



POST-CEREMONY & INTEGRATION

PDF MANUAL

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I. PREFACE

There has been a lot of literature written and research done about the experience of drinking Ayahuasca and working with the sacred plant medicines. However, the missing link in the PM world is what comes after, in this stage of the work called "integration" which comes after the ceremony.

As PM facilitators, it is important to recognise that the profound healing experience with the sacred plant medicines does not finish at the end of the ceremony. The real work begins at this stage. How we integrate the insights that we've learnt from the PM work, the application of the tools and perspectives we receive, will ultimately determine the gifts and offerings given to us in the PM experience.

Unfortunately, the integration process after a ceremonial experience is not given enough importance in this field, nor is there ample and adequate training for integration coaches to understand how we can help participants process trauma memories which can arise in the PM space, to respond effectively, or to support the integration their PM experiences fully in body, mind and in our participants lives.

It is our wish that this training will provide facilitators in understanding how to hold trauma safely and with care, and to support the healing process with awareness, attention and compassion.

With Love, Humility and Great Respect,



Atira Tan Head of Integration



Elio Geusa Founder AYA Healing Retreats



TRAUMA-INFORMED INTEGRATION:

AN INTRODUCTION

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2. TRAUMA-INFORMED INTEGRATION: WHAT IS IT?

There is a trend and tendency in our egoic Western culture of collecting spiritual experiences without integration or embodied wisdom.

The cost at simply collecting experiences through the absence of a commitment to traumainformed integration practice is that deep and important universal wisdom is not bleeding into the fabric of people's everyday lives in such a way as to promote meaningful change in themselves and the world.

I see this changing in the past few years, but mostly, the importance of PM Integration, in an unregulated sacred medicine culture is perceived at best as an add on. It's not as sexy or well understood in Ayahuasca circles, and for that reason, trauma-informed ayahuasca integration work does not receive the attention both within ceremony and without. We need, therefore, to better understand the importance of integration and what it might, context depending, consist of in order to begin to conceive of it as equally as important as the medicine itself in promoting deep healing.

Integration, in my role as a trauma informed clinician is about supporting my clients to become an embodiment of their insights. If, within the context of the sacred medicine experience we can turn our insights into a living reality, one that we use to create new behaviours and ways of responding to difficult people and circumstances in the busyness of our everyday, we've become an embodiment of our insights.

For example, when encountering a familiar situation that previously unsettled or confused us, we might choose to respond to it in a different, more intentional way. Or alternatively, we might find ourselves with the courage we never before to change our thoughts, actions and behaviour and to veer down a new career or relationship path which is more aligned with who we are and how we want to be of service in the world.

As Trauma-Informed PM facilitators, our goal is to support the participants to become embodiment of their insights, and to help them in resolving any traumatic memories that, and to assist them in making changes in their external world to match the inner transformation that they may have experienced with the PM.

In short, the objective of integration should be for the insights received through the sacred medicine experience to be embodied and a living reality, instead of a collection of experiences which fade into the background. As trauma-informed facilitators, we are mindful to hold this space with safety, care and compassion.

Integration is therefore a process, a perpetual unfolding, and not a final destination. It can take years and may never reach a peak of complete resolution. I speak here, not only as a clinician, but as a participant.

When I was in my teens, I took LSD and was transported to phenomenal places. I learned a great deal about the universe through these experiences. At the time, I was a part of a small, close knit group that would take LSD together. We would meditate and were very intentional and responsible about our psychedelic use. I distinctly recall this one trip where I tuned into this voice that said to me, "Atira, you really do know a lot about the universe already and we are not going to show it to you anymore because, you need to live what you know."

After receiving this insight, LSD never really worked for me again. I never again reached a state akin to that reached before.

I instead chose to take what amounted to ten years of my life integrating this knowledge. I learned to embody the knowledge gleaned through my experience of LSD and made it into what I term my "living reality." I learnt how to access altered states of consciousness, and my own connection with the Divine, in conscious states, through meditation, as an example.

Learning to embodying one's sacred medicine insights in a holistic way, that is, with the full participation of one's body, mind and spirit and to have it manifest externally through one's thoughts, feelings and behaviours may be a lofty aspiration, but it is achievable, and what I consider to be the ultimate goal and guiding premise of any successful Ayahuasca integration practice.

Practically, according to ICEERS, the post ceremony and integration processes best practices involve:

1. Give the participants ample time to recover before allowing them to leave the premises and make sure they have room to do so. Traditionally, participants may return to their beds or remain in the ceremonial space until morning.

2. Ensure that there is ongoing support available for those who need it. Depending on the nature of the ceremony, this could include therapeutic support from a specialised therapist, the facilitator or a support person.

3. Provide an integration area, where the participants can individually or together use creative materials (pencils and crayons for drawing, etc.) as they process their experience.

4. Ensure that all participants have the opportunity to share their experience with the rest of the group.

5. Be mindful of the interventions during the share group. An active listening attitude, without judgment nor interpretation that can narrow the amplitude of the experience. Allow the participant to reach his/her own conclusions and interpretations.

6. Check the physical and emotional state of all participants before they leave.

7. Offer additional support after the ceremony such as integration sessions.

8. Direct participants to a qualified professional if you are unable to provide the level of support that they require during their integration process.

9. Ask the participants to fill again the health questionnaire during the next week/months to measure any sustainable changes from the PM experience.

(Adapted from ICEERS, <u>www.iceers.com</u>)

This module will touch upon the post-ceremony and integration steps stated above.

"The deep psychological and spiritual dynamics potentially brought to our awareness during ceremony require guidance, both before and after, for their full integration. Even participants who have lovely experiences may not derive the complete benefit without some guidance and help with interpretation."

Dr. Gabor Maté

THE HERO'S JOURNEY:

AN APPLICATION TO TRAUMA-INFORMED INTEGRATION

3. THE HERO'S JOURNEY: AN APPLICATION TO TRAUMA INFORMED PM INTEGRATION

Joseph Campbell was an American mythological researcher who wrote a must-read book entitled The Hero with a Thousand Faces.

In his lifelong research Campbell discovered many common patterns running through hero myths and stories from around the world. Years of research led Campbell to discover several basic stages that almost every hero-quest undergoes which is universal. Campbell calls this common structure "the monomyth", with the archetype of the hero at the center of the story.

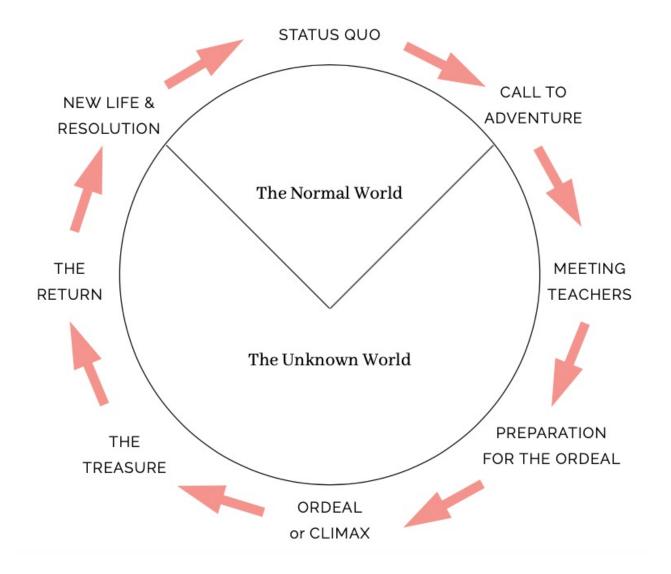
The hero is an archetype which is a set of universal images combined with specific patterns of behaviour. The archetype of the hero can be applied to many contexts, including the journey of PM for participants.

It's helpful to understand the Hero's journey in its application to trauma-informed plant medicine integration as a roadmap for ourselves as facilitators, and for our participants. Campbell has defined the stages of his monomyth in various ways, sometimes supplying different names for certain stages.

There are many different versions of the Hero's Journey that retain the same basic elements, and in this training, we will be looking at the basic structure of the Hero's journey as a guide for our work as trauma-informed integrators.

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

THE PLANT MEDICINE JOURNEY



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"You enter the forest at the darkest point where there is no path.

Where there is a way or path, it is someone else's path.

You are not on your own path.

If you follow someone else's way, you are not going to realise your potential."

JOSEPH CAMPBELL

3.1 THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

'This first step of the mythological journey—which we have designated the "call to adventure"—signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown.'

- Joseph Campbell

The journey into the unknown first starts in the status quo. Here, our hero/heroine exist in world where they feel comfortable, or a life which is a "known" life. However, there may be something amiss. There may be a feeling that something is not quite right, or something may need to change.

Often, although this world is known and comfortable, the hero/heroine may not feel happy, or they may be struggling with a certain aspect of themselves or their lives in which they want to transform. It may be the lingering feeling of stuckness, or stagnation. Perhaps it may be the struggle with addictions, or depression and anxiety. Maybe it's the call to the Divine.

In most cases, the hero/heroine may exist in a world is considered ordinary or uneventful by those who live there. Furthermore, the heroes are considered odd by those around them in the ordinary world and possess some ability or characteristic that makes them feel out-of-place. But they are seeking more than just the known, and are called away from the ordinary world.

This call to adventure starts our quest. In order for the questing and transformation to occur, our hero/heroine must be removed from their ordinary and known environment. Usually there is a discovery, some event, or some danger that starts them on the heroic path. Perhaps it's a synchronistic encounter with someone who introduces them to the plant medicines. Maybe it's reading it in a book or listening to it in a podcast. Or perhaps it's the desire to heal a trauma or limiting belief which is hiding them back from their true power. Sometimes, it's a death or a loss of someone close and dear, or a relationship breakup.

In some cases, heroes happen upon their quest by accident. In his book, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Campbell states:

"A blunder-the merest chance-reveals an unsuspected world."

The new world the hero is forced into is much different from the old one. Campbell describes this new world as a "fateful region of both treasure and danger…a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state…a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight".

In the adventure with plant medicines (PM), the new world and kingdom also includes new inner worlds, opening of consciousness and new worlds and dimensions through the Altered States of Consciousness (ASC). Furthermore, for many, it may include travelling to distant lands, for example, the Amazon jungles of Peru or Brazil, or a retreat centre away from friends and family to undergo such an adventure.

For those journeying to distant lands, both internally though ASC or to the Amazon in Peru, can be a terrifying experience which requires courage, strength and resources. For many, the journey can be uncomfortable as we're being brought out of our comfort zone. For many, the call of adventure can bring out our deep seated experiences of trauma so that the "shadowy" parts of ourselves can be held, seen and heard.

It is our role as trauma-informed PM facilitators and support people to understand and acknowledge that the call to adventure requires courage and tenacity, and to hold a space of safety, care and compassion for these individuals so that they can journey into the inner and outer landscapes with tenderness and care.



3.2 MEETING TEACHERS AND PREPARATION FOR THE ORDEAL

"The journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step."

- Lao Tzu

The initiatory process starts here as the hero/heroine finds himself/herself in the unknown, and starts to face a series of trail and tribulations. It is here where the hero/ heroine may not succeed in their wishes and expectations, but will start to meet allies, their fears and teachers in this stage.

In the PM process, this may look like allies, such as us, the facilitators or support people who are providing them with support, safety and orientation to this new world. They may have fears and insecurities which arise as they start to prepare themselves both mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically through the abstinence of certain foods, alcohol, drugs and sex. Their teachers may be the shamans or the Plant Medicines as they start to make the journey inwards.

In this part of the journey, the wayfarer enter a world they may have never experienced before. Unlike the comfort of their old known world, this new world often has it's own rules, and the hero/heroine quickly has to learn and adapt to these rules as their endurance, strength and resilience being tested time and time again. In this part of the adventure, it is not the goal of the journey which is the teacher, rather it is the process of the journey itself. This could be the actual rules of the session, or the retreat center.

Alongside their allies and teachers, the adventurer starts to prepare for the ordeal, or the test. This could be, in the Trauma-Informed PM journey, the stages of assessment, screening, preparation and intention setting.

3.3 THE ORDEAL OR THE ABYSS

At the pinnacle of the adventure lies the stage of the Ordeal, which can be the central life or death crisis, where the hero/heroine faces their great fears, and confronts this most difficult challenge. This stage is seen as the central and most essential, and at times, magical stage of any Journey. It is believed that only through this "death" can the hero/heroine be reborn, experiencing a resurrection which may grant them deeper insight, power and love to see the Journey to the end.

In the PM journey, this stage can be seen as the PM experience, where the hero/ heroine partakes of the PM over a period of time. In the PM experience, the adventurer may have an ego-death experience, or face a traumatic memory, or gain insights or healing pertaining to their intention. It may also go the other way, where the hero/ heroine experiences frustration where their expectations with the PM are not met. Or they may go through a terrifying experience where they can make no sense of.

As Trauma-Informed Facilitators, we are mindful of how the PM can bring up traumatic memories and some of these memories can be a terrifying experience. We help our participants to be present so that they can overcome the obstacles as their allies and teachers in the safest way so that their vulnerabilities can be seen, felt and held in awareness.

There are times when the trauma which arises during a PM ceremony is not yet resolved in the minds and bodies of the participants, and they may need more assistant and support in trauma resolution. This is where we can support them in the integration and post-ceremony process.

Typically, there is a reward given to heroes for passing the Supreme Ordeal in the hero's journey. In the PM world, this may look like an insight, a healing experience, resolution in a relationship, or a spiritual understanding or state. Sometimes, the reward is not straightforward, and it may take time to process the deeper meaning of a PM experience. It is our role as facilitators to help the integration of all of the above in a way which is traumasensitive.

3.4 THE TREASURE, RETURN & NEW LIFE

When the hero/heroine has survived death, overcome his greatest fear, confronts their traumatic experiences, they now possess a treasure and reward. This reward may come in many forms. In the application with PM, This may be freedom from a certain experience which has been holding them back. It may be the strength and resilience they cultivated whilst being in a challenging experience. Or it may be an insight which they may have realised.

Having endured the trials and hardships of the adventure, the hero/heroine returns home. But the hero is no longer the same. An internal transformation has taken place through the maturation process of the experience. In some cases, they may not fully realise the extent of the transformation until later when they return to their "normal" life later, realising that their old life does not fit with the new person who has transformed any longer.

This stage in the TIPM process is the post-ceremony and integration part of the process, and in a way, this stage is one of the most crucial parts of the hero's journey. If the hero/heroine is not careful, they may misplace the treasure, or not value it enough. they may lose it, or feel lost and overwhelmed about the next steps ahead.

At a very basic level, the treasure of the PM may mean cleaning up areas of your life which can be in support of the newly upgraded self, or the treasure. This may include your job, your relationships, your environment, your diet, habits, mindset and emotions —all these are up for transformation in your physical reality in the weeks following ceremony.

A second aspect of integration involves shadow work or trauma work. As many of you know, PM can be a potent activator of the unconscious, bringing buried traumas, forgotten memories, and rejected aspects of self to our awareness.

The hero/heroine may need support to firstly, tolerating, then working with and understanding these. Integration, in large part, is the process of absorbing and resolving the trauma and forgotten aspects of self; quite literally, integrating it into your life and awareness. This inevitably changes many things ini your life, including your sense of self, your identity, and your purpose. This can be a deep and ongoing journey, and for some individuals, this may take time. This process is what I call Embodied Integration, where the treasure becomes not just an idea or an insight, but a lived experience.

As we continue, a third level of integration emerges: taking our gifts and what we learn into the world, showing up as our true whole selves. We begin to cultivate a way of being that is in touch with what really important, not just to our selves, but also to the world. In this way, this part of the process could be seen as a "new life" in the Hero's Journey. Our lives are never the same again, and we use what we know to support others who may be going through a similar journey. This could be a new path in life, or a new career path which is more resonant with who we truly are.

At this deepest level, integration demands that we transform our way of being and working with ourselves, our perceptions, and the world. All three of these levels of integration require tools and practices to support transformation-practical ways to work with body, spirit, heart, and mind.

At minimum, we need to know how to deal with difficult emotions and destructive mental patterns, and how to sustain a healthy body that is both grounded on Earth and connected with spirit. If we have any insufficiencies in these areas, we may have a challenging time in the integration process. In a way, it's not the medicine's work, but our work—integration work—to grow into new ways of being, and at times, this may require some effort and support. It is our role and responsibility of trauma-informed facilitators to support our participants in this endeavour as their allies and teachers.

In the next section, we will revisit the principles of Trauma-Informed PM facilitation with the lens of focusing on the practical application of this in the process of integration.



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TRAUMA-INFORMED

INTEGRATION:

THE OBJECTIVES & GOALS

4. TRAUMA-INFORMED INTEGRATION: THE OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

As a whole, the principles of TIPM apply to the entire process of the TIPM paradigm. In summary, the goal in TIPM is:

"The goal of a trauma-informed plant medicine facilitator is to support the participants to **build their resiliency**, **establish greater self-regulation**, and to support them in resolving the trauma in their body/minds with PM medicine and ASCs.

It is about helping them to feel safe, supported, and not alone, so that they can feel met, heard, empathised and attuned, and that they have choice and agency as much as possible so as to prevent re-traumatisation from happening.

A trauma-informed PM facilitator is sensitive to the needs of a participant with trauma symptoms and offers them tools to feel safe, empowered, and self-regulated **before**, **during and after** the PM experience."

- Atira Tan

As we apply this in the process of integration, the experience in ceremonies can sometimes be confusing, disorienting and terrifying. They can also bring up traumatic memories which the participant can find overwhelming, including past experiences of abuse, which can remain in their minds and bodies even after the ceremony. When this happens, part of our role and responsibility as a TIPM facilitator is to ensure that we can help the participant to **tolerate** uncomfortable sensations, to continue staying present, regulated and grounded, so that they can complete the trauma resolution process which they have started in ceremony.

We may offer them tools to feel safe and empowered, and to co-create an integration plan where they have choice and agency to identify their feelings and needs in order for a full embodied transformation to occur.

In addition, the trauma-informed principles also include the following:

• We assume that anyone walking into the PM space may have experienced trauma, and we treat them with the care, attunement, sensitivity and therapeutic presence which is needed.

This is the first and foremost principle of TIPM, and is true of the post-ceremony and integration experience. Most of the time after the ceremony, there can be more chatter and dialogue between participants, and the sharing of the experience in the ceremony.

Sometimes that helps with the integration process, but at other times, depending on the experience in ceremony, the resilience of the individual, as well as the trauma that they've had in their lives, the social nature and the break of the container of silence can be triggering and unsafe.

For others, they may need the comfort of social engagement which can bring them more in the present moment. In any case, as TIPM, we need to cater for the needs of the participants, and to ascertain and provide safety to those who may still be in the ASC, and to provide safety to those that prefer social engagement.

In addition, when we are providing integration sessions, we must always hold the trauma of the individual with care and gentleness. We are encouraged to apply the art of therapeutic presence with the attunement and sensitivity which is needed for safety and support for integration to occur.

- We recognise participants as experts on their bodies and experiences, and refrain from giving unsolicited advice which may belittle their experiences and feelings.
- We use trauma sensitive language which is attuned, strength-based, acknowledging and empathic of the participant's experience whilst listening for resources as it comes up in the person's body language or experience.
- We refrain from rigid, dismissive, "spiritual bypassing" analysis & positivesising statements and advice; instead, we listen more than we speak, using the language of inquiry, empathy and reflection.
- We ALWAYS give participants choice and promote their sense of agency and inner wisdom and knowing. We do not, in any way, force an experience on them.
- We are aware of our professional role as an authority figure in PM work, and uphold professional boundaries with our participants. We understand the importance of safety, consent, boundaries and refrain from "hands-on assists" or apply them cautiously if we do use them.

As we apply this principle in TIPM Post-Ceremony and Integration sessions, we are mindful NOT TO project, assume or provide unsolicited advice when the participants are sharing their PM experiences. This includes visions that we may "see" about the person in the PM ceremony.

I have seen facilitators go up to individuals after a ceremony, or perhaps in an integration session, and say: "Yes you were crying in the ceremony which means that you have a blocked heart chakra, and you have not resolved the grief that you've experienced in your life. You **need** to book in a session with me to clear your heart chakra and **should** do this as soon as possible."

These statements are very harmful and NOT trauma-informed nor are they empowering for the individual. These statements are an abuse of power (superiority complex) because we are acting as if we are experts of the participants bodies and experiences instead of supporting them to Instead, we hold a stance of being equal to these individuals, and to EMBODY the understanding that each individual has the wisdom inside of them to find the solution which suits them best. You can share your own embodied reflections of their story, but not in a manner which is condescending and disempowering.

We encourage you to respond in a trauma-sensitive approach:

- Listen with therapeutic presence and your full attention. Many people listen only halfway to a sentence until they work out what to say in response back. Listening with your full attention means that you're extending your undivided attention to the entirety of what the individual is sharing, and listening to not just their words, but also their body language, the presentation of their nervous systems, the feelings and desires behind their words, and the bigger picture of their world and experience.
- 2. Use empathic and reflection language which is attuned with the participant's words and feelings. It is important that the participant feels "gotten" or heard and seen by you as the facilitator. We do this by using reflection and picking up the key feeling words that they use to describe their experience. For example, if they have stated that they are feeling overwhelmed and ungrounded, and if this is uncomfortable for them, use the same words that they use. You may want to respond by saying: "I am hearing that you are feeling overwhelmed and ungrounded and this is uncomfortable for you. I'm here to support you in any way I can."
- 3. Ask the right questions and offer support with invitational language which promotes the participant's choice and agency. Instead of giving advice, ask questions which can provide you with good information on how to support the participant in the best way possible. Listen for their strengths and resources and reflect this back to the participant. For example, you can say:

"Even though you're feeling ungrounded, I can see that you're still being present with me at the moment. I'm wondering if this feels supportive to you noticing that we're here together and you're not alone in this experience."

Use invitational language such as "I'm wondering", or "I'm curious", or "perhaps" or "maybe". For example, instead of saying: "Where are you feeling overwhelmed and ungrounded in your body?", say:

"I'm curious to know if you notice where you're feeling ungrounded in your body and perhaps you'd like to explore this together."

If you're wanting to offer a suggestion which you feel may be helpful for the participant, instead of offering in statements such as "You need to ground yourself by putting your feet on the floor.", instead, say this:

"I have a suggestion which may be helpful to ground you. May I offer this suggestion?"

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or
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"What do you feel would be helpful to ground you at this time?"

Be mindful to avoid having a "superiority complex" and assuming that you know better, or know things about the participant which are projections and assumptions without checking in with the individual first. This could be potentially harmful, especially in the power dynamic. As facilitators, we hold the participant's inner wisdom in the highest regard, and communicate in ways where we can bring out their own knowledge and expertise, instead of our own.

• We aim to create a safe, comfortable spaces that is empowering for all participants, and provide them support structures systems before, during and after the PM experience.

In the post-ceremonial experience, we are extra mindful and careful to support participants who may still be in an ASC even though the formal ceremonial experience is over. This may involve setting aside a quiet space away from chatter and noise (which can be overwhelming for some participants) with one or two support people who can care for the needs of such individuals.

In addition, after the ceremony, especially for participants who went through a traumatic or challenging time in the ceremony, they may need one on one support to ground or settle their nervous systems, or someone to chat about their experience. We want to ensure that these support systems are available if there is a need.

In addition, ICEERS suggest that a post-ceremony integrative practice could be putting out some art materials or journalling materials so that the individuals can have the opportunity for further integration after the ceremony if need be. This is not an "art therapy" workshop, so this time is spacious and open. It is advisable to have a support person around to welcome the individuals to the space, and orient them to the room and art/journalling materials.

It would also be helpful, depending on the needs of the participants, to make the space a silent one, for integration instead of chatter and conversation which could take participants away from their own individual process.

In the day after the ceremony, support structures which could be helpful for integration are the following:

- A free form art workshop.
- A gentle breath and movement workshop. (No intense breath work experiences)
- A group sharing.
- An Integration workshop.
- An integration document for participants to keep.
- Sharing the integration structure following the ceremony. For example: "Mr X. will be in touch with you to schedule your first individual integration session, and in three weeks, we will schedule a group integration Zoom session for us to onnect again. Mr. X and you will determine how many integration sessions would be helpful for this part of the process, and if you need anything else, I will be available to contact on this email/phone number."

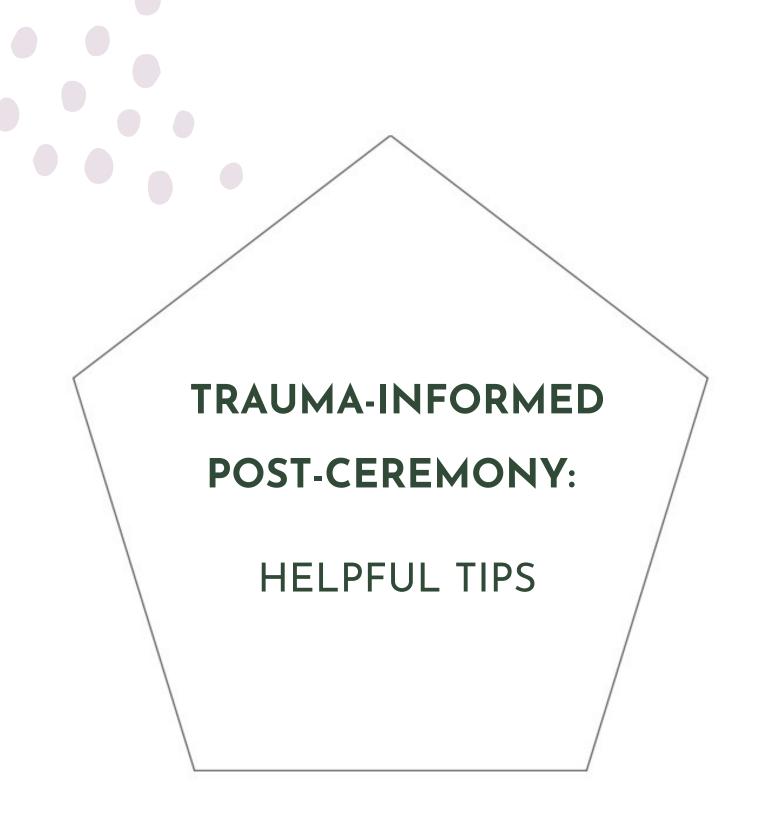
Please ensure that all spaces for these activities are comfortable and that they are inclusive for everyone to join.

For example, if there is someone who has a hip problem, or finds movement difficult, you may want to do something more gentle such as an art workshop instead of a movement workshop so that the individual feels included in the offerings. Also, remember that in trauma healing, LESS IS MORE, so from a trauma informed perspective, it is not helpful to offer activating PM offerings which will stimulate the nervous systems of the participants more.

• We may share ways of self-regulation and clearly explain the guidelines of support that can facilitate calmness and stabilisation for our participants before, during and after the PM experience.

In the post-ceremonial experience, we are extra mindful and careful to support After the ceremonial experience, it may be helpful to share ways of selfregulation and the 101 of trauma resolution to participants to help them to implement in their daily lives if they feel wobbly or perhaps if they experience flashbacks of traumatic memories.

It is advisable to have a "self-regulation" document of activities they can do to help regulate themselves after the retreat/ session, and to do this in a workshop or practice this the day after.



5. TRAUMA INFORMED POST-CEREMONY: HELPFUL TIPS

According to ICEERS, the best practices for post-ceremony are:

- Give the participants ample time to recover before allowing them to leave the premises and make sure they have room to do so. Traditionally, participants may return to their beds or remain in the ceremonial space until morning.
- 2. Ensure that there is ongoing support available for those who need it. Depending on the nature of the ceremony, this could include therapeutic support from a specialised therapist, the facilitator or a support person.
- 3. Provide an integration area, where the participants can individually or together use creative materials (pencils and crayons for drawing, etc.) as they process their experience.
- 4. Ensure that all participants have the opportunity to share their experience with the rest of the group.
- Be mindful of the interventions during the share group. An active listening attitude, without judgment nor interpretation that can narrow the amplitude of the experience. Allow the participant to reach his/her own conclusions and interpretations.
- 6. Check the physical and emotional state of all participants before they leave.
- 7. Offer additional support after the ceremony such as integration sessions.
- 8. Direct participants to a qualified professional if you are unable to provide the level of support that they require during their integration process.
- 9. Ask the participants to fill again the health questionnaire during the next week/ months to measure any sustainable changes from the PM experience.

Many of the above trauma-informed post ceremony tips have been mentioned above. Some additional helpful tips are:

- It is helpful to have specialised trauma therapist in the retreat or ceremony weekend to care for the participants who have traumatic experiences of memories arise. If a participant is still in an ASC, or is disoriented, create a safe and quiet space where the therapist can see the individual and support the participant after the ceremony is over.
- In addition, if an individual has a particularly terrifying or confusing experience, it may be helpful for the participant to rest first (to settle and calm the nervous system) and then have an individual session the next day after they have rested. This is because in order for integration to happen through titration (which means that the participant can process the ceremony, a little bit at a time), the nervous systems needs to be stable and calm. If the participant is still agitated and in hypo/ hyper arousal, it is likely that very little somatic integration will occur.
- If a participant is still in hypo/hyper arousal after the ceremony is over, and they are not in the ASC, help them to come back to the present moment with tools and tips that you learnt from Mod 1. These may include:
 - Orienting with their senses, especially their eyes or ears, instead of keeping their eyes closed to their inner world,
 - Grounding them by helping them to notice their mid-line and the support of the earth.
 - Social engagement, such as greeting them with kind eyes and a warm and genuine smile, and taking an interest in who they are and their lives.
 - Self-contact exercises such as getting them to hold their upper arms, or pressing into their feet to feel the container of their bodies.
- When you're doing a group share the next day, it would be also helpful to do a check in with the participants on their physical bodies and their emotions.

You could lead them in a short meditation, where they can come up with an image, or a word to describe their bodies and their inner landscape of emotions and sensations. You can use this information to ascertain how participants are feeling, and whether they are ready to emerge back into the "ordinary" reality of the world. This may also include activities such as driving or going back to work.

- Prepare an integration workshop where all can attend where you share:
 - Integration: what is it, and why is it important.
 - What integration can look like for some.
 - Some helpful tools, practices and tips for integration.
 - Emotional support and 101 on trauma integration and resolution.
 - Brainstorming one or two things they can do (action steps) in the next few weeks which can integrate their insights into reality.
 - A document of external resources such as integration specialists, trauma therapists and other helpful people which can support their process.
 - A document of the integration structure and system that you have in place. For example: Support people to call in an emergency, frequency of integration sessions, times/ dates of group integration sessions etc.
 - A document for practices that the participants can do to help ground, self- regulate and integrate their experiences.
- In addition, it would be helpful to have an anonymous feedback form, or an evaluation form (evaluating the mental state and wellbeing of the participant) to measure any improvements emailed to the group two weeks after the session/s are over. If you do, please inform the group of this during the post-ceremony group sharing.



6. ASPECTS OF SELF FOR INTEGRATION

There are many layers and levels in Integration work. For example, integration can involve emotional and spiritual support before and after ayahuasca use, as well as support to understand and incorporate teachings into day-to-day life.

In indigenous communities where PM is part of ritual and rites of healing, ayahuasca is an integral piece of the culture. Truly, it takes a village to heal. In indigenous communities, as we learnt in Module 1, they are shaped by a collectivist paradigm.

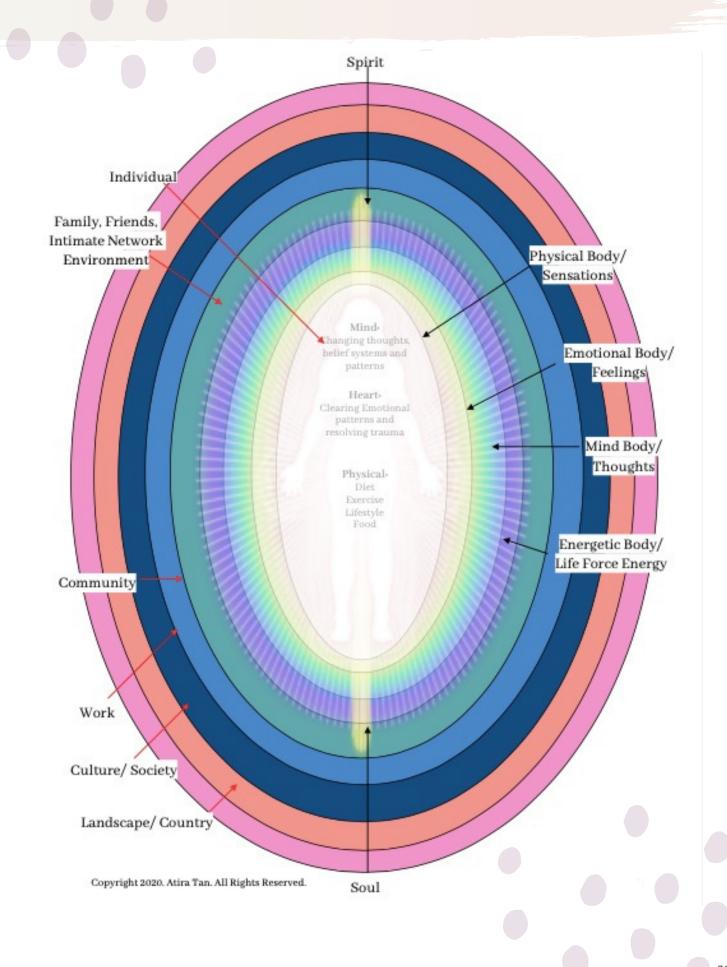
However, this is not true in the Western world; so we travel to foreign lands to attend traditional or hybrid ceremonies or we participate in ceremonies close to our own homes, far from the medicine's roots and cultural container. And unlike indigenous communities, our Western world is shaped by an individualist and egoist paradigm, and not many of us are supported by a community.

One of the biggest challenges people face when returning home from an ayahuasca experience is a lack of community. This can be especially true in underground communities where secrecy is part of the culture. As such, the sense of alienation and disconnection that most Westerners experience—whether consciously or subconsciously—can become magnified after a PM experience. A strong community is vital to the health of an individual and their personal growth and healing can be supported best when one feels a sense of belonging, both socially and spiritually.

A person's capacity for integration of the PM experience and the support which is available for such integration can have important influences on the outcomes for a participant. For example, the integration process can heighten the positive effects of ayahuasca use, and it can make the difference between the unnecessary suffering of memories of a traumatic experience resurfacing, and a potent experience of growth that is both challenging and healing.

In order to best support an individual, it is important to understand the different aspects of self. We are helping them in the transformation process in each part, not just merely the physical, or their work life, or in their relationship as singular units, but the understanding that each parts affect a greater whole.

INTEGRATION ASPECTS OF THE SELF



When we explore the process of integration, it is helpful to understand the different aspects which makes up an individual, as well as the environmental factors that affects us as individuals. Integration may mean creating change and transformation to all the levels of existence simultaneously, depending on the PM experience.

These layers are:

Aspects which make up the individual:

- 1. Physical body
- 2. Emotional body
- 3. Psychological/Mental body
- 4. Energetic Body
- 5. Soul Body
- 6. Spirit Body

As you may know, these bodies overlap and what happens in the emotional body will affect the physical body. Similarly, our connection with our soul and soul's purpose also affects our mental body and our energy.

In addition, external aspects which also affects the individual are:

- 1. Family, close intimate circle, home environment
- 2. Our community or outer circle of friends.
- 3. Work and institutions.
- 4. Collective cultural & societal conditioning
- 5. Landscape and larger environment.

When we support the integration of the individual, it is important that we understand the different layers of self and environment which can support the change and transformation of the participant.

For example, the participant may need to make changes in their relationship to their physical body such as changing lifestyle habits, exercise, diet, and getting help to heal their physical body. They may need help to embody their insights from the PM experience. This may also include receiving support to resolve any lingering emotions or feelings which may have arisen from the PM ceremony due to the remembrance of a trauma imprint.

Furthermore, the individual may need support to change thought patterns and belief systems, and ways of thinking in their mental body.

In addition, we also want to look at the external factors which can affect the individual. These include relationships with close intimate family members or friends, and changing the external environment, or in some cases, changing the relationship which we have to the external environment which can support a more harmonious integration experience.

For example, if an individual's intention for PM session is to stop addictions to alcohol, it's important to offer support around the participant's friendship circle, and if their friends are still using alcohol and drugs, or if they are going to a gathering the next day after a PM session to an environment where drugs and alcohol are part of the culture, it may be difficult for the individual to uphold the insights and changes received from the PM in the environment.

Integration sessions may need to address this, and to support the participant to create a plan where they are supported to either create new friendship groups or a new community which is more resonant and supportive to their desire of stopping the alcohol addiction, or what to do when the urge to drink happens.

As mentioned, it takes a community to heal, so it's important that we create awareness for participants in integration sessions to look at their integration in a holistic way for a deeper anchoring and healing experience.





7. TRAUMA-INFORMED INTEGRATION: THE CATEGORIES

In my experience of facilitating integration sessions with hundreds of PM participants, I have seen emerging patterns in the post-ceremony experience. These include:

Most participants leave a ceremony or a retreat on a high from the experience with PM. They leave excited and pleased with their new found insights and the change and transformation during their time with the sacred PM.

However, with most cases, this exhilaration and feeling lasts for about 4 -6 weeks, and the changes start to fade away, and the individual realises that they have fallen back into their old habit patterns. Their insights are not fully embodied, and they realise that they may need support to help them with father integrating this change deeper in their bodies, minds and lives.

In some cases, participants are disoriented still from the ceremony, especially if they have experienced a terrifying experience, or perhaps re-connected to an old trauma imprint or memory. When they leave the retreat or the session, they are either in high sympathetic (flight or fight), or in dorsal vagal (freeze). These participants need support immediately, either during the post-ceremony time, or immediately within the next week, and perhaps may need additional integration sessions or therapy to support with their journey.

In a few cases, individuals have truly healed their traumas from the PM experience, and they need little effort to embody the transformation received. They leave the ceremonial space grounded, resilient and resourced.

In this training program, we will be focusing on three categories of integration. They are:

1. CLEANING THE WARDROBE

This category of integration may mean cleaning up and transforming areas and aspects of your life which can be in support of the newly upgraded self, or the insights that you've gained from the PM experience. This may also depend on your intention before ceremony, and what you wanted to change in your life.

Examples of this may include change in a person's job or life-path, how we relate to those around us in intimate relationships, our home and work environment and the community we surround ourselves with, our diet and how we care for our body, personal habits, transforming our mindset, caring for our emotions, spiritual practices which we may want to include in our lives – all these are up for transformation in your physical reality in the weeks following ceremony.

Part of what's needed in the integration process is **SPACE** and **TIME**. It is not advisable to go immediately back to work or a stressful environment after a PM experience. Change takes time, and in order to honour the sacred process of transformation, it's important to be patient, and to carve space to slow down so that we can change our physical reality for it to be resonant with the inner changes felt inside.

2. SHADOW WORK

The second aspect of integration involves shadow work or trauma work. As many of you know, PM can be a potent activator of the unconscious, bringing buried traumas, forgotten memories, and rejected aspects of self to our awareness. Ayahuasca use can also lead to a stripping of old psychological defences, leading to a rising up of fear, shame, disgust, anger, and grief, and these sometimes challenging states can persist for some time. It is also common for individuals to experience massive shifts in their perception of self and others; even of their view of the world and their role in it.

In more extreme cases, old traumas can resurface, a surge of psychiatric symptoms can ensue, or an individual can have an unfortunate encounter with a mal-intentioned ceremonial leader. Participants, depending on their individual resilience and resources, may need support to firstly, tolerate uncomfortable sensations and emotions pertaining to the PM experience, and then working with and understanding these with a professional specialised therapist or integration therapist who has a background in trauma recovery.

Integration, in this category, is the sacred phase of processing and resolving the trauma and forgotten aspects of self, and integrating it into the participant's life and awareness. This is not a quick fix, and it takes the right integration therapist with the right skills to support trauma recovery and resolution. This part of deeper healing and integration can inevitably be a catalyst for change in many aspects in life, including the individual's sense of self, their identity, and purpose. This can be a deep and ongoing journey, and for some individuals, this may take time. This process is what I call Embodied Integration, where the PM experience becomes a lived experience of deep somatic lived wisdom, on all levels from changes in the nervous system, to our thoughts and lifestyle, to our connection with all sentient beings.

3. TAKING IT OUT INTO THE WORLD

As we continue the integration journey, and depending on the spiritual commitment and maturity of an individual, a third level of integration may emerge. This category of integration involves us taking our gifts and what we learn from the PM into the world, selfactualising our potential, and showing up as our true whole selves.

In this category, participants have been in the process of healing and personal development for some time, and they start to move from the "me" to the "we". These individual have cultivated a way of being that is in touch with what really important, not just to their individual selves, but also to the world around them and the greater community.

In this way, this part of the process could be seen as a "new life" in the Hero's Journey. Our lives are never the same again, and we use what we know to support others who may be going through a similar journey. This could be a new path in life, or a new career path which is more resonant with who we truly are.

TRAUMA-INFORMED INTEGRATION:

THE PROCESS

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8. TRAUMA-INFORMED INTEGRATION: THE PROCESS

Integration can be a very personal process, and from a trauma-informed lens, each individual has different and unique needs for integration, depending on their PM experience. As integration coaches and therapists, we are encouraged to support the participant to firstly, process the PM experience, and secondly, to ask the right questions to find out how we can best support their intention for integration.

It would be helpful to provide participants with some integration tips and tools to support their integration process in a self-directed way. Integration tips may include tip on how to change and make space for the integration process to be honoured in their daily lives, how to transform their environment around them to support their inner change, and how to ask for help and additional support if needed.

In self-directed integration, we can turn to integration practices in the eastern, western and indigenous paradigms for inspiration to support us in this process. Such practices which may be helpful must always be aligned with the cultural/religious and spiritual beliefs of the individual, and should not be forced in any way on the participant.

I have found the article written by to be particularly helpful in looking at the different paradigms from different cultures in the area of integration. I have added excerpts from the article below for your reference and as a resource:

Practices from Eastern Spirituality

Eastern religions offer a multitude of practices to dissolve the separation created by the ego and reveal the light of the essential self. Buddhism gives us tools for wisdom and compassion: meditations to open and clarify the mind, and practices to unlock the heart.

The wisdom traditions of India offer many meditational and devotional methods, including the incredibly comprehensive practices of yoga in all its forms. Taoism, too, has practices to cultivate subtle energy and align oneself with the cosmos. All these are based on similar principles: that man, nature, and universe exist in fundamental harmony; that inner and outer, divine and human, are essentially one; that the universe and everything in it are expressions of a single fundamental reality; and that our limited, egoidentified sense of self is merely a contraction, a temporary forgetting, of this basic state.

Non-dual traditions, like Advaita, Kashmiri Shaivism, Zen, and Dzogchen may be particularly valuable to Westerners seeking to expand their egocentric worldview. There is much more to glean from Eastern traditions: sophisticated methods of working with the psycho-spiritual body through yoga, tai chi, qigong, and aikido; an understanding of the subtle body and the energies that dance their way through the channels and chakras; mantra and yantra, mandala and mudra, cosmologies that open to other realms and universes; respect for karma, the vast web of cause and effect we are constantly weaving, and the understanding that the "soul," non-existent though it ultimately is, has more than one life and inhabits more than one body through the spiritual evolution of reincarnation.

Practices from Western Spirituality

From the Western perspective, we draw on depth psychology, with its appreciation of the unconscious and the transpersonal. The work of Carl Jung, James Hillman, and others offers profound wisdom for integrating ayahuasca experiences with insights on the shadow, the psychodynamics of projection and introjection, and the power of archetypes and symbolism.

Jung's emphasis on wholeness rather than perfection is fundamental to the path of integration; so is Joseph Campbell's elucidation of the "Hero's Journey," which draws on mythology from around the globe to reveal the collective unconscious at work. Depth psychology offers many ways to listen to the language of the soul as it speaks through dreams, images, symbols, and creativity. Journaling, art therapy, active imagination and dreamwork are all channels through which the unconscious can become more conscious; a process that lies at the heart of integration.

Further useful perspectives can be gathered from somatic psychology, including the growing understanding of how to work with trauma in an embodied way, as in Somatic Experiencing and Sensorimotor Psychotherapy.

More resources come from the many contemporary non-dual spiritual teachers of the West. Adyashanti, A. H. Almaas, Catherine Ingram, Byron Katie, Eckhart Tolle, Matt Kahn, Jeff Foster, and many more, all speak of the direct experience of reality as fundamental wholeness, free of identification and concepts. Rooted in Eastern spiritual traditions, this is wisdom presented in modern form. Finally, from the West we can draw on the astonishing perspectives revealed by quantum physics. Here, the mechanistic worldview explodes into an understanding of a holographic universe, in which apparently discrete particles are actually streaming waves of probability, and conceptual categorization collapses into a realm where all things are non-locally united in an invisible, indivisible whole.

Practices from Indigenous Spirituality.

Indigenous worldviews are embodied by thousands of traditional cultures on every inhabited continent. Even Europe has its indigenous wisdom traditions, though these have been largely destroyed; first, by the Church; then, the modern religion of scientific materialism. Through the indigenous perspective, we come to understand the natural world as sacred and vibrantly alive. Rituals for connecting with nature and ways to heal through it pervade the indigenous practices of shamanism with their spirit journeys, divination, and healing techniques, and animals, protectors, and totems. Here again, there is an appreciation of dreams and an understanding of the fluidity of human identity and our interconnection with the whole.

Indigenous perspectives are not so much religions as ways of perceiving and relating to this Earth, and the worlds beyond. Diverse indigenous cultures—Maori, Shipibo, Yupik, Lakota, and thousands more—are deeply familiar with the unique spirits, plants, and powers of their homelands. The plant spirit of ayahuasca has been collaborating with indigenous peoples of the Upper Amazon for a very, very long time.

One thing indigenous peoples understand very well is how everything is interconnected. This unbroken sense of connection with nature—the recognition that we humans are organically interwoven into the fabric of nature and cosmos—is perhaps the most significant gift. The Quechua people of Peru understand this as ayni, "sacred reciprocity," a way of honoring the relationship between humans and the larger sentience of the world, and seeking to live in balance with it. Modern culture has lost the sense of reciprocity with nature that infuses traditional cultures, and the ensuing hubris threatens the entire planet.

The indigenous worldview comes surging back in through ayahuasca; part of the healing that reconnects us to a larger matrix. Post-ceremony, it is very common to feel a new sense of belonging to nature, along with a responsibility to protect creation and use its gifts wisely. The understanding that the Earth is alive, that creation is intelligent, and we are part of the web of life: these are some of the many gifts that come from working with ayahuasca.

In this process, we are healing our fragmented modern minds. Ayahuasca's work takes place on many levels, not least in repairing the Cartesian split of mind/body and man/ nature. The medicine reconnects brain with body, a valuable contributor, but no longer the master. In reuniting with nature, we are reweaving ourselves back into the matrix of life in a way that is urgently, desperately needed. Eastern, Western, or indigenous; all three perspectives provide ways for us to open up to something greater than our conscious minds, be it Self, the unconscious, or the universe. Humans are part of the bigger picture, but only part. From all these perspectives we gain clues as to how to work with integration. We draw in all sorts of possibilities and examine them for what is most useful to our particular situation. There is always room for more on the path of growth. The integration process does not end – ever. It is the ongoing process of life moving into further complexity and deeper simplicity. And it is up to us to live it, to make it real.

- Sourced from <u>https://chacruna.net/world-best-practices-integrating-ayahuasca/</u> Written by Kerry Moran, M.A with acknowledgement to Matthew Watherson.

8.1 SELF-DIRECTED INTEGRATION

Integration practices can help these individuals to navigate the changes that accompany such profound internal transformation. There is still a gap, though, between the large numbers of people who seek healing and the number of people who can support them.

In the meantime, self-directed integration can be useful approach to avoid an emotional or spiritual crisis, manage overwhelming experiences, and deepen the teaching and healing that can follow ayahuasca use. Dr. Adele Lafrance, Tanya Mate and the Temple of the Way of Light have identified several self-directed strategies that individuals can utilise in the absence of, or as a complement to, more formal integration support which I am sharing below:

Reflection Practices that Support Integration

1. Listen to your body. Ask yourself on a daily basis: "What is the most loving thing I can do for myself today?" Let your body provide you with that answer. You may discover the extent to which you need physical rest, nourishment, or even hydration.

2. Connect with your body. Go for a massage, practice a martial art, or engage in yoga or mindfulness. There is a growing body of research relating to the mental health benefits of increasing the connection to one's body.

Meditate. The benefits of meditation are well documented and include enhanced physical functioning as well as an improved capacity to regulate one's emotions.
Vipassana, Zen, The Presence Process, etc.: find the fit that is right for you.

4. Practice gratitude. Make a daily list of people and things for which you are grateful. Not only does the practice of gratitude act as an antidepressant, it increases access to positive memories, among other positive outcomes.

5. Journal. Write about your experiences in ceremony, but also about your thoughts, emotions and sensations in the body. Reread your journal to stay connected to the insights and teachings.

6. Recall "positive" ceremony experiences. Take some time to remember those moments in ceremony that were especially joyous, connected, loving, or ineffable. Invite those experiences into your body and let them ground you in the here and now.

7. Read books. Ask friends and professionals for their favourite contemplative and integrationsupporting books. Some of our favourites include Eckhart Tolle, Jack Kornfield, and Adyashanti.

8. Get creative. Write, draw, paint, sculpt; even if you have zero artistic ability. Creative activities can have a healing and protective effect on mental well being. They can also promote relaxation, reduce blood pressure, and even boost the immune system.

9. Spend time in nature. Purposefully reflect on your experiences and feelings in this setting. Take advantage of the direct and positive impacts of nature on well being.

10. Cultivate your spirituality. Religious and spiritual practices are positively related mental and physical health. Pray to God, to Creator or to universal love. You don't need to be clear about your religious or spiritual identity to ask for external support, guidance, and reassurance that life is unfolding as it should.

<u>Creating an Integration-Friendly Environment</u>

1. Take time for yourself. Take time off from school, work, or extracurricular activities. Healing with ayahuasca can be regarded as spiritual surgery. And, like any surgery, rest and recovery time are essential. You may also plan for a gradual return to normal activities.

2. Avoid harshness. Whether in the form of loud noises, scents, or even sights; take a break from things that are jarring. You may even avoid the news for a while.

3. Engage in soothing practices. Take a bath. Listen to soothing music. Snuggle with your pet. Drink comforting tea or sink into a really comfortable bed.

4. Create a relaxing environment. Clean up, de-clutter, buy some plants, light candles. Let your external environment influence your internal environment in a good way.

5. Clean up your relationships. In the words of Rumi: "Be with those who help your being." Invest in nourishing relationships that promote healing and growth. You may also avoid toxic relationships until you have the strength to change their course through assertion, forgiveness, or letting go.

<u>Ways to Ask for Help</u>

1. Connect to supportive others on the Internet. There is a growing global community of people working with ayahuasca, connecting via moderated Facebook groups and other online forums. Take advantage of the benefits of social technologies.

2. Talk about your experiences with trusted others. Peer or informal support can be very beneficial and can help you to feel supported. It can also help you to make sense of your experiences. But be cautious: start slow and test the waters before sharing the vulnerable details.

3. Connect with retreat leaders or assistants. If you are struggling, email or call the people who hosted, organized, or led the ceremonies and ask for support. The ceremonial leaders themselves may not always be available, but they may connect you to those individuals in their community who can connect with you.

4. Attend an integration circle. There are circles happening all over the world. They may be hosted through your local psychedelic club, or you may find a circle that is ayahuascaspecific. These are usually best if led by an experienced clinician. Join the community. Share. Ask for help.

5. Find a psychedelic-friendly psychotherapist or an experienced integration provider. Connect with organizations comprised of psychedelic researchers and clinicians. For example, MAPS has a directory of individuals and organizations in the mental health field who can help people to integrate past psychedelic experiences, and in Europe, resources and integration support are available through ICEERS.

It is encouraged for you as the facilitator to suggest that participants experiment and try new things as it pertains to integration. It can be highly beneficial to work at integrating the healing and teachings at each of the aspects of self. Integration practices can be difficult to maintain, but they can also be highly rewarding.

- Sourced from <u>https://chacruna.net/taking-charge-of-your-ayahuasca-integration/</u> Written by Dr. Adele LaFrance & Tania Mate.

8.2 INTEGRATION SESSIONS: COACHING OR THERAPY

As aforementioned, PM integration is a highly unregulated area of expertise, with many people offering psychedelic integration without the proper training or education. Much research still needs to be done in this field, however, there are a number of institutions which offer training and education programs in psychedelic integration and therapy.

1. California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS)

In 2015, CIIS started a formal training program called the Certificate in Psychedelicassisted Therapies and Research. The curriculum is a roughly 9- month course, and is broad in focus, interdisciplinary, and covers classic psychedelic medicines (e.g., psilocybin, ayahuasca, peyote, LSD) as well as the newer medicines (sometimes labeled empathogens or entactogens) like MDMA and ketamine.

2. Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS)

Inhas an MDMA Therapy Training Program for PTSD. More information can be found: <u>https://integration.maps.org/</u>

3. Compass Pathways offers a 5 day training program in psychedelic therapy with psilocybin.

Their therapist training programme has been designed by leading experts from the fields of psychology, psychiatry and psychedelic therapy research, and approved by the FDA.

Applicants must be registered mental health professionals. They are typically mental health nurses, clinical psychologists, or psychiatrists with experience in counselling or psychotherapy. Therapists are chosen based on core qualities of compassion, openness, presence, and motivation to help patients. More information can be found: <u>https://compasspathways.com/</u>

This training program does not qualify anyone to become a psychedelic integration coach or therapist, however, it will assist facilitators and those who are practicing as integration coaches or therapists to look at the integration process from a trauma- informed perspective.

Firstly, it is highly encouraged that integration practitioners possess a minimum qualification of counselling, coaching, psychotherapy, psychology or the equivalent. It would be helpful to also have a minimum of one year's experience working in the mental health sector, or in social work, or trauma recovery.

8.3 ELEMENTS OF TRAUMA-INFORMED PM INTEGRATION

In trauma-informed PM integration, the body is the key. As Dr. Bessel van Der Kolk states, as we have learnt in Module 1:



"The memory of trauma is imprinted on the human organism.

I don't think you can overcome it unless you learn to have a friendly relationship with your body.

Trauma victims cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations in their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort.

Physical self-awareness is the first step in releasing the tyranny of the past."

— Bessel A. van der Kolk (2014)

In addition, Dr. van der Kolk goes on to share the following four fundamental truths, which we can apply to the process. Let's explore these fundamental truths as it pertains to PM integration.

Our capacity to destroy one another is matched by our capacity to heal one another. Restoring relationships and community is central to restoring wellbeing.

As PM integration workers, remember that RELATIONSHIP IS KEY. Frequently, trauma happens when an individual is alone without support. Therefore, being a safe and regulated person where the participant can connect to share their PM experience can be a very healing experience.

Many PM participants do not have a supportive community around them, and their experience with PM can be a very isolating experience when they return home. It's very challenging to share and communicate such an experience with those that have not experienced ASC.

Furthermore, individuals may find it confronting or difficult when their close and intimate circle of friends may find it challenging relating to their experience of ASC, or trauma. The inner change experienced in a ceremony or a retreat may be harsh if the outer world has not changed in unison and is not aligned with their newly upgraded selves.

In addition, it is not uncommon for those who do not understand the PM experience to judge or criticise the individual's experience. The participant can enter their new life feeling deeply isolated and alone, and this experience can be re-traumatising for many.

As PM integration workers, it is encouraged that we are aware of this, and to find out information from them about the relationships around them after the PM experience. The support and connection created in just one integration session may mean the world to a participant.

If the participant does not have a community of like-minded individuals around them, the integration worker may need to co-create a plan with them to encourage them to connect with some communities or spiritual groups where they can build new friendships and relationships, which are more aligned with their newly upgraded self.

(2) Language gives us the power to change ourselves and others by communicating our experiences, helping us to define what we know, and finding a common sense of meaning.

In PM integration, we assist participants, through sometimes different modalities of communication (words, art, music, poetry) which can help individuals to process their PM experiences. Some of these experiences can be scary, frightening and disorienting, and at times, don't make much rational sense.

Part of our role as an integration worker is to ask the right questions to encourage the quality of self-reflection and inquiry to support the individual to explore and to make meaning of their experiences. This also includes the utilisation of traumainformed language and reflective listening, listening to the strengths, resources, nervous system and body language of the individual.

Being able to communicate in this way, through words or any other modality, helps to expand different ways of seeing and understanding our selves as it pertains to the PM experience. This information supports the individual to understand how to take effective action in the integration process so that they can embody the insights learnt.

(3) We have the ability to regulate our own physiology, including some of the so-called involuntary functions of the body and brain, through such basic activities as breathing, moving, and touching.

As trauma-informed integration workers and facilitators, we are tracking and noticing the nervous systems of participants, even in the integration sessions and process. Ask yourself: Are they resourced and regulated? Are they activated and in fight/flight? Or are they collapsed and in freeze? Noticing the individual's nervous system can provide us with important information on how the process of integration is for the participants.

If you notice that an individual is in sympathetic or dorsal vagal activation, as an integration therapist, you may ask the individual if it would be helpful to share some tips and tools on self-regulation. These may include resources such as orienting, grounding, centering, movement, and self-touch to assist them in stabilising their nervous systems.

Part of trauma healing and recovery lies in the body. Therefore, in order for trauma resolution to happen, we are encouraged to bring the body, breath and at times, movement into the session. Questions which can help assist this process may be:

"When you remember this part of your ceremony, what do you notice in your body now?"

or

"Would it be possible to slow down here, and to notice what happens inside as you share your PM story?"

We guide the participants to their inner wisdom through connecting them to their innate knowing and intelligence.

(4) We can change social conditions to create environments in which children and adults can feel safe and where they can thrive.

As mentioned before, our environment and intimate relationships affect us, and it's important to support PM participants to feel safe after a retreat or ceremony. At times, emerging out of a PM retreat can feel like being a new-born baby. We may feel vulnerable, open and sensitive to the outer world.

This is a precious time where deep healing and integration can happen, and akin to keeping a baby safe and secure during the post-natal period. Therefore, part of the integration process is to ensure that individuals are empowered to create safe environments after the PM ceremony, and in their lives.

At times, PM participants may need a plan which may take time to create a new environment where they can thrive. This may include changing their friends, moving homes, getting in contact with new communities, and ending unhealthy relationships. At times, this may follow with a grieving process, or individual may need support to conjure the power and courage to follow through with endings and new beginnings.

As PM integration workers and facilitators, we are encouraged to be sensitive to the needs of such individuals, and they may need some additional support in order to move from living in unhealthy and at times, unsafe environments, to safety and support. Dr. van der Kolk continues to share:

"When we ignore these quintessential dimensions of humanity (the above four truths), we deprive people of ways to heal from trauma and restore their autonomy."

Therefore, supporting PM individuals to become a participant in one's own healing process can create inclusion in community, and bring people closer to their inner sense of self.

Therefore, part of our role of PM integration workers is to support participants to EMBODY their insights and gifts offered through the PM experience. **The body is key. The nervous system is key.** Mental insight is simply not enough. We want these insights to anchor in the nervous system. Dr. van der Kolk continues to share his body- oriented approach:

"In my practice I begin the process by helping my patients to first notice and then describe the feelings in their bodies—not emotions such as anger or anxiety or fear but the physical sensations beneath the emotions: pressure, heat, muscular tension, tingling, caving in, feeling hollow, and so on. I also work on identifying the sensations associated with relaxation or pleasure. I help them become aware of their breath, their gestures and movements.

The mind needs to be reeducated to feel physical sensations, and the body needs to be helped to tolerate and enjoy the comforts of touch. Individuals who lack emotional awareness are able, with practice, to connect their physical sensations to psychological events. Then they can slowly reconnect with themselves."

It's helpful to assist individuals to start connecting to their bodies, and to introduce a somatic approach in PM integration. We will go deeper into this subject in the next part of our workshop.



In a nutshell, a guide to our role and responsibility as integration workers involve:

- Supporting the participant to process or "make sense" of the PM experience, and helping the individual to debrief the experience.
- 2. Helping the participant to understand the "treasure" or the insights gained from the PM experience.
- 3. Assisting the individual to process any traumatic imprints or memories which may arise in the PM ceremony or session. If we are not qualified for this, please refer the participant to someone who is specialised.
- 4. Guiding the participant to resolve any fight/flight/freeze responses which may have arisen in the PM Ceremony or session. If we are not qualified for this, please refer the participant to someone who is specialised.
- 5. Supporting the participant to integrate any beneficial experiences in the PM ceremony so that these experiences are embodied and anchored in the nervous system, so that it can percolate throughout all the aspects of their lives in a holistic way.
- 6. Inspiring participants to create an integration plan with practices which can support their inner change with outer change.
- 7. Follow-up with participants on their progress (pertaining to their intention) and providing any support which they may need in their journey.

8.4 HEAL: TURNING STATES INTO TRAITS BY DR. RICK HANSEN

Dr. Rick Hansen, Ph.D, is is a psychologist, senior fellow of at UC Berkeley, and New York Times best-selling author. He has pioneered positive neuroplasticity to develop one's inner strengths and resources, and is a New York Times best selling author in his numerous books on positive psychology.

Dr. Hansen has created a technique and approach called HEAL, which assists individuals to anchor and grow positive experiences and strengths in the brain and the nervous system, so that such experiences become embodied and hardwired into our lives through internalising positive experiences.

I have found his method useful in PM integration, especially to support individuals to embody positive PM experiences in their bodies, lives and nervous systems. In this way, the positive insights become a lived reality, instead of an experience which one will forget in time.

In brief, **HEAL** is the deliberate internalisation of positive experiences in implicit memory. It involves four simple steps:

H: Have a positive experience.

Here, you can invite the individual to remember some of the top three positive experiences which was gained in the PM experience, and to share the story of their experience. Listen for the highlights, or the core pivotal experiences in the story. Then enrich the experience with the following steps.

<u>E: Enrich it.</u>

There are five ways to enrich an experience:





- Lengthen it. Stay with it for five, ten, or more seconds. The longer that neurons fire together, the more they tend to wire together. Protect the experience from distractions, focus on it, and come back to it if your mind wanders.
- Intensify it. Open to it and let it be big in your mind. Turn up the volume by breathing more fully or getting a little excited.
- **Expand it**. Notice other elements of the experience. For example, if you're having a useful thought, look for related sensations or emotions.
- Freshen it. The brain is a novelty detector, designed to learn from what's new or unexpected. Look for what's interesting or surprising about an experience. Imagine that you are having it for the very first time.
- Value it. We learn from what is personally relevant. Be aware of why the experience is important to you, why it matters, and how it could help you.

Any one of these methods will increase the impact of an experience, and the more, the better.

A: Absorb it.

You can increase the absorption of an experience in three ways:

- Intend to receive it. Consciously choose to take in the experience.
- Sense it sinking into you. You could imagine that the experience is like a warm, soothing balm or a jewel being placed in the treasure chest of your heart. Give over to it, allowing it to become a part of you.
- Reward yourself. Tune into whatever is pleasurable, reassuring, helpful, or hopeful about the experience. Doing this will tend to increase the activity of two neurotransmitter systems-dopamine and norepinephrine-that will flag the experience as a "keeper" for long-term storage.

This is not about holding on to experiences. The stream of consciousness is constantly changing, so trying to cling to anything in it is both doomed and painful. But you can gently encourage whatever is beneficial to arise and stick around and sink in— even as you are letting go of it.

Happiness is like a beautiful wild animal watching from the edge of a forest. If you try to grab it, it will run away. But if you sit by your campfire and add some sticks to it, happiness will come to you, and stay.

- Lengthen it. Stay with it for five, ten, or more seconds. The longer that neurons fire together, the more they tend to wire together. Protect the experience from distractions, focus on it, and come back to it if your mind wanders.
- Intensify it. Open to it and let it be big in your mind. Turn up the volume by breathing more fully or getting a little excited.
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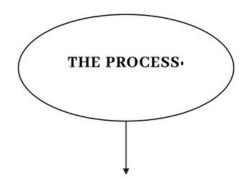
L: Link positive and negative material.

To link, start with something positive, such as the positive PM state. While having that experience, you can bring to mind some negative material for which it would be good medicine. Or, you can start with something that is uncomfortable, stressful, or harmful, perhaps a traumatic experience which you wanted to heal from the PM session. After noticing a bit of the traumatic experience and feelings, guide the individual back to the positive material to replace what you released, such as a sense of calm from knowing that people are actually interested in hearing what you have to say.

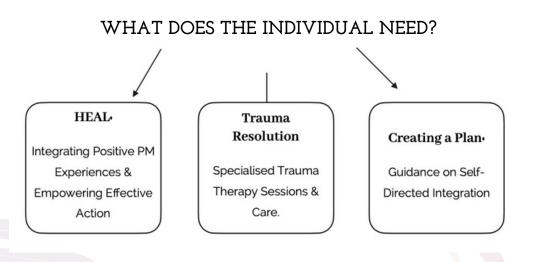
If you get pulled into the negative, drop it and focus only on the positive. And remember that this step is optional: If the challenge you're facing is too powerful, you can grow mental resources for addressing it through the first three HEAL steps alone.

Sourced from <u>https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/</u> how_to_hardwire_resilience_into_your_brain. Written by Dr. Rick Hansen.

8.5 TRAUMA-INFORMED PM INTEGRATION: SUGGESTED PROCESSES



- 1. Inquire about the participant's intention for PM session.
- 2. Inquire about the ceremonies and their experiences/themes.
- 3. Inquire about what they learnt about the experience about themselves
- 4. Inquire about how the participant has been after the retreat. What have they noticed? What are their challenges? What changes have they noticed? What are their strengths?
- 5. Inquire into what the individual may need currently. What do they need in order to attain theobjective of their intention? Do they need to change anything in their present day life? What is their wish?



DOES THE INDIVIDUAL NEED A FOLLOW-UP SESSION?

TRAUMA-INFORMED SOMATIC INTEGRATION:

AN INTRODUCTION

9. TRAUMA-INFORMED SOMATIC INTEGRATION: AN INTRODUCTION

Trauma-Informed Somatic Integration in Practice

In my work as an integration specialist, I frequently observe the mind grasping and understanding an insight that has been gleaned through the sacred medicine experience, coupled with a failure by the body to follow suit. The principal modalities that I use in my work are therefore ones that intend to support the process of embodiment, rather than disembodiment through mental analysis.

Somatic Psychology approaches, such as Somatic Experiencing, are my preferred methodologies because it targets the nervous system and bodily awareness. The experience of taking Ayahuasca is itself very somatic, that is it works very much through the intelligence of the body and the cells.

A participant may vomit, defecate, experience hot and cold sweats, scream, laugh or cry. Ingesting Ayahuasca is by nature a somatic experience, and therefore needs to be married with an equally somatic integration and holding process.

If we return to the ceremonial experience for a moment, we may be better able to comprehend how the modalities described work in practice. If, for example, a participant experiences an overwhelming surge of grief and despair during or shortly after ingesting Ayahuasca, oftentimes, no amount of talking will help. When a deeply held traumatic memory or feeling surfaces often the medicine itself may not be sufficiently able to resolve the grief, loneliness and fragility that has emerged.

Somatic Psychology approaches can be more suited to the resolution of such feelings and the integration of key learnings because they succeed in, what we term, "completing a trauma cycle," by re-regulating and reducing the arousal of the nervous system.

Somatic Experiencing works at the level of the "felt sense" and supports the resolution of confronting feelings and integration of vital insights by supporting the participant to return to their body, not their mind in order to make meaning from and about their experience.

Past clients have described Somatic Experiencing as opening up a kind of "spaciousness" within. And when that spaciousness has been created and felt into, the mind is a quick follow and starts to integrate the key learnings gleaned. In short, once the body understands and has made meaning from an experience, the mind will rapidly follow.

We are, however, more accustomed to wanting to talk through and analyse such experiences, which may, in some contexts proffer resolution of trauma, but in the long term, particularly within the context of the trauma that emerges for those seeking deep healing and insight through the use of psychedelics, the trauma must be resolved on the level of the felt senses if it is to become holistic healing, or one's "living reality."

A culture of impeccability

As described, Somatic Experiencing is a trauma-informed methodology that helps to resolve that which remains unresolved by the medicine itself. Trauma-informed therapies are vital for helping to promote what I have termed here an "embodied reality," by operating on the level of the felt senses, not the mind. They are, in my own work at AYA Healing retreats and elsewhere bound up together with my duty of care and what I take to be my ethical responsibility to my clients.

My hope is that other practitioners and facilitators will also begin to recognise the salience of such methods for supporting the successful and enduring integration, as well as the wellbeing of their participants and that we can, together advocate for a regulatory body and formalised code of ethics that succeeds in building the trust and credibility of the sacred medicine work we know is vital for the health of our culture in the West.

The attainment of a new "embodied reality" should be what drives us to seek out and participate in the sacredness of these ancient rituals in the first place; not the desire to collect an experience, only to package it up in a photo album. When we pursue and persevere with the work of Ayahuasca or psychedelic integration, when we commit to creating a new "embodied reality" we can begin, ever so incrementally, to realize our potential in the world, that is, our own innate power to effect radical shifts in our communities.

By bringing more ardent attention and reverence to the importance of integration in tandem with the ceremonial aspects of Ayahuasca we can, I hope, stop collecting experiences and begin, rather, to transcend our egocentric world by making true and meaningful contributions to others who are less fortunate than ourselves. In short, by creating a culture of impeccability within the sacred medicine community, we can begin to create a culture of impeccability, of excellence and compassion, elsewhere.

9.1 WORKING WITH TRAUMA IN INTEGRATION

As PM integration workers, we need to be honest and in integrity with our limitations and strengths. Trauma is the new black at present, and many people claim to work and heal trauma, although they do not possess any professional qualifications or education in trauma.

There are many paths to trauma resolution, but a dangerous pitfall in the spiritual world today is that many programs which are being offered are highly unregulated, and there are many out there who practice and claim that they "heal" trauma, without the professional experience, supervision, or proper education which is needed in trauma resolution.

Dr. Peter Levine states that it takes a decade for an SEP to be adept in Somatic Experiencing, and I completely agree. It takes, not just years of study and education, but also years of practice as a therapist, and also continuing education, mentorship and supervision, to truly understand the field of trauma resolution. Even then, the nature of human consciousness and how we heal is a never-ending field of intrigue and curiosity. We need to be humble, and to understand that there are more things that we do not know, then what we know.

To uphold a culture of impeccability, we need to understand our own limitations, and what we feel comfortable and secure assisting participants with, and what may be out of our professional range. Working and supporting in trauma resolution is a not an easy task and takes years of experience, and if not respected properly, we may cause more harm than good. If you find yourself outside of what you know or are comfortable with, please refer them to an experienced trauma specialist who can support them more effectively.

If an individual shares a traumatic experience in the PM session, these are some traumainformed tips which you may find helpful:

1. Listen with therapeutic presence. What information are you gathering from the story? What is the body language of the individual? What are behind their words? What is the deeper feelings, emotions and beliefs which are behind the story? What are their needs? Is there anything more that you need to know in order to help and support the person? Listen before you speak.

2. **Refrain from proving unsolicited advice**. Before you do this, reflect back to the participant what you have heard, most importantly, their feelings, and perhaps you may need to clarify the story, or get more information from the participant by asking the right questions.

3. Normalise their experience with attunement and empathy. Many individuals feel isolated after the frightening PM experience, so we want to help them regulate through our social engagement with co-regulation. Saying things (ensure that these things that you share are sincere), such as:

"I understand how you would have felt frightened from such an experience".

"These experiences on the PM are really normal and common. I would love to share with you that you're not the only person who have gone through such an experience. I too have been through experiences such as these, and they can be really disorienting."

"This sounds really scary, and I'm here to support you in any way I can to help you process this experience."

"It's completely human to feel this way".

4. Ask for consent. Inquire if he/she would like to explore this experience a little further, and share with him/her that you may have some tools which could be helpful to support their process. If they say no, please do not take it personally, and acknowledge this:

""I understand that for some people, it can be difficult to say no, so I really celebrate you being able to listen to your needs, and saying no. Is there something which you feel I could help you with?"

If they provide you consent, you may continue with the following steps:

5. Inquire into the participant's resources. Remember...if a person is in a trauma vortex from a scary experience, going too deep into the trauma is NOT HELPFUL. Instead, we want to strengthen the "healing vortex" and what is strength building for the participant.

Invite them to notice pleasant and supportive sensations.

For e.g. it could be their outer or inner resources. You could ask them: If you had a magic wand and wish for something or someone who could assist you to feel better, who or what would this person or thing be? Get them to expand the resource by asking them where they notice this in the body. Help them to stabilise their nervous systems.

6. Stabilise and Resource. Support the participant to stabilise their nervous systems and resource them to take effective actions to process the trauma. Focus on positive experiences in the PM session. Perhaps this may be the supportive community that they felt around them during this time. Perhaps it's a safe person, or a place. You may want to expand their resources through the "Felt Sense of Safety" meditation. After stabilisation and resourcing, you may choose to move into Step 7, or go to Step 8, into empowering the client to take effective action.

(Advanced step: only for counsellors and trained therapists).

7. Get them to share a bit of the PM experience and assist the somatic resolution process. As they tell the story, ensure that they are titrated, and connected to their body's sensations. Ask them the questions:

"As you tell this part of the story, what are you noticing in your body now?" $% \mathcal{A}^{(n)}$

Stay with the sensations, and the questions: What's happening now? What does this part of you need? What happens when you listen to this part of yourself? How can you provide this part of yourself with what it needs?

8. Pay attention to the answers. Make a plan with the individual and empower them to take effective action. This may include making changes in their outer lives which are doable and non-overwhelming.

9. Make a Follow-up plan or a follow-up session. Some individuals may need a few more follow-up sessions as a check-in to ensure their safety and support. If this is required, create a plan with the participant for their follow-up session, or perhaps this could be a 15 min phone conversation or an email follow-up. Perhaps this may involve a referral to a more specialised trauma therapist for support. If this is the case, check in with the individual in a few weeks to ensure that this has been completed before you stop follow-up sessions.

USEFUL TIPS AND TOOLS FOR INTEGRATION FOR FACILITATORS

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10. USEFUL TIPS AND TOOLS FOR INTEGRATION

Other suggestions for integration/follow-up:

Feedback: It could be useful to have a questionnaire so participants can give feedback about the session anonymously, with the aim of improving the support given.

Generate Knowledge: Validated questionnaires could be administered in order to measure the impact of the experience on the daily life of the participants for a longer period and to monitor the integration process. The questionnaire can be resent to the participants after a week and after two months.

Self-care: Be mindful of your role as assistant and do not get carried away if participants wish to give you the credit for their profound experiences or see you as a kind of spiritual guide. It is important to be helpful and supportive but knowing that is each participant who directs his/her own process and is the responsible of his/her evolution and the discoveries and connexions he/she makes.

Integration Tips

PM does not stop working when the ceremony ends or when the retreat is over. PM initiates a healing process deep within our soul that unfolds over time, and can take months or years.

The goal of integration is to maximise the healing process, and our role as integration coaches or therapists is to support the healing process so that participants can:

- Be listened to compassionately by someone who can understand what they might be going through.
- 2. Debrief and gain understanding or clarity on PM experiences.
- 3. Be guided to reconnect with their own inner strengths, resources, intuition and guidance.
- 4. Discover teachings hidden in the PM experience or other challenging life experiences.
- 5. Resolve traumatic memories or experiences of disorientation or confusion which may have arose in the PM session through providing therapeutic care. This is if you are a trained and specialised therapist.
- 6. Integrate experiences of love, joy, connection and peace in ASC in the nervous system.
- 7. Providing tools or strategies to integrate their retreat or PM experience in their daily life.
- 8. Following-up with the participant, understanding their integration challenges and provide them support.
- 9. Clarifying their healing goals and supporting them to reach their intention: in body, mind, emotions, environment and community.
- 10. Be referred to other specialised support (I suggest having a resource list).
- ll. Gain more insights in their life.
- Receive continued help and encouragement to put actions of change and growth into place in their lives.

I would also strongly suggest for all PM facilitators to create an integration document that contains information about what may happen after a PM experience or retreat. This document could also be a resource that participants could refer to during their journey of integration.

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