you. That baffled me, because it was an indication [omen]."

"What kind of - indication, don Juan?"

"Mescalito was pointing you out to me."

"What for?"

"It wasn't clear to me then, but now it is. He meant you were the "chosen man" [*escogido*]. Mescalito pointed you out to me and by doing that he told me you were the chosen man."

"Do you mean I was chosen among others for some task, or something of the sort?"

"No. What I mean is, Mescalito told me you could be the man I am looking for."

"When did he tell you that, don Juan?"

"By playing with you, he told me that. This makes you the chosen man for me."

"What does it mean to be the chosen man?"

"There are some secrets I know [*Tengo secretos*]. I have secrets I won't be able to reveal to anyone unless I find my chosen man. The other night when I saw you playing with Mescalito it was clear to me you were that man. But you are not an Indian. How baffling!"

"But what does it mean to me, don Juan? What do I have to do?"

"I've made up my mind and I am going to teach you the secrets that make up the lot of a man of knowledge."

"Do you mean the secrets about Mescalito?"

"Yes, but those are not all the secrets I know. There are others, of different kind, which I would like to give to someone. I had a teacher myself, my benefactor, and I also became his chosen man upon performing a certain feat. He taught me all I know."

I asked him again what this new role would require of me; he said learning was the only thing involved, learning in the sense of what I had experienced in the two sessions with him.

The way in which the situation had evolved was quite strange. I had made up my mind to tell him I was

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going to give up the idea of learning about peyote, and then before I could really make my point, he offered to teach me his "knowledge". I did not know what he meant by that, but I felt that this sudden turn was very serious. I argued I had no qualifications for such a task, as it required a rare kind of courage which I did not have. I told him that my bent of character was to talk about acts others performed. I wanted to hear his views and opinions about everything. I told him I could be happy if I could sit there and listen to him talk for days. To me, *that* would be learning.

He listened without interrupting me. I talked for a long time. Then he said:

"All this is very easy to understand. Fear is the first natural enemy a man must overcome on his path to knowledge. Besides, you are curious. That evens up the score. And you will learn in spite of yourself; that's the rule."

I protested for a while longer, trying to dissuade him. But he seemed to be convinced there was nothing else I could do but learn.

"You are not thinking in the proper order," he said. "Mescalito actually played with you. That's the point to think about. Why don't you dwell on that instead of on your fear?"

"Was it so unusual?"

"You are the only person I have ever seen playing with him. You are not used to this kind of life; therefore the indications [omens] bypass you. Yet you are a serious person, but your seriousness is attached to what you do, not to what goes on outside you. You dwell upon yourself too much. That's the trouble. And that produces a terrible fatigue."

"But what else can anyone do, don Juan?"

"Seek and see the marvels all around you. You will get tired of looking at yourself alone, and that fatigue will make you deaf and blind to everything else."

"You have a point, don Juan, but how can I change?"

"Think about the wonder of Mescalito playing with you. Think about nothing else. The rest will come to you of itself."

*Sunday, 20 August 1961*

Last night don Juan proceeded to usher me into the realm of his knowledge. We sat in front of his house in the dark. Suddenly, after a long silence, he began to talk. He said he was going to advise me with the same words his own benefactor had used the first day he took him as his apprentice. Don Juan had apparently memorized the words, for he repeated them several times, to make sure I did not miss any:

"A man goes to knowledge as he goes to war, wide-awake, with fear, with respect, and with absolute assurance. Going to knowledge or going to war in any other manner is a mistake, and whoever makes it will live to regret his steps."

I asked him why was it so and he said that when a man has fulfilled those four requisites there are no mistakes for which he will have to account; under such conditions his acts lose the blundering quality of a fool's acts. If such a man fails, or suffers a defeat, he will have lost only a battle, and there will be no pitiful regrets over that.

Then he said he intended to teach me about an "ally" in the very same way his own benefactor had taught him. He put strong emphasis on the words "very same way", repeating the phrase several times.

An "ally", he said, is a power a man can bring into his life to help him, advise him, and give him the strength necessary to perform acts, whether big or small, right or wrong. This ally is necessary to enhance a man's life, guide his acts, and further his knowledge. In fact, an ally is the indispensable aid to knowing. Don Juan said this with great conviction and force. He seemed to choose his words carefully. He repeated the following sentence four times:

"An *ally* will make you see and understand things about which no human being could possibly enlighten you."

"Is an *ally* something like a guardian spirit?"

"It is neither a guardian nor a spirit. It is an aid."

"Is Mescalito your *ally*?"

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"No! Mescalito is another kind of power. A unique power! A protector, a teacher."

"What makes Mescalito different from an *ally*?"

"He can't be tamed and used as an *ally* is tamed and used. Mescalito is outside oneself. He chooses to show himself in many forms to whoever stands in front of him, regardless of whether that person is a *brujo* or a farm boy."

Don Juan spoke with deep fervour about Mescalito's being the teacher of the proper way to live. I asked him how Mescalito taught the "proper way of life", and don Juan replied that Mescalito *showed* how to live.

"How does he show it?" I asked.

"He has many ways of showing it. Sometimes he shows it on his hand, or on the rocks, or the trees, or just in front of you."

"Is it like a picture in front of you?"

"No. It is a teaching in front of you."

"Does Mescalito talk to the person?"

"Yes. But not in words."

"How does he talk, then?"

"He talks differently to every man."

I felt my questions were annoying him. I did not ask any more. He went on explaining that there were no exact steps to knowing Mescalito; therefore no one could teach about him except Mescalito himself. This quality made him a unique power; he was not the same for every man.

On the other hand, the acquiring of an *ally* required, don Juan said, the most precise teaching and the following of stages or steps without a single deviation. There are many such *ally* powers in the world, he said, but he was familiar with only two of them. And he was going to lead me to them and their secrets, but it was up to me to choose one of them, for I could have only one. His benefactor's *ally* was in *la yerba del diablo* (devil's weed), he said, but he personally did not like it, even though his benefactor had taught him its secrets. His own *ally* was in the *humito* (the little smoke), he said, but he did not elaborate on the nature of the smoke.

I asked him about it. He remained quiet. After a long pause I asked him:

"What kind of a power is an *ally*?"

"It is an aid. I have already told you."

"How does it aid?"

"An *ally* is a power capable of carrying a man beyond the boundaries of himself. This is how an *ally* can reveal matters no human being could."

"But Mescalito also takes you out of the boundaries of yourself. Doesn't that make him an *ally*?"

"No. Mescalito takes you out of yourself to teach you. An *ally* takes you out to give you power."

I asked him to explain this point to me in more detail, or to describe the difference in effect between the two. He looked at me for a long time and laughed. He said that learning through conversation was not only a waste, but stupidity, because learning was the most difficult task a man could undertake. He asked me to remember the time I had tried to find my spot, and how I wanted to find it without doing any work because I had expected him to hand out all the information. If he had done so, he said, I would never have learned. But, knowing how difficult it was to find my spot, and, above all, knowing that it existed, would give me a unique sense of confidence. He said that while I remained rooted to my "good spot" nothing could cause me bodily harm, because I had the assurance that at that particular spot I was at my very best. I had the power to shove off anything that might be harmful to me. If, however, he had *told* me where it was, I would never have had the confidence needed to claim it as true knowledge. Thus, knowledge was indeed *power*.

Don Juan said then that every time a man sets himself to learn he has to labor as hard as I did to find that spot, and the limits of his learning are determined by his own nature. Thus he saw no point in talking about knowledge. He said that certain kinds of knowledge were too powerful for the strength I had, and to talk about them would only bring harm to me. He apparently felt there was nothing else he wanted to say. He got up and walked towards his house. I told him the situation overwhelmed me. It was not what I had conceived or wanted it to be.

He said that fears are natural; that all of us experience them and there is nothing we can do about it. But on the other hand, no matter how frightening learning is, it is more terrible to think of a man without an *ally*, or

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without knowledge.

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### Chapter 3

In the more than two years that elapsed between the time don Juan decided to teach me about the *ally* powers and the time he thought I was ready to learn about them in the pragmatic, participatory form he considered as learning, he gradually denned the general features of the two *allies* in question. He prepared me for the indispensable corollary of all the verbalizations, and the consolidation of all the teachings, the states of non-ordinary reality. At first he talked about the *ally* powers in a very casual manner. The first references I have in my notes are interjected between other topics of conversation.

*Wednesday, 23 August 1961*

"The devil's weed [Jimson weed] was my benefactor's *ally*. It could have been mine also, but I didn't like her."

"Why didn't you like the devil's weed, don Juan?"

"She has a serious drawback."

"Is she inferior to other *ally* powers?"

"No. Don't get me wrong. She is as powerful as the best of *allies*, but there is something about her which I personally don't like."

"Can you tell me what it is?"

"She distorts men. She gives them a taste of power too soon without fortifying their hearts and makes them domineering and unpredictable. She makes them weak in the middle of their great power."

"Isn't there any way to avoid that?"

"There is a way to overcome it, but not to avoid it. Whoever becomes the weed's *ally* must pay that price."

"How can one overcome that effect, don Juan?"

"The devil's weed has four heads: the root, the stem and leaves, the flowers, and the seeds. Each one of them is different, and whoever becomes her *ally* must learn about them in that order. The most important head is in the roots. The power of the devil's weed is conquered through the roots. The stem and leaves are the head that cures maladies; properly used, this head is a gift to mankind. The third head is in the flowers, and it is used to turn people crazy, or to make them obedient, or to kill them. The man whose *ally* is the weed never intakes the flowers, nor does he intake the stem and leaves, for that matter, except in cases of his own illness; but the roots and the seeds are always intaken; especially the seeds; they are the fourth head of the devil's weed and the most powerful of the four.

"My benefactor used to say the seeds are the "sober head" - the only part that could fortify the heart of man. The devil's weed is hard with her protégés, he used to say, because she aims to kill them fast, a thing she ordinarily accomplishes before they can arrive at the secrets of the "sober head". There are, however, tales about men who have unraveled the secrets of the sober head. What a challenge for a man of knowledge!"

"Did your benefactor unravel such secrets?"

"No, he didn't."

"Have you met anyone who has done it?"

"No. But they lived at a time when that knowledge was important."

"Do you know anyone who has met such men?"

"No, I don't."

"Did your benefactor know anyone?"

"He did."

"Why didn't he arrive at the secrets of the sober head?"

"To tame the devil's weed into an *ally* is one of the most difficult tasks I know. She never became one with me, for example, perhaps because I was never fond of her."

"Can you still use her as an *ally* in spite of not being fond of her?"

"I can; nevertheless, I prefer not to. Maybe it will be different for you."

"Why is it called the devil's weed?"

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Don Juan made a gesture of indifference, shrugged his shoulders, and remained quiet for some time. Finally he said that "devil's weed" was her temporary name [*su nombre de leche*]. He also said there were other names for the devil's weed, but they were not to be used, because the calling of a name was a serious matter, especially if one was learning to tame an *ally* power. I asked him why the calling of a name was so serious a matter. He said names were reserved to be used only when one was calling for help, in moments of great stress and need, and he assured me that such moments happen sooner or later in the life of whoever seeks knowledge.

*Sunday, 3 September 1961*

Today, during the afternoon, don Juan collected two *Datura* plants from the field.

Quite unexpectedly he brought the subject of the devil's weed into our conversation, and then asked me to go with him to the hills and look for one.

We drove to the nearby mountains. I got a shovel out of the trunk and walked into one of the canyons. We walked for quite a while, wading through the *chaparral*, which grew thick in the soft, sandy dirt. He stopped next to a small plant with dark-green leaves, and big, whitish, bell-shaped flowers.

"This one," he said.

Immediately he started to shovel. I tried to help him but he refused with a strong shake of the head, and went on to dig a circular hole around the plant: a hole shaped like a cone, deep toward the outer edge and sloping into a mound in the centre of the circle. When he stopped digging he knelt close to the stem and with his fingers cleared the soft dirt around it, uncovering about four inches of a big, tuberous, forked root whose width contrasted markedly with the width of the stem, which was frail in comparison.

Don Juan looked at me and said the plant was a "male" because the root forked out from the exact point where it joined the stem. Then he stood up and started to walk away, looking for something.

"What are you looking for, don Juan?"

"I want to find a stick."

I began to look around, but he stopped me.

"Not you! You sit over there." He pointed to some rocks twenty feet away. "I will find it."

He came back after a while with a long, dry branch. Using it as a digging stick, he loosened the dirt carefully along the two diverging branches of the root. He cleaned around them to a depth of approximately two feet. As he dug deeper the dirt became so hard-packed that it was practically impossible to penetrate it with the stick.

He came to a halt and sat down to catch his breath. I sat next to him. We did not talk for a long time.

"Why don't you dig it out with the shovel?" I asked.

"It could cut and injure the plant. I had to get a stick that belonged to this area so that, if I had struck the root, the injury wouldn't have been as bad as one caused by a shovel or a foreign object."

"What kind of a stick did you get?"

"Any dry branch of the paloverde tree would do. If there are no dry branches you have to cut a fresh one."

"Can you use the branches of any other tree?"

"I told you, only paloverde and not any other."

"Why is that so, don Juan?"

"Because the devil's weed has very few friends, and paloverde is the only tree in this area which agrees with her - the only thing that grabs or hooks onto it [*lo unico que prende*]. If you damage the root with a shovel she will not grow for you when you replant her, but if you injure her with such a stick, chances are the plant will not even feel it."

"What are you going to do with the root now?"

"I'm going to cut it. You must leave me. Go find another plant and wait until I call you."

"Don't you want me to help you?"

"You may help me only if I ask you!"

I walked away and started to look for another plant in order to fight the strong desire to sneak around and watch him. After some time he joined me.

"Let us look for the female now," he said.

"How do you tell them apart?"

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"The female is taller and grows above the ground so it really looks like a small tree. The male is large and spreads out near the ground and looks more like a thick bush. Once we dig the female out you will see it has a single root going for quite a way before it becomes a fork. The male, on the other hand, has a forked root joined to the stem."

We looked together through the field of daturas. Then, pointing to a plant, he said, "That's a female." And he proceeded to dig it out as he had done the other. As soon as he had cleared the root I was able to see that the root conformed to his prediction. I left him again when he was about to cut it.

When we got to his house he opened the bundle in which he had put the *Datura* plants. He took the larger one, the male, first and washed it in a big metal tray. Very carefully he scrubbed all the dirt from the root, stem, and leaves. After that meticulous cleaning, he severed the stem from the root by making a superficial incision around the width of their juncture with a short, serrated knife and by cracking them apart. He took the stem and separated every part of it by making individual heaps with leaves, flowers, and the prickly seedpods. He threw away everything that was dry or had been spoiled by worms, and kept only those parts that were complete. He tied together the two branches of the root with two pieces of string, cracked them in half after making a superficial cut at the joint, and got two pieces of root of equal size.

He then took a piece of rough burlap cloth and placed in it first the two pieces of root tied together; on top of them he put the leaves in a neat bunch, then the flowers, the seedpods, and the stem. He folded the burlap and made a knot with the corners.

He repeated exactly the same steps with the other plant, the female, except that when he got to the root, instead of cutting it, he left the fork intact, like an upside-down letter Y. Then he placed all the parts in another cloth bundle. When he finished, it was already dark.

*Wednesday, 6 September 1961*

Today, late in the afternoon, we returned to the topic of the devil's weed.

"I think we should start with that weed again," don Juan said suddenly.

After a polite silence I asked him, "What are you going to do with the plants?"

"The plants I dug out and cut are mine," he said. "It is as though they were myself; with them I'm going to teach you the way to tame the devil's weed."

"How will you do that?"

"The devil's weed is divided into portions [*partes*]. Each one of these portions is different; each has its unique purpose and service."

He opened his left hand and measured on the floor from the tip of his thumb to the tip of his fourth finger.

"This is my portion. You will measure yours with your own hand. Now, to establish dominion over the devil's weed, you must begin by taking the first portion of the root. But since I have brought you to her, you must take the first portion of the root of *my* plant. I have measured it for you, so it is really *my* portion that you must take at the beginning."

He went inside the house and brought out one of the burlap bundles. He sat down and opened it. I noticed it was the male plant. I also noticed there was only one piece of root. He took the piece that was left from the original set of two and held it in front of my face.

"This is your first portion," he said. "I give it to you. I have cut it myself for you. I have measured it as my own; now I give it to you."

For an instant, the thought that I would have to chew it like a carrot crossed my mind, but he placed it inside a small, white, cotton bag.

He walked to the back of the house. He sat there on the floor with his legs crossed, and with a round *mano* began to mash the root inside the bag. He worked it over a flat slab which served as a mortar. From time to time he washed the two stones, and kept the water in a small, flat, wooden dugout basin.

As he pounded he sang an unintelligible chant, very softly and monotonously. When he had mashed the root into a soft pulp inside the bag, he placed it in the wooden basin. He again placed the slab mortar and the pestle into the basin, filled it with water, and then carried it to a sort of rectangular pig's trough set against the back fence.



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