I've had quite a few letters here and there.

Will try to provide my insights as provided by the vane as well as discussions

ion of how it works. Frankly, so would I. I add a concise explanation of

of MAPS fall into the second category. But probably would like an explanation

can understand, I attribute my health to the vane. I promise that most readers

caffeinated beverages, and that seems to satisfy them. To others, who I think

(aren't) exercise regularly, and have all but stopped drinking alcohol and

To some of these people, I explain that I have changed my diet (vegetarian).

What I am doing is look that way.

and immune days. People frequently comment on how healthy I look and ask

aside from a couple of eating joints here and there, reminders of my tough

1996. As I approach my seventh year, I can say that I have never felt better.

appears to be in complete remission. The original diagnosis was in September

First of all, let me say that I am still healthy, and that the metastasized cancer

is best taken as another anecdote in the growing body of lore of the vane

happening with me. At this point of our experience and knowledge, my story

anything else I am simply relaying my own story and my sense of what is

very clearly that I am not proposing any research or a miracle cure for cancer or

before sharing these thoughts with MAPS Bulletin readers, I need to share

ing with me, and the role of Ayahuasca.

surprise, and pushed me to further thoughts about what I believe is happen-

with cancer and others, who are healthy, but curious. The responses took me by

several letters, e-mails and telephone calls from interested persons, some

in the MAPS Bulletin (VIII:3), 1998, I received

"Ayahuasca and Cancer: One Man's Experience."

FDR THE PUBLICATION OF MY ARTICLE

Ayahuasca and Cancer: A Postscript.
Several who have written about ayahuasca (notably Mabit, Grove and Vega) talk about the three domains in which the vine appears to work: psychological, spiritual and organic. My experience confirms this notion, although the distinction between psychological and spiritual is not as clearly defined for me as that between spiritual and organic. Perhaps that is because of my unique approach to the experience, initiated by me in the quest for a restoration of health. Nevertheless, the psychological and spiritual dimensions have played an important, albeit a more subtle role in my recovery.

I will briefly touch on each of these three areas as I experienced them during the past two years, but with primary focus on the organic domain. This is not to minimize the importance of the other two areas, which no doubt play important roles in my well-being.

**Psychological changes**

The most profound psychological change was noted during my fist experience when I encountered death in the form of a soft, deep, dark void. The clear message was that death is always present, but nothing to be feared. It is there along with all the other forces and elements of nature, nothing exceptional. Death happens. Stating these obvious facts in words sounds trite. But when the vine reveals such things, the impact is far more profound. Going into my first session the thought of imminent death, as predicted by my physician and the data, was a major concern. The vine put that to rest straight away.

As for other psychological impacts, I would include the lesson on the relative importance of things in life. One vivid example came during my fourth or fifth session when I saw a gallery of assorted clocks and watches, dozens if not hundreds of them, moving as though in a shooting gallery, with the minute and hour hands going rapidly in a counter-clockwise direction. I interpreted this as a commentary on my preoccupation with time and the fear of running out of it before I have accomplished my goals.

The vine seemed to be saying, "OK, if that bothers you, let's make time run backwards." The revelation to me was that the notion of time is something that humans view as a commodity to be measured, valued, calculated, saved, wasted, sold, etc., while in ayahuasca reality none of those things matter. Like death, time is always present. Living each day fully means much more than achievement.

Others, including some drug addicts, have reported psychological impacts that have resulted from ingestion of the vine, such as letting go of the ego while allowing light to illuminate the dark corners of the psyche and confronting the demon within. Some have reported this as a difficult experience. Although I have not had this type of psychic encounter, I think I understand the process. There is no place for ego or control when interacting with ayahuasca. There are no dark corners in which demons can hide from the probing of the vine.

**The spiritual realm**

The spiritual aspects of my experiences with ayahuasca are even more difficult to describe and define. Not having been a spiritual type since my adolescent disillusionment with Christianity, I did not have any expectations. My mission was the restoration of my physical health, which I naively believed to exist independently of the spiritual me. Ayahuasca persuaded me that I was wrong. How did this come to pass?

During ayahuasca-induced visions, I see and hear some astonishing things that have changed my perceptions and understanding of the forces at work in my universe. Plants morphed into animals, and vice-versa. Waves of varicolored lights separated into twisting, undulating ribbons of energy, at times resembling serpentine creatures, switching back and forth from plant to animal form, all the while emitting sounds that I can only describe as a rapid sequence of high-pitched chirps, a bit like the sounds made by dolphins but in a different tone. In the dim shadows of the forest at night, the surrounding plants became robustly alive, gently pulsating and moving toward me as though to join together. While there was nothing that suggested a singular deity, there was an unmistakable presence of a force that permeated the entire experience, linking my body with my inner self, and with the rest of my surroundings: others in the group, the plants, the air, the stars and beyond.

Once I tried to follow the upward spiraling ribbons of light to see how far they would lead me into the infinite darkness. I soared upward, as though riding a comet's tail, until the ribbons split off, forming arcs which veered off in a trajectory that would bring them back to begin the cycle again. I began to see this as the energy force that unites everything, the life force, or spirit, of the living and the dead, past, present and future.

It is on the organic level, however, that my experience has been easier to perceive and define for myself. Perhaps this is because I began my relationship with the plant for
The cell is the basic unit of life. All living organisms are made up of one or more cells. Cells are the building blocks of life. They are the smallest unit of life that can reproduce and perform all the functions necessary for life. Each cell contains aDNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), which is the genetic material that carries the instructions for making proteins and other molecules essential for life.

Cells are divided into two main types: prokaryotic and eukaryotic. Prokaryotic cells are simpler and smaller than eukaryotic cells. They lack a nucleus and other organelles. Eukaryotic cells are more complex and have a nucleus and other structures called organelles. Prokaryotic cells are found in bacteria, archaea, and cyanobacteria. Eukaryotic cells are found in all other living organisms.

The cell membrane is the boundary that separates the cell from its surroundings. It controls what goes in and out of the cell. The cytoplasm is the gel-like substance that fills the cell and contains organelles and other molecules.

The cell nucleus is the control center of the cell. It contains the cell's DNA and is responsible for controlling the cell's activities. The ribosome is the site of protein synthesis. It attaches to the cell membrane and uses the cell's genetic material to manufacture proteins.

The cell wall is the outermost layer of the cell. It provides structural support and protection. The cell organelles are specialized structures that carry out specific functions within the cell. The endoplasmic reticulum is involved in protein and lipid synthesis. The Golgi apparatus modifies and packages proteins for secretion. The lysosome breaks down waste materials and cellular debris. The mitochondria are the powerhouses of the cell, producing energy in the form of ATP.

Cell division is the process by which a cell reproduces. It occurs through two types of division: mitosis and meiosis. Mitosis results in the production of two genetically identical daughter cells for growth and repair. Meiosis results in the production of four genetically diverse gametes for reproduction.

Cell death is a natural process that occurs when a cell is no longer useful to the organism. It can be caused by various factors such as injury,old age, or disease. Cells can undergo apoptosis, a form of programmed cell death, to eliminate damaged or unnecessary cells.

The study of cells has provided insights into the functioning of living organisms. It has led to the development of new treatments for diseases and has helped us understand the origins and evolution of life.
limbs, climbing, soaring and bursting into brilliant showers of light, like enormous Skyrockets. From time to time I both feel and see a powerful upwelling of a brilliant gold mass of energy, coming from deep within me, climaxing in an orgasmic burst into infinity. With such surges of light I feel the internal cleansing, as though by some sort of cosmic Roto-Rooter.

I interpret these visions (among many others) as manifestations of what the plant is doing on the organic level. Once inside me, the plant begins doing its work, looking for dark corners to illuminate and malformations to correct, communicating from its cells to mine through the chemical chain provided by our respective DNA. In plain words, the DNA of the vine is talking to mine. The resemblance of these visionary forms to DNA is not from my imagination. I saw them long before I ever read Narby or made the connection with DNA, and was struck by their consistent recurrence during every ayahuasca experience. If one could see DNA in full action it would probably look much like what I have tried to describe.

The importance of the purge

Perhaps the most important aspect of the work on the organic level is the purge. As with most others, ayahuasca makes me vomit. Unlike others, however, I generally don't vomit until the visions have faded, maybe four or more hours after ingestion. Again, I interpret the late vomit similarly to the way I interpret the late onset of vision. The vine needs more time with me to do the cleanup work, gathering the detritus and bringing it to the trash bin. When the cleanup job is done, the vine presses the vomit button and the garbage gets dumped. On two occasions I have experienced slight diarrhea, the other type of purging that ayahuасареs report.

I cannot overstate the importance of the purge. This is the vine's way of eliminating physical as well as psychic toxins that don't belong inside a healthy body or mind. The cleansing effect is manifest, both immediately and for subsequent days or even weeks. Although the act itself is not pleasant, the lingering effects make it all worthwhile. It strikes me as a rite of purification.

But how does it work?

To accept my interpretation of how ayahuasca works requires a suspension of all previously held beliefs about the differences between the plant and animal worlds. It requires acceptance of the idea that plants can communicate, not only among themselves but with humans as well.

We must accept the notion that, as our group leader once put it, "the plant knows what it is doing." These are not easy concepts for westerners to understand or accept. Yet, this is how I, a life-long skeptic and pragmatist, see the plant doing its work. And it has undeniably worked well for me.

Could this be pure fantasy on my part? Could it be that I have constructed from my imagination an account in an effort to explain my experiences? I don't think so. I have attempted to provide an accurate description of my experiences. And I am still convinced that my affair with the vine is largely responsible for my current state of good health.

My experience with ayahuasca and cancer is not unique. I keep learning of other such experiences among people from different parts of the world. Some of these have been reported in the literature, others by word of mouth. There are too many such reports to dismiss them as merely anecdotal. The curanderos of the Amazon have been using ayahuasca for healing purposes for centuries, during which they obviously saw concrete results, not necessarily for cancer but for a host of other diseases. As with other practitioners of folk medicine, they don't pursue modalities of treatment that don't work.

We come to the question: Does ayahuasca really work in treating disease as I and others have claimed? A considerable amount of anecdotal evidence suggests that it does. However, if we westerners (myself excluded), locked into our analytic mind-set, are to believe, we need to see controlled studies on humans with carefully measured data which could be studied and evaluated in a scientific protocol. Such a study should not be difficult to conduct if the obstacles of prohibition can be overcome. One way to do this is to conduct the study in a less repressive country. The other approach is to take on the DEA and defy them to prohibit scientific inquiry the world of entheogenic plants.

It is my fervent hope that such studies will move forward in the near future. There is much to be learned from plants if only we can learn how to tune in.