



## The Door

EDUARDO WAS SURPRISINGLY WELL-EDUCATED, articulate, and a bit cerebral, despite his relaxed appearance and his crude style of existence in this tropical world. For a “witch doctor,” I was impressed. He was proud of the extensive garden surrounding his encampment, which blended so well with the enclosing jungle that it was not immediately apparent that a cultivated garden existed there at all.

On a walking tour, he pointed out his small cacao trees, with fruits like acorn squash. Eduardo split one open with his machete and we ate the sweet, spongy pulp in the center, sucking it from the slimy seeds. We washed and saved the seeds to roast later. Eduardo also showed us his banana trees, heavy with small red fruits, coffee bushes, covered with tiny berries, and one towering Brazil nut tree, seventy meters high. The abundance of his forest garden was amazing; he harvested mangos, pineapples, oranges, tangerines, and many other exotic fruits. One fruit looked like a red golf ball with fish scales. Peeling off the scales exposed a large, round seed underneath, covered by a dry rind. The seed was inedible, but the rind was tasty. There was no shortage of food in this year-round garden.

Our wanderings through the jungle gave us plenty of opportunity for discussion. I was intensely interested in getting back to the conversation we had initiated the day before at the lake, particularly the issue of the “balance

point,” but Eduardo refused to discuss it further. I had a half million dollars resting on that issue, and I wanted to know as much about it as I possibly could. He said it should sink in slowly. So instead, I barraged him with questions about my Aunt Lucy — why had she come to him, and what had she gained from it? We were all together on a food gathering expedition in the jungle when I started asking questions.

“Lucita needed a teacher. I taught her about the spiritual side of life,” Eduardo explained, plucking a breadfruit from a small tree. He put it into a mesh sack.

“How do you define the word ‘spiritual?’” I asked. “It could mean a lot of things, like ghosts.”

“It means only one thing,” he replied without hesitation. “We are all part of a Greater Being. We are linked to it. Everything is connected. Awareness of that connection is spirituality. Nothing more, nothing less.” He dropped two more fruits into his bag.

“Can you describe the Greater Being again?” Sarah asked, jumping into our conversation. “My Dad has trouble understanding that concept.”

“Well, I wouldn’t put it exactly like that,” I replied defensively. “It’s just not something I think about much.”

Eduardo stopped gathering fruit and looked around. He pointed to a towering tree, covered with a thick mat of vines. “See that tree?”

“Yes,” we answered.

“Do you really *see* that tree?” he asked.

“Of course, it’s right there. What do you mean?” I asked.

“Not all of the tree is visible to the eye,” he said. “Half of the tree is under the ground. That is a part of the tree that many people do not acknowledge. That huge tree began from a tiny seed. An invisible spark of life caused the seed to sprout, the same life energy that permeates the Great Mystery. The seed then sent a tiny root into the earth, and at the same time, opened a tiny leaf to the sky. Over time, the young plant absorbed the earth through its

roots, and it absorbed the sky through its leaves, until it became the huge living being you see there now. The earth, the air, and the sun combined to create this tree. Because it is a tree, it is easy for you to see that it is physically connected to the earth through its roots. The connection to the air and the sun is not as apparent. If the tree is uprooted from the earth, it would die. If it is removed from the sun or the air, it would also die. The Earth mother is a Greater Being in relation to the tree. The tree is made from her and cannot live without her. Humans are no different. We are like walking trees. We start as a seed, then we absorb the earth and the sun through our food, and the air through our lungs. If we are uprooted from the Earth, we will die. But even our Earth mother is only an insignificant speck of dust in comparison to the Great Mystery. We are mere humans and can know only very little about the ultimate nature of Being.”

“So as a spiritual teacher, you taught Lucy to better understand her connection to the Earth, is that what you’re saying?” I asked.

“Not to the Earth only. Our Earth is almost nothing in the overall scheme of things, just a grain of sand in the universe, but it is a critically important grain to those who live on it, like us. It is not a dead rock revolving around the sun, as some of your people believe. It is a living thing, a Being. We sprout on its surface, as does the tree. Yet, humans have become so self-centered, arrogant, and insensitive, they are making the Earth mother sick. We are becoming like parasites. Lucita was very concerned about this, so I tried to help her understand.”

“And what did you tell her?” I asked.

“I told her many things. And she learned much on her own. I told her the Earth mother will only tolerate human foolishness for a while. Then she will shrug us off like a dog scratches a tick from her back.”

Eduardo glanced to his right, abruptly ceased speaking and beckoned for us to stop and stand still. Then he crouched and sneaked toward a nearby tree very slowly,

almost on all fours, as we watched in silent bewilderment. Suddenly, he jumped up and lunged toward a big Iguana resting on a low horizontal branch. In one lightning-quick motion he grabbed the lizard by the tail and swung it in a full circle over his head, dashing its skull against the heavy tree branch. Eduardo held the dead creature up by the tail for all to see. "This will make lunch for all of us," he announced. We were speechless. Annie and Sarah covered their mouths with their hands and stifled quiet gagging sounds. "It is quite delicious," asserted Eduardo, noticing our reaction. "And it is easy to skewer with a stick for roasting over a fire."

Back at the camp, Eduardo gutted the lizard, impaled it with a long stick, then slowly roasted it, head, legs, tail, and all, over the fire.

"Tastes like chicken," I commented to Annie and Sarah, neither of whom would touch the carcass. They were content to gnaw on dried provisions from home, mostly oatmeal and raisins, and to scowl at me with frequent sideways glances as I ate the Iguana with gusto. Michael was more adventurous than the ladies and was also happy to eat his fill of lizard. I'd have given anything for a cold beer to wash it down.

"You must eat nothing else today," Eduardo informed us after we ate. "Tonight I will show you a door that will lead you into the higher consciousness. You must fast the remainder of the day, taking only drink, but no solid food." I groaned out loud, remembering the last time I had fasted, for the Sisters of the Sacred Circle. I could hardly believe someone else was asking me to do it again. I was intrigued by Eduardo, but not exactly thrilled to be missing yet another dinner.

"What do you mean, you'll show us a *door*?" asked Michael, who perked up with a sudden keen interest. We were all sitting on the ground under the lean-to between the two thatched huts. The fire had died down to a bed of coals. Eduardo always kept the end of a long log in the fire so it wouldn't go out. Every so often, he'd push the log in a

little. When he wasn't tending the fire, he'd throw a huge green leaf over the smoldering log's end. The leaf kept the intermittent rain off the fire and when the leaf dried up, it was simply used as kindling to get the fire stoked.

"I will show a door only to those who want to see it," he said, looking in my direction.

"What door?" asked Sarah. "How do we know we want to see it if we don't know what it is?"

"You already know what it is. Lucita sent you here. You are here for a reason."

"Can you explain what this door actually *is*?" asked Annie.

"I will try, but it is very difficult. There are some things for which there are no words. The door I speak of is one of them." We were all sitting around the fire spot. The little monkey came running out of nowhere and climbed onto Eduardo's lap. He began stroking her head as he continued speaking. "I have explained already that we are part of the Earth mother, although you may *think* that you are separate from her. Your concept of being separate is only an illusion. It is, to some extent, a necessary illusion because it helps you to recognize that you are important, too. We must take care of ourselves. We must have some degree of self-respect and pride. That is the human condition. Little Pepita here is part of the Earth mother too."

He squeezed her arm, and she chattered as if in agreement, then climbed onto his shoulder and grabbed his hair with her little fists. "Everything is connected," Eduardo grimaced, as Pepita tugged at his hair. "Nothing is separate. That is the Great Mystery. When we think we are separate and apart from the rest, then our spirit becomes ill. In indigenous cultures, when a person's spirit is sick, they seek the help of a shaman. The shaman asks the Earth mother herself to provide the necessary healing." Eduardo carefully removed Pepita from his head and set her on the ground, shooing her away. He rubbed his scalp and brushed dirt off his shoulder.

"How do they do that?" asked Sarah. "How does a

shaman ask the Earth mother for help?”

“The shaman can ask for help in many ways. One is to ask the spirits of the sacred plants. The Earth mother has given us plants that will unlock the door that imprisons human consciousness. It is like releasing a caged animal and allowing it to taste freedom, perhaps for the first time. Only outside the cage can the animal realize that its life has been extraordinarily limited. What it thought were its boundaries were only the walls of a small box. When the animal sees that the actual extent of reality is huge beyond imagination, it gains a new perspective on its own limited existence. It understands then that its reality is only a small part of something much greater. It is thereby humbled, enthralled, amazed, and enlightened, and its spirit is renewed.”

“So you’re saying our consciousness is limited, like it’s in a cage?” asked Annie.

“No. That’s not what I’m saying. I’m saying that our consciousness is *unlimited*. Incredibly unlimited! But we *choose* to box it into a small room because only then can we function as human beings. Everybody’s room is a different size. Some bigger, some smaller.”

“So if we need to limit our consciousness, why bother opening any doors?” Sarah shrugged.

“If the room has windows, and I’m speaking metaphorically now, you understand? These concepts are difficult to put into words. If there are windows in your room, then you can see that there’s an entire world out there beyond the limited scope of your space. When you are comfortable with that awareness and understand it, you will be able to open the door to your room at will. You will be able to wander into the higher levels of consciousness. But you will always come back to your room, because that is the framework that enables you to function as a human. That is where you belong. Lucita could open the door of her room at will.”

“I still don’t get your point,” replied Annie. “Why not just stay in the room, if that’s where you belong?”

“There is nothing wrong with staying in your limited consciousness. You can spend your life within that room and it would be fine. If, that is, you can also see through a window. If you understand that there is more to reality than just the walls around you. Instead, people line the insides of their rooms with things that reflect themselves. These things could be called mirrors, because everywhere the caged person looks, they see only themselves.”

“What do you mean?” she pressed.

“For example, a person sees a tree and they think of how much money they can make from it. They’re not seeing the true tree as a living entity, they’re only seeing themselves, their desires, superimposed on the tree. Such a person thinks they are the world, forgetting that they are only one miniscule part of an infinite puzzle. They remain unaware of the true nature of what exists beyond themselves. This is when they need to be reminded that there is a door, and that it leads out to the rest of reality — the world they have forgotten or denied. If a person cannot see beyond the confines of his or her own self, their spirit shrivels and, eventually, dies.”

“So how do plants enter into this picture?” I asked.

“Humans have evolved over many hundreds of thousands of years. Even millions. Many other life forms have coevolved with us, some of which complement human beings here on Earth. Plant helpers come in many forms, but the most important ones are the spiritual helpers, the sacred plants. These plants coevolved with us, and some contain chemical substances that are otherwise found only in the human brain. When we ingest the plant helpers, they communicate with us. It is one of the Earth mother’s ways of speaking directly to us. Some plant helpers can open a door for us, exposing us to a greater level of consciousness. Tonight, we will ask the plant helpers to speak to us. I will ask them to introduce you to the Earth mother. You must see through the door, once and for all. Then you will understand what I am saying.”

At that, Eduardo stood up, walked a few paces, and

turned to face us. “I must go off into the bush to find the plant helpers. I must go alone, but I will return in a few hours. It will take some time after that for me to brew the drink, which should be ready by nightfall. Eat nothing until then and don’t wander off.” He climbed up the ladder into his hut, and soon jumped out with an empty sack. Then he took off into the jungle leaving the four of us alone.

Well, not entirely alone; we had a small, black monkey to keep us company. She had grabbed Sarah’s half-eaten bowl of oatmeal and had almost gotten away with it, but Sarah wrestled it back, offering the monkey a banana as a trade. Pepita took it and ran off, chattering like crazy.

“That monkey is a pain in the ass,” Michael complained. “The damn thing took my toothpaste this morning.”

“You should keep everything zipped in your bag,”



The author and Pepita (author on left)

Sarah suggested.

“It was *in* my bag. The friggin’ monkey unzipped it.”

“Tape the zipper down. I have some duct tape in my bag. That works,” I offered.

“I don’t know about this plant helper stuff,” Annie said, shaking her head, ignoring the monkey.

“What’re you worried about? This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to learn something from a South American shaman in person, not in your books! What more could you ask for?” I replied.

“But he’s talking about taking *drugs*. Probably hallucinogens,” she countered.

“Ah, that’s not exactly accurate,” Michael offered, forgetting about his Pepita problems for the moment.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Well, number one, he’s not talking about drugs, he’s talking about *plants*. Drugs are things people make in laboratories. Pills, capsules, crystal powders, synthetic chemicals. Indigenous peoples don’t even have a word for ‘drug’ in their language,” he explained. “It’s a concept created and embraced by our culture; it’s not a concept indigenous cultures even understand. Nature gives them their cures, but there is no stigma attached to using them. There is only respect. Most of the cures are medicinal, but some are spiritual. In fact, they say that all diseases have a spiritual cause.”

“What makes you such an expert on this?” I asked.

“It’s a research specialty of mine. Ethnobotany. I’ve studied it in Mexico and in Central America. So I agree with you, Joe, this is a great opportunity,” he continued. “As I was saying, number two, the word *hallucinogen* is a misnomer. The correct word is *entheogen*. It’s derived from the root words *en*, meaning within, *theo*, meaning divine, and *gen*, meaning to create. Entheogens are plants that enable a person to find the divinity that dwells within — to find the link to the Greater Being that Eduardo talks about all the time. So Eduardo is apparently speaking of entheogenic plants, not hallucinogenic drugs. There’s a

world of difference between the two.”

“Well, it seems wrong,” Annie said.

“What seems wrong?” Michael asked.

“Taking drugs.”

“Really? Then don’t take any. But you’ll be un-American if you don’t.”

“What’s *that* supposed to mean?”

“Drugs are big business in the United States. There are drugstores on every corner. There are drug commercials all over TV, in the magazines, in the newspapers, on radio. Drug use is fully encouraged and supported by both the government and by American society. Americans are the biggest drug users in the world.”

“That’s not what I mean by drugs. I mean *illegal* drugs.”

“The vast majority of drugs are both dangerous and perfectly legal,” Michael continued. “They’re big, big business. And many of the so-called illegal ‘drugs’ are not drugs at all. They’re plants. Some of the world’s most valuable sacred plants, those used by indigenous peoples since prehistory, have simply been labeled ‘illegal drugs’ by American law makers and banned, despite thousands of years of beneficial use. Americans have been subjected to decades of brainwashing on this issue, and now they can’t even distinguish between a drug and a plant. The so-called ‘war on drugs’ itself has become another huge business. But there is no war on ‘drugs,’ there’s only a war on *people*. When beneficial plants are made illegal, people’s basic freedoms have been stripped away.”

“But don’t you think, Michael, that the illegal drugs are dangerous *too*, and that’s why they’re illegal?” Annie countered.

“I can only speak of plants. I know little about pharmaceutical drugs. The most dangerous plants in the world, plants like the fungus called the Death Cap, are perfectly legal to grow, possess, and eat. If plants were illegal because they were dangerous, then dangerous plants would be illegal. They’re not. Only an idiot would intentionally

poison himself. So why make laws that tell people not to poison themselves? People already have enough sense that such laws are unnecessary.”

“Why are substances illegal, then?” she questioned.

“Substances? You mean plants? It depends on the plant. Virtually all of the plants that have been made illegal in the states have hundreds of years of beneficial use in other cultures. So why are they illegal? That’s a good question, and one we’ve been conditioned to *not* ask. We’re told to ‘just say no,’ as if asking questions, or even *thinking*, is wrong. Well, if a plant can enable a person to see things from a different perspective, if it can enable us to communicate with nature, with the Earth mother as Eduardo calls it, then maybe our government feels threatened by that. Maybe our government doesn’t want us to be able to hear what the Earth mother has to say. Maybe our government wants to control our minds, control what we think. No doubt we’re much better consumers that way.”

“For *chrissakes*, Michael. That sounds like paranoia to me,” said Annie dismissively. She rolled her eyes at him.

“Oh? Then why do you have such a knee-jerk reaction to so-called ‘drugs’?” he pressed. “Why do you call plants ‘drugs’? Why are you so quick to obey restrictions against plants, or even to assume they exist when you don’t even know if they do? Could it be that your mind has been manipulated? That’s thought-control by *my* definition. It starts in the schools, it’s reinforced by the media, TV, radio, print media, and then, by the time you’re an adult, you’re cheering on the sidelines as innocent people are being dragged off and crammed into overcrowded prisons because of the *plants* they use. That’s not paranoia, that’s the real world today.”

Seeing no end in sight to their heated debate, I abandoned camp and wandered off to take a nap. Sarah had left the conversation long ago, and was underneath Eduardo’s hut, tossing raisins and nuts to the chattering monkey, who was scooping up the treats and stuffing them into its mouth. I climbed the ladder to our hut and settled into my

hammock, trying to forget about the loud protests of hunger coming from my stomach. My next meal would be, according to Michael, an entheogenic one. I don't know if I was ready for that, but it sounded interesting, to say the least.