

Guidelines for behavior in Ayahuasca ceremonies:

Over the many thousands of years that ayahuasca has been used, a method of working has evolved that allows people to enter into the visionary state without coming to harm. Today, a great variety of methods exist: those that came to us from indigenous peoples, as well as the newly evolved methods dating back to early experiments with LSD. AOS© rituals make use of a combination of methods from both traditional and modern settings.

Early experimenters such as Stanislav Grof, and Dr. J Bastiaans came to similar conclusions: the healing process of the visionary voyage once embarked upon, needs to be completed with as little as possible outside intervention. In order to facilitate this process a guide, or road-man keeps the ritual going, no matter what happens. Thus, each participant is able to complete whatever cycle presents itself during the ceremony. The guide takes particular responsibility for his wards during the journey. Naturally, this job becomes more difficult to assume, if his wards refuse to take responsibility for themselves. For this reason, the guide has a number of 'tricks' of the trade to ensure the safety and well-being of the ritual. To newcomers the methods of the ritual may seem strange. Participating in an ayahuasca ceremony is like learning to swim: if the instructor explains to you that you should hold your breath, you might find staying afloat considerably easier, right? The following guidelines may seem strange, but if you keep them in mind during the ceremony, their purpose will soon become apparent.

Firmeza, —resolve, firmness, determination:

The term comes from Portuguese, and refers to the ability to stay calm, remain in ones place, sit up straight, and keep to ones promises (the ones you make that are stipulated in the agreement for participation) Firmeza also means the ability to not allow our emotions lead us astray from the purpose of the ritual which is to transcend superficial impressions, also to stay with our own emotions and thoughts and not become preoccupied with what others may be thinking or experiencing. During a ritual communications with others are limited to the bare necessities, we do not talk, but use gestures instead, and musicians may maintain eye contact for the purpose of the music.

Surrender:

Accept what happens as a reflection of your interior world. Don't try to resist whatever is coming over you, fear, anxiety, pain, sorrow. Beware that you don't start to project the origin of any such feeling onto the outside world! This happens more readily when you are already preoccupied with others rather than concentrated on yourself, and on the visions inside you. The more you come to understand the experience as a reflection of your inner world, the

more you will experience the freedom of accepting responsibility for yourself. If the experience is disagreeable, ask yourself and ask the ayahuasca to show you why, where the disagreeable feelings are truly originating from. First timers may have difficulty remembering that the experience is a temporary one, sooner or later you will return to an ordinary state, the calmer you are as you contemplate an unpleasant experience, the better you will remember it, and recognize its origin. You may not get an immediate response to a request for the truth, accept this as part of the experience too, some feelings may take years to uncover.

Coping with fear:

Experience teaches us that fear is actually an illusion created by anticipation. There are many experiences in life that can show you this: when you anticipate pain for example, you almost experience the pain, and so you are afraid and in pain, whereas when you are actually in pain, there is none of the anguish of the anticipation! Anticipating pain, or fear, is actually quite pointless, since we are unable to prevent things from occurring. However when we are relaxed, we are much more readily able to react, and so we can either avert an accident, prevent things from getting worse, or else we are even in a lot less pain than we anticipated, simply because we accept the pain, as an experience that we may learn from. Fear thus works as a kind of veil, that prevents us from seeing things clearly, it quite literally distorts our view. The way of the warrior or shaman of dealing with fear is to follow it, and find out where it comes from. Again experience shows, that our fears always lead to great discoveries! Identifying their source means freeing ourselves from fears prohibitive influence, and accelerating our ability to learn.

Silence:

Silence does not mean that we are not allowed to make a sound, it does mean that we consider the auditive space as common space, belonging to all, and try not to fill it with our presence, try not to dominate this space. Without realizing it, many people, especially in the modern world are afraid of silence, not hearing their own voice, they begin to enter into a dissociative experience, where they do not know who they are. To reassure themselves they attempt to make sounds. The voice of ayahuasca can only truly be heard when the auditive space is free, this is where the songs, Icaro's and music of ayahuasca originate. Human beings are descended from monkeys, and so there is always a temptation to imitate each other: any unnecessary sounds we make, may cause others to feel a need to do so likewise, I have seen this happen often. The silence that we maintain during a ritual is a sign of respect and creates a close harmony, in which no one feels it is necessary to dominate, and no one feels incapacitated. Everyone can be heard effortlessly. During singing or making music, we

attempt to play in such a manner that we can still hear others well, leaving enough of the auditive space free for others to participate

Conversation:

Conversation is completely unnecessary for the duration of the ritual. Dialogue keeps us firmly in the realm of the rational mind. All we need in a ritual are gestures. Try and develop your ability to sense what is necessary, and communicate with gestures, or even simply with the eyes. The less you have to do, the better.

Helping:

When someone is not feeling well, sad or ill, or needs something they can communicate this. As long as someone is not doing that, it is superfluous to help, it disturbs your own inner processes, provides you with an object to focus on to escape your own discomfort, and distracts the other person from their problems, and from the idea that they can help themselves more effectively by remaining focused on the interior.

These tips are not rules however: sometimes another person really does need some help. If someone is too ill or needs to vomit, or if they are terribly afraid it is alright to offer them a hand. When you do this however, you should be really sure that you will not get drawn into their process. A sign of sympathy is not the same as trying to take on the problems of another person! Be very cautious where the distinction lies between helping, and just being nosy. So: touching another is allowed, if they show clearly that it is appreciated (when in doubt ask, preferably with a gesture, like holding out a hand) be very careful never to touch someone suddenly, or from behind.

Never under any circumstances try to restrain or grab someone. If someone is really confused, you may block their way to prevent them leaving a room or a ceremonial space, but never try to physically restrain them unless they are in clear danger. Rituals should be conducted in appropriate places, where it is impossible to jump from windows or run into a four lane freeway.

Trust:

Trust is the key to transformative experiences. The deeper you trust, the further you are able to enter into the inner journey, and every time you return to the ritual you will be able to go further! Naturally, your trust takes you to progressively deeper levels of your mind, and so logically you will also start to encounter painful subjects. However painful a subject is, remember you are going to come back afterwards.

Don't try to understand experiences too hard, or to draw conclusions immediately. Also don't try to determine the outcome. Ayahuasca usually peaks in strength for about two hours, you may find this reassuring, though you will probably forget it when you are experiencing something unpleasant, remember your fear or pain come from within! For someone who is having an unpleasant experience, subjective time is stretched immeasurably.

Realize that someone else's experience is no measure for your own, whatever someone else is going through, you do not necessarily need to experience. The experience you had on a previous session doesn't necessarily need to repeat itself a next time!

Integrating the experience:

The integration of an experience is an important aspect of handling the ayahuasca experience. (and other psychedelic experiences too!) The experience is extremely personal, but allows itself to be interpreted in a wider context, that we call the 'transpersonal'. Although an experience manifests itself in a language and imagery that are entirely dependent on personal experience, everyone has certain 'types' of experience in common, such as birth.

The integration of a subjective and personal experience depends on being able to place the experience in a 'wider' context, and being able to apply what we learn from this procedure in daily life. If we are unable to apply what we are 'learning' in daily life, chances are that the activity is either superfluous (meaning not necessary) or a false, sensational, experience (meaning in fact that we are in danger of becoming trapped by the experience, rather than liberated) Integration of a transpersonal experience is therefore a litmus test of it's validity, and without integration we are in danger of becoming detached from any true purpose, allowing the ego to interpret the experience.

For example when one has successfully experienced ones own pain, and placed this pain into a wider context, such as humanities suffering, it becomes possible to be a more compassionate person, in doing so our suffering becomes less personal, and our actions become directed towards a common cause.

Body Language:

The mind has a number of good defenses, meant to avoid impressions that are unpleasant. Some of these defenses are mental: rejection, anger, boredom, sarcasm. All these mental defenses have physical correspondents they manifest themselves in gestures and body language:

Yawning:

The moment of yawning is actually a very short spell of unconsciousness, the eyes shut, and the mind's eye is also closed. When we yawn continuously, others may notice and this sets off a chain reaction of yawning, concentration is disturbed and during a strong session people may get completely lost. Yawning is supposedly a reaction to low levels of oxygen in the blood, and meant to increase oxygenation, but what few people realize is that the boredom that precedes yawning is also often an attempt to evade impressions that we reject. With experience we can yawn consciously and thus avoid this moment of unconsciousness, and also put a hand before our mouth, which seems to suffice to stop others from 'catching' our yawn.

Changing positions:

We are uncomfortable and start searching for a better position. This search never really satisfies us, because the discomfort is internal, so changing positions actually distracts us from entering into a deeper concentration. By keeping a straight back and simply accepting our discomfort we are able to return to a state of concentration, and stop wasting energy.

Crossed arms or legs:

Crossing arms or legs is a blocking gesture, often seen in conversation with someone who makes us uncomfortable. During a ritual we always leave the arms and legs in a relaxed position, which helps to relax the body and mind. (think about it, as long as you are actually relaxed you remain completely alert, and safe from fear) Gestures like spreading the legs wide may be seen as threatening, so be discreet in your body language.

Breath:

When we are frightened breathing and pulse become rapid, liberating adrenaline into the bloodstream. This reaction can be controlled by steady deep breathing and especially breathing out slowly.

Respect:

The tranquility of a ceremony lend it an air of dignity, distinct from the rest of the day. Take and allow others the rest and peace they need, try and create a state within yourself where nothing needs to happen and everything is o.k. Be attentive and alert, as concentration increases and the silence becomes deeper the human mind always tries to fill the silence. ayahuasca speaks to us from the depths of this silence, by maintaining the silence we create a space for the ayahuasca to manifest itself. Be aware how you walk, how you breathe, whether you are making a noise, even if it is a tiny sound it may be loud to others, try not to leaf through books, or search in plastic bags, avoid making noises except on purpose.