

Sharing from a Shuar Healer

By Carla Woody

Anank Nunink Nunkai is a traditional healer, an Uwishin, of the Shuar Tribe. Born deep in the place of his ancestors—the Ecuadorian Amazon—he was chosen by his people to come live in the United States about 15 or so years ago. Like a number of indigenous peoples around the world, they were alarmed at the strong appetite and doctrine that Western culture preaches. Having first-hand experience resulting from these ways, their rainforest home disappearing around them, they sent Anank to us in an attempt to remind us of a kinder, gentler way of living—one of respect for each other and the Goddess Nunkui (Mother Earth).

Photo by Arte Nunkai Design

Anank Nunink Nunkai playing his Tumank, a traditional Shuar instrument.





Photo by Stephen DeNorscia

Shuar elder shares his wisdom with students at the Sedona Charter School.

Currently living in the Pacific Northwest, Anank can often be found speaking to students of all ages and participating in conferences in the United States and abroad.

He speaks on a wide range of topics from the diversity of animals in the jungle to indigenous permaculture or the healing properties of plants.

You may also find him singing, performing traditional Shuar dances or teaching people to meditate.

When discussing Shuar cosmovision and the wonders of the rainforest, Anank hopes to inspire interest in protecting such a magical place.

He continues to be an active member of the Shuar community and works closely with his sons toward the goal of creating a Shuar owned ethno-biological

preserve in the Kutukú and Shaimi Forest Reserve.

Kenosis Spirit Keepers hosted Anank and his wife Catherine in October in Prescott as part of the Spirit Keeper Series.

Anank's message is one of simplicity, sometimes delivered quietly, and at other times with a loud voice, that he attributes to his ancestors, to get our attention. Either way, there's an abject humility present in the man that I've learned, over the years, to value in a true teacher and traditional healer.

Counseling meditation and being present is an antidote to frustration and worries, he said.

"If today is Monday, you can't jump to Wednesday for your necessities until it arrives."

He then chuckled slightly under his



breath, as if sharing a joke with spirits we couldn't see but were very apparent to him.

Anank shared openly about his native traditions, their entwinement in all ways, spiritual and otherwise, with their environment and their rainforest home. Indeed, so many of the jungle plants are sacred to them, not only for medicinal purposes but also as teachers of spiritual ways of living.

In traditional times, if a child misbehaved, there was no punishment. Instead, the grandfather gave the child an herb and while the father watched over him, the plant taught the child, correcting the behavior.

He shared the ways of initiation. A young boy, having been prepared by his

family, is sent into the jungle alone, with only a spear.

The boy walks until he encounters something. If he is chosen, an image will appear in his path—in a swirling mist or great fire—unlike anything he has ever seen before, an incredible monster or demon.

He is to go right up to the apparition. If he steps back, the monster would disappear because he knows the boy is afraid. But the child will soon die because he is empty of spirit.

If, however, the boy is ready, he will chuck his spear right into the image and—in that moment—the image disappears. And the boy enters the realm of the Great Spirit Arutam.

When he finally returns, he's a young man, with his particular power in place, having been told all happenings until the last day of his life.

After weaving the magic of his stories, Anank closed with a special meditation. Taking out a large bow, an instrument called a Tumank, he produced vibrations that entered my body.

They moved in my interior in such a way that they found something I had been holding onto and expelled the energy through a cough I finally couldn't suppress.

To learn more about the work of Anank Nunink Nunkai and Catherine Nunkai to preserve the Shuar culture and rainforest home, visit their Web site at www.nunkui-shuar.org/.

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