

A Mother and Son Peyote Ritual

Written **anonymously**

THE MOTHER

My introduction to psychedelics was in my early teens. Psychedelics were the most helpful guidance I received during those difficult years. I was introduced to psychedelics by my older siblings. When my kids were reaching their early teens, and I knew they would be exposed to the drugs through the culture that we are in, I wanted to take the opportunity to share with them the values and the importance of respect and appropriate use that I felt might help them through their coming of age.

When my oldest son turned thirteen, as his mother I thought that it would be the perfect rite-of-passage to take him into the mountains to introduce him to plant medicines and plant teachers. When he was eleven and twelve, he was drifting away from our close bond. More troubled in school, getting into fights, and becoming rebellious, he was clearly ready to create a new identify of his own within the context of his peer group and the outside world. I was concerned about the potential for drug and alcohol misuse. At that age, he was young enough to listen to me and take me seriously, and I could still get through to him to impart positive values.

I believe in the power of the plant medicines to create a very bonding experience and I felt that within the context of a spiritual, psychedelic rite-of-passage that our bond would be even greater and that he wouldn't feel the need to rebel and reject me as a parent. I felt that doing something so powerful as psychedelics with him and entering into that state of mind would allow for a point of reference that would be the anchor in creating a more honest relationship between us.

I approached him and asked him if he wanted to do a special ceremony for his thirteenth birthday. I explained to him that we would use a small amount of peyote because he was familiar with it from being around Native American Church ceremonies. I used to attend NAC services and while he never took any peyote at them, he did attend some meetings with me as a small child, though mostly he just slept through them. He was happy and excited to have been asked—probably more about the time alone camping in the mountains together on this special day than about the peyote. I have another younger son as well, so my soon to be 13-year-old appreciated the

opportunity for time alone with me. I didn't know if he had tried marijuana yet when I offered him the experience with peyote, and he confessed that he had tried smoking pot before.

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I've always done psychedelics away from civilization so I could have a deeper relationship with nature and the earth, in an uninterrupted manner. I wanted to help him reconnect to the earth as his mother and to the incredible power and beauty of the animals, birds and plants. We'd had family camp-outs before, but this was the first time that we ever camped out alone. We went to the Steens Mountains in Southern Oregon. I felt at the time that it was the best experience I'd ever had with another person, let alone my son. There wasn't a bit of tension.

I briefly told him about what peyote does in advance. But mostly I felt that I needed to sit with him with the medicine and explain it while he was having the experience. It was important to me to share information and my experiences during the ritual—what I have been taught and what I have learned—and not to talk too much about it beforehand. I didn't give him anything to read about. There were no other resources other than my own experience, which I trusted.

We woke up in the morning after our first night of camping and had a bit of breakfast. We packed a lunch of snacks and then we began to hike. We hiked about an hour. We did a ceremony where I first called for protection and asked for blessings from the four directions and the guardians and we thanked this place on earth for being there for us. Then we ate the equivalent of one or two small buttons of peyote—a light dose. I began to speak. The words just came freely and naturally as I expressed my views and values about the differences between use and abuse. I talked about the traditional uses of psychoactive plants and I explained how they were tools. I told him how the plants were teachers and they were medicines and that this was the appropriate, respectful way to use them in whatever form you get them in, whether peyote, mescaline, or LSD. I also explained the importance of set and setting, of being in the right place and the right frame of mind.

I don't remember him expressing any fear or anxiety. After eating the peyote and talking and answering his

questions, we began hiking again, and noticing the magic of the land that we were in. I asked him to walk in silence with me for an hour. I think he broke the silence after about 45 minutes. Then we sat and he shared with me his comfort with what he was feeling and his excitement about being in the mountains with me. We then started talking about shamanism and he shared with me his own techniques he practiced as a child in his imagination to protect himself when he felt fearful. He also shared with me insights and his spiritual inspiration he received from the books he'd been reading, which were mostly fantasy novels. Under these circumstances, he felt safe to open up to me about his secret side, his spiritual take on the world.

We talked some more about shamanism, and power animals and protection, and he asked me how he would know what his power animal is? I explained to him they sometimes come in dreams, or in visions when doing plant medicines, and sometimes you just know—you have a sense about it. I asked him what he thought his power animal might be, if he had any idea? He said he thought it was a bear. I suggested to him that he close his eyes and ask the universe what his power animal was.

At the time, we were sitting on some rocks on the ridge of a mountain. We opened our eyes and talked a little while more. Ten or fifteen minutes later, a bear walking across a field of snow appeared about a hundred yards in front of us. He asked me if that bear was real since he thought he might be hallucinating. I told him it was real. It was springtime, and down where we were there was no snow, but up on the hill there was snow. After the bear was gone, we went to look at the tracks. We followed them to rocks where they disappeared and left some of our nut mix as a gift. It was quite magical.

Later, we were in an old juniper forest up high and he found a tree and connected to this one tree and even felt like it was speaking to him. Then we felt it was time to walk back to camp.

The next morning, we ventured to the hot springs just down the road where I facilitated a symbolic rebirth of his self. I asked him before he went under the water to hold a picture in his mind of himself as he has known himself as a child. I told him that when we went under, he should let go of that image and allow a new part of himself to emerge. He emerged from the water with great elation.

The rest of the time together was laughing and sharing like we never did before. I let him drive the truck for the first time. It was just fantastic. I think he will remember more about our experience than I will. A lot has happened since that journey.

Before we went on this retreat, he was going through a rebellious period. Afterwards, we had very little conflict. When conflict did occur, we were able to talk through it more easily. He was more mature and at ease around me. He's been very honest around me ever since, and we've expressed love and affection more openly.

Sometime after that, my husband took him backpacking in the mountains for several days, conducting a rite-of-passage in his own way. Even though he wasn't doing psychedelics at the time, my husband understood and agreed with what we were doing and valued it. When there is conflict among parents, kids can become confused, so it was important that we both were in harmony about the value of my sharing peyote with our son.

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Later when he wanted to do mushrooms with his friends, he told me about it and I was able to encourage him to do it in a natural setting. I was able to be a kind of a guide and explain to him that drugs were not all the same, and, for example, that cocaine was not as useful as psychedelics. He felt comfortable coming to me. Later when he was 15 he came to me with some blotter acid. Since I was worried about the quality of the acid, I traded him some mushrooms for it. I never have known him to abuse any drugs. He seemed to prefer mushrooms over synthetics. He smokes marijuana occasionally, but has never used it heavily. His relationship to alcohol is the same, occasional and not frequent. He seems aware of what he is doing and of when he might be getting close to abusing. He hangs out with like-minded boys who also seem respectful of their use.

My younger son and I also did a similar ritual that really bonded us. He listens to me and respects my values and views and opinions about drugs. He's a skateboarder. Since the ritual, his self-esteem and perseverance increased. He's become a semi-professional skateboarder. He appears in magazines and videos. He's "hot stuff" and he did it all himself. He's had many injuries, resulting in

three surgeries, but he never allowed these to discourage him. He made the most out of his talent and has tremendous self-confidence. I think he gained much of that from a powerful affirmation from his parents.

The rites-of-passage weren't focused as much on doing the psychedelics as on giving my sons an affirmation of their value and place in the world. The time alone in the mountains provided us with the space of comfort, ease, and openness, without distractions. Now my kids prefer to go into nature to do psychedelics. When my youngest was 17, he wanted to go the Oregon desert to do mushrooms with his friend. He wanted me to take them, which I did. I acted as their sitter. I'm not sure if his friend's parents knew. That was a little uncomfortable, but I knew they were both already doing mushrooms and smoking pot and that the friend's parents knew that. He said his parents would be okay with what he did, so I trusted him.

An open dialogue with kids about substances is very important these days. If they want to do it, kids will do drugs regardless of whether they have their parents' approval. I don't think my kids are doing more drugs because of this open attitude. My oldest son is doing well in college and is a serious student. He's an occasional user, but I don't see him stoned too often.

My younger son has a laid back life-style and is a more frequent user of marijuana and occasional user of alcohol. He's had run-ins with the law, but my honest opinion is that the cops in my town harass the youth more than they need to, and have developed a paranoia about drugs. It's so silly to think that they can stop kids from doing drugs. It takes a lot to influence kids at that age. I think it has to begin early and with an open and honest approach. Do they really think that the War on Drugs has ever worked? Has it ever stopped kids from using drugs, or even slowed it down? Wherever you try to forcefully control the youth culture, it gives them something to rebel against.

Kids need a validating experience at that age and if they don't have it, then they create it through rebelliousness, in order to establish their own identity. I found that rites-of-passage my husband and I provided not only gave our boys the validation they needed from us, but also strengthened our family bond.

THE SON

Starting in about the fifth grade, an anger began to grow within me. When I entered middle school, the anger grew bigger and more powerful. I was confused about many things and I often felt torn between contradictory ideas and values. On one hand, there was what I knew from the upbringing my parents had given me. On the other hand, there was what I was receiving from my friends and peers and the pop culture around me. I became painfully aware of my individuality, which often manifested as a profound sense of isolation and loneliness. I was trying to find a way to feel okay with myself.

My rites-of-passage came at an important time in my life. I began smoking pot before my thirteenth birthday. On my birthday, I did blotter acid bought off the street, and later I began to use mushrooms. These experiences were always with my friends, with no guiding values other than curiosity and a fear of being left out. My friends who had already tried psychedelics made the experiences sound exciting. I was aware of their potential use as plant medicines and spiritual tools, but that awareness was not reflected anywhere in my life outside of my home. Since it was through my peer group and the music that I listened to that I was being introduced to marijuana and psychedelics, I naturally began to associate their importance with what my friends told me, which had no spiritual content.

When my mother first proposed doing the rite of passage, I was excited about it. Even through my darkest years, I never lost my respect for spirituality. In fact, it was during the hardest times that I yearned most strongly for it. I was aware of and curious about peyote use in the Native American Church, but that seemed far removed from my life as a twelve-year-old boy. The rite of passage with my mother taught me another way—the true way, I believe—to use psychedelics and plant medicine.

The experience itself was powerful, but in a very subtle way. I took only a small amount of peyote, in a capsule, and did not have any sort of normal psychedelic experience. I didn't have auditory, visual, or other sensory hallucinations, or feel a drastic shift in my consciousness. What I experienced instead was a deeper connection with the natural world, almost a sort of expansion of consciousness into it. A paradigm shift. The experience with seeing the bear also had a profound impact on me, as it was the first time I had what I considered at that time a "spiritual experience," and gave me something to hold on to—my spirit animal. At an age when everything is being questioned, it was a powerful reinforcement of the truth and existence of the spirit, and universal connection.

A connection between my mother and I was created, which has stayed open ever since. She was very trusting with me, non-judgmental, and accepting of what I had to say and of my previous experiences. This allowed me to feel safe enough to share my deepest and most-closely held ideas about the world—ideas I wasn't able to share with anyone else at the time. Being able to externalize these, and feel validated by what she said to me and what I experienced those days out in the desert, strengthened my self-confidence. From then on, my experimentation with "drugs" didn't come between my mother and I—I didn't have to hide it. When I felt ready, I could share these experiences with her. She always listened, accepting and honest. She would express her concerns about things she saw as inappropriate, and explained to me why this was, but she never got angry or punished me. I came to respect her opinions. Although I had to build my own understanding of the world, much of my personal spirituality has been based directly on my mothers teachings. •