

Interview with Ayahuasca Shaman, Darpan New Dawn Magazine September 2003

Darpan is a shaman, healer, musician, performance artist, and vision quest facilitator. Darpan has devoted 30 years of his life researching the sacramental use of psychoactive substances for religious experience and healing. The main thrust of his research has been into Ayahuasca. Ayahuasca is a Quechua word meaning 'Vine of the soul,' and refers to a potent hallucinogenic tea made from plants native to the Amazonian rainforests, where it has been used by geographically disparate groups of indigenous peoples for millennia. To the minds of outsiders, Ayahuasca has often been controversial, leading to attempts by various government bodies to limit and control its use. This interview presents a unique glimpse into the use of Ayahuasca in order to foster powerful shamanic experiences.

The interviewer, Tony Mierzwicki, runs regular workshops on classical hermetic magick, in Sydney, Brisbane and on the Gold Coast. More details on Tony can be found at: www.hermeticmagick.com

Tony: Maybe we should define our terms. What exactly is Ayahuasca? I understand it's the combination of two different vines from the Amazon?

Darpan: Yes, Ayahuasca is a medicine, a sacrament which has been used for millennia in the rainforests of South America by hundreds of different tribes, many of them never having come into contact with each other, and it's made from two plants. One is a woody 'liana' vine that grows abundantly in the forest, it's called *Banisteriopsis caapi*. The other plant is called *Psychotria viridis* or commonly known as 'chacruna,' which is a tryptamine containing plant, specifically N-N Dimethyltryptamine. And it's the combination of these two plants that make up the fabled ambrosia, the magical drink, called Ayahuasca.

Tony: So how exactly do they work in a bio-chemical sense?

Darpan: If you were to drink the liana vine by itself, very little would happen. It would be akin to a mild soporific... it would make you feel very relaxed and at peace but wouldn't modify consciousness greatly in a visionary sense. The vine contains a family of alkaloids called Beta-carbolines. They consist of harmine, harmaline and d-tetrahydroharmine. The alkaloid contained in the chacruna plant is commonly known as DMT. It's the combination of these two families of alkaloids, the Beta-carbolines and DMT which create the psychoactive effect. The Beta-carboline group of alkaloids act as a potentiator of the DMT. How this works is that in our stomachs an enzyme named monoamine oxidase is released which breaks down cultured foods, yeasted foods, alcohol, and various other compounds that we ingest including DMT. So if you drank the chacruna plant by itself, nothing would happen, it's orally inactive. But in the presence of the Beta-carboline group of alkaloids it becomes very active, in fact it's potentiated to the degree of three. So it three times potentiates the strength of the alkaloids of the DMT in the chacruna. This is quite a remarkable combination and many western researchers have been intrigued as to how the shamans in South America, faced with the possible combinations of millions of herbs and plants, discovered the unique synergy of these two plants.

Tony: Ayahuasca has been the subject of much media attention recently. Is Ayahuasca just another drug subject to abuse in the name of religion?



Darpan: I would not use the word 'drug' to describe Ayahuasca for a number of reasons. The word drug is used to describe so many substances that are in themselves unrelated - the pharmaceutical drugs, the recreational drugs, the opiates and others, all these come under the heading of drugs. Well yes, Ayahuasca is psychoactive, but I refer to it as a medicine not a drug. Drugs are prescribed daily by allopathic doctors as medicine. Ayahuasca is a medicine that has been prescribed for millennia in the Amazon by shamans (their doctors, if you like) to heal people. So it's used in a totally therapeutic sense. It's never used in a recreational sense, and therefore I would call it a medicine.

Tony: You've spent quite a bit of time researching Ayahuasca and other psychoactive agents. Would you be able to give us an idea of the extent of your research, academic qualifications, and so on?

Darpan: My interest in psychedelics and their potential for healing began around about 1973 not long after I enrolled at Flinders University in Adelaide. I completed an Honours degree four years later in which I majored in Psychology. For my thesis I submitted a piece which was entitled 'Consciousness Expansion and the Nature of Religious Experience,' in which I looked for a common thread shared by various comparative religions. I examined Taoism, Sufism, Hinduism, Tantra, Meditation and some ecstatic Christian traditions. Part of my research at that time included a study of plant psychedelics because they had been extensively used in the past by various indigenous cultures as sacraments. At that time the ground-breaking work on LSD psychotherapy by the seminal transpersonal psychologist, Dr. Stanislav Grof. formed the basis of my inspiration to delve more deeply into these mysteries.

Tony: So when did you actually start looking into Ayahuasca specifically?

Darpan: I looked into Ayahuasca already back in that period but had no access to it, had no way of researching it, and couldn't afford to go to South America at the time [laughs]. So at that time, it was merely academic. I did some academic research into the nature of the experience of Ayahuasca and the history of it, but it wasn't until about 8 years ago when I met the very eminent philosopher and researcher named Terence McKenna who introduced me to the potion known as Ayahuasca.

Tony: So how does Ayahuasca compare with other hallucinogens?

Darpan: Most hallucinogens that people are familiar with such as LSD come under the family name of alkaloids known as phenethylamines. They initiate certain neuro-chemical responses in the brain which result in a specialised condition known as an altered state of consciousness. They create visual, somatic and time distortions which tend to highlight our dependence on a self generated consensus reality which we call 'normal'. These substances are keys which in the right set and setting profoundly modify consciousness and can yield deep insight into the nature of Being. This is also the case with Ayahuasca but what is different and what makes it amazing is that the alkaloids that are contained in the Ayahuasca drink are also produced endogenously within our own body and in the brain. DMT for example, is produced in the pineal gland; harmine and harmaline have been found in the hypothalamus. It is the current hypothesis of some researchers that dream activity we experience whilst sleeping is the result of these Beta-carboline alkaloids and the DMT interacting in the brain naturally. So what we're doing when we're ingesting Ayahuasca is actually putting into the body those alkaloids which already exist there, which is why the drinking of Ayahuasca is very, very clean. There's no side effect, it is benign in the body, leaves no hangover and does no harm. In fact its good for the body and health. The body knows exactly how to process these alkaloids.

Tony: The ancient Vedic scriptures talk about a psychoactive substance called Soma. Soma has been looked at by a number of researchers and it seems that there are as many ideas of what Soma actually was as there are researchers. Some claim it was the fly agaric mushroom, some claim it was the psilocybe, some claim it was the blue lotus. What do you think it was?

Darpan: Well, I'll put in my two cents for what it's worth. Certainly I think you're referring to Gordon Wasson who was a researcher in the field of mycology who put forward the idea that

it may have been the fly agaric mushroom, because it was available in the northern parts of India where in fact the Vedas were written.

Tony: There was John Allegro as well.

Darpan: John Allegro exactly, and he brought Christ into the equation as well! But then along came Albert Hofmann in association with Carl Rucke and claimed that the Soma drink most likely consisted of an ergot mould taken from wheat. Albert Hofmann was the one who discovered LSD-25 in ergot mould for the Sandoz Company in the 30's. It was Einstein who said: if the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail. In other words scientists tend to lean towards evidence which will support their hypothesis. I think each of these theories is a reasonable candidate for the truth. Probably adhering to the same principle, I tend to believe that it was an Ayahuasca type potion. There is another significant plant which contains exactly the same alkaloids as the liana vine from which Ayahuasca is made, and that is *Perganum harmala*, otherwise known as Syrian rue. Syrian rue was commonly used in the Middle East and Northern India as a red dye to make up carpets.

Tony: So is that where the legends of magic carpets come from?

Darpan: Indeed they do, that's right. The Sufi idea of the magic carpet ride, came about because I'm sure they discovered uses for Syrian rue other than making the dye for carpets. Like I said before, these Beta-carboline alkaloids are potentiators for other substances, so if you were to put a mushroom in conjunction with the Syrian rue, you would get an Ayahuasca type brew because the mushroom contains psilocybin which shares a similar chemical structure to DMT. It has an extra hydroxy molecule added to the ring which renders it orally active. So you can produce an Ayahuasca type potion by mixing Syrian rue with Psilocybin, or some other DMT containing admixture plants. If you read the Upanishads which are songs of praise, poetry and prayers offered up to the spirit of the Soma experience, they are so beautiful and so heart felt. These descriptions and these poems are exactly what you'd be reading or writing if you were referring to the Ayahuasca. The other semantic clue that substantiates my belief is this: another name for Syrian rue in the Middle East is 'Haoma.'" This has an obvious phonetic similarity to Soma. Syrian rue may well have been the key ingredient in the Soma drink, to create the legendary transformative ambrosia that has been written about so eloquently over the ages.

Tony: You mentioned before that you believe that Ayahuasca is quite a safe substance. Are there any studies which bear this out?

Darpan: Most of the academic studies on Ayahuasca have either recently been done or are in the process of being produced. One of the great studies so far in the field was Terence's brother, Dennis McKenna who went on to write many papers and books on the psychopharmacology of Ayahuasca. He in conjunction with a guy named Charles S Grob studied the Unaio de Vegetal, which is an Ayahuasca using church in Brazil. It's a Christian based church, and they use Ayahuasca as their sacrament in their rituals. They did a study on members of this church who were drinking weekly over a time period of several years. They studied them in conjunction with a control group who had never drunk Ayahuasca. Without delving too deeply into their findings the overall synopsis is that they were studying the serotonin levels in the brain and were studying the positive effects or otherwise of repeated ayahuasca use. They found unanimously that people who had been using Ayahuasca on a weekly basis seemed to be more integrated within themselves and within their chosen society. People with addictions tended to stop using hard drugs like cocaine, heroin or alcohol. But their research goes far deeper than that and if anyone's interested they could follow it up. They analysed the production of platelettes and measured the serotonin levels in the brain. Apparently serotonin levels decrease as you grow older, but if you drink Ayahuasca it keeps these platelettes in the brain alive and it keeps adding and producing them. So it demonstrates that it has actual positive health benefits.

Tony: So it's like a longevity drug?

Darpan: I would hesitate to call it that, but if talk to the shamans in the jungle they would probably say that it is, because they say that it's very good for the health. As for my experience of being in the Amazon, the average life expectancy is about 50 years. The reason is that there are many worms, parasites, flukes, all kinds of bugs in the jungle, which debilitate the human organism. However, the shamans who drink Ayahuasca on a very regular basis classically live to 80, 90 even 100 years old, double the life expectancy. They will attribute that to the drinking of Ayahuasca. Drinking of the Ayahuasca by the way does physically reduce or eliminate worms, parasites, flukes, things of that nature. It's very good for cleaning the stomach and the basic physical organs, it's a cleanser

Tony: Is Ayahuasca the sort of thing that a person can experiment with on their own, or should they be initiated into the practice by someone who's experienced, a shaman, for instance?

Darpan: I would say definitely the latter. Ayahuasca is not a recreational substance, it's not something you go to a party and take. Ayahuasca is something you approach with a lot of respect. It's not something you do like drinking a glass of wine or having a joint, it's something you approach with full awareness because it takes you into your very innermost. And when you go into your innermost to the sanctuary within, it's sometimes beautiful love and light, but it can also bring up any darkness or any kind of trauma that hasn't been looked at. It will heal whatever needs healing by bringing it into the light of awareness. If there is resistance to this process it can sometimes be very difficult. If there is something that's unconscious within you it generally has to be faced.. So I would suggest, that unless you're very experienced, don't take Ayahuasca on your own. In my experience of travelling around the globe and researching ayahuasca, it is always taken in a ritual setting. It is usually taken with a facilitator who has had a lot of experience and it's done in a very respectful sacramental way. That is so that protection and a positive result can be guaranteed.

Tony: Given how safe Ayahuasca is, and how positive people's experiences have been whilst taking Ayahuasca, why do you think there are moves afoot to ban Ayahuasca whereas drugs which are proven to be malevolent such as cigarettes and alcohol are allowed to be sold?

Darpan: I think it's interesting that certain drugs are condoned by society and other ones are not. I think a lot of that has to do with society's values. The drugs that are sanctioned and condoned by society are generally not the ones which are going to open up the keys to consciousness. Cigarettes are an addictive relaxant, alcohol is something that will inebriate you and put you into a drunken state. But it seems to be an unfortunate situation that the very substances that can open up consciousness in a positive way when used in the right context have been banned by society, lumped into the same category as health endangering substances like heroin, cocaine and amphetamines. To my knowledge, I don't think anyone has ever died from taking a psychedelic. If you go to the local drug authorities who study these things they'll bear out what I say. They don't have any statistics of anybody who has actually died from any psychedelics, whereas every year thousands of people die from cigarettes and alcohol. So it's a good question, and one for which I don't have a logical answer. With regard to Ayahuasca in this country it isn't actually classified as illegal. There are legal plants that exist in this country which contain the required alkaloids and there is no law preventing you from making a tea or infusion from these plants. In fact many countries around the globe, on the track record, have pronounced it legal. Most of the countries in South America have acknowledged its traditional therapeutic and sacramental benefit. In Europe, countries like Holland, Portugal and Switzerland have followed suit and various other countries are open about using it. So the reason I think why these countries have opened up the Ayahuasca as a sacrament is because it's used in a ritually sacred context, it is not used in recreational abuse. Even if Ayahuasca was made available, people just wouldn't be taking it at parties. For a start, purging is often part of the experience. It cleans you out, especially if you have any kind of toxins or poisons in the body. It's not something you do for fun, nor is it something you really want to do alone. However when it is taken with good intent within the context of a circle it can have incredibly positive and uplifting effects. It's my belief that as more research is done on Ayahuasca, and more statistics are brought to bear, and more

people proffer accounts of their individual experiences, that governments will be forced to look at this phenomenon in the light of objective research and that they will come to the conclusion that this is in fact a panacea and not something that's going to be of harm. In fact it's been used for thousands of years in that context already by the indigenous peoples of the rainforest. One is reminded that Amazonia is the source of virtually every healing plant that we use as human beings, and even modern pharmaceutical factories get their source material from the jungle. So you have to give some credence to the indigenous peoples of these areas that they knew a lot about their environment and that they have an intimate knowledge of these healing plants. And the fact that they refer to Ayahuasca as the Mother of all plants and put it up there at the top of the hierarchy of all of the healing herbs known to them, is no coincidence. There must be some good reason why they did that. And why is it that every tribe independently of each other, came to the conclusion that Ayahuasca is a very sacred, very holy healing substance which has absolutely beneficial communications to offer to human beings. Current research being conducted in the West seems to be arriving at the same conclusions. (Benny Shannon 'Antipodes of the Mind')

Tony: Do you see Ayahuasca as a means of accelerating spiritual development?

Darpan: Certainly it can be used for that purpose, and often has been. Many of the Ayahuasca drinking churches in Brazil use it in this way. When it was still illegal in Brazil, back in the 70's, some of the syncretic ayahuasca using churches like the Santo Daime, the Uniao de Vegetal and the Barquinia presented a petition to the government, saying, "look this is our sacrament, it's not a drug, why have you made this illegal?" And so the government said, "look, we'll do a study, we'll do a research." They got medical doctors, scientists, philosophers, and social workers to study once again a group from Santo Daime who were drinking regularly every week over an 8 year period. Over that 8 years they found unanimously that people drinking Ayahuasca became better integrated human beings, seemed to be very open, very sharing, very good human beings, useful, worthwhile human beings from society's point of view. In the end, many of these researchers independently started taking Ayahuasca, and that to me is the ultimate validation. After that it was made completely legal, it was taken off the Opium Law in Brazil. And I think Peru, Ecuador, Chile, many of the South American countries followed suit.

Tony: Just assume that someone wanted to take Ayahuasca to accelerate their spiritual progress, would they become dependent on the drug, insofar as they wouldn't be able to make spiritual progress without it, or is it something they would be able to wean themselves off?

Darpan: There is no addiction to Ayahuasca, there is no tolerance or addiction. If you take it over time, it's not like 'I've got to take my next Ayahuasca hit!' On the contrary, you approach each time with a lot of respect because it's not something that fulfils a desire, a neurotic desire or even an addictive desire. It is something that opens you up to your full multi-dimensional being, and that is not from the point of view of the ego, an easy thing to do. In fact, for some people, it can sometimes be a fearful experience because one of the common effects of the Ayahuasca is that it dissolves the ego and opens us up to our true essence which is the larger Self within. If there is resistance to 'letting go' it can be quite challenging for the ego, the ego self. In that sense, it's not something that you do to get off, or get a hit, or get a thrill, not at all. It's something you do as a sincere attempt to open yourself up to the natural frequencies which allow you to experience yourself in an exalted and expanded way.

Tony: What we're talking about sounds like something that the Christian mystics refer to as the Dark Night of the Soul, which is quite fearsome, quite terrifying.

Darpan: It can be experienced like that, indeed. If you take the image of the night, the darkest hour is just before the dawn... but then, when the darkest hour has passed, it heralds the dawn and the sun rises in its full glory. So it's a very good image, because sometimes in your journeys with Ayahuasca you may have to go into the darkness of your own spirit. There are sometimes aspects of our being which are unconscious, which are below the level of our conscious awareness. And in order to integrate these into our conscious awareness, we need to go into that area of the dark, and bring it into the light. So it is a very good image, and

indeed the Dark Night of the Soul can be experienced through the taking of Ayahuasca. But to come back to your former emphasis of the question, yes Ayahuasca can be very beneficial for spiritual growth, in the sense that it opens you up more completely to being who you are, on a very basic fundamental level. But on the other hand, it's not an addictive or habit forming thing. So even after years of using it, if you decide tomorrow "I want to stop, this is finished, I don't want to take it anymore," you will have no hankering, no desire or urge which pushes you to take another drink. My approach is traditional in that I treat Ayahuasca as a teacher. To me it is truly a teacher plant. This may be a hard concept for some people to get their head around because often we don't really think of a plant as alive let alone conscious or having something of value to impart to us as human beings. We in our arrogance think that we're the most intelligent species on the planet because we happen to build things and solve problems. Let me suggest to you that there are equally wonderful and magical modalities of consciousness available through the agency of the plant/spirit world

Tony: We also create weapons of mass destruction, that's not very smart.

Darpan: How true, and it is in fact indicative of our collective sickness and lack of true intelligence that we can represent such a clear and present threat to the continuation of every species on this planet... But plants are very much alive. The fact that they produce such beauty, the flowers, the leaves, and the roots... They drink the water from the earth, just as we drink the water from the earth. They produce energy directly from the sun, something we as human beings are hard pressed to do. Certainly it's undeniable that they're alive but also that they have intelligence. I mean for many years of my life it didn't occur to me that the plant world is conscious and intelligent. But once I started drinking Ayahuasca and was given deep visionary information which seemed to come as a synergistic download from the plant itself I was persuaded to consider otherwise. My feeling is that plants do have intelligence, that they do have something very valuable to impart to us as human beings. There is already an obvious synergy happening between man and the plant world. It is evidently demonstrated by the fact that plants give off life giving oxygen. They take our waste product, carbon dioxide, and convert it into oxygen. So they use the carbon dioxide, we use the oxygen. Synergy! They produce the gift of fruit. We take the fruit, we eat it, we deposit the seed somewhere else through our faeces. Again, we're doing work for the plant, we're actually distributing the seeds for the plant. We don't look at it that way, but in fact that's what we're doing. Even though they are mute, they don't speak, they don't walk, they have their own way of communication and information is transmitted within a visionary context via the production of psychoactive alkaloids. When you drink Ayahuasca you participate in a psychic transmission which I can only describe as a relationship. Just as I am relating to you now, we are having what we call an intelligent interchange, so it is my experience that I have an intelligent interchange with a plant, the plant that is Ayahuasca. This is certainly how the indigenous people talk about it in the rainforest.

Tony: Do they have a word for the intelligence within Ayahuasca?

Darpan: They call it Spirit. It's a doorway to the spirit world. They talk about ancestors and spirits. They talk about devas, gods, goddesses. These are all metaphors to describe fundamental elemental energies which you will encounter in the Ayahuasca experience.

Tony: What's actually involved in an Ayahuasca rite? What sort of steps would a shaman go through if he wanted to take another person on an Ayahuasca journey?

Darpan: That depends upon what tradition you encounter, and they differ and vary, widely and greatly, depending on what country and what tradition. For example, in Amazonia, in a jungle setting, the shaman will gather a circle of people to perform a healing ceremony. He will drink the Ayahuasca as well as the client, or the circle of clients, and it will be done in the dark, because Ayahuasca is a visionary vine. It produces visions, it speaks to you in pictures. He'll take it and there'll be certain prayers and rituals and the singing of Icaros which are magickal songs that are used as invocations and to heal. The shaman sings throughout the ceremony. He uses sound and song as a way to navigate through the astral world and to invoke certain energies and spirits to come to do healing. So in the jungle, you're in the dark completely. You drink and the shaman will be singing. He may variously utilise Chacapa leaves,

perfumes and special liquids to cleanse the auric field. And he will use the visionary aspect of the vine to see into you - to see where the blocks are and to identify the location of 'entities' which may need to be extracted. Then, using sucking and blowing techniques, he will take out those elements that need to be extracted, and will often use other herbs in conjunction. You might need to take certain herbs for a day or 2 weeks afterwards.

Tony: So these are purely medicinal herbs are they?

Darpan: Purely medicinal herbs, yes, not psychoactive. And then, if you go to Brazil it's a completely different experience. In Brazil, in the Ayahuasca drinking churches they conduct their healings in a totally different context. The emphasis there is not upon individual visions for the healings but rather to work together to reach a collective state. It is taken in the bright white light, and is generally taken with a large group of people who are all drinking. There is no shaman as such who is officiating, but there is a priest with their assistants and helpers. Everybody sings, everybody has a song book, and they're all singing hymns, like in any Christian church. They sing hymns throughout the night whilst doing the steps of a trance like dance known as Bailado..

Tony: But obviously the priest's training would have to go well beyond the training that our priests have.

Darpan: Yes, well the training is done 'in the field' if you like. Someone who is being initiated into being a priest or a shaman or a healer will spend years drinking the Medicine, learning the icaros and healing techniques and ritual pathways before they officiate at ceremonies. In the amazon it is customary for the novice to retreat into the forest for up to a year to work with the plants. During this period celibacy and a very strict diet are observed. By cleansing themselves in this way they are able to attract and invite the assistance of beneficial 'helper spirits' who communicate information to them through the medium of visions. Ayahuasca is multidimensional and particularly so if one is in 'training' with it. It can be used to travel to other dimensions and parallel realities... it is a vast library of ordinary and extraordinary information... it can be used for divination or for seeing into the future... it can inspire, it can reconnect one with the indivisible reality of the natural world, it can heal. One needs to be disciplined and dedicated if 'called' to do this work.

Tony: One question I've been itching to ask you, is what's it like? What's an Ayahuasca journey like? If someone goes to a shaman, they do everything properly, they administer the drug, what can they expect?

Darpan: Well firstly, if you go to a shaman in South America he'll insist that you go on a diet. There is a big emphasis on diet before drinking the Medicine. Actually I ate pretty much just plain rice and roasted green bananas when I was in the jungle! Very, very plain food – no salt, no sugar, no spices. And as I mentioned before one is asked to abstain from sexual relations prior to going into an extended Ayahuasca retreat. If it's just a one-off session, they don't make so many stipulations, but some of them still might. But diet is a very big part of the South American experience of Ayahuasca. It's all to do with cleansing, because they use the Ayahuasca to cleanse the psycho-physical body. The purging is very much a part of that cleanse. And the purging is not just a physical cleanse because sometimes all kinds of psychic dross and detritus is released, in this purging aspect of the drink. In the jungle it's seen as a very positive aspect of the drink. In the west we have a rather squeamish attitude to purging because we associate it with sickness.

Tony: Or excessive alcohol consumption...

Darpan: Exactly. In the Ayahuasca drinking churches however they're not so strict in that regard. They sometimes suggest to avoid have sexual relations for a few days beforehand but are not rigorous in their insistence.. I guess I could go into this aspect of it briefly. The reason why sexual abstinence is suggested for a few days prior to the experience is this: if you have a good amount of chi, a strong kundalini charge if you like, then that facilitates the plant to be able to communicate with you on a deeper level. If you feel depleted in energy, or in any way are run down, it's difficult for the Ayahuasca to really interface or connect with you because

your low physical energy will make it very difficult. Not enough energy. So being in good health and having a high energy facilitates deep interaction with the plants. If you're really sick and coming to be healed, then obviously you can't meet those conditions, then firstly the shaman will extract the sickness and then calibrate the Ayahuasca to give the patient energy. It will clean the body so that healthy life energy can be re-established in the body. Even terminal illness can be put into remission with this Medicine. It's been used with great efficacy by one of the shamans I was studying with in Peru, a guy called Don Jose. He's cured many people of heroin addiction, cocaine addiction, alcohol addiction, with a good success rate. Same with cancer – breast cancer, prostate cancer, lung cancer – he's had cases come to him where doctors haven't been able to help, and he's brought about complete remission of the disease. Now the success of that can be attributed to Ayahuasca but it also has a lot to do with the mindset of the person being treated. The patient must have a sincere desire to be healed and be prepared to face whatever is needed to be faced in their journey. But he has many documented cases in which he's had complete success cleansing and ridding the body of disease.

Tony: Okay, so just getting back to the question that I asked, what would a person expect to see once they've administered Ayahuasca?

Darpan: That's a very difficult question to answer because just as we are unique as human beings, and the way we see reality is uniquely our own way, so the way you receive the plant will be unique to your own being. But I can say a few general things. Ayahuasca can give you an insight into the multi-dimensional nature of existence. There are worlds, if you like, which we don't normally invest with intelligence or consciousness. We as human beings are intelligent animate beings. We then have apart from our own human world, have the plant world, the animal world, the mineral world, the planetary perspective, the galactic perspective or cosmic perspective. The Ayahuasca can be a doorway into any one of these worlds. It can give you a direct experience of these worlds. I've been taken into the subterranean realities of the ants, and experienced what it means to be an ant and what that feels like in relationship to the unified consciousness on this planet, which is Gaia. Gaia is the complete planetary experience of matter and spirit. These parallel worlds and dimensions can be seen as different aspects of the One Gaia experience... and seen in this way it becomes very apparent that it is all intelligent. In the jungle before the hunt, they would take Ayahuasca to pay respect and to ask the animal protector spirit if it was okay to hunt a certain kind of animal for the nourishment of the tribe. The spirit of that animal would come to them in the visions and say "yes, it's okay, you can take this many and no more, and this is where they are right now, in this part of the jungle." Sure enough they'd go there and that's where they'd be! Ayahuasca can give you the actual experience of being in the presence of any number of animal or nature spirits. It can show you what it is to experience the mineral world. And when you take Ayahuasca you realise that minerals also have intelligence - rocks, cliffs, mountains have intelligence and are invested with spirit. I know it is still difficult for some people to accept when I say this, but all of Life is invested with intelligence, not just bio-organic beings like animals and human beings. Even the so-called inorganic elements of existence are intelligent, and Ayahuasca can give you a direct experience of the intelligence within these worlds. And that's a very difficult thing to impart to anybody else unless one experiences it. I can intimate it to you, but I can't really give you that experience unless you drink the plant. And even then I can't guarantee the plant will give you that experience, because it may want to show you something else which is more purposeful to you at that time. Certainly from my own experience I can tell you that it can give you all kinds of information about the Gaia world, all of the many multi-dimensional realities that exist within the Gaia experience. And you understand that the planet earth is one whole spirit, one being of which we are just one aspect, one dimension of that experience.

Tony: Given that most people in the western world live in cities which are totally man-made constructs, how relevant is Ayahuasca to them?

Darpan: Well, initially of course Ayahuasca was taken exclusively in the jungle and the forest. This is the natural habitat of the ayahuasca vine and the indigenous people learned everything there is to know about the forest through drinking it. However, when the Mestizo Indians (who are a mixture of Spanish and indigenous Indian blood) moved to the cities within South

America, they brought the Ayahuasca with them. They would gather in a little shed or the lounge room of some person and they would conduct their rituals in the city environment. Nowadays you'll find Ayahuasca drinking communities in all the large cities. It's not necessary to drink it in the jungle. It is beautiful to drink it in natural surroundings, in any forest, because you tune very much into the devas, the spirits of the plants and the trees which surround you. However, if it is taken in the city, no problem. In fact similar circles are beginning to appear all over Europe, in North America and other places around the world. Small communities and circles of friends are coming together to drink Ayahuasca and are having positive, profound, life changing and life enhancing experiences.

Tony: And do you feel those people are becoming better integrated members of society?

Darpan: I can't speak for those people because I haven't personally met them, however, from the literature that I've read, certainly that seems to be the case. And from the communities that I have come into direct contact with, I would say if you were to ask any of the individuals there, they would attest to that.

Tony: If you had one message that you wanted to get out to the world, what would it be?

Darpan: Well, in order to answer that question I'd just like to say one more thing about Ayahuasca, apart from all of its incredible healing potential, its potential for accessing shamanic and supra-conscious information. One of the greatest gifts of Ayahuasca in my estimation is that it takes away the veils of separation. It gives you experience of non-separation, of being connected to all things. This is to me the greatest gift of Ayahuasca. In the west we come from the long line of tradition that started with the Grecian tradition, and Aristotle and all those guys, about the left brain, of objectivity, empiricism, the fact that we have to prove something scientifically before we know it to be true. From that point we started to cut off from our intuition, and intuition was always our connection to all of the rest of nature. So we've been starved in the west. We've had an atrophied sense of intuition, so we've put much more emphasis on scientific process, and in doing so we've gained many things – all of our civilisation, wonderful machines and technology that we've created have been a result of that, so there have been positive benefits. But unfortunately, the side effect has been that our intuition, the right hand brain, the more holistic part of our consciousness has sadly become atrophied over time. And what's happening with Ayahuasca is that it's coming into the west right now, almost surreptitiously, and it's popping up all over the place. I think it's doing so in a really humble way, just to reconnect us to our deeper self, to our multi-dimensional reality which has direct links to the rest of the natural world, the natural expression of the Gaia. To me, this sense of non-separation, this sense of being at one with all things, is a very humble, a very simple thing, but it's so healing, so life affirmative. I believe that our whole myth of being kicked out of the Garden of Eden was being separated from Mother Nature and we went into another journey. And now in this point of our evolution we seem to be coming back to the Mother. To me, Ayahuasca is the Mother, it is a very feminine experience, it is like a feminine entity or spirit that exists within the plant, and to me it epitomises all of nature. As we reconnect with Ayahuasca, then Ayahuasca herself reconnects us with the whole plenitude of consciousness which is Gaia. This is very threatening to a society which has a largely vested interest in keeping people into the straight and narrow of the objective world, of the material world. This relates back to your earlier question about why do societies like this make substances like Ayahuasca illegal.