



# Ayahuasca: a personal encounter with the miracle vine

*Olly Robinson*

Ayahuasca is a vine that grows in the Amazon and has been used by shamans for thousands of years to induce non-ordinary states of consciousness. As well as being used within shamanic traditions in South America, ayahuasca has been adopted by a church called Santo Daime, which uses it within its religious ceremonies to induce mystical awareness. The active ingredient in ayahuasca is DMT (Dimethyltryptamine), a chemical that has been the subject of a major research study, written up in the book *DMT: The Spirit Molecule*. If smoked in its synthesized form, the DMT experiences last for just 10 minutes or so, but in ayahuasca, DMT is combined with enzymes that slow its metabolism down, so the effects last for many hours. Ayahuasca is finally getting serious scientific attention; a report in the prestigious journal *Nature* from April of this year presented findings that shows ayahuasca helps treat depression.<sup>1</sup>

After several years of vacillation over the idea, in December I finally decided to attend a three day ayahuasca workshop in Eindhoven, Holland, called *Jam of a Lifetime*. The workshop is run by an organisation called Ceu de Amsterdam, which has its roots in both the Santo Daime and shamanic traditions. *Jam of a Lifetime* has a global draw; there were folks there from Holland, Germany, Ireland, Brazil, the USA, Romania, Russia, England, Denmark and more.

At around 4pm on the day of arrival, the group moved into the main hall for the first ceremony. The hall was lit with candles and was thick with incense smoke. Sixty mattresses were arrayed around the edge of the hall, and a blue bucket had been placed carefully next to each one (ayahuasca is an emetic). In the middle of the hall there was a patterned rug with flowers and symbolic objects on it, placed as a kind of central altar. In one corner lay all the instruments that the musicians would be playing – guitars, a double bass, a cello, a flute, a clarinet, a ukulele, a sitar, a tambura, and every kind of percussive instrument you could imagine. After saying a communal prayer calling for health, love and peace, we all drank a glass of ayahuasca and the musicians started playing. It was a diluted version to get us sensitised for the next day's serious session. The whole evening I danced and moved around to the music, my attention moving between outer reality and a swirling, coloured information-field that was present when my eyes were shut. It was beautiful but not existentially challenging. The next day was to be far more intense.

At the start of the second day, I could feel a portentous fear about the ceremony ahead, and there were dark thoughts whispering around my consciousness when we gathered to start. The music and the space of the room took on a dark resonance as the medicine took hold, and I started to feel a deep and grinding fear that took form in visions. As I shut my eyes, I could see demonic beings moving towards me out of a dark realm, and there was a noxious vibrating noise-like energy that was slowly occupying my being. I moved out of the main hall and sat in an adjacent room, sweating and nauseous, as the visions increased in intensity. One of the ceremony assistants, Pieter, came out of the hall, saw my pained look and sat down next to me. He assured me that

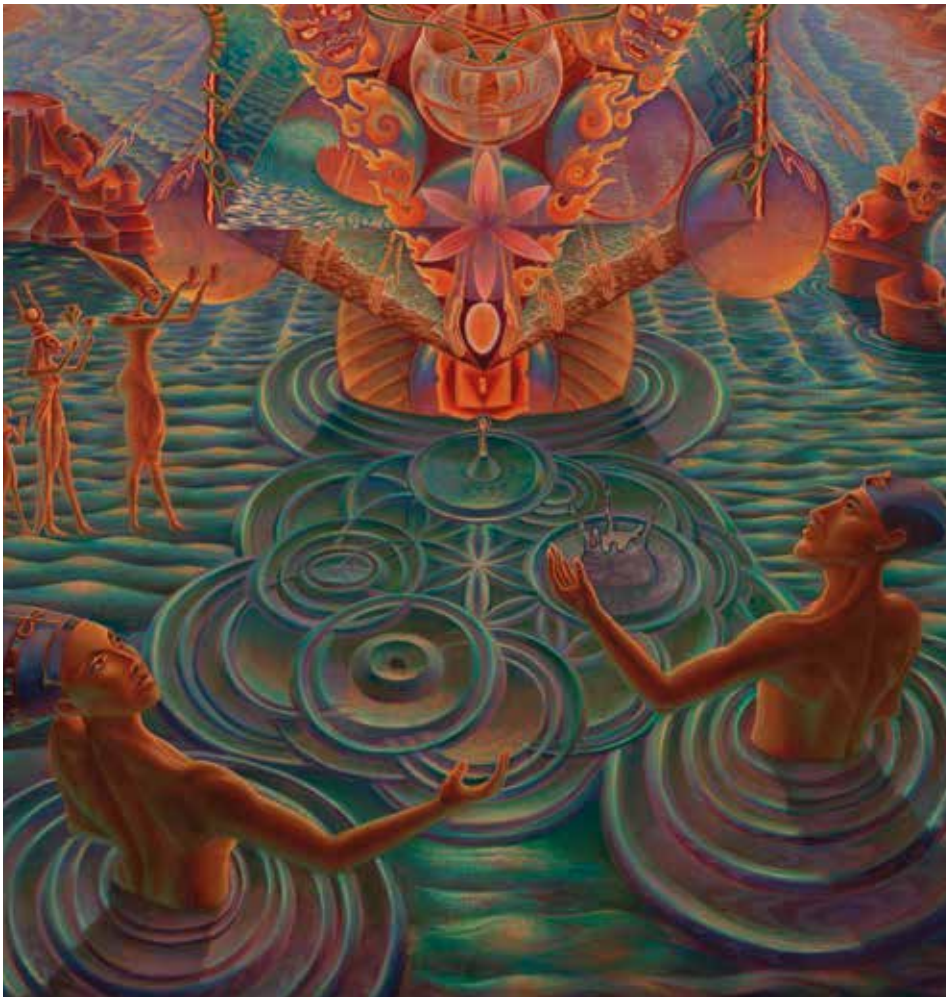
the feelings would pass, and his strong and centred presence next to me was a big help through a horrible twenty minutes or so, during which I felt like I was going to be dragged down in the very pits of darkness. Eventually the intensity of the fear subsided, and I said to Pieter that I was going to go and lie down on my mattress.

I hobbled inside the hall, lay down, pulled a blanket over myself, and promptly left my body. As I sailed off into Otherness, I was still battling with demons, which by this point had taken on a horrifying clarity and objectivity, but at some point I realised (or was gifted the realisation) that my only escape from this was through love, indeed it was made abundantly clear to me that love is the way out of darkness into light. I focused on the love I have for my wife, imagined holding her close, and this appeared in the vision as a light in my chest. The light grew and grew, and as it did so it transmuted the hell-like realms around me, and the colours of the visions became lighter and lighter – blacks, browns and dark hues transmuted into yellows, oranges, whites and greens. The love I was feeling in my chest expanded into an even more intense form, as I was shown my unborn child (my wife was 14 weeks pregnant at the time), as a baby girl in my arms. I sobbed out loud with love for this baby for what seemed like hours, and with my tears I was finally released from darkness into light.

I was still in realms of total and overwhelming otherness. Now that love and peace were present as the core of the experience, far more order and symmetry was manifest in the visions. The higher worlds that I had emerged into were spectacular. Impossible to describe properly in language, they were constantly-shifting spaces of symmetry-laced geometrical surface and structures, like part-mechanical, part-organic crystalline cities, interlaced with animals, birds, semi-human forms and deity-type figures. This was no hallucination – no fragmentary perceptual intrusion - I was *in* these perfectly formed hyper-complex worlds for hours, repeating to myself over and over 'never forget this, never forget this'. Every time I tried to understand what was going on by way of the rational refrains of 'why?' and 'how?', I was informed of something like 'hah, puny human, you cannot understand this! This is far beyond human comprehension'. I felt during the experience that if I were a million times more intelligent than I am, then I *still* would not understand it. However it was by no means irrational, for its over-riding features were geometry, precision, complexity, symmetry and sentience.

By this time, almost three hours of the ceremony had passed. The remaining three hours, during which I became present in my body again, were also spent on the mattress, laughing, crying, and experiencing the music in the room as spiritual entities within my psyche. Inner and outer had merged and become one – what happened in the room also happened in me, and what happened in me happened in the room around me. This is difficult to convey in language, for sentences are structured around subject and object, so when those merge, words fail. Every tune played manifested as sacred soul-droplets from upwards in my being and as parts of me crying out from within, rather than (or as well as) inwardly through my ears. For example, the delicate clear notes of tubular

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nature.com/news/ayahuasca-psychedelic-tested-for-depression-1.17252>



dark, fear-fuelled realms, I was physically sick, and this purging released me more quickly from the negativity, and I was able to go and lie on my mattress and enter ayahuasca's world again with a level of peace in my heart. The vividness and precision of the visions was even more extraordinary than the day before. Great vistas of symmetry-laden, infinitely complex organic-mechanical worlds opened up, surpassing intellect and imagination. I felt like a newborn infant in comparison with their insane scale and grandeur. At one point I felt that I could see up towards the higher realms and could see white beings moving around on walkways a distance above me, but I was not going to be blessed by a visit to the celestial realms. Others in the group did go there – one woman described being fed ambrosia by angels! It was not all peace however even for her, as she at times felt panicky about whether she would return.

Half way through the final session, as the ayahuasca wore off in intensity, I felt a desire to contribute to the music, so I joined in with the musicians. I play both the ukulele and guitar but hadn't picked up either for about a year. I started jamming along, finding a new inspiration in helping guide the mood of the

bells appeared as a cluster of small blue angels flying down from above right of my vision. Even now I can't understand this, but it is reminiscent of Swedenborg's depictions of correspondences across the material and spirit realms; everything that happens on the material plane has immediate corresponding parallels in other realities.

I was shown the nature of my spirit body and the heart centre within this body. What I was shown was that in the spirit body (which is the same shape as the physical body but appears as a coloured lattice of pure energy and information) the heart is a ball of loving light that is located in the centre of the chest. I was informed that our task as human beings is to learn how to love and live from this heart centre, so that its light and love shines and emanates in our dealings with others and the world. To the extent that we live in accordance with this loving light, we are spirited and ordered, but if we lose our heart connection, or lock it away so that it cannot shine, we become dispirited and disordered.

At the end of Tuesday's journey, I called my wife and told her with complete assurance that we going to have a girl (A scan a month later confirmed that). After the ceremony had concluded and we had gone to our rooms, I could not sleep. The enormity of the events of the day could not squeeze themselves into my poor little psyche. I wanted to resist their implications, and by the next day slivers of doubt had squeezed their way back into my consciousness. *What...was THAT?!?! Did that really just happen? Is ayahuasca really a portal to other worlds? What do I do with all that new knowledge? Doubt is my natural *modus operandi*, and I reverted back to it.*

Wednesday's ceremony was the third and final one, and doubts were still darting across my mind as we started. After I drank the first cup of ayahuasca, I felt the same feeling of a vibrating fear and circling darkness as I did at the start of the previous one. This time, as I headed back down into the

session rather than receive it passively as a gift. Becoming part of the musical wave that carried the journey was part of my own healing. At the end of the final session, as with all the previous sessions, the group gathered together and chanted 'health in the body, peace in the spirit and love in the heart!' The group then shared our experiences and visions, and without exception, the sixty participants had experienced some kind of journey through darkness into light, or for the lucky few a direct path into the light.

The words on this page are a mere approximation of certain parts of the whole experience, but I felt moved to try to convey even a tiny portion of it, as it was one of the most important experiences of my 38 years of life. If you also feel drawn to Ayahuasca, I recommend *Céu de Amsterdam*. They treat the vine with the deep sanctity and respect it deserves, and create a caring and secure space that is suitably safe for your journey into radical Otherness and your deepest Self.

#### Notes

**Céu de Amsterdam website:** <http://www.ayahuasca.nl/>

If you have had a visionary experience using DMT or ayahuasca in the past, do submit your account to the Network Review.

For beautiful visual depictions of ayahuasca worlds, as featured on the front cover of this edition of the Network Review, I recommend the art of Emma Watkinson, who was present as a participant at the ceremony ([www.emanations.co.uk](http://www.emanations.co.uk))

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*Oliver Robinson is Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Greenwich, author of *Development through Adulthood: An integrative sourcebook*, and co-editor of *A New Renaissance*. He is currently writing a book on science and spirituality, due out in 2016.*

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