

Exploring the World of Ayahuasca-Based Tourism and the Globalization of Psychedelics:

A Review of Two New Books from Rak Razam



By David Jay Brown, M.A.
MAPS Guest Editor, Author
dajabr@well.com

A FEW MONTHS AGO, while Australian journalist Rak Razam was visiting California, I participated in a roundtable discussion with him, MAPS Communication Director Randolph Hencken, and several others about the relationship between psychedelics and creating a sustainable future. This well-attended event was part of a global tour that Razam was on to promote his two new books, and he was going around from city to city, leading panel discussions about psychedelics. Razam was great fun that night; he radiated a lot of enthusiasm, which generated much excitement and fostered the free flow of interesting ideas.

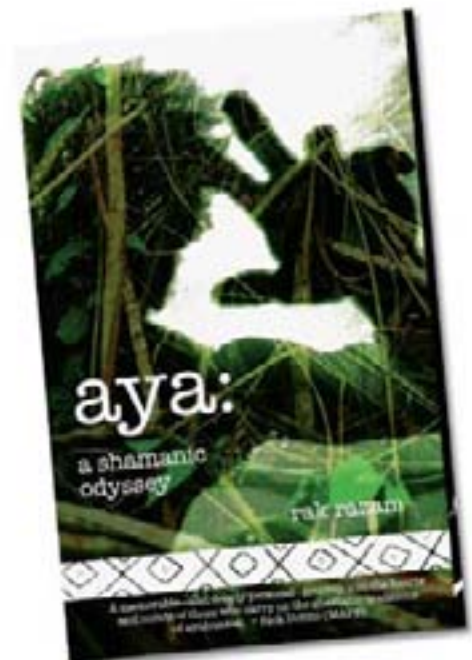
Prior to that evening, I was familiar with the delightful anthology of essays and interviews that Razam had edited about psychedelic history and psycho-nautic exploration, “The JourneyBook”—which is jam-packed with fascinating information from the frontiers of consciousness exploration, and provides an especially interesting window into the psychedelic culture of Australia. It’s a treasure chest overflowing with wonderful psychedelic revelations and extraordinary visionary artwork. Beautifully illustrated with dazzling full-color graphics, The JourneyBook includes mind-expanding contributions by Stanislav Grof, Dennis McKenna, Eric Davis, Daniel Pinchbeck, and many

others. Nineteen writers and thirteen artists contribute to this innovatively-designed, back-coverless, flip-upside-in-the-middle book, which draws attention to the fact that—thanks to the internet—a new and sophisticated form of psychedelic culture is emerging on the planet, globally connecting its participants through boundary-dissolving interactions.

While visiting California, Razam gave me a copy of his latest book “Aya: A Shamanic Odyssey.” After reading the first few pages, I was quickly swept up into his deeply inspiring, highly educational journey, which left me with my jaw hanging in awe. You really have to hand it to Razam, as this book was quite an ambitious undertaking. He did a marvelous job documenting the fascinating cultural phenomenon that’s currently occurring in the Amazon with ayahuasca tourism—as well as his own personal shamanic journeys into the hyperdimensional realms of ayahuasca consciousness—for those of us without the courage, time, or resources to head off into the hot, wet jungles of South America, and drink the powerfully hallucinogenic jungle brew.

Aya: A Shamanic Odyssey

By Rak Razam
444 pages, softcover.
Icaro Publishing, 2009
www.ayathebook.com



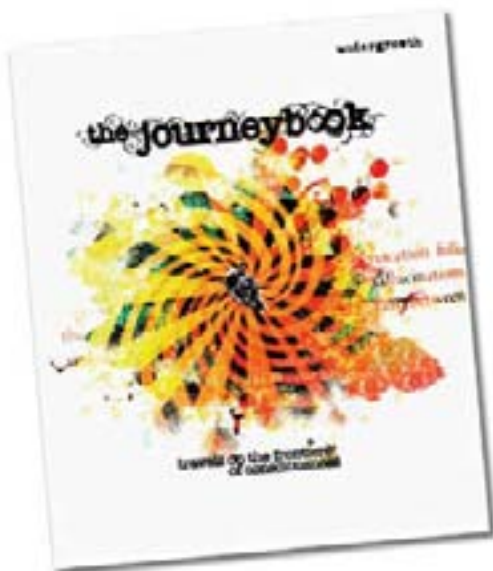
Initially on assignment from Australian Penthouse magazine, Razam traveled to Peru, where he immersed himself in the cross-cultural, ayahuasca-based community that flourishes in and around Iquitos. While he was there—amongst the curanderos, spiritual seekers, backpack adventurers, impoverished indigenous people, desperately ill, well-to-do tourists, shifty-eyed salesmen, and shaman-entrepreneurs—organically and unexpectedly, the article that he was writing grew vine-like into a whole book. Razam first attends an international conference about ayahuasca, and then embarks on his own far-flung adventures with the plant brew. He partakes in numerous ayahuasca ceremonies, led by an unusual array of memorable curanderos and curandero mix-breeds, in various culturally-blended settings, amongst a colorful collection of characters, recording every microscopic detail, so that you really feel like you're there with him, inside of his head.

I think that this is the best book available about the strange and intriguing interface between Western culture and traditional ayahuasca-based shamanism.

It's also a true adventure story, written in a very personal, readable style, and it had me turning the pages to find out what happens next. Recounted with unusual sensitivity, compassionately brutal honesty, high humor, real guts, and an incredible eye for detail, Razam shares his hard-earned shamanic knowledge with us by using Western memes and icons as archetypes, so that Australians and Americans can especially relate to his experiences. Razam does a remarkable job incorporating his own insights and revelations, dreams and synchronicities, with the story, and you can sense the symbiotic spirit of the ayahuasca vine intertwining with the words in the book. I highly recommend this inspiring and hopeful book to all aspiring ayahuasqueros, as well as anyone interested in the alchemical transformation of consciousness, and I think that it will especially appeal to people interested in plant-based spirituality quests, and the interface between Western and indigenous cultures. •

Call for Submissions

The next MAPS Bulletin will be a special edition about Psychedelics, Death and Dying. If you would like to contribute an article please contact guest editor David Jay Brown at dajabr@well.com



The JourneyBook:
Travels on the Frontiers of Consciousness
 Edited by Rak Razam
 Art Director: Tim Parish
 240 pages, softcover, illustrated
 Undergrowth Inc., 2009
www.thejourneybook.com