

Quechua Shamanism and Jung

Weaving the Traditions

Weaving The Traditions: the Natural Wisdom of C.G. Jung

and the Kichwa traditions embodied in the wisdom of don Alverto Taxo

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Nature is an incomparable guide if you know how to follow her. She is like the needle of a compass pointing to the north...

-C. G. Jung

We can enter into the secrets of Mother Nature [Pachamama], and we can be sons and daughters, apprentices to the Wisdom of Mother Earth [Ashpamama].

-don Alverto Taxo

When I reflect on why the teachings of don Alverto so initially attractive to me, I keep coming up with the same answer, that his teachings are so convergent with, and complementary to the wisdom teachings of C.G. Jung, my great psychological mentor. While the path of the lachak is in many ways deeper and richer than any modern depth psychology, my clinical practice and my life had been strongly influenced by Jung, one of my lineage Elders. So it felt good to find a way I could initially begin integrating the wisdom of don Alverto with that of C.G. Jung and the tradition of analytical psychology. There is a strong shamanic elements in Jung's life and his work, as I brought out in detail in my book, JUNG AND SHAMANISM IN DIALOGUE [Paulist Press, 1997]. It was a milestone to write that book, but in the past 7 years I have so much deepened my practice and understanding of the shamanic path, that I was inspired through the path of the lachak to developed a psychology of the heart, which you can find in theory and practices throughout this website. This piece I wrote in my 5th year of apprenticeship, and it reflects some of the common themes between Jung and the tradition of Jungian thought, and don Alverto and the Kichwa tradition, and the lachak path for the interested reader.

When I met and began studying with don Alverto some years ago, I asked to become his apprentice in the path of the lachak. Yet there was some reservation about being anyone's apprentice. He responded that I was welcome to follow my own path and simply walk along side of him—perhaps we could share things with each other. I must admit that I feared that he might want me to give up the wisdom tradition I had done my spiritual spade work in for 25 years, that of the analytical psychology inspired by C.G. Jung. This would not be the case, and what I have come to notice is that the more I have studied with don Alverto, walked the path of the lachak with him, the more I have become a better individuator, having developed more feminine feeling values, standing more in my own truth, and feeling more whole than ever. I have become a better psychologist as well.

It has amazed me the great similarities between the wisdom tradition of both men, and I believe the reason for this is because both have followed a natural path in life. Since this book has given ample attention to the natural way of the lachak, to the development of feeling, using the four elements to get in balance and so on, I would like to compliment it by emphasizing a bit of the natural wisdom of C.G. Jung, pointing out the natural resonances as we go along. For me this is very important because I want my life, my daily walk, and my therapeutic talk and action to be integrated, all of a piece, so to speak. Don Alverto gave me the one thing I did not get from Jung, and that was a daily devotional practice that was ongoing and thoroughly natural. Jungian psychology had given me some very powerful techniques of inner work, including skill in working with dreams and doing what Jung called 'active imagination'. These were ways of working with the wisdom of the Great Mother as She reveals herself in the human psyche. I have employed these tools faithfully, and I and my clients have benefited greatly from them. But these methods, deeply as they reached into the heart of my living never thoroughly took the body and the physical world into my daily consciousness practices. They never helped me sufficiently develop the "feminine feeling values" which Jung so often stressed as important to our health and wholeness, and they rarely affected my eating, and bathing, and breathing. My Jungian practices, while open to the synchronicities of the day, were essentially confined to my period of inner work in the morning, in which I worked my dreams and reflected on what needed more attention each morning. When the period of inner work was over, I turned my attention to other things, including my professional responsibilities. So I had in essence put walls or boundaries around my inner work and benefited greatly from the discipline. But as my personal journals show, my dreams repeatedly spoke to me of a need to develop what Jung called the 'anima' the feminine values of feeling, receptivity of consciousness, and instinctual and intuitive living, intimate relatedness. I made many intellectual recognitions of this need, yet over a period of 20 years I felt I hadn't succeeded in developing or integrating anima. Perhaps this is why I often felt myself longing for a set of practices which were thoroughly grounded and earth-honoring, and completely compatible with the useful wisdom I had learned from C.G. Jung and yet resourceful in helping me develop the feminine more.

Dreams: A Gift of the Great Mother

My longing for an earth-based, earth-honoring path was reflected in my writing and reading over the past couple of decades. This is reflected in my first two books, *Psychotherapy and the Sacred*, [i] and *Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue* [ii] e in which I sought to revitalize modern psychotherapy with shamanic and indigenous healing resources. However, I now realize that my approach was too intellectual, non- experiential, and that not much insight or wisdom is gained from an intellectual look at a natural system of healing. One of my colleagues told me the books lacked ‘anima.’ It is largely because of don Alverto’s influence that I live, write, and practice from a different place today, a deeper place, with an ongoing, rhythmic flow of practice no longer confined to set times of the day.

Today I am less interested in Jung’s theory and technical writings, marvelous as they are in their attempts to bring a natural way into modern psychology. But they are primarily candy for the mind if they are not felt, experienced, and lived. I am more interested in Jung the naturalist of the psyche, and in Jung the nature-mystic, which is reflected in the earthy retreat he built with his own hands, called Bollingen Tower, and which gave real soil and grounding to his life’s work. At Bollingen he felt himself in the midst of his true life. He had no running water or electricity. He chopped his own wood, cooked over open fires, lit oil lamps at night, and attuned himself to the Earth Mother with feminine receptivity and feeling. This passage from his autobiography shows to what degree he had succeeded in attuning to the elements of nature:

At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the procession of seasons. There is nothing...with which I am not linked. [MDR 225]

Jung had, in his own way, recovered and considerably developed the capacity to feel, and sympathetically enter into the essence of things, commune with what don Alverto calls the their “ushai”. Jung lived as well as advocated a natural way of living. He was deeply concerned that modern life had neglected nature and that this was the source of many of the ills he saw in his patients. He felt modern science and technology had brought many good things, but that we had failed to establish a balanced relationship to them. He advised us, in a manner reminiscent of don Alverto’s invitation to deal with modernity by living more simply and intentionally:

“to live in small communities, to work a shorter day and week; to have a plot of land to cultivate so the instincts come back to life; and to make the sparest use of radio and television, newspapers, and technological gadgetry. [Sabini 19]

Consider, also, these comments Jung put in a letter to one of his clients, in which the good doctor dispenses a practical and earth-honoring wisdom in words that could almost be those of don Alverto:

Dear N:

I was very pleased to hear that you now have house and land of your own. This is important for the chthonic powers. I hope you will find time to commit your plant counterparts to the Earth and tend their growth, for the Earth always wants children—houses, trees, flowers—to grow out of Her and celebrate the marriage of the human psyche with the Great Mother, the best counter-magic against rootless extraversion!

With regards to you and your dear husband,

Always your friend,

C.G. Jung

[LT II, 320]

Jung's intent, here, is not to motivate us to repair Nature, but to let Nature repair us and bring us back into balance. Like don Alverto, Jung had a natural view of healing and the work of a healer. He knew the ultimate healer was not the doctor, but Nature herself. Sometimes he spoke of the healer as God or the Self, sometimes he preferred to speak of the Tao who is the ultimate Mother of us all. He claimed that the peoples of the modern industrial countries had lost touch with the Great Mother and advocated one sure way to reclaim Her natural being in us through listening to, and working with our dreams. Through dream work we can reclaim the natural being that has been forgotten, for dreams are an activity of Nature. Jung believed that we had 2 different psychologies in us. The one he considered to be the modern ego, the mind of modern man, and this corresponds to the "Eagle" in don Alverto's view, as this statement should make crystal clear.

In our time, it's the intellect that is making darkness, because we've let it take too big a place. Consciousness discriminates, judges, analyzes, and emphasizes the contradictions. It's necessary work up to a point. But analysis kills and synthesis brings to life. We must find out how to get everything back into connection with everything else. [Jung, JS 420]

Don Alverto would say that it is through the development and use of feeling that we can reconnect, and that it is we who have disconnected ourselves by forgetting the way of the Condor---for the heart knows that everything is already connected. It is just that the mind, has forgotten this in our modern civilization. Again we cite Jung, in agreement with don Alverto, that many problems in modern living are generated by this loss of connection with wisdom of Nature:

In the final analysis, most of our difficulties come from losing contact with our instincts, the age-old forgotten wisdom stored up in us. [Jung JS 89]

The other person within us is the age-old natural person, who Jung sometimes called the “2 million year old man”. In calling it this, Jung was drawing attention to our natural evolution as a species, one of many on the planet, and that the wisdom of our species is thus the wisdom of the Earth who nurtured us into being. Dreams are natural occurrences that must have value or they wouldn't be. They have been taking place in other mammals for 140 million years. Dreams serve up the natural instincts and desires we have forgotten. Their striking images and arousing emotions and desires are often shocking or embarrassing to the modern mind because the modern mind has repressed, dissociated, or otherwise cut itself off from feeling and awareness. Dreams relentlessly remorselessly rub our noses in the “unvarnished truth” and serve to remind us of those poles or sides of ourselves that are part of what we are as natural beings. In reminding us of the side of ourselves that we tend to forget or ignore, they seek our acknowledgement, our consciousness, and want us to give them due place in our lives. Thus we could say that dreams are one of the ways the Earth Mother speaks to us and tries to help us grow, come more into balance, and live fully in tune with Nature. Other ways don Alverto has suggested: through cultivating feeling and using the elements of Nature. Don Alverto, when discussing dreams, speaks of “traveling” to other dimensions, while “leaving” our bodies in sleep, Jung accented a different aspect of the power of dreams. In so far as they are natural expressions of the Great Mother, and the wisdom of the species passed on from generation to generation, and in so far as the Self or the Divine within evokes dreams to help bring us into balance by compensating with our less conscious or undeveloped potentials, Jung advocated working with dreams as a regular practice. This daily practice aims at getting the complimentary message of the dream, the one that adds to or expands our ordinary, everyday thinking or attitude. Yet Jung also acknowledged the other realms, sometimes classifying them as dimensions of the “collective unconscious” a conception similar to Wiracocha, [iii] the “Lake of Wisdom” of the Iachak tradition. In his autobiography, Jung tells us about travels experienced as “out of the body”, meeting with a meditating guru in some stone temple in outer space. Both men invite us to see the power of dreams to expand our perception, knowledge, and way of living by accenting different attributes of the dreaming process.

Logos and Eros (Jung's Eagle and Condor)

Jung was well aware of the problem of imbalance in the land of Eagles a century ago. He felt the modern mind had stripped nature of meaning and value and left us dehumanized. Don Alverto speaks of the need to bring Eagle and Condor into balance. Jung spoke of the need to bring the principle of Logos and the principle of Eros into balance. Logos was Jung's symbol for the power of the mind, its ability to think, analyze, plan, and make things materially. Without Eros, the mind can be dangerous—becoming inhuman, greedy and driven to dominate, acquire, and exploit nature and other peoples and the earth herself. Eros was the symbol for the principle of relationship through love and feeling. Jung's diagnosis of modern northern culture is that it is over developed in Logos, and under developed in Eros. Thus as a psychiatrist, Jung looked far more deeply than his professional domain for the roots of modern mental maladies.

Jung did not think of Nature as simply matter, for the word 'matter' has come to be an abstract idea of materialistic-reductionistic thinking. Jung experienced nature as alive, and he once experienced the Earth trembling during an earth quake, describing the experience as if he had been riding on the back of a huge animal. Jung invited us to see nature as more than mere matter, and as having a beauty, wisdom, intelligence, and creative-healing power of her own, which he sometimes called the "Spirit of the Earth," and which he sometimes referred to as the Anima Mundi, or Soul of the World. Like don Alverto, Jung was deeply concerned that we modern peoples recover our sustaining connection to Her through developing the principle of Eros, and more particularly through cultivating feeling, intuition, our natural instincts and creative imagination. It is the lack of development of these qualities that has stripped modern life of the sense of sacredness and left us in a waste land:

Through scientific understanding, our world has become dehumanized. Man feels himself isolated in the Cosmos. He is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional participation in natural events which hitherto had a symbolic meaning for him. Thunder is no longer the voice of a god, nor lightening his avenging missile. No river contains a spirit, no tree means a man's life, no snake is the embodiment of wisdom, and no mountain still harbors a great demon. Neither do things speak to him nor can he speak to things like stones, springs, plants, and animals. [CW 18: 585]

Jung goes on to say that this enormous loss is compensated in our dreams by the various symbols or images which bring up our original nature, our natural instincts, and their peculiar wisdom. [CW 1 586]

So listening to dreams, for Jung, was listening to nature, and working with our dreams, was an effort to take the messages of Nature seriously. While Jung stressed other methods, such as

active imagination, he gave the greatest attention to doing dream work as a way to bring oneself back into balance, and through following the voice of the Spirit or Nature in our dreams we had a reliable guide for living, an inner source.

[insert story of Mista' Peo amongst the Naskapi of Labrador]

How I became a Better Individuator

Through Don Alverto's Invitations

Jung's views and the tools he offered have been of great benefit in my life and work, as I mentioned at the beginning. If there is an area where I had difficulty with the tools and wise ideas he offered it is particularly in the area of developing more Eros, or more of the feminine principle in my life. While Jung greatly advocated this for wholeness, and while it is his equivalent of the condor and the powers of feeling, he was not, for me at least, very helpful in informing of how I could develop more feminine feeling, more eros in my life. This is where the teachings of don Alverto have been most useful. Although I wasn't aware of it for some time, the developing of the capacity to feel, through feeling the elements, through using greetings and attuning to plants and trees and the wind and especially in paying attention to eating with feeling and feeling the love of the Earth Mother, is essentially what Jung meant by developing feminine feeling values, or 'anima'. So in a sense I have become a better Jungian, a better individuator in so far as I have finally been able to practice and develop more feeling, more eros, feminine feeling values to complement my strongly developed intellect. I am therefore more whole, more in balance than ever before. My life is much more natural as a result. I live in greater attunement with the elements, and my eating is meditative and thankful. I take better care of the Earth now, and She takes care of me, removes my distress, fills me with energy and inspiration, and speaks through my intuition and creative instincts. My life is a deep joy, and my little hand crafted dwelling on the edge of a forest is made of Earth and surrounded by beauty. I am a rich man—not in monetary sense, but in the sense of the deep abiding joy one feels in living a hand-crafted life, that is a co-creation with the Great Mother of all life. My clinical work has gotten better. I no longer try to be so smart or so helpful. Usually those things got in the way, evoked confusion or resistance. I try to get out of the way now, and let Nature do the diagnosing and healing work. It helps to have no plans for any client or any session, to stay close to my body, my heart and instincts, and remain in the moment. As I do so, I notice that just what needs to happen for my patient occurs, without effort. It reminds me of the 'Tao of healing' where the doctor does nothing and all things are then accomplished.

I know that I must keep in balance myself or this process does not occur for my patient. Over time I have noticed my clients burst into flower and I have felt more their companion and witness, than one responsible for their blossoming. My therapeutic symbols and metaphors are more natural now. I don't talk of ego and anima and archetypes and complexes so much anymore. But I do speak of plants and flowers, of cooking and baking. Words have power and this shift in words coincides with a shift in results. Things seem to gestate or ripen in their own time and rhythm, the inner person grows stronger, comes more into their own, with new sureness, more spontaneity or creativity, and more wholeness. I notice this, and so do my clients. We both become witnesses to the process of Mother Nature doing Her work.

A Little Psychology of the Heart

There is another fruit of my work with the wisdom traditions of don Alverto and C.G. Jung that I wish to mention here. As a result of my study in these two great wisdom traditions, the Jungian path of individuation and the way of the lachak, I have decided to reformulate my own understanding of the psyche and of therapy in terms that are practical, simple, earth-honoring, and experience-near. I am very indebted to C.G. Jung and don Alverto in this, yet my formulation is also an original act to synthesize my own experience and express my own living understanding. I like to think of it as a collaboration between Jung, don Alverto, and myself. The main motive has been to cut to the essentials of how to live from the heart, with the mind in proper relationship, and to be able to share this wisdom without all the psychological jargon that has made communicating Jung's wisdom far too intellectual. Don Alverto's wisdom and his teaching methods have been a corrective to all this complicated jargon, which the mind likes, but which makes the path too difficult. Additionally, this little heart theory enables me to share the wisdom of don Alverto with my clients and with other psychotherapists, thus bridging cultural distance. This, I am convinced, is a project well worth the effort. I only wish I had the space to share it with you here.

[i] C. Michael Smith, Ph.D. Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue: Retrieving Soul/Retrieving the Sacred. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.

[ii] C. Michael Smith. Psychotherapy and the Sacred. Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion Press, 1995.

[iii] In the lachak vision of the Cosmos, described by don Alverto Taxo Wircocha is a lake of knowledge or Laguna of wisdom, similar to the collective unconscious of Jung, and alayavjnana of Mahayana Buddhism.